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ALL-STORY WEEKLY



His Word of Honor

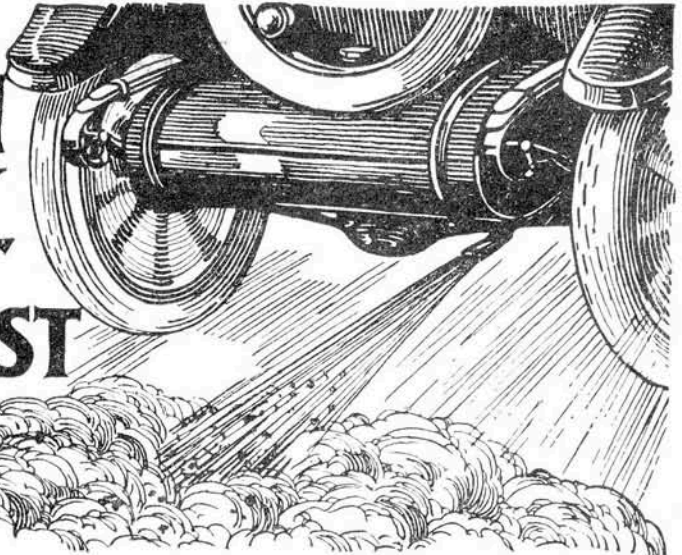
by Edgar Franklin

Author of

"The Wicked Streak,"
"Ready to Occupy," etc.

*A Sprightly Comedy by
a Master of Humor*

REMOVE CARBON THE EASY WAY=OUT THE EXHAUST



THE easiest, cleanest, safest and most satisfactory method of removing carbon deposits is with Johnson's Carbon Remover. It will save you from \$3.00 to \$5.00 over any other method without laying up your car and with much better results. After one application your car will run like it did the first 500 miles—quietly and full of “pep”—and you will secure the maximum power and speed from the minimum amount of fuel.

Johnson's Carbon Remover is a harmless liquid to be poured or squirted into the cylinders. It contains no acids and does not affect lubrication or interfere with the oil in the crank case. Millions of cans have been used. Recommended by many of the leading car Mfrs. including the Packard and Studebaker Companies.

JOHNSON'S CARBON REMOVER

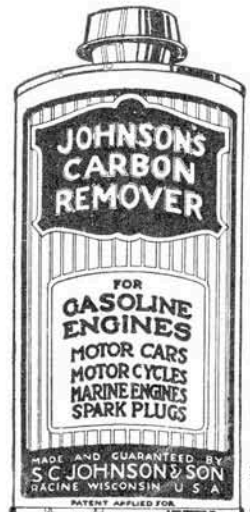
A dose of Johnson's Carbon Remover—the engine laxative—will cure 80% of engine troubles. It will increase the power of your car—improve acceleration—stop that knock—quiet your motor—save your batteries—cut down your repair bills—and reduce your gas and oil consumption.

Don't wait until your motor is choked with carbon—remove it every week or two with Johnson's Carbon Remover. You can do it yourself in five minutes—no mechanical experience necessary.

The regular use of Johnson's Guaranteed Carbon Remover will automatically eliminate most valve trouble and keep your motor clean, sweet and at its highest efficiency.

For sale by Hardware, Accessory dealers and Garages. Send for our booklet on Keeping Cars Young—it's free.

S. C. JOHNSON & SON, Dept. AA-6 Racine, Wis.
Established 1882



How "Silent Simms" Became a Master of Speech

By Martin M. Byron

"YOU are exasperating beyond words," shot out Mr. Worden. "Why didn't you keep Mr. Truesdale here? You knew I would be back in ten minutes."

Harry Simms gulped hard, and replied weakly, "I did try to keep him here, Mr. Worden, but he wouldn't stay."

"What? Wouldn't stay even ten minutes? Why you could have kept him that long without his realizing it. Why didn't you talk to him about the weather, about peace, about the price of potatoes, about anything?"

This wasn't the first calling down I had heard Simms get. He had been with the firm for eight years and had reached the point where he was as much a fixture around the office as the desk or the chairs. He was so quiet that the only things that would start him talking were such momentous events as the beginning of the war or the end of the war. Even when his baby was born, Harry said only three words—"It's a boy."

It wasn't long before we nicknamed him "Silent Simms."

Yet the "Silent Simms" of two years ago is now our Sales Manager, regarded as one of the most brilliant men in our organization, getting an annual salary that runs close to five figures, and is slated for the vice-presidency!

How all this happened in so short a time makes one of the most remarkable stories of success I have ever heard. But let Harry tell the story as he told it to me when I asked him point-blank what sort of magic he used in transforming himself.

"Well," said Harry, "you remember when Mr. Truesdale came in that day and I could not hold him for ten minutes until the Chief got back? And when the Chief came back and found Truesdale gone, how he bawled me out? That incident marked the turning point of my life.

"It was the most humiliating experience I ever went through. I had been with the firm 8 years—was getting \$40 a week—and was the office 'football.' I went home that night determined to learn how to talk convincingly, interestingly, and forcibly, so that I could hold people spell-bound, not only for 10 minutes, but by the hour. I did not want to become a public speaker—what I wanted was the ability to talk as a business asset. I bought numberless books on public speaking, but they all taught oratory, and were so complicated that I gave up almost in discouragement. I continued my search, however, and was rewarded a few weeks later by hearing about the work of Dr. Frederick Houk Law, who was conducting a course in business talking and public speaking.

"You may be sure that I lost no time in attending the lectures. I went after them as eagerly as a hungry wolf goes after food. To my great surprise and pleasure I grasped the secret of being a convincing talker—the secret I had needed all my life—almost in the first lesson.

"Almost at once I learned why I was afraid to stand up and talk to others. I learned how to talk to a number of people at the same time. I learned how to make people listen to every word I said. I learned how to say things interestingly, forcibly and convincingly. I learned how to listen while others talked. I learned how to say exactly what I meant.

"And the whole thing was so simple that in a single evening I learned the secrets that turned me into a very dynamo of ambition. I knew that I had at last found the road to Mastery of Speech. I began to apply the principles at once, and found that my words were electrifying people. I began to get things done. It wasn't long before I was taken off my old desk and put at the city salesman's desk. You know how I made good. Seems almost like a dream now. Then, a short time later, I was given Roger's job on the road, in the hardest territory we have. And when I began to break records there the Chief wired me to come back and gave me Morgan's job as the sales manager when Morgan was put in charge of the Seattle office.

"This great change came over me simply as a result of my having learned how to talk. I imagine there are thousands of others who are in the same boat in which I found myself and who could become big money-makers if they only learned the secret of being a convincing talker."

When Harry Simms finished, I asked him if I could not have the benefit of Dr. Law's Course, and he told me that only recently Dr. Law had prepared a complete course in printed form which contained exactly the same instructions as he had given in his lectures. I sent for it and found it to be exactly as he stated. After studying the eight simple lessons I began to realize that Simms' success was the natural outcome of real ability to talk. For my own success with the Course has been as great as his. I can never thank Simms enough for telling me about Dr. Law's Course in Business Talking and Public Speaking.

SEND NO MONEY

So confident is The Independent Corporation, publishers of "Mastery of Speech," Dr. Law's Course in Business Talking and Public Speaking, that once you have an opportunity to see in your own home how you can, in one hour, learn the secret of speaking and how you can apply the principles of effective speech under all conditions, that they are willing to send you the Course on free examination.

Don't send any money. Merely mail the coupon or write a letter and the complete course will be sent, all charges prepaid, at once. If you are not entirely satisfied send it back any time within five days after you receive it and you will owe nothing.

On the other hand, if you are as pleased as are the thousands of other men and women who have used the Course, send only \$5 in full payment. You take no risk and you have everything to gain, so mail the coupon now before this remarkable offer is withdrawn.

FREE EXAMINATION COUPON

Independent Corporation

Publishers of The Independent Weekly

Dept. L-336,

119 West 40th Street, New York

Please send me Dr. Frederick Houk Law's "Mastery of Speech," a Course in Business Talking and Public Speaking in eight lessons. I will either remail the Course to you within five days after its receipt, or send you \$5 in full payment of the course.

Name.....

Address.....

..... All-Story-Argosy-6-14-19

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOLUME XCVIII

NUMBER 2



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

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Entered as second class matter May 17, 1915, at the Post-Office at New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879

3 Dress Shirts \$1.00 with Collars to Match

Astounding Value!

Down

MOST extraordinary shirt set ever offered.

We are able to offer this amazing bargain for a limited time only. This shirt set is easily worth \$10.00 and must be seen to be appreciated. Don't hesitate but send coupon immediately and we will send them subject to your approval.



SIX Months To Pay!

Shirt set consists of three handsome negligee dress shirts with three soft detachable collars to match. Patterns are the very latest stripe effects in guaranteed fast colors. Each shirt cut coat style with French double cuffs. Fine pearl buttons. Sizes 14 to 18. Packed three assorted patterns of one size to each set. Order by No. D-7. Only \$1.00 down and balance \$1.20 per month. Total price \$7.95.

Easy Payments: Take 6 months to pay. We will open a charge account for you. No discount for cash—not one penny extra for credit. Just a small monthly payment which you will hardly miss. Get the habit of buying on credit. It is good, sound business policy. Every one uses their credit—why shouldn't you use yours? Act AT ONCE.

Send the Coupon!

Thousands will be sending in for this great bargain. It will be first come, first served. You may never again get the opportunity of getting such a wonderful bargain. We are only able to offer you such amazing value because of our tremendous output. Don't wait any longer. Sit right down today and send the coupon. **ACT NOW!**

Elmer Richards Company
Dept. A107—West 35th Street, CHICAGO, ILL.

Elmer Richards Company

Dept. A107 West 35th Street, Chicago, Ill.

Gentlemen:—I enclose \$..... as first payment.

Please send me the 3 negligee shirts No. D-7. Size If I am not satisfied, I can return them and get payment back with all charges. Otherwise I will pay \$1.20 per month until total price of \$7.95 has been paid.

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Address.....

Post Office.....



Classified Advertising

The Purpose of this Department

is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needfuls for the home, office, farm, or person; to offer, or seek, an unusual business opportunity, or to suggest a service that may be performed satisfactorily through correspondence. It will pay a housewife or business man equally well to read these advertisements carefully.

Classified Advertising Rates in The Munsey Magazines:

	Line Rate	Combination Line Rate
Munsey's Magazine	-\$1.50	\$3.25
THE ARGOSY COMB'N		Less 2% cash discount
The Argosy	} 1.75	
All-Story Weekly		

July 12th Argosy Combination forms close June 19th.

"A New Force In Business" is a booklet that tells how to advertise successfully in the Classified Department of the Munsey Magazines. Mailed anywhere on request.

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WOULD YOU LIKE TO WEAR A BEAUTIFUL NEW SUIT made to your own measure Free, and make \$35 to \$50 every week? You can be the best dressed man in your town and earn a lot of extra money if you write at once for our beautiful samples and wonderful offer. The Progress Tailoring Co., Dept. 284, Chicago.

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WONDERFUL STARTER FOR FORDS—No Cogs—No Ratchets—Takes no power from engine. Retail \$15.00. Agents coming money. Exclusive Territory. Simplex Company, Desk A, 9 S. Clinton Street, Chicago.

AGENTS—SELL PICTURES, BATHING GIRLS, art poses, sample 12c; sixteen varieties \$1, refunded if dissatisfied. Roseleaf Club, Desk S, St. Louis, Mo.

\$\$\$ Big Money for Agents and Salesmen. Rugh's Unbreakable Pocket Mirror is the best advertising medium for hotels, merchants and every business firm. Send stamp for sample and particulars. H. O. Rugh, Dept. A, 9 S. Clinton St., Chicago.

RELIABLE PEOPLE WANTED.—Place our new, novel, big value goods in stores and appoint agents. Wonder Pudding Powder—25 Big, Delicious Dishes, 25c; Orangeade Powder—10 Big Glasses, best drink you ever tasted, 10c. Many other good things. Morrissey Company, 4417-20, Madison Street, Chicago.

FIBRE BROOMS OUTWEAR FIVE CORN BROOMS. Guaranteed one year. Sample \$1.25 postpaid. Agents wanted, men and women, \$1.00 an hour easy. Keystone Fibre Broom Co., 618 Duquesne Way, Pittsburg, Penna.

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MEN—AGE 17 TO 45, EXPERIENCE UNNECESSARY. Travel; make secret investigations, reports. Salaries; expenses. American Foreign Detective Agency, 320, St. Louis.

FIRE MEN, BRAKEMEN, BAGGAGEMEN. \$140-\$200. Colored Porters, by railroads everywhere. Experience unnecessary. 636 Railway Bureau, East St. Louis, Ills.

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FORDS RUN 34 MILES PER GALLON with our 1919 carburetors. Use cheapest gasoline or half kerosene. Start easy any weather. Increased power. Styles for all motors. Runs slow high gear. Attach yourself. Big profits for agents. Money back guarantee, 30 days trial. Air-Friction Carburetor Co., 519 Madison Street, Dayton, Ohio.

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\$50.00 A WEEK AND YOUR OWN SUIT FREE. A wonderful offer to advertise our classy tailoring. All extras free; delivery charges prepaid. Self-measuring blanks, size charts, sample book, etc., free. Send no money. Just write your name and address on a postal. American Woolen Mills Co., Dept. 901, Chicago.

AGENTS: SELL GUARANTEED HOSIERY FOR MEN, women and children. Must wear 12 months or replaced free. All styles, colors and fancy stripes. You can sell at less than store prices. Write for terms and samples. Thomas Hosiery Co., 3407 North Street, Dayton, Ohio.

WE GET THE MONEY—NEARLY EVERY TIME. Rather, our system gets it. District managers, sub agents, side line men—\$40-\$100 weekly picked up. Actually P-I-C-K-E-D up. Every business man a prospect. We protect territory. Write now. Promer Service, 1546 Larrabee, Chicago.

Miracle Motor-Gas amazes motorists. 3c worth equals gallon gasoline. Eliminates carbon, 200% profit. Isom, Idaho, wares: "Ship 500 packages. Made \$79 yesterday." Samples Free. Chas. A. Butler, Secretary, Dept. 72, Toledo, Ohio.

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BE AN AUTO OR TRACTOR EXPERT. Unlimited opportunity for civil and Government Work. 5000 successful graduates. Write at once for our big free catalog. Cleveland Auto School, 1819 E. 24th Street, Cleveland, Ohio.

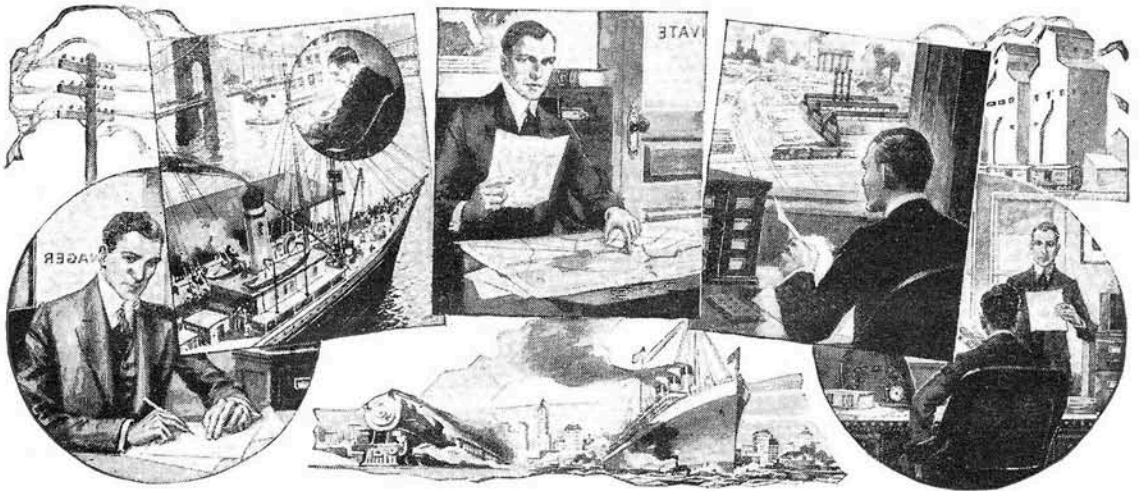
MOTION PICTURE PLAYS

PHOTOPLAYS WANTED BY 48 COMPANIES; \$10 TO \$500 EACH PAID FOR PLAYS. No correspondence course or experience needed; details sent free to beginners. Sell your ideas. Producers League, 388 Wainwright, St. Louis, Mo.

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STAMPS—12 DIFFERENT FROM WARRING NATIONS. 10 cents; 10 different foreign coins, 15 cents; 10 Uruguay Stamps, 10 cents. Lists free. We buy old stamps. Buying list, 10 cents. Toledo Stamp Co., Toledo, Ohio.

Classified Advertising Continued on Page 6.



A Bigger Job Yours—If You Master Traffic Management

Reconstruction work to be done in Europe and expansion of our foreign trade means a greater demand than ever before for men trained as traffic experts. Great plants working overtime—raw materials shipped in—finished products shipped out—carloads, trainloads, shiploads, going North, East, South, West—contracts placed not on price basis, but for quick delivery—that is the condition we are facing.

"We must have efficient traffic men" say manufacturers, jobbers, railroads, ship owners. Hundreds are needed where one is available. This is the chance for ambitious men to rise to higher positions—to get into an uncrowded calling—to have the specialized knowledge which commands big salaries.

Train by Mail Under LaSalle Experts

This opportunity is yours now. Train while you hold your present job. Only your spare time required to become proficient in every branch of traffic.

Learn from men who have held or are among those now holding the highest positions in the field. Get practical training—the training which equips you to step into one of the highest places. This is what the LaSalle experts offer you.

They will explain every point concerning Freight Rates, Classifications, Tariffs, Bills of Lading, Routing, Claims, Demurrage, Express Rates, Ocean Traffic, R. R. Organization, Regulation and Management, Laws of Carriers, Interstate Commerce Rulings, etc. etc.

How many men are expert on even one of these subjects? You will be made proficient in all.

And here is something more—your enrollment gives you free the privileges of our Business Consulting Service. This means advice from our staff whenever you need help on any special business problem.

Over 800 people here—300 business experts among them—are ready to put you

on the road that leads directly to advancement. Get the complete, combined experience of many authorities, all given in easily understood form.

No Large Fees

The total cost is small. Your increase in earnings will soon pay it (see in next column what McMullen, Wright and other members say). Then also you can pay on easy terms—a little each month if you wish. No hardship in getting this training. Any man can afford it. And the time is now—when the great movement in business is beginning. Give a few hours weekly of your spare time for a few months—and get a larger salary.

Send the Coupon and Get All the Facts

Your request will bring complete information. We will tell you just what the course offers in every detail; all about the opportunities open to trained traffic men. We will also send you our book, "Ten Years Promotion in One" which has shown thousands of men the short road to promotion. If you are ambitious to rise—if you want to enter a paying and uncrowded field of business, get these facts. Sending the coupon implies no obligation upon you. Mail it today.

B. S. McMullen was a freight checker on the docks at Seattle.

Two years after beginning the LaSalle Course in Interstate Commerce and Traffic Management he was appointed General Freight and Passenger Agent.

He said that it would probably have taken him 8 or 10 years to make this advance if he had depended merely upon work and experience.

LaSalle experts helped him to reach the top in the space of months.

T. J. Wright, an Illinois member, reports three promotions since taking the course.

H. S. Watson, of Michigan, figures his increased earning capacity at 400 per cent.

Fred Hoffman, an Ohio member, reports 600 per cent profit on his investment in one year.

Among the many LaSalle trained men who are now Traffic Managers or Experts on Interstate Commerce are:

Wm. Ritchie, Vice-President and Traffic Manager, Philadelphia Lawn Mower Co.

F. E. Combs, Traffic Director, Twin City Traffic League, Benton Harbor, Michigan.

F. E. Hamilton, Traffic Manager, Retail Merchants Association of Canada.

Mr. Hamilton says: "I cannot speak too highly of this institution. The course is up-to-date, authentic, and easily understood. My only regret is that I did not take it up five years ago."

The success these men have made can be paralleled by any other ambitious man who will do as they did—train!

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Dept. 632-1C

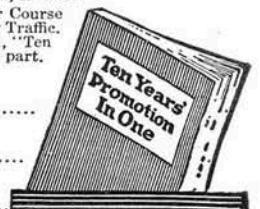
Chicago, Illinois

Please send me your catalog and full information on your Course and Consulting Service in Interstate Commerce and Railway Traffic. Also a copy of your valuable book for the ambitious man, "Ten Years' Promotion in One." This without obligation on my part.

Name.....

Address.....

Present Position.....



Classified Advertising Continued from Page 4.

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 LaSalle Extension University, Dept. 632-LA Chicago, Ill.



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280 Broadway, New York



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His Word of Honor by Edgar Franklin

Author of "Dodd—His Diary," "Ready to Occupy," "One Bright Idea," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE SLINGS AND ARROWS.

HE had noted it before, had Henry Baird. He noted it again now; one's first impression of that attractive Alan Moss smile was quite all wrong! The second impression was the true one, casting faint and ominous light upon the murkier depths of the Moss soul.

Even this time, though, the smile had fooled Henry for a moment. Flashed at him over the side of the long, pale-blue sport car, as he himself stood on the curb, its white teeth, its twinkling eyes, had carried their brief illusion of friendliness and candor. Until Henry, catching himself, had looked more closely, of course—until Henry had noted again that the teeth were hard and sharp as well as white, teeth made for biting rather than for smiling; and that the seeming twinkle was in reality a keen, sly glint, betraying an inner wealth of pure, unscrupulous malice. These things may not have been apparent to most people, but certain deep, secret, personal stirrings had given Henry Baird the vision!

Still, there was no denying that Alan was good enough to look upon, in his limp, un-

dersized way. His skin was clean and tight, his features regular, his clothes as perfect as the car he drove and as expensive as the huge portmanteau strapped so trimly at its side. His voice matched the rest of him, being crisp and clear to the point of sharpness as he said:

"You're not staying in town all summer, Baird?"

"I may get out for a while next month," Henry muttered.

"Not before that, eh?"

"No."

Mr. Moss nodded and surveyed upper Broadway, its rolling cars, its tall apartment-houses, its afternoon sunshine.

"Manage to keep yourself pretty well occupied, eh?"

"So-so," said Henry, with the tight-lipped, evasive smile of the man who has much in the business line that he does not care to discuss.

He started a trifle, however, as Mr. Moss, having considered the gloved hand that rested on his steering-wheel, addressed it directly:

"You've given up the idea of working that Michigan copper property of yours, Baird?"

"I never had any idea of working it myself."

"That's true, too. You told me that you'd sold it recently, didn't you?"

"I'm considering an offer for it, although I don't recall telling you anything about it," Henry said quite pointedly.

Moss's disarming grin turned on him suddenly, almost wonderingly, and then broadened with the utmost good cheer.

"Quite so—I get you. I beg your pardon, Baird; it's no business of mine, of course. I like to congratulate a man who has cleaned up a million or so—that's really all."

"Well, I haven't cleaned up any million—yet," said Henry, with a strange, significant smile.

Altogether on his guard now, he waited for further impertinent queries. They were not propounded by Mr. Moss. Mr. Moss, indeed, seemed to have lost interest in Henry for the moment; his gaze, directed at the lower skies, grew absent, almost rapt; his lips, pursed for a little, parted in a faint, soft smile; he sighed audibly.

"You're headed out of town?" Henry ventured, and there was the oddest little sharp note of anxiety in the inquiry.

"Eh? Me?" Alan returned to earth and stared at him for a moment. "Oh, yes, I'm running away for a while. There's nothing to keep me in New York, and it's very pleasant up—er—in the woods."

"What woods?" Henry said bluntly.

"I'm going up Massachusetts way," Moss submitted mildly.

"Ah! You've got a place of your own in—where was it? Rockridge?" Henry asked the railing of the subway ventilator.

Alan Moss crossed his legs and fastened a baby gaze on Henry.

"No, I haven't a place there," he said blandly. "As a matter of fact, I'm going up that way, though. I stop at the hotel or—just visit around a bit. A good many of the people you and I know are in the Rockridge colony at this time of the year."

"I know they are," mused Henry.

"The Burgesses," Alan suggested.

"They've quite an estate, haven't they?"

"Yes, indeed. And Philip Darrow and Mabel—that is, Miss Darrow, of course,"

Alan said easily, and looked straight at Henry Baird.

And this time Henry ceased his contemplation of the subway ventilator and looked straight at Moss. Two seconds they stared thus—five seconds—ten—while their eyes narrowed slightly, and Henry's color, at least, rose a little. It was growing quite uncomfortable and unusual when Alan, with a slight effort, slid his gaze from Henry and stared at the clock on the dashboard.

"Good gracious! Is it all that time of day?" he demanded. "I'll have to be hitting the trail, Baird."

"You're not going to try making Rockridge to-night?" Henry asked.

"To-night? With this car?" Moss laughed outright. "Why, I'll be up there before nine o'clock. This affair travels when it sees an open road, you know. I've got an airplane motor under that hood, boy!"

"Ah?"

"Yep!" Alan agreed cheerfully, and bent a loving and attentive ear as his starter ground for a moment and then sent out a soft whirl upon the summer air. "When she drops below fifty-five or so on a State road, I run her into the next garage and give her a little expert attention. That's *my* speed, you know! How's your car, by the way?"

"Well enough. It's not up to *your* speed," Henry said shortly.

"Yes, I do try to maintain a certain high speed in every good thing," Mr. Moss chuckled, rather enigmatically, after a lightning, sidelong glance at Henry, as his emergency-brake went out with a precise little click, and his gears meshed with no click at all. "Nevertheless, you might come out and try to catch me some day, Baird."

"That's quite true; I might!" Henry said darkly.

The velvet clutch went in. The car barely crawled into tremorless motion. Mr. Moss grinned again at Mr. Baird, suddenly and brilliantly and with a peculiar flash of daring. "Up Rockridge way, perhaps!" Moss suggested.

"Yes, up Rockridge way!" Henry snarled at him, in the most remarkably emotional manner.

Then a canary-colored hand waved back at him and a light-blue streak curved around a taxicab and whizzed north, and Alan Moss was gone from that particular section, while Henry Baird, his hands clenched and his teeth gritting, stared after him. Alan Moss, with his good looks and his good car, and his rather taking manner, and his million or so tucked away in gilt-edged paper, was gone up Rockridge way; while Henry panted and directed a blazing stare at the distances that had swallowed him!

It was decidedly odd, of course, yet it was no more odd than the way Henry left the ill-fated spot where Alan had pulled up beside him, five minutes back. Jaws set viciously, gaze upon the pavement, hands still clenched, Henry breathed heavily as he turned down the side street, where stood the apartment-hotel he called home, and made strange sounds, causing several startled bystanders to open their eyes and look after him. Savage sounds they were, running from a growl to a distinctly profane rumble and back again to a growl; and they ceased only when Henry caught the inquiring stare of the day-clerk in his hotel lobby. Thereupon Henry relaxed somewhat, stared darkly at his pigeonhole in the mail-rack and found it empty, and asked briefly:

"Mr. Terral home yet?"

"You'll find him up-stairs, sir," said the clerk. "He came home half an hour ago. There's a gentleman with him, waiting to see you."

"Who?"

"Why, I think it's Mr. Anderson, your lawyer. He—"

More than this Henry failed to hear, for he was darting into the elevator. The blackness was disappearing from his countenance, too; hope kindled a new light, and Henry was even smiling eagerly as he stepped off at the seventh floor and strode down to Suite 7C at the end.

And, then, having entered quite boisterously, Henry stopped short. Whitmore Terral, the rather insignificant second cousin with whom he shared his rooms, was sitting there, prim as ever, and Anderson, the attorney, smoked comfortably in the big leather chair—but there was no expected

joyful glow on either of their faces. Anderson, in fact, sighed as he arose and shook hands with Henry.

"I thought perhaps—when they said that you were here—" escaped Henry.

Anderson smiled dismally, shook his head and sat down again.

"You thought that everything was all right, eh, and that I'd come to tell you, Mr. Baird. I wish that it might have been so."

He sighed again and considered his cigar. Henry, having disposed of his hat and found a cigar for himself in the dwindling box, trimmed it and lighted it and dropped into a chair with:

"Well?"

"Well, you're not going to sell your Michigan copper property this week—or next week—or the week after," the lawyer said slowly. "Our Mr. Wiggins just got in this afternoon, after looking the whole thing over on his Western trip."

"And—"

"The man Blackton still insists that the title to the whole tract is his, and not yours, Mr. Baird," the attorney said slowly. "Wiggins talked with him, and although he declined to show any of the papers that are supposed to support his claim, he persisted that they would be produced at the proper time and establish all his contentions."

"And—"

"Well, in the crude state of some of those early Western land records, we may have the very dickens of a job proving that he's wrong," Anderson sighed.

CHAPTER II.

THE GOLDEN CLOUD.

BUT who the devil *is* this man Blackton?" Henry demanded wildly.

"Whoever heard of him until three weeks ago, when it was practically settled that Tilbury and Tilbury, here in New York, were willing to buy me out for eight hundred thousand cash? Where did he come from? Did he just pop out of the ground out there to grab off property I bought for a song two years ago, with an absolutely perfect title? Who—"

"There, there, Mr. Baird!" said Mr. Baird's attorney. "Shouting isn't going to help matters, you know. The man has faith enough in his claim to have carried it to the courts, when you refused to buy him out. Nevertheless, Wiggins says that he seems reasonable enough in some ways. He is still willing to compromise."

"Compromise for laying claim to something that's *mine*?" Henry cried.

"If you choose to call it that," Anderson smiled patiently. "At any rate, he is still willing to drop his claim for fifty thousand dollars. You don't care to pay that, I take it?"

"You take it dead right!" Henry said hoarsely. "I don't care to pay it; I haven't got it to pay and—you're not advising me to pay it, are you?"

The attorney favored him with a wry smile, and munched his cigar.

"Honestly, I don't know," he said. "You bought that tract of land for sixty thousand or so, Baird. You took the gamble and won, because the copper certainly is right on the job. You've got a chance now to sell out for eight hundred thousand, cash. If memory serves, you had a mighty task getting Tilbury and Tilbury up to the point of that cash offer, and it is thinkable that they may not hold it open forever. The principle's rotten, of course, because we're virtually certain that the man Blackton is a fake, pure and simple. At the same time, it might pay to buy him off and—"

His voice trailed away as he regarded Henry. Henry's gaze, so fiery a moment ago, had settled with curious intentness upon a golden cloud, heading toward the sunset and just visible through the window. Harder and harder stared Henry at his cloud, while his eyes grew to little slits, and his lips parted; and: "Er—are you listening, Mr. Baird?"

"Eh?" Henry whirled about again with a queer, dazed effect. "Er—of course I'm listening. Why shouldn't I be listening?"

The lawyer smiled faintly. In his corner—he seemed naturally to fade into the more shadowy spots—Whitmore Terral squinted, removed his shell-rimmed glasses and polished them, and squinted the harder at

Henry Baird when he had replaced them. Whitmore, too, had noted that unaccountable preoccupation of Henry's.

"Your mind seemed to be straying," murmured the attorney. "Well? You don't feel that it's worth while to pay Blackton his fifty thousand and charge it off to profit and loss?"

Henry shook his head slowly. But that such a thing was manifestly absurd, one might have thought that he was gazing straight through the lawyer and at some unpleasant shape far beyond; and there was a distant, dismal quality in his voice now, too.

"No, I don't feel anything of the kind," he said absently. "What then?"

Anderson shrugged his shoulders and reached for his hat.

"Things will have to take their natural course, I presume. We may possibly be in for a long wait, if the thing hangs over till the fall term of their court out there. On the other hand, it may very likely be possible for us to have Blackton's suit brought to trial in a week or two. I hope so."

"And then?" Whitmore suggested anxiously from his corner.

"I'm no clairvoyant," the attorney laughed, as he arose. "I can't tell what may happen then. Very possibly we'll run Blackton out of court in another week or so, and Mr. Baird will sell his mine, if the Tilbury offer still holds good. On the other hand, it's likely enough that—"

And now the unusual Henry had come quite out of his unaccountable dream! Now, quite fiercely, he turned upon his attorney.

"No, it isn't likely enough!" he exploded. "We're going to lick Blackton, and lick him inside of that week or two at the very most. D'ye hear? *At the very most!*"

"Naturally, we hope—"

"It isn't what we hope; it's what *has* to be! That copper tract is mine to sell, and I've got to sell it, and sell it quick! I've got to get my hands on that eight hundred thousand dollars!"

"But—er—why?"

"Why? Because—huh!" Henry said, his tone dropping as he caught himself. "Well—er—because I have to have eight

hundred thousand dollars!" he ended gruffly.

Half a minute or so, Mr. Anderson waited for further light. Henry, apparently, had no idea of furnishing it; his hard, steady gaze remained upon the attorney, as if challenging him to deny the necessity of that particular eight hundred thousand—and that was all. And since Anderson did not know Henry intimately enough to be aware that the demon rum had never passed his lips, he entertained certain private suspicions and shrugged his shoulders again and put on his hat.

"Most of us stand in chronic need of about eight hundred thousand dollars, of course," he said dryly. "I'll do whatever can be done, Mr. Baird; you know that, of course; and I'll let you know just as soon as anything new appears. Good afternoon."

"Well—wait just one second!" Henry cried, and this time there was something downright piteous in his tone. "Always supposing that things do go well, Anderson, what's the shortest possible time in which I *may* be able to sell the property?"

"You may sell it to-morrow, if Blackton drops dead or quits the case. It's possible enough that we may have him licked in—say a month. But—"

"Can't we lick him in less than a month?"

"Why, if they decided to rush the thing through, we could lick him in a week, of course," Anderson said soothingly, and accomplished another step toward the door.

To some extent, Henry controlled himself.

"But for the immediate present that sale is blocked hard and fast?"

"Very hard and uncommonly fast, I should say, Mr. Baird," the attorney concluded grimly. "Good day."

The elevator-gate had clanged behind him before Henry Baird and his second cousin, Whitmore Terral, ceased gazing at one another. There was a vast difference in these two gazes. Whitmore's was the gaze of deep trouble, sanely faced, nevertheless. Henry's was the gaze of a stricken animal, wounded and helpless and still infuriated past bearing.

"It is unfortunate," Whitmore murmured. "Very, very unfortunate."

"Unfortunate?" Henry echoed savagely. "What sort of sickly little word is that—*unfortunate?*"

"Eh?"

"Don't gape at me like that, Whitty! Do you realize that I'm stuck here—stuck fast—while *he* and his aviation engine—"

"*What?*"

Whitmore rose suddenly, drawing himself to his full height, a trifle more than five feet. With deepest concern, he hurried to his cousin, and there was that in his expression which calmed Henry suddenly and, in great measure, permanently. When Whitmore looked like that his tireless brain was about to probe to the bottom of a situation.

"What in the world did you mean by that?" Whitmore demanded.

"I didn't mean anything at all," his cousin said readily. "I'm so thundering mad I don't know what I'm talking about—that's all."

"You spoke of—of an aviation engine?"

"I was looking at that cloud, Whitty, and it—Lord, I don't know! I suppose it suggested aviation to me. What I meant to say was 'he and his claim,' or something of the kind."

"Meaning—er—Blackton?"

"Meaning Blackton, of course."

Whitmore sighed lightly and considered his cousin again; and reading his thoughts was no simple matter now, unless one could penetrate the back of a head. Henry was staring out of the window once more.

"Henry, there is something on your mind—beside this copper matter, I mean?" Whitmore said tentatively. "I've never seen you act like this before."

"You've never been around when any one tried to trim me for eight hundred thousand dollars before."

"But even if the sale is delayed for a while—"

"It isn't necessarily fatal, eh?" Henry said drearily. "Well, perhaps it isn't to you, Whitty. You're drawing down the astonishing sum of fifty per week for being private secretary to an elderly gentleman who collects old china and writes letters to his tenants. But I haven't even fifty a week, Whitty. I've got about two thousand dollars' worth of small bills that I see no

chance of paying. I've got an elderly automobile worth four or five hundred dollars, if the market was good—which it isn't. I've got just one hundred dollars in cash, right here in my pocket, *in the whole world!*"

"I—er—didn't know that you were quite as low as that, Henry," Whitmore said, steadily enough. "But, even so, that doesn't account for your excitement."

"Do I have to account for it?" Henry muttered.

"Henry, I—I beg your pardon, but you—you haven't been drinking?"

"Don't be an ass!"

Whitmore drew a deep breath and nodded to himself.

"Is it a—a woman, Henry?" he inquired.

"Eh?"

"A woman, Henry?" Whitmore repeated steadily.

"A—pah! Hell! No! No, it isn't a woman!" Henry snapped, and fixed his eyes on the distant golden cloud.

And it was a queer statement, coming from Henry, too. The very soul of honesty and honor, Henry had told a flat lie that time, because most certainly it was a woman!

Not that this was any ordinary, everyday women, you understand; this was the one perfect flower of all the generations of woman that have been born to earth since the creation. This woman, let it be confessed at once, was none other than Miss Mabel Darrow—Mabel, the only daughter of Philip Darrow, who has made a number of millions himself and is really the whole firm of Darrow & Co.

And she had gone away from Henry three full weeks ago, and in each of these weeks he had somehow survived seven centuries of gnawing loneliness and yearning; and through each of them he had looked forward with straining eyes toward the big day when the accursed mine should actually be sold and, his poverty-locked lips free at last after so many agonizing months, he should dash to Mabel's side and gamble his whole future happiness on a single word when he asked—oh, no, that lie was fully justified! Whitmore never could understand a thing like that!

And now, poverty-stricken still and likely to remain so for a long time, Henry was here in New York and Mabel was in Rock-ridge, Massachusetts; and somewhere on the road between the two Alan Moss was spinning along. Darrow himself liked the cheeky little rotter, too! So much had been evident on several occasions when Henry had met Moss in the Darrow home and—

"It is *not* a woman, Henry?" Whitmore repeated doubtfully.

This time Henry Baird did not even bother to answer. Was it actually, humanly possible that a—a thing like this Alan Moss stood a chance of winning her, be his obvious advantages what they might? Did those eyes of Mabel's really mean nothing at all, when they looked so deeply into Henry's own—or had looked in that dead age, three weeks ago? Henry caught the sigh just before it escaped and went on staring at his golden cloud.

The cloud was breaking into little fragments now and drifting away in several directions. Five minutes more and it would have vanished completely—which, by the way, is the mean little trick played by many varieties of golden cloud.

CHAPTER III.

JABS FROM THE NEEDLEMAN.

IT may be as well to glance briefly at Whitmore Terral.

He was small, as has been noted, where Henry was distinctly big and broad and splendidly upholstered with muscle. People passed Whitmore fifty or sixty times before they even knew of his existence; Henry, on the other hand, caught one's attention at the first glance, with his rather handsome countenance, his long and positive stride, and his general air of prosperity and importance. Whitmore was very thoroughly educated, while Henry—well, of course, Henry was very thoroughly educated, too, since he had been graduated from the same college in the same year; but it will have to be conceded that while Whitmore had carried away many rare gems of the mind, the most tangible evidences of Henry's flight through college were one

silver cup and two medals, now in the bookcase. In the evenings, Whitmore read deeply and at great length, while Henry wandered happily among congenial people—and yet, as a rule, the pair got along wonderfully well together.

Just now Whitmore sighed and returned to the chair beside the living-room's big table.

"I wish you felt able to tell me what troubles you, Henry," he said simply. "It might be that I could advise you."

Henry turned away from his window; the cloud was all gone now.

"You can't advise a man who's carrying around a personal hoodoo, Whitty."

"You have no personal hoodoo, Henry."

"Well, I insist that I have," Henry snapped. "He's been with me for a solid year now, working overtime. I've had more pure hard luck than—"

"Rot!" said Whitmore.

"Rot be hanged!" Henry cried. "There's no rot about it! Everything I touch crumbles to bits! Everything I look at fades away and dies! Everything—"

"Twaddle!" said Whitmore.

"Do you find an unusual amount of twaddle in the way this copper sale has fallen down?" Henry demanded grimly, yet with a touch of sour satisfaction. "Five per cent of that is yours, you know, Whitty. It costs you forty thousand dollars to see the thing held up!"

This time Whitmore Terral winced.

"I am quite aware of that, Henry," he said gravely. "I invested all that remained of father's fortune in the venture, and it means much to me. Nevertheless, you do not find me moaning about hard luck?"

"Go ahead and moan, then!" Henry said savagely. "You'll have to moan like sin to beat me!"

"I shall not moan at all," Whitmore smiled soberly. "I am not a believer in hard luck."

"What do you call it, then?"

"In your case, as a broad, general proposition, I should say that it was a genius for doing the wrong thing, Henry. Oh, not so much in the matter of this copper tract, perhaps, but in other things. Let us consider your case, point by point, and—"

"Whitty," Henry said, almost dangerously, "let us can that didactic stuff! When a man has absolutely nothing left on earth, he doesn't want to be considered point by point."

"You have a great deal left," said Whitmore. "You have youth and health and—spotless honor, Henry!"

"Eh?"

"You have the blood of the Terrals in your veins, Henry!" concluded Henry's cousin, with downright solemnity.

Henry grinned tartly at him.

"Why, you haven't sprung that one in six or eight months, Whitty," said he. "What's the idea of it now?"

"To steady you, for one thing, perhaps," sighed Whitmore. "You're in quite an abnormal state this afternoon. Your perspective seems entirely shattered, my dear boy. You are magnifying a mere annoyance into a positive calamity. Why, a little while ago you seemed downright hysterical!"

Henry said nothing at all. On the bookcase, the little clock was just preparing to strike the hour of six. There is not so much traffic on the Boston Post Road at that time on a week-day. At a guess, because he was a superb driver, Alan Moss had about passed the suburban districts by now and was preparing for some real speed. Another space he would run along the Sound, slowing down through a pretty town, whizzing on again, slowing down for another; then he would head north and open her up in good earnest and—he meant to visit with the Darrows themselves this time, Henry concluded suddenly and with a start!

That had been the significance of his mention of "visiting around" and of the unusually self-confident grin! Yes, that was it: he meant to stay at the Darrow place in Rockridge, which Henry had never even seen. And they expected him—Mabel expected him—and there would be a late dinner waiting for him, doubtless to be enjoyed alone with Mabel, because Henry recalled all too vividly a dozen remarks which indicated that Darrow spent most of his evenings at the Rockridge Country Club. And all of this while Henry sat in Suite 7C.

He clasped his hands and sighed shud-

deringly. He set his teeth. It seemed to Henry that he must see Mabel Darrow again or—yes, actually, literally, die! That sort of thing really does happen when one has postponed the first real falling in love to the ripe old age of twenty-eight. Henry groaned and—

“But don’t take it so much to heart, Hen,” Whitty said, quite kindly, and it was evident that he had been talking for some time. “I don’t mean to distress you unduly, but that ridiculous notion of hard luck must be exorcised—really! Remember that the Terrals have never been whipped, boy! Remember that the Terral honor—”

“Yes, I know all about the Terral honor, Whitty. I’ve never soiled it at all, and I never shall,” Henry said briefly. “That has nothing to do with being marooned here with the last hundred dollars and no real prospects for weeks.”

“It has much to do with just that, Henry,” said his cousin, and leaned back thoughtfully. “Now, suppose that we analyze, quite calmly—”

He might have done just that, too, save that the telephone bell selected just that second to ring briskly. Henry started nervously and gazed at it; Whitmore, on the other hand, after noting the start and frowning perplexedly, arose with entire calm and stepped to the instrument. He listened and grunted an affirmative; he turned back to Henry.

“Larkin!” he said simply.

CHAPTER IV.

A VISIT FROM MR. LARKIN.

“EH? My tailor?” Henry smiled sadly. “Tell him to go to blazes, Whitty. I can’t afford any more clothes for a while.”

“Are you sure you haven’t ordered any lately?”

“Quite sure. Why?”

“Larkin’s coming up here with a bundle for you, Henry.”

Henry scowled and shook his head.

“He’s made some mistake or other,” he muttered, without concern. “It isn’t my bundle, Whitty. I rather wish it was.”

“When it is barely a month since he made you three new suits, Henry!” Whitmore exclaimed.

In the hallway, the elevator gate had rattled again. The little buzzer on the door of the suite whined energetically—and Larkin and his bundle were with them.

He entered very briskly, did the little tailor. He nodded at Whitmore and closed the door after him with his foot, which was an odd little thing to do and not at all like the usual Larkin. As a rule, he carried an air of fitting and flattering humility with him; that seemed to have been left somewhere else this late afternoon.

Still, he smiled at Henry, who had absorbed none of these details, and Henry smiled at him with a careless:

“Not my stuff, Larkin. You’ve made a mistake.”

Mr. Larkin’s smile broadened.

“I know it’s not your stuff, sir, but I haven’t made any mistake. It’s just linings in that bundle.”

“Eh?”

“In a house like this it’s a bit easier to get up-stairs without a lot of questions, if you’re delivering something,” the caller informed him, and laid his package on the big davenport and his hat atop the package; after which he straightened up and looked directly at Henry Baird.

Henry grinned absently.

“I suppose so,” he agreed. “But you’ve wasted your ingenuity this time, Larkin. I don’t care to order any more clothes just yet.”

“I hadn’t thought of asking you to order any, sir,” the tailor informed him quietly. “It wasn’t about that that I called.”

“No?”

“No, it was about the three suits I made for you over two months ago, sir,” the caller said significantly—and waited.

“Oh, they were all right,” Henry assured him.

“I know they were, Mr. Baird,” Larkin agreed, “but they’ve left a little balance on my books that isn’t quite so much all right, so to speak.”

“What?”

“A matter of three hundred and fifty dollars, sir.”

Henry's smile faded and a scowl whisked into its place.

"It 'll be paid in due time, Larkin!" he snapped.

"Exactly, Mr. Baird. But that might leave a sort of diversity of opinion, as you may say, about just what due time means," the tailor said steadily yet smilingly.

"Well, it means in this case that when I get mighty good and ready to pay you, you'll get your check!" Henry thundered, for on this particular afternoon he was in no mood at all to bandy words with tailors.

And this, of course, was Mr. Larkin's cue to gasp a little and snatch up his package and fade swiftly from the picture; yet he must have missed his cue, for he did none of these things. Instead, his eyes hardened and his chin stuck forward a little, and he kept on looking at Henry Baird.

"Quite so," said he. "And I've no doubt you find that sort of thing very effective with some people, but it doesn't go with me at all, Mr. Baird!"

"What's that?" cried Henry, unbelievably, since his hearing seemed to have gone astray.

The thing simply couldn't be happening, you see. Robbins, who had made Henry's clothes for a dozen years, or until his poor old failing eyes really made a change of tailors imperative, could no more have made a speech like that than he could have spread his elderly arms and flown away toward the moon. Larkin wasn't doing it, either, although:

"That's exactly what I said!" Larkin repeated. "It doesn't go at all with me, Mr. Baird!"

"Well, upon my soul—" gasped Henry.

"Now, I think if you'll just drop that bunk indignation, sir, we'll get on much better," the unusual tailor rapped out. "Let's see where we stand, sir. This was my first order from you, wasn't it?"

"And the last!" choked Henry Baird.

"Like enough," agreed Mr. Larkin, without a single visible tear. "You came to me from Robbins, sir, and I didn't ask you why you'd made the change—although I may say that sometimes I suspicion them that are slow pay. However, I did your work in the very best fashion."

"Eh? Yes."

"And promptly?"

"I presume so," Henry said coldly, for he was recovering himself and preparing the icy blast of words that should send Larkin running.

"And I'll tell you, Mr. Baird, that there's no finer woolens, and no finer linings, and no finer workmanship than what you got in them three suits," the tailor pursued energetically. "All right. I did my part. Now I'm asking you to do yours. That's all."

"Larkin!" Henry began heavily.

"I'm willing to give thirty days, sir; I'll give sixty if I have to. But when a gent doesn't show any signs of paying inside of sixty days, I come after the money, and I get it!"

His wretched chin stuck farther forward. His eyes shot a hot, unpleasant light that had its own most peculiar effect on the icy torrent about to leave Henry's lips. If ever an untutored savage of a tailor meant business, it was this Larkin person; and, really, the best that Henry could do was a hoarse:

"Very well! You've said enough. Go! I'll see that you're paid shortly."

"Well, I'll see that I'm paid right here and now, sir."

"You can't collect from me by any such tactics, Larkin!" Henry said threateningly.

"Oh, yes, I can!" Larkin corrected briskly. "I'll tell you why. I've got a man in my shop who used to work for Robbins, and he tells me that you were frequently eight or ten months behind, and that you owe Robbins money right now. That's Robbins's business; I run mine differently. I've got a pretty good line on people like you, Mr. Baird: either you've got no money at all, and I know better than that, or you're—well, I may as well say it and end any misunderstanding—or you're trying to be a dead beat!"

"Why, you infernal—" Henry began.

"So I ask you just once more: will you pay that bill now, sir?"

"I will not!" said Henry.

"Will you pay half of it now, sir?"

"I will not!" said Henry, and the more he strove to render his voice infuriated, the more it sought to thin out.

"Then I'll tell you quite honestly, Mr. Baird, that I'm going to give you until day after to-morrow to reconsider the thing—and after that I'm going to sue you."

"What?"

"I'm going to show you up!" the tailor said angrily. "I mean that, too! I'm going to advertise you for just what you are, Mr. Baird. Well?"

"I think I'd pay him, Henry," Whitmore suggested unexpectedly, for in the excitement he had quite lost track of Henry's financial condition.

"I'll do nothing of the sort!" Henry said thickly.

Larkin shook his head and gathered up his hat and his package.

"I thought I hadn't made any mistake!" he said unpleasantly. "I've got five cases like yours, and I'm going to make an example of one of them. You'll be *it*, I think. Good evening!"

He nodded and walked straight out, slamming the door after him. It may be that he waited in the corridor to be called back, because it was some time before the elevator ascended to remove him; if so, he was wholly disappointed. They did not call him back; there was no occasion at all for anything of that sort.

Instead, they gazed round-eyed at one another. Whitmore was rather pale; Henry himself was distinctly red, with a shiny film upon his forehead.

"He'll do it!" Henry said hoarsely.

"I think he will," mused Whitmore.

"And you know what it means, don't you?" Henry pursued, with agitation that soared by the second. "It means that I'll be advertised as a plain pauper, Whitmore. It means that everybody 'll know I'm stone broke. It means that Tilbury & Tilbury 'll know it."

"But—"

"I've been putting up a considerable bluff around that office, Whitty. I've been posing as a rather wealthy person who doesn't really care whether he sells out his copper property or not. That, chiefly, is how I got them worked up to paying eight hundred thousand dollars—and once they find out that it's a matter of life or death to me—"

He broke off, for his voice caught. He laughed bitterly at Whitmore, then: "Well, do you believe in my hard luck *now*?" he demanded.

Whitmore swallowed the rather scared little lump in his throat and was himself.

"No, I do not!" he said tartly. "The thing's an infernal nuisance, of course, but it isn't going to ruin us by any means."

"Have you got three hundred and fifty dollars to choke him off with?"

"No, I haven't," Whitmore said, with a sad little smile. "I haven't put aside anything these last months, you know; what with the—er—rent here and one thing and another. Still, that's not important. You can borrow that much, Henry."

"From whom?"

"Well—Peters might lend it to you."

"Yes, and he'd tell every soul he met about it."

"He might," Whitmore conceded. "Well, why not—why not try Joe Plant, Henry? He has plenty of money."

"Who?"

"Joe Plant, of course. You've known him a good many years."

"Yes, and I'd rather go to the newsstand at the corner and try to borrow money from the old man there!" Henry said, with more than a touch of contempt for his cousin's intelligence. "Why, Joe Plant hates me worse than I hate him!"

"Joe?"

"Of course. We passed a good part of our boyhood punching each other's heads. He's detested me since the first time he laid eyes on me, and I feel about the same toward Joe. Anyway, he's not in town."

"Where is he?"

"Honeymooning, somewhere or other—up Tolver Manor way, I believe. That's another count he has against me, you know," said Henry, and grinned suddenly. "His wife—Evelyn."

"Eh?"

"Yep!" Henry chuckled. "I—I had a sort of temporary obsession about Evelyn, you know, a year and a half ago, and Evelyn seemed rather taken with me, too, Whitty. In fact, I'll admit to you now that we were engaged for about forty-eight hours, although it wasn't advertised."

"Henry!" said Whitmore, who did not take these things lightly.

"And then we both woke up, thank Heaven, and Joe came along with his brute cave-man stuff and won her and married her. For which, by the way, I'm duly grateful; I'm not strong for these ladies who feed on emotion, and fancy the whole world in love with 'em because they're fairly good-looking and vampish and—all that sort of tommyrot, Whitty. But I'd never ask a favor of Plant if it was to save my neck, boy! Think up somebody else."

"I'll try," muttered Whitmore, and sat down suddenly and buried his head in his hands.

Now, it might have been supposed that Henry, too, would have devoted his whole brain to the canvassing of prospects. As it chanced, he did nothing of the kind. Drearly enough, Henry walked back to the window and resumed his study of the sky, which was darkening now.

By this time, he suspected, Alan Moss was past Stamford, drawing nearer and nearer and nearer to Mabel. Henry shut his teeth hard and rammed his hands into his pockets. And *he* was here, dunned by a tailor who threatened to— Henry started visibly!

Astonishment came to his features—and then a frown—and then a very curious, intent expression which indicated deep, quick thought. There is such a thing, of course, as combining discretion and inclination, business and pleasure. In fact, considering his secret mental state, it was rather odd that the inspiration had not come to Henry within two seconds of Larkin's departure. His lips parted and he nodded to the outer dusk; he smiled, quickly and eagerly.

"Now it is just possible—" Whitmore began.

"Never mind whether it is or not," Henry said, so briskly, so differently, that Whitmore blinked at him through the glasses. "I can't afford to take the risk of going around and borrowing little sums of money just now. It's too beastly obvious and it's unnecessary, anyway. I've got the answer to the whole thing: I'll disappear!"

"You'll do what?"

"Just disappear early to-morrow morn-

ing, Whitty. I'll take the car and strap on the little trunk of clothes and roll out of town for a week or two!"

He laughed, with real blitheness; and while it may be too much to say that suspicion welled up with new force in Whitmore, it is certain that he looked very narrowly indeed at his cousin.

"Yes? And in—er—just what direction were you thinking of rolling?" he asked.

"Eh? Oh, that doesn't matter, so that I'm out of the way," said Henry; and gave an excellent imitation of a man pausing to give brief consideration to a matter of really small importance. "I'll probably head up New England way. I'll keep you advised as to where I am, of course. I may make—er—Rockridge by to-morrow night—or, no! I'll probably stop off at New Bingham, twenty miles this side. They've got a pretty decent hotel there, I believe."

"You have friends at New Bingham?"

"Friends? New Bingham? No, certainly not!" said Henry, and treated his cousin to a smile of childlike innocence that contrasted almost uncannily with his perturbation of five minutes ago.

"And suppose something comes up, in this mine matter, that needs your attention?"

"You'll look after it, because I'll leave a power of attorney with you, Whitty."

And now Whitmore stared the harder. And having stared, he came closer to Henry and laid a hand on his arm.

"Henry, old man," said he, "just what is behind all this?"

"Eh?" Henry scowled. "What the devil should be behind it?"

"Don't bluster," Whitmore said steadily. "I know that there's something behind it, Henry; I feel it. You—you may have thought I didn't notice it, but you have been far from yourself these last two or three weeks. You've been irritable and—and—preoccupied—and—jumpy!"

"Piffle!" said Henry.

"Manifestations of that kind usually have a woman somewhere in the background," Whitmore smiled, rather timidly and apologetically. "You know, I—I hesitate to say anything of the kind, Hen, but you're a—a handsome cuss and women

seem attracted to you; and I've been wondering if—if—"

"Well, you quit your wondering right now!" Henry said sternly. "If I'm not here that little rat can't serve a summons and complaint on me, can he?"

"No."

"Well, that's why I'm leaving town. Are you ready for dinner?"

"You believe that you can run away from your—your 'hard luck,' as you call it?"

"Yep!"

"Trouble can travel faster than any automobile, Henry!" sighed Whitmore. And there he ceased for a little and took to studying Henry intently. "There's a very bright spot on each of your cheeks!" Whitmore finished, irrelevantly.

"It's a good thing you're able to find a bright spot somewhere," Henry submitted, cheerily, for the last detail had settled itself in his mind during the past minute. "Let's eat!"

CHAPTER V.

WITH TROUBLE AT HIS HEELS.

REPEATEDLY, during that first forty miles of rolling through the bright morning sunshine, Henry Baird was forced to grin at the white road ahead as he thought of Whitmore.

Whitmore, you see, had spent the better part of a vain evening in trying to point out the folly of leaving town at all. He had sought, with deep earnestness, to impress upon Henry that, even when one travels alone, one hundred dollars is very limited capital for a motor trip. He had dwelt at length upon several minor weak spots in Henry's rather elderly car, which might give way and call for attention, which in turn meant cash outlay; he had mentioned the high cost of living and its bearing on hotel rates; he had mentioned, as well, about everything else that had occurred to him and that might possibly have some deterring effect upon Henry—and the best he had received in return was the calm smile of Henry's unaltered determination.

So that now Henry bowled along with

his back toward New York and his eyes toward New England; and the very curious thing is that life's pathway had smoothed itself out automatically and the future held nothing but good for Henry Baird. That persistent run of hard luck had been left behind; he seemed to know it—that was all. The man Blackton and his ridiculous claim would be thrown from the Michigan courts; the mine would be sold to Tilbury and Tilbury for the full eight hundred thousand dollars; and more immediately and more important, Henry Baird would look again upon Mabel before night.

Aye, with a little care Henry might look upon her for two solid weeks! Rockridge has an hotel of excellent repute and prices not too exorbitant; there Henry would be settled before dark. To-night, perhaps, he would run over to the Darrow place and—oh, just pop in unexpectedly, after he had scrubbed off the road dust and extracted his evening clothes or his white flannels from the shiny little trunk, just now strapped to the back of the car.

Henry sighed and slumped down comfortably behind his wheel. One hundred dollars can be made to go a long, long way—particularly if nobody suspects that it is your last hundred. From clothes and shoes down to collars and tooth-paste, supplies for a good deal more than two weeks were in that shiny black trunk. Five dollars a day ought to suffice for the inn and, to the best of his knowledge, there were few ways of spending loose change, up at Rockridge. Yes, carefully stretched, his hundred dollars would—Henry aroused suddenly. That loud report had been in his immediate neighborhood! Henry slowed down and craned over the side for a view of his left rear tire.

Full of miles and hard service, its end had come at last! Even as he stopped, a jagged fragment as large as one's hand stretched out sickeningly from the flattened wreck. Henry stepped out and stared at it, with heart pounding rather more energetically. Henry spoke, too, although it were better not to dwell too minutely upon his words; in a broad way, they indicated his opinion of the tire that had been; later, they sketched in the self-evident fact that

there was no spare tire on the rear, nor had there been for a month or so.

Still, it is only your craven soul that permits itself to be stopped by minor obstacles. It was bitter enough, to be sure, since every penny expended on the road must shorten his Rockridge stay; but the garage down at the foot of the hill had a window full of nice, new casings, visible even at this distance. Henry smiled grimly and bumped his way to the foot of the grade.

He was the poorer by an even fifty dollars when he resumed his tour and he had ceased to smile so broadly. His bursts of speed were less frequent, too, and his look-out for sharp stones grew far more keen—and when lunch-time came, well up in Connecticut, Henry turned his back upon the alluring place, with its outdoor tables and its hurrying waiters, and paused at the humble little bakery, where he consumed buns and sweet, fresh milk.

And now real hills were appearing and Henry was in Massachusetts, with Rockridge not more than fifty miles ahead. They were harder hills than Henry had imagined, too; he seemed to have all manner of difficulty in getting up them to-day. That was downright odd, because whatever else might be said for it this old reliable car usually negotiated anything short of the side of a house without complaint. Henry found himself frowning over the queer, unaccountable skip in his motor. Poor gas was probably the cause; he tried a new carburetor adjustment.

And the skip persisted and grew worse. It sounded more like faulty ignition now. With another fifteen miles of increasingly difficult going behind, Henry paused again, took out his spark-plugs one by one and scrubbed their points carefully. They did not seem particularly in need of cleaning, nor did their scrubbing bring any marked improvement.

The first cold dread, as to the real cause, came just as he passed the crossroads with its "New Bingham—fourteen miles" sign and its little cluster of houses ahead. He might try, hard as he chose, to deny it; but the fact was that his motor had gone through two full revolutions just then with-

out firing in a single cylinder. Henry pushed at his horn button; from the horn came one faint, sad little squeak and nothing more. Ahead, on the concrete garage, loomed like the writing of Fate the words "Battery Service Station." Henry stopped and called, without enthusiasm, for the battery man.

And presently this kindly person looked up from the cavern he had been exploring under Henry's driving-seat and said:

"How long's this battery been in, brother?"

"It must be two years. How long will it take you to fix it?"

The kindly one smiled sadly.

"Brother, there's no fix to a battery that's run six months longer than it has any license to run. This one's stone dead, y' know."

"Er—er—*all* worn out?" Henry gasped.

"Absolute and complete!"

"I'll have to—to buy a new one?" Henry inquired, with a wan and slightly bewildered smile.

"You will unless you want to stop here with us a spell, brother."

"How—how much?" asked Henry Baird.

"Forty-three fifty for this type—five off for cash, of course—and it's only luck we got one of 'em in stock. That's the old price I'm giving you, too, brother. Shall I stick her in?"

He waited, without much sympathy, since Henry was so evidently a prosperous person. Possibly he wondered why Henry stared so fixedly at the sky-line to the north. There was a matter of thirty-four miles between Henry and Rockridge.

No smile at all played about his lips as he rolled out of the village with his new storage battery under the seat; yet this was more by reason of Henry's deep pre-occupation than because of any real sadness. To some small extent, Whitmore had certainly been right: Henry had not quite succeeded in distancing his hard luck. One or two of the tentacles had reached after him from New York and stripped his pockets of all but seven or eight dollars.

Still, while it altered his plans, there was nothing wholly disastrous about that. One good thing about a car of standard make

is that it has a certain fairly fixed value at all times. Henry would have to sell his car at New Bingham and in some ways that would be better, for it meant that he would have much more loose money in his pocket when he made Rockridge on an early evening local.

In a place like New Bingham, he fancied, one should get a pretty good price for this kind of car. Henry frowned meditatively and spun along. About six hundred dollars would be the right figure for a beginning, he thought; he might have to shade that a trifle, although not much more than fifty dollars—and there, by the way, were the spires of New Bingham, just over the hill.

Henry thrilled and put on a little extra speed, entering the town with quite a swirl of dust and coming to a rather effective stop before the one big garage. A soured-looking man shuffled out, evidently under the impression that Henry wished to buy gas.

"I want to see the boss," Henry said crisply.

"Keep on looking," the other advised.

"You're he?"

"I'm him," said the soured one unsmilingly.

"Do you—er—buy cars?"

"H-m. Now and then."

"I'd like to sell you this one!" Henry laughed cheerily.

The soured one peered at him—and at the car—and at Henry again—and then seemed to back into his shell.

"What you asking?"

"Six hundred, cash!"

"As is?"

"Without the trunk, of course."

Followed a period of deep silence, where-in the native sent his eyes from front to rear, from top to bottom, of Henry's motor.

"I don't see it."

"I might shade that figure a little."

"Uhuh? How much?"

"Shall we call it five fifty?" Henry inquired.

"You pretty anxious to sell?"

"Oh, no—no!" said Henry. "But I'm not going to have much more use for a car this summer and—"

"Your car, of course?"

"Well, naturally."

"You're—touring, hey?"

"Yes."

"And you just got the notion you'd sell the car and quit touring, eh?" the soured one asked curiously.

"You have said it," Henry laughed.

The other backed farther into his shell. He seemed rather to have forgotten Henry, too. He stared down the main street for a space and then up the main street; he scratched a match on his "No Smoking" sign and lighted his pipe. Keenly, he peered at Henry Baird.

"Give you one hundred and fifty, spot cash!" he shot forth.

"You'll give me—what?"

"One fifty, and not a cent more!"

Henry Baird caught his breath. And still—unless he wished to start out and drum the town for another buyer, it really seemed to lie between taking this criminal's hundred and fifty dollars or turning back homeward again. One does not spend a week or two in Rockridge on eight dollars.

"All right! I'll let it go at that!" Henry said bitterly.

The soured one did not even remove his pipe, but his eye sparkled curiously.

"You won't let it go at that around here!" he stated.

"Eh?"

"You listen to me, you darned crook!" the sour person said, astonishingly. "You ain't the first one that's stole a car and brought it here to sell and you won't be the last, but at that I'm gettin' darned sick of it! D' ye hear? I'm gettin' sick of being taken for a blasted fool!"

"I—I—what are you talking about?" Henry stammered.

"That's all right! Don't you get red and shout at me! I'm wise to ye and I ain't afraid of ye!" said the other and backed away a pace. "Nobody's selling a car like that at any such figure that come by it honest. You beat it!"

"Why, you—you confounded old—"

"Say, listen!" cried the garage-man. "I have got rheumatism and m' wife's sick and I'm having a time with help here and I ain't lookin' for any more trouble or excitement; but if you want to stick around a few minutes I'll phone for the constable

and let you prove this here's your car. Get me? I don't want to see your tickets; I know that one, too! The last chap we had here with a stolen car 'd durned near killed the owner getting his tickets away from him. You going to wait here for the constable?"

"No, you blithering idiot!" said Henry Baird, bitterly, as he climbed back behind his wheel again.

CHAPTER VI.

TWO HUNDRED CHANCES.

ANOTHER sale was shattered; he would do no more peddling of his car in New Bingham, because this pessimistic individual, in all probability, would shuffle in to his telephone and warn any other garages that might be in town. For that matter, if he chose to warn his constable, Henry Baird was in no mood for effective protest.

He had wronged Whitmore; Whitmore was utterly right; there are certain kinds of hoodoo which one cannot leave behind. Henry owned a fine, healthy specimen of the breed and—oh, what was the matter with him, anyway? He looked around at New Bingham's chief residential street, with its handsome houses set far back and its lawns and smiling, hurrying people and happy children. Surely enough, what *was* the matter with him? In a world packed with joy and opportunity and any number of other good things, it is only the weakest kind of weakling who permits himself to be depressed by a demented garage keeper.

Henry straightened up and even laughed aloud, partly at the man and partly in scorn at himself. He was very nearly through New Bingham now and still heading toward Rockridge and—What in the world was the big festivity over there? Henry turned toward it and slowed down.

The big white church appeared to be the center, but there were tents and booths and gay trappings all over the huge lawn and in the big, smooth field behind as well. There were people around by the hundreds, too—women in gala attire and girls and girls and girls and still more girls, with a

man or two here and there. There was a band, off in the distance—and there were even girls on Henry's running-board and one little sixteen-year-old was crying:

"Come right in here at the big gate. There's no admission!"

Henry grinned doubtfully.

"Er—just what is it?"

"The fair for the new organ, of course."

"Well, I'm afraid—"

"Well, just come in for a minute and look around!" a musical voice beside his left ear importuned. "You can park your car out behind the church and—oh, just look at what we're doing and—"

They had fairly swamped him now. He seemed to be turning in, of no particular accord of his own. A fat, pink hand reached over and jabbed incessantly at his horn-button as he rolled slowly through the crowd, bringing a scurrying and a chorus of care-free laughter at every jab.

"You've come up from New York?" another voice was asking him.

"Just to-day," said Henry.

"Well, then—just stop here; this is good enough—girls! Here's somebody come all the way from New York, just to attend the fair! Mr. Singer!"

A plump, benign person, mainly in black, detached himself from a surging knot of femininity and approached with quiet, kindly dignity. The same voice shrilled:

"Oh, Mr. Singer! Here's—what's your name?"

"Baird!" Henry confessed, rather faintly.

"Here's Mr. Baird, from New York. He wants to help, too!"

A large, soft, white hand shook Henry's. A low, carefully modulated voice assured him:

"We're very glad indeed to welcome you, Mr. Baird. Our girls have turned out wonderfully for the new organ, don't you think?"

"They have indeed!" Henry agreed.

"We'd never have done a thing, if it hadn't been for Mr. Singer!" a new voice informed him enthusiastically. "Mr. Singer just does absolutely everything that's to be done in the church here!"

"Oh, Miss Reece!" Mr. Singer protested benevolently.

"Oh, but you do! You know you do! If it wasn't for Mr. Singer—"

Here a chorus, coming from nowhere in particular and for no particular reason, drowned the words. The group surged away from Henry. Mr. Singer smiled happily.

"Our girls are workers, Mr. Baird!" he mused.

"They—er—yes, they do seem to be," Henry agreed. "You've raised the money for the organ, I hope?"

"Well, we expect to raise it, before the evening is out," said Mr. Singer. "Things are going a little slowly as yet and I—yes, Miss Donaldson?"

A statuesque blonde was beckoning him. He mumbled his excuses to Henry and hurried away—and Henry himself settled back with an astonished little sigh. Certainly, he had been projected into a new atmosphere with something of a rush; and at another time and under other circumstances he might have drawn a good deal of fun from Mr. Singer and the racing girls and all the rest of it. Just now, Henry thought—since there was no earthly reason for his being just here—he would make an inconspicuous escape and—

"Won't *you* buy a chance on my crazy-quilt?" asked a rather maddening combination of red hair and violet eyes, bounding to Henry's side.

"Well, I'm afraid—" Henry began.

"Just *one!* They're only a dollar! Just one chance!"

And she laid the little printed ticket on his knee and looked at Henry; and Henry even grinned when he had handed her the dollar and pocketed the slip!

"And you'll have to take a chance on my banana-tree!" a thin, sparkling little girl informed him from the other side. "Oh, yes you *will*, if you bought one from her! Yes, you *will*, Mr. Baird! It's a lovely tree and some time or other there'll be bananas on it—and it's only a dollar!"

So Henry bought another chance; and as the sparkling little girl twinkled off into the crowd again, Henry drew a long breath and placed his heel on the starter-button; if he meant to retain the price of an evening meal, it was time to leave.

And she who must unquestionably have been New Bingham's very loveliest daughter, had glided to the side of his car and laid both fair hands thereon.

"There are just two chances left for the sun-dial," she confided to Henry. "Won't *you* buy them? They're only two dollars apiece!"

"I might—might—I might take one of them!" Henry stuttered.

"Oh, do buy both!"

"But—"

"*Do* buy them!" pleaded New Bingham's prize beauty, and there was no denying that she was an almighty attractive girl and that her eyes were little short of wonderful. "It's such a little thing, you know, but it all helps with the organ; and Mr. Singer has worked so hard and he counts so much on us!"

There was a mere five-dollar bill, shrinking timidly and alone into the very bottom of Henry's pocket. Yet she who had had two chances left had none at all, when she had handed Henry his dollar in change!

Then she was gone and Henry was breathing heavily. To all intents, he was penniless now and—how had it happened? He could not as yet understand. And *why* must it have happened? That he was even less able to grasp. It was merely the way Fate played with Henry Baird, he assumed, or—Henry sat up and blinked! Was it possible? Yes, it really did seem to be possible: Fate had relented and decided to allot to Henry Baird at least one real inspiration!

A minute or more he sat quite still, revolving the idea and its possibilities, oblivious even to the vivid little brunette who asked him thrice if he would not take just one chance on the Spanish leather armchair in Mrs. Fosdick's booth. Then Henry descended and pushed his way through the throng until his hand rested upon the plump arm of Mr. Singer himself.

"May I have just a moment with you?" Henry asked.

"You certainly may, my dear sir!" said Mr. Singer and, his head inclined attentively, led Henry to the shady side of the smaller ice-cream tent. "What is it, Mr. Baird?"

"I want to help here!" said Henry.

"Ah?" beamed Mr. Singer. "Whatever you wish to subscribe to the organ fund—"

"I can't subscribe—I'm too poor. I really am, you know," Henry said earnestly. "But I have an automobile here that I don't use very much and I've been thinking of selling it, anyway."

"And you wish to donate it?" Mr. Singer asked, clasping his hands happily.

"I'd like to, but I can't even afford to do that," sighed Henry Baird. "What just occurred to me was this: we might take the thing and raffle it off—say, two hundred chances at two dollars apiece. That would make four hundred and I'd be very willing to take three hundred of it and hand the other hundred to the organ fund."

It is possible that the faintest shade of disappointment passed over Mr. Singer's benign countenance; if so, it persisted for no more than the smallest fraction of a second. Then Mr. Singer was wringing Henry's hand.

"My dear sir! You are very much more than good!" he cried. "In the name of our congregation, I thank you most heartily and—" He wrung the hand again as his eye drifted critically over the throng. "You're willing to do this immediately?"

"Of course."

"There couldn't be a better time," murmured Mr. Singer, briskly. "The young ladies have sold off most of the chances on the smaller articles and the larger ones we're saving until evening. I believe that your car, sir, will fill most beautifully a little gap that I had hardly suspected until you made your suggestion." He beckoned and a nice-looking boy hurried to him. "This is our amateur sign-painter, Harry Masters," he beamed.

"Harry, Mr. Baird here is going to donate his car to the fair; you go with him and take it down to the middle of the back lawn and fix up a sign and—oh, Miss Wells! Just a moment! Miss Wells, we're going to sell two hundred chances on an automobile at two dollars apiece. Will you call in all the young ladies and see if we can't sell them out with a rush. I'll write the tickets, I think."

He felt about in his pocket and found

a pencil; he beamed around again, in search of paper, and since there were several sheets of the brown wrapping variety on the counter of the ice-cream tent, he selected one and folded it and tore it. "You might tell Harry the best points of the car, Mr. Baird, and he will put them on his sign?"

He plodded tirelessly into the ice-cream tent and settled himself at a table. Henry hurried off with young Mr. Master.

And really, when one came to watch closely, the speed and efficiency with which they handled things at this particular fair were downright amazing! A little space, Henry watched the boy sketching in his sign; then a tornado of femininity seemed to swirl down on them, by way of inspecting the car it was about to sell. A minute or so it surged about; then it broke up and ran in a dozen directions; and Henry, having unstrapped his little shiny trunk and laid it aside, strolled away for a further study of the indefatigable Mr. Singer.

The gentleman was bobbing about in the thicker spots now; girls ran to him, squealing delightedly—and ran away again, waving brown paper slips—and other girls ran to him and handed him green bills, with a yellow one here and there indicating that some daring soul had risked as much as ten dollars in chances! Stately ladies hurried to Mr. Singer, too, and bright young men, while Henry lounged and watched and frequently refused to buy chances on his own car.

And then, with a significant inclination of his head toward Henry, Mr. Singer was heading for the inner recesses of the ice-cream tent again. Henry followed to the last table at the rear, where Mr. Singer was counting money. He beamed up at Henry.

"There is your three hundred dollars, Mr. Baird—thanks to our energetic young ladies. And there is another good one hundred toward our organ, thanks to *you!*"

He went so far as to wring Henry's hand again, very feelingly; and this time, when he had tucked the mass of small bills into his trousers pocket, Henry was able to return the clasp with real heartiness.

Not half an hour ago, ruin and despair had been his portion. Now, following the peculiar, jerky course that seemed to be

part of his destiny, events had straightened out beautifully; he would spend, perhaps, not one or two, but three or four weeks, at Rockridge!

CHAPTER VII.

FATE'S FURTHER FREAKS.

THE projected organ's one hundred dollars was sealed in an envelope and marked in Mr. Singer's oddly scrawling hand. He considered it lovingly.

"I'm a wretched writer," he mused. "Still, I think that's clear enough. You've done a very splendid thing here, Mr. Baird."

"Nonsense!" Henry said airily.

"Oh, but I insist that you have. You have friends among the congregation, perhaps?"

"Not one!"

"Then your act is just so much more commendable, sir. Now, let me see. I suppose we'd better draw for the car at once. I think I'll find little Josie Wilbur and see if her mother won't let her draw the winning ticket. You'll be down there in the meadow, Mr. Baird, and tell the winner whatever he or she may want to know about the car? Most of our people drive, but all cars have their own little peculiarities."

"I'll be there!" Henry smiled absently.

So Mr. Singer hurried away again; and since the ladies up at the forward end of the tent seemed wholly occupied with their two freezers and their dishes and business was decidedly slow back here, Henry dug out his latest capital and smoothed out the bills more carefully.

A few tens there were and more fives, with two-dollar bills beyond number. He assorted them, chuckling, and rolled them into smaller compass; and for a little while he stared at the white enameled top of the table and pondered.

There would be an early evening train for Rockridge. He would catch that, because all trains stopped here at New Bingham, and have himself at the inn in time for a rather late dinner, probably enough. Then, since he had not been through the

little mountain summer colony for several years and remembered little of its geography, he would make inquiry as to the location of the Darrow place; and after that, if it was within strolling distance, he would stroll over.

He would collide with Alan Moss, of course. He grinned unpleasantly at the table. With three hundred dollars in his pocket, he fancied, he would give Alan to understand that he had arrived for the better part of the summer—and Mabel was not markedly enthusiastic about motoring, even in pale-blue sport cars, but she did want to learn a real game of golf—and Alan, trying to cover nine holes under three or four hundred, was a sight to bring tears from the angels, whereas Henry was rather good in a small way.

For a while this afternoon, Henry had been on the verge of real depression, but he was able to face the future fearlessly enough now. In fact, Henry looked the future right in the eye and grinned securely. He was not banking on it at all, of course, but some little inner voice informed Henry that his luck had turned and that from this point onward things would go rather smoothly. Yesterday, what with Anderson and Larkin and getting down to his last hundred and all the rest, he had been rather groggy and confused; now all things ahead wore a brighter aspect. He was sure of a breathing spell and in it, now that he had banished that absurd "hard luck" thought, matters would straighten out naturally and happily.

So Henry sighed pleasantly and gazed at the roof of the warm little tent for another spell and then strolled out into the crowd again and looked around.

More than a little did he wish that Singer had said nothing about waiting to instruct the winner of his old faithful car. It would have pleased Henry better just then to find a hacking-car and load his little trunk aboard and then get down to the railroad—or, if he was willing to do it at any reasonable figure, to let the hacking-car take him straight over to Rockridge.

Yes, that was the idea, anyway, no matter what they charged! That would take him into Rockridge before any evening train and, in a car, he could make inquiries and

get the location of the Darrow home even before going to the hotel. Henry frowned thoughtfully at the gathering and wondered where one obtained a hacking-car without going to the garage which had already accused one of being an automobile thief; and as he wondered, the very girl who had steered him into the grounds ran to his side with a breathless:

"Oh, Mr. Baird!"

"Who won it?" smiled Henry. "You?"

"Your car? Oh, I don't know. I think they're just drawing now. It wasn't that I wanted to say. There's some one looking for you, Mr. Baird."

Still Henry merely smiled on.

"I mean a stranger, you know. I think he just came up from the train—there's the taxi he came in, over there."

"From the train? Looking for *me*?" Henry frowned.

"Yes, a—a little man with glasses. I think it's business—or something very important. He—oh, there he is! See him? The little man with the funny felt hat."

Then she had flitted away again, outwardly a very good and pretty little fairy; and actually—and the notion came to Henry like a hammer blow—a messenger of the blackest evil. Because the man with the funny light hat was Whitmore Terral!

He was darting here and there, making inquiries. Ah, and now he had collided with Mr. Singer himself—yes, and Mr. Singer, having shaded his eyes and located Henry, was beaming and pointing. And now Whitmore, having nodded his thanks, was speeding toward Henry.

"Henry!" gasped Whitmore.

"Who's dead?" gasped Henry.

"What? Nobody! I—"

"What are you doing here?" Henry demanded, not quite flatteringly.

"I've come to find you, and it's only the merest luck that made it possible. I took the chance and left the train at New Bingham. Henry, and mercifully some boys down on the main street there had noticed your car and the shiny trunk and had seen it come in here and—phew!"

He smiled wearily at Henry.

"You'll have to find some way of selling your car, Henry!"

"What?"

"Larkin!"

"Has he exploded again?"

"He—he came around again this morning, Henry, even before I should have started for work. I had to phone Mr. Patterson and ask him if I might take the day off. He seemed so annoyed!"

"Go on!" Henry said grimly.

"Well, I'm not sure just what it was he came to say. I think it may have been to apologize, Henry, for that is how he began. But when he found that you had left town indefinitely, he flew into a perfect rage. Why, the man has the temper of a fiend, Henry! He swore and stamped about the rooms and vowed that he'd expose you and—well, he's going to start suit to-morrow morning if you haven't paid him then."

A strange, internal whine sounded somewhere deep in Henry. His fingers tightened convulsively upon three hundred dollars.

"I've done my best! I can't borrow it for you!" Whitmore hurried on. "I did get to Dick Norris and he lent me fifty dollars; and I just happened on old Mr. Cowenhoven and—and I managed to borrow twenty from him. That's the best I could do, Henry. We'll have to sell your car and—and take two hundred and eighty dollars of that."

He stroked his brow again with his fine white handkerchief. Henry, after a struggle, was able to speak.

"Isn't— isn't there any other way of stopping Larkin?" he asked hoarsely.

"No, there's not! He said that yesterday he'd have taken half and waited six months for the rest; but he said that since you'd chosen to run away he'd have his money or show you up, if it drove him out of business! He meant it, too. I—I have never seen a man so genuinely furious, Henry!"

CHAPTER VIII.

"TOO BAD!"

THEN Whitmore waited, while Henry shut his teeth and stared over the heads of the crowd.

Whitmore seemed to have settled it all.

There would be no happy month at Rockridge for Henry Baird. Whitmore would have to have the money and go back with it, and Henry would have twenty dollars for his own.

Yet even though the sweet agony of the thing killed him, he would snatch one evening with Mabel on that twenty dollars! He had started for Rockridge; he would go to Rockridge, in spite of all the Whitmores and the Larkins and the hoodoos on earth! Henry, then, glared savagely at his second cousin, although why he should have glared at that devoted soul was not plain even to himself.

"All right!" he snapped. "I've sold the car already!"

"What?" Whitmore cried joyfully.

"I raffled it off, right here at this fair. I got three hundred dollars for it. Here's two hundred and eighty of it. Give it to Larkin and tell him from me to go to—"

"By Jove! That's—that's wonderful luck!" gasped Whitmore. "Come along, Henry!"

"Come where?"

"We can just make the down train, boy!"

"Well, you go make it. I don't want it!" Henry snapped.

Whitmore laughed outright.

"You poor old chap!" said he. "You've lost your bearings completely! You're coming back with me, of course. Larkin was the only thing that sent you out of the city, Henry, and now that you're going to pay Larkin in full there's no reason for your being away—at this most important time, too."

Henry said nothing. Whitmore laid a hand on his arm.

"Thank the Lord you *can* get back now, too. Something new is developing out there in Michigan, Henry. Anderson called up early this morning to talk to you; he didn't know just what it was, but it's some new development and he said he wanted to be in close touch with you. Come along!"

This time he tugged at Henry's sleeve. Henry shook him off impatiently.

"I'm not coming!" he snapped.

"When the—the only reason for your absence has been removed?"

Henry stared down at him; mentally, as it were, Henry shook his head. There are some faces, some natures, to whom it would be downright sacrilege to communicate anything in the nature of a romantic confidence!

"I need a change," Henry said gruffly. "I'm going to take it for a day or two—that's all. I'm going to stay out of the city."

"But just when—"

"I don't care a hoot what happens! I'm going to stay out of the city."

Followed a pause of the tensest variety, extending over seconds.

"Where are you going to stay, Henry?" Whitmore asked, very, very quietly.

"What? Over at Rockridge—or somewhere else. Probably somewhere else," Henry said hastily.

"Henry, who lives at Rockridge?" Whitmore asked, even more quietly.

"Well, who in the world should live there? Hundreds of people!" Henry snapped.

"Yes, Henry, but you're not being drawn there by hundreds of people," Whitmore went on, with the same deadly calm. "I suspected last night that there was more behind this trip than any desire to avoid Larkin. I know it now and—Henry, I want you to come home with me!"

"I'll be home inside of two or three days," said Henry.

And here an overgrown boy, a native, tapped Whitmore Terral's shoulder.

"If you want make that down train, boss, we gotta start," he said. "We ain't got more 'n three or four minutes to spare as it is."

"When is the next through train to New York?" Whitmore asked swiftly.

"Six ten to-morrow morning."

"All right. Go back to your cab. I'll be there in a moment. Henry!" He clutched his cousin's arm. "I am going to speak very frankly to you! There is something—something—yes, I *will* say it—something dishonorable afoot here! Something you wish to hide!"

"Bosh!" said Henry.

"Very well. Maintain that attitude if you choose, Henry. I have done what I

could for you, always. I shall continue to do what I can for you, because you are a Terral. But I ask you to remember, Henry, that the honor of the Terrals, through all the generations—”

“Say!” Henry began loudly. “I—”

“Boss! If you want that down train, we gotter start!” said the boy, drifting back. “I ain’t going to be picked up for speeding and they ain’t going to hold that train while you stay here!”

“I shall have to catch it, to save you from Larkin, Henry,” Whitmore panted. “For the last time, will you come? For your own sake, will you come?”

“Whitty, I’m awfully obliged to you, but I’m not in any danger,” Henry grinned. “I don’t know what it is you think I’m doing, but I’m not doing it. I want to— to stay here where I can breathe, for a day or two, and I’m going to do it, regardless of consequences.”

Whitmore clasped his hands!

“Henry, give me your word that there is—is no woman whom you should not see connected with all this!”

“Whitty,” laughed Henry, “I give you my word that, so far as I know, there isn’t a woman in the world I shouldn’t see, as you put it, and if there is, she has no connection with this. Is that enough?”

“It will have to be, I suppose!” Whitmore said hoarsely, yet relievedly nevertheless.

He fled to the door which the driver of his taxicab was holding open. Looking backward, he entered—and he was whisked away, while Henry stared after him unsmilingly and shook his head.

And now he was free to go to Rockridge with his twenty dollars, he assumed. A bitter sigh came from Henry—yet a thankful one followed almost immediately. Even one day with Mabel was far, far better than no days at all. He would look up Mr. Singer now and make his adieus. Not quite so blithely as before Whitmore’s unfortunate appearance he walked off toward the rear of the grounds.

They had drawn for his poor old car by this time, of course. Henry fancied that he would pause for a last look at it and at the winner and—well, what on earth was

all the excitement down in that direction, anyway?

People were screaming and rushing about quite remarkably. Henry quickened his pace and peered ahead. It seemed that people were being shooed away from the automobile that had been his; yes, that was it, fast enough! Numerous young men, their arms outstretched, were pushing back countless ladies and children in every direction, so that the faithful automobile stood alone in the center of an immense circle!

And then Mr. Singer was waddling swiftly toward Henry, and crying:

“How ever could it have started, Mr. Baird? However could it have started?”

“Is—is that car *on fire*?” Henry gasped, as the stout lady just ahead finally moved aside and permitted him to see.

“It must have happened four or five minutes ago, sir! Some of the boys raised the hood and found everything blazing there and—”

“Lemme get down there and put it out!” Henry cried.

“You’ll do nothing of the kind, sir!” said Mr. Singer, and fastened his very considerable bulk to Henry. “The fire extinguisher is empty. We tried it!”

“What’s true, too!” gasped Henry, relaxing.

“And the whole thing’s ablaze underneath now. One of our young men, who has an automobile agency here, says that the fire’s in the gas line and that it may reach the tank any second. That’s why they’re getting the people back and—”

He said no more just then. From the isolated spot in the middle of the circle there had come a mighty boom. Flame, suddenly, soared up toward the heavens. Screams came from a dozen mad directions and women fled wildly, dragging children. And then the flames seemed to condense and center their whole force on the car itself—for the unfortunate vehicle was a mere crackling ball of fire now!

“The danger, I take it, is past,” sighed Mr. Singer, releasing Henry. “It is very unfortunate, sir!”

Henry could not speak. No expert in junk, his estimate was nevertheless rather

accurate: just then, at a guess, his car was worth between eight and nine dollars as scrap metal!

"It was insured, of course?" said Mr. Singer.

"It wasn't," Henry choked. "The insurance ran out last month and they wanted such a price for so little insurance that I never renewed it!"

The flames roared on. They were making a wonderfully swift job of it. The hair in the cushions was blazing; the floorboard was blazing; the dashboard was a bonfire all in itself. The little bottle of ether which Henry kept for cold weather starting, exploded with a nice little pop of its own,

there in the side pocket. Even the spokes of the wheels had caught now and grass around the car was beginning to sizzle and curl.

"Too bad!" Mr. Singer said resignedly. "Somebody will be sorely disappointed!"

"Yes!" Henry muttered, in thick bewilderment.

Mr. Singer nodded. Then, quite as if Henry's share of the proceeds was not already racing toward New York in Whitmore's pocket, Mr. Singer saw fit to make another remark.

"Too bad indeed!" he repeated. "Now we shall have to refund the whole four hundred dollars!"

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.



The Slaughter of Slim Malone

By Max Brand

TIME has little to do with reputation in the far West, and accordingly the name of Slim Malone grew old in the region of Appleton, and yet the owner of the name was still young.

Appleton was somewhat of a misnomer, for the region had never known anything save imported apples or any other sort of fruit since the time of its birth into the history of whisky and revolvers. But a misguided pioneer in the old days had raised a few scrubby trees and had named the town forever. The dreams of the early agriculturalists had died long ago, but the

name remained to pique the curiosity of travelers and furnish jokes for inhabitants.

The town lay at the conjunction of three gorges in the heart of the Rockies, and the little plain where it nestled was crowded with orchards which bore everything but apples. The six original trees which had given the town its name now stood in the back yard of Sandy Orton's saloon—old trees with knotted and mossy limbs which suggested a venerable age due to the hard climate rather than to the passage of years. They were pointed out to casual travelers with great pride, and they were the estab-

lished toast of Sandy's place. But Sandy's was frequented by a loud-voiced and spendthrift crowd not usual to agricultural towns.

In the old days, when Appleton was a name rather than a fact, the hilarity had been as absent as the men; but after gold was discovered in the three gorges which led from the settlement into the heart of the mountains, the little town became a rendezvous of a thousand adventurers. The stages to and from the railroad thirty miles away, were crowded with men eager to face the hardships of the climate and the great adventure of the gold-fields.

It was then that Slim Malone appeared. It was said that he had first come upon the scene as the owner of the Red River strike, which was finally owned by Sandy Gleason. It was further rumored that Sandy had beaten Slim Malone out of the claim by a very shady deal at cards; but Sandy refused to discuss the matter, and Slim Malone was rarely within vocal range, so the matter had never been sifted. Sandy was rarely more vocal than a grunt, and when Slim Malone appeared, people had generally other things to think about than questions concerning his past.

A certain percentage of lawlessness is taken for granted in a mining town. People are too busy with their own concerns to pay attention to their neighbors, but when three stages in succession, passing from Appleton to Concord, the nearest railroad station, were robbed by a rider on a white horse, the community awoke and waxed wrath. The loss was too much in common to be passed over.

The first effort was an impromptu organization of half a dozen angered miners who rode into the Weston Hills. They found fresh hoof-prints after an hour of riding, and went on greatly encouraged, with the pistols loosened in their holsters. After some hours of hard travel they came upon a white horse in the midst of a hollow, and then spread into a circle and approached cautiously. But not cautiously enough. While they were still far from the white horse the bandit opened fire upon them from the shelter of a circle of rocks. They rode into town the next day

with three of their number badly hurt and the other three marked for life. That started the war.

As the months passed posse after posse left Appleton and started to scour the Weston Hills for the marauder. The luckiest of the expeditions came back telling tales of a sudden fusillade from an unexpected covert, and then a swift white horse scouring into the distance. The majority came back with no tales at all save of silent mountains and the grim cactus of the desert.

In the mean time the stages from Appleton to Concord were held up with a monotonous regularity by a rider of a fleet white horse, and the mining town grew more and more irate. Men cursed the name of Slim Malone. An adventurous singer in one of Appleton's dance halls invented a song featuring the marauder, and it was taken up by the matrons of the town as a sort of scare-crow ballade to hush their children.

Then the new mayor came to Appleton. He owned three claims on Askwarthy Gulch, and he ran on the double platform of no-license for the Appleton saloons and the end of Slim Malone. The women used their influence because of the first clause in his platform, and the men voted for him because of the second. His name was Orval Kendricks, but that didn't count. What mattered was his red hair and the statements of his platform. Slim Malone celebrated the new reign of holding up two stages within the first five days.

But the new mayor lived up to the color of his hair, and proved worthy of his platform. He held a meeting of every able-bodied citizen in town three days after his inauguration, and in his speech the men noted with relief that he forgot to mention the saloons, and that he concentrated his attention on Slim Malone. He stated that the good name and the prosperity of Appleton depended upon the capture of this marauder at once. Divorced from the mayor's rather sounding rhetoric, the populace of Appleton realized the truth of his remarks and applauded him to the echo. His silences were as much appreciated as his words.

After a carefully prepared peroration he built up to his climax by the proposal that the community import "Lefty" Cornwall, at a salary of five hundred dollars a month and five thousand bonus, to act as deputy sheriff until the apprehension of Slim Malone. Then the crowd applauded to the echo. In their midst were men who had lost more than five thousand at a blow owing to the strenuous activity of this Slim Malone. They were equal to any measures for his suppression even if it meant the importation of Lefty Cornwall.

The fame of Lefty had begun in Texas when he mortally wounded one greaser and crippled two others in a saloon fight. Since then it had increased and spread until he was a household word even farther north than Appleton. He came from that sun-burned southland where a man's prowess was gaged by his speed and dexterity with his "irons," and even on that northern plateau of Appleton men knew that to cross Lefty Cornwall was death or murderous mutilation.

At first there were some dissenters. Men stated freely that Lefty would never dream of coming as far north as Appleton for a paltry five thousand dollars. There were even a few dissenters who claimed that even should he come he would never be able to cope with Slim Malone, but these were laughed and hooted down by a radical minority who came from the southland and knew the fame of Lefty Cornwall in detail. The sheriff accounted for the others by stating that he had already communicated with Lefty, and had received his assent by letter. This announcement dissolved the meeting in cheers.

Appleton decreed the day of the arrival of the new sheriff a festival occasion. The farmers from the adjoining table-land drove into town, the miners from the three valleys rode down. And when the stage arrived from Concord the incipient sheriff dismounted in the midst of a huge crowd, and cheers which shook the sign-board of Sandy Orton's saloon.

Now the mayor of Appleton had declared deathless war against the saloons in his platform, but since his election he had been strangely silent upon the liquor ques-

tion. He was as canny as his red hair suggested, and he had a truly Scotch insight into the crucial moments of life. He perceived the arrival of Lefty Cornwall to be such a moment, and he perceived at the same moment the correct way of meeting that crisis.

It was with surprise no less than pleasure that the throng heard the lusty voice of their chief official inviting them to Sandy Orton's saloon, and where they were in doubt, his beckoning arm put them right. They filled the saloon from bar to door, and those who could not enter thronged at the entrances with gaping mouths.

The sheriff was equal to the occasion. He mounted the bar much as a plainsman mounts a horse, and standing in full view of his fellow citizens, he invited Lefty Cornwall to join him in his prominent position. Nowise loath, Lefty swung onto the bar in the most approved fashion, and stood, locked arm in arm with the dignified official of Appleton. In the mean time the bartenders, thrilled equally with surprise and pleasure, passed out the drinks to the crowded room. It was apparently a moment big in portent to Appleton, and not a heart there but pulsed big with pride in their mayor.

"Fellow citizens," began the mayor, raising a large freckled hand for silence.

A hush fell upon the assemblage.

"Boys," continued the mayor, after a proper silence reigned, "I haven't got much to say."

"Here's to you!" yelled a voice. "I hate a guy that's noisy."

The mayor frowned and waved a commanding hand for silence.

"I spotted you, Pete Bartlett," he called. "If you don't like silence you must hate yourself."

The crowd roared with approving laughter.

"Boys," began Orval Kendricks again, when the laughter had subsided, "this here is a solemn occasion. I feel called upon to summon the manhood of this here town to listen to my words, and I reckon that most of the manhood of the town is within hearin'."

A chorus of assent followed.

"I don't need any Daniel Webster to tell you men that this here town is hard hit," continued Mayor Kendricks. "It don't need no Henry Clay to tell you that these diggin's are about to bust up unless we have the right sort of a strong arm man in town. We've been sufferin' patiently from the aggressions of a red-handed desperado who I don't need to mention, because his name just naturally burns my tongue."

"Slim Malone!" cried a dozen voices. "We're followin' you, chief!"

The mayor thrust his hand into his breast and extended the other arm in imitation of a popular wood-cut of Patrick Henry. The crowd acknowledged the eloquence of the attitude with a common gaping.

"There may be some of you guys," cried the mayor, rising to the emotion of the moment, "there may be some of you guys who don't know the man I mean, but I reckon that a tolerable pile of Appleton's best citizens spend a large part of their time cursing Slim Malone."

"We ain't through damning him yet," yelled a voice, and the crowd voiced their assent, half in growls and half in laughter.

"He has tricked our posse as an honest man would be ashamed to do," went on the mayor, warming to his oration; "he has shot our citizens, and he has swiped our gold! I'm askin' you as man to man, can a self-respectin' community stand for this? It can't. What's the answer that Appleton makes to this desperado?"

He paused and frowned the audience into a state of suspense.

"There is only one answer to this gun-fighter, and that answer stands at my right hand," bellowed the mayor, when he judged that the silence had sunk into his hearers sufficiently. "The name of the answer is Lefty Cornwall!"

The following burst of applause brought a momentary blush into even Lefty's cheek. At the reiterated demands for a speech he hitched at his revolver in its skeleton holster, removed his sombrero, and mopped his forehead with a ponderous hand. When it became evident that the

hero was about to break into utterance the crowd became silent.

"Fellows," began the gun-fighter, "makin' speeches ain't much in my line." "Makin' dead men is more your game," broke in the wit of the assemblage.

A universal hiss attested that the crowd was anxious to hear the Texan gun-man out.

"But if you are goin' to do me the honor of makin' me sheriff of this here county and this here city of Appleton," he continued, letting his eye rove down Appleton's one street, "I'm here to state that law and order is goin' to be maintained here at all costs. Right here I got to state that the only costs I'm referrin' to is the price of the powder and lead for this here cannon of mine."

The crowd broke in upon the speech with noisy appreciation, and many cries of "That's the stuff, old boy!"

"I been hearin' a tolerable pile about one Slim Malone," went on the new sheriff.

"So have we," broke in the irrepressible wit of the assemblage, only to be choked into silence by more serious-minded neighbors.

"Sure," agreed the sheriff. "I reckon you've heard a lot too much about him. But I'm here to state that all this talk about Slim Malone has got to stop, and has got to stop sudden. I'm here to stop it."

He hitched his holster a little forward again as he spoke and a deep silence fell upon the crowd.

"Fellow citizens," he continued, spitting liberally over the side of the bar, "whatever gun-play is carried on around here in the future is to be done strictly by me, and all you men can consider yourselves under warning to leave your shoot-in'-irons at home, unless you want to use them to dig premature graves."

This advice was received with an ironical chuckle of appreciation from the crowd.

"As for Slim Malone," he went on, "I'm goin' out into the Weston Hills to get him single handed. I don't want no posse. I'll get him single handed or bust, you can lay to that; and if I come back to this town without Slim Malone, alive or

dead, you can say that Malone has the Indian sign on me."

Having finished all that he had to say, Lefty felt about in his mind to find a graceful manner of closing his exordium, when the mayor came to his assistance. He recognized that nervous clearing of the throat and wandering of the eyes out of his own first political experiences. Now he raised his glass of colored alcohol and water, which in Appleton rejoiced in the name of Bourbon.

"Boys," he shouted, "there ain't no better way of showin' our appreciation of our new sheriff than by turnin' bottoms up. Let's go!"

Every hand in the barroom flashed into the air, and after a loud whoop there was a brief gurgling sound which warmed the heart of Sandy Orton.

It should have been the signal for a day's carousal, and the good citizens of Appleton were no wise averse. They desired to hear the voice of their new sheriff in friendly converse. They desired to see him in that most amiable of all poses, his foot on the rail and his hand on the bar. They wanted to look him over and size him up just as a boy wishes to fondle his first gun. But the sheriff objected. He was sorry to spoil the fun. He said that they could go ahead and have their little time, but that they must leave him out. He had business to perform that didn't admit of drinking.

There might have been adverse criticism of this Spartan strenuousness, but at this point a diversion occurred in the shape of four wild riders who broke into Appleton and brought the word that Slim Malone had been out again. This time he had held up a mule train on its way to carry provisions up Bender Cañon to Earl Parrish's claim. With his usual fine restraint Slim had taken no lives, but he had winged two of the drivers badly and had helped himself from the provisions without unnecessary waste. He had even lingered to give first aid to the two drivers whose courage had overcome their sense of proportion.

If anything had been needed to spur on the new official of Appleton it came in the form of the message which Slim Malone

had left with the wounded man before he rode away.

"Tell the new sheriff," he called, as he sat easily in the saddle, "that I've heard of him, and that I'll organize a little party for him as soon as possible so that we can get better acquainted. Tell him that the one thing he lacks to make him a good fighting man is a sense of humor."

Lefty Cornwall heard this message in silence the while he spat with vicious precision into a distant spittoon. Afterward, and still in silence, he retired and worked for an hour cleaning his already shining revolver and patting and oiling the holster. He performed these grave functions in the house of the mayor, and that dignitary announced later that he had wound up by practising the draw and point, walking and sitting down, and at every angle. The mayor was impressed past speech.

When Lefty issued at last he found a score of hard riders standing by their horses in the street.

"An' what might all this here gang be for?" inquired Lefty mildly.

"We're the posse, waitin' to be sworn in," announced one of the men.

"Swearin' in takes a terrible lot of time," said Lefty, "an' besides, I don't know how it's done. I don't want no posse, as I said before. I wouldn't know how to handle it. Anyway, twenty men on horseback make enough noise to scare away a whole gang of bandits. You might as well start lookin' for trouble with a brass band, because you'd sure find the trouble."

He hitched at his belt in his customary manner when at a loss for words, and his right hand dropped gracefully upon the handle of his gun and drooped thereon somewhat sinisterly.

"This here Malone," went on the sheriff, "may be a tolerable bad man in his way, but I ain't no shorn lamb myself. I'm goin' out to get him, an' I'm goin' to get him by myself. I reckon that's final."

They accepted his announcement with cheers, and set about offering all the information in their power. It was generally believed that the bandit lived somewhere at the far end of Eagle Head Cañon, about fifteen miles from the town. His dwelling

had never been spotted, but he was most frequently seen riding to and from this place. Thrice posses had raked the cañon as with a fine-toothed comb, but they had never come upon a trace of his habitation; but the cañon was thick with caves, and heaped with giant boulders which offered innumerable places of concealment, and the legend was strong that Slim Malone lived in that place.

The next thing was to find a proper mount. This proved a more difficult task. The sheriff knew horses from nose to hoof, and he was hard to please. At last he selected a tall roan with a wicked eye and flat shoulders which promised speed. These preparations made, he swung to the saddle, waved his hand to the crowd, and galloped out of town.

There was not much bluff about Lefty Cornwall, as the curious-minded had frequently discovered in the past, but as he swung into the narrow throat of Eagle Head Cañon, he began to realize that he might have gone too far. While he was in the town it had been easy enough to make ringing speeches. Now that the evening began to come down by lazy, cool degrees a certain diffidence grew in him.

He had fought many men during his brief life, but he had never come across a reputation as strange or as fascinating as this of Slim Malone. If the challenge which the bandit had sent him was irritating, it also roused in his mind a certain degree of respect, and as he rode up the cañon, winding slowly among the boulders, a hundred doubts infested his mind.

If he had been back upon the level reaches of the Texan desert, which he knew, these uncertainties would probably have never entered his head, but here every half mile of his journey was passed under the eye of a thousand coverts from which a man could have picked him off with the safety of a hunter firing from a blind at partridges. Moreover a curious loneliness akin to homesickness came in him, located, as far as he could discover, chiefly in the pit of the stomach.

The mountains were blue now, and purple along their upper reaches, and as the sun left off the moon took up her reign

over the chill blue spaces. It was very solemn, almost funereal to the thought of Lefty Cornwall. And the silence was punctuated with the melancholy howling of a far-off coyote.

It was complete night before he reached the upper end of Eagle Head Cañon, and he was weary from the stumbling gait of his horse over the rocks. Moreover, the mountain night air was cold—very cold to Lefty. He wanted desperately to turn back, but he had not the heart to face the inquiries which would meet him at the town, and the covert smiles which would welcome the hero returning empty handed, the man who needed no posse.

Lefty was a very brave man, but like almost all of the physically courageous, he dreaded derision more than actual pain. Yet, in spite of this he finally decided that it was better to go back to the town and face the smiles than to remain through the cold night in these dread silences. He wished heartily that he had taken one other man with him if it were only for the companionship. As it was he felt that it was no use to hunt further, and he started back down the cañon. He had not gone far when his horse stumbled and commenced to limp.

Lefty got off with a curse and felt of the fore hoofs. The difficulty proved to be a sharp, three-cornered rock which had been picked up under the shoe of the left fore foot. He was bending over to pry this loose between his fingers when he caught the glint of a light.

In his excitement he sprang upright and stared. At once the light disappeared. Lefty began to feel ghostly. His senses had never played him such tricks before.

He leaned over and commenced work on the stone again, but as he did so his eye caught the same glint of light. There was no possible mistake about it this time. He remained bent over and stared at it until he was certain that he saw a yellow spot of light, a long, thin ray which pointed out to him like a finger through the shadows.

This time he took the bearings of the light carefully, and when he stood up he was able to locate it again. Lefty's heart beat high.

He threw the reins over his horse's head and commenced to stalk the light carefully. Sometimes as he slipped and stumbled over the rocks he lost sight of it altogether, only to have it reappear when he had almost given up hopes of finding it again. And so he came upon the cave.

The light shone through a little chink between two tall boulders, and as Lefty pressed his eye to the aperture, holding his breath as he did so, he saw a long dug-out, perhaps a dozen paces from end to end, and some five paces wide. Behind a partition at one end he heard the stamping of a horse, and as Lefty gazed, a magnificent white head rose behind the partition and looked fairly at him. His heart stopped as that great-eyed gaze turned on him, the ears pricking and the wisp of hay motionless in the mouth. But after a moment the horse dropped his head again and went on crunching his fodder, stamping now and then and snorting as he ate.

At first he saw no other occupant of the place, but by moving his eye to one side of the aperture he managed to get a glimpse of the bandit himself. There was no question about his identity. From the descriptions which he had heard while in Appleton he knew him at once, the expressionless gray eyes, and the thin, refined face with an almost Greek modeling about its lower part.

He sat tilted back in a heavy chair smoking a pipe and reading, and Lefty saw that he sat facing a blanket at the far end of the room. Evidently this was the entrance. So far as Lefty could see the bandit was unarmed, his two long guns lying on the table half a dozen paces away.

Very softly he crept along the side of the boulder, and finally came to an aperture, as he had expected. It was just wide enough for a man to press through, and from the chisel marks at his sides it had evidently been artificially widened from time to time. At the end of the narrow passage hung the blanket.

If Lefty had proceeded cautiously up to this point, his caution now became almost animal-like. Behind that blanket he had no idea what was happening. Perhaps the bandit had heard a noise long before, and

was now crouched against the wall in another part of the place, ready to open fire at the first stir of the blanket. Perhaps he had stolen out of the cave by another entrance and was now hunting the hunter. The thought sent a chill down Lefty's back and he turned his head quickly. Then he resumed his slow progress. At the very edge of the blanket he paused for a long and deathly minute, but Lefty was not a woman, to fail at the last moment.

He swung the blanket aside and crouched in the entrance with his gun leveled. The little round sight framed the face of Slim Malone, who still sat reading quietly and puffing at a black-bowled pipe.

"Hands up!" said Lefty softly.

Even then, with his bead on his man, he did not feel entirely sure of himself. It seemed that this could not be true. Opportunity had favored him too much. There must still be some turn of the game.

The meaningless gray eyes raised calmly from the book. It seemed to Lefty that a yellow glint came into them for a moment like the light that comes into an animal's eyes when it is angered, but the next moment it was gone, and he could not be sure that it had come there at all. The rest of the face was perfectly calm. Malone lowered the book slowly and then raised his hands above his head.

"Ah, sheriff," he said quietly, "I see that you have honored my invitation."

"Right-o," said Lefty, "I'm here all right."

He felt strangely relieved after hearing his quarry speak. He stepped through the entrance and straightened up, still with the revolver leveled. It was beyond his fondest hopes that he should be able to bring the desperado alive to Appleton, and the thought of his complete success warmed his heart. Also the immediate prospect of that five-thousand-dollar bonus.

"In order to remove any strain you may be under," went on Slim Malone, "I'll assure you that I am quite unarmed. My guns are both lying on the table there. In order that you may make sure, I shall stand up, with my hands over my head, and turn around slowly. You can examine me to your own satisfaction."

He did as he had said, and Lefty's practised eyes saw that there was not the suspicion of a lump under the clothes.

"Now," said Slim Malone, as he faced his captor again, and his smile was strangely winning, "I hope that I may lower my arms and we can commence our little party."

"Your end of this here party is all over, my beauty," said Lefty grimly, "except that the boys at Appleton may give you a little impromptu reception when we hit town. They seem to be rather strong on celebrations."

"So I understand," smiled Slim Malone. "I have no doubt they will be glad to see me."

"Ain't no doubt in the world," grinned Lefty, warming to the perfect calm of this man. "Between you an' me, pal, I'm sorry to have to turn this little trick; but—"

Malone waved a careless and reassuring hand.

"Business is business, my dear fellow," he said.

"That bein' the case," said Lefty, "I'll have to ask you to turn around and put your hands behind your back while I put these here bracelets on. I don't want to discourage you any, but while I'm doin' it this here gun will be in my hand and pointin' at your back."

"Naturally," nodded Malone; "quite right, of course; but before we start on our little jaunt back to the camp won't you have a drink with me? I have some really rare old stuff here; quite different from the firewater they put labels on in Appleton."

Lefty grinned appreciatively.

"It's a good move, pal," he said, shaking his head with admiration, "an' I know that you're hard put to it or you wouldn't try such an old dodge on me. It's a good move, but down in Texas the booze stunt is so old that they've almost forgotten it—not quite!"

"Ah," said Malone, with a little sigh of regret, "then I suppose we shall have to ride out in the night without a nip. Gets mighty chilly here before morning, you know."

This fact had gradually dawned on

Lefty during his ride up the valley, and as he looked forward to the journey back he shivered with unpleasant anticipation. In Texas a summer night was one thing; in these mountains it was quite another.

"I suppose the booze is the real thing?" he inquired casually.

"There are little bubbles under the glass," said Slim Malone with subtle emotion.

Lefty Cornwall sighed deeply. The taste of the Appleton bar whisky still burned his mouth. After all this fellow was a man. He might be a criminal, but Lefty's own past was not free from shady episodes. Furthermore he was about to make five thousand dollars on presenting him to the good people of Appleton.

"If you sure want a drink before we start, go ahead," said Lefty.

"The bottle and a glass is over there in that little dugout on the wall," pointed Malone.

In the little open hutch on the wall the sheriff perceived a tall bottle which shimmered pleasantly in the torch-light.

"Go ahead," said the sheriff, "I reckon you know I'm watchin' all the time."

"Surely," said Malone pleasantly. "I know you're on your job all the time."

He walked over to the hutch and picked up the bottle and the glass. He paused with the bottle tucked away under his arm.

"Queer thing," pondered Malone, "the same pack that held this bottle of whisky held this also."

Lefty tightened his grip on the gun as Malone reached deeper into the hutch, but he starightened again, and appeared carrying a large concert banjo.

"That fellow had taste," he continued, crossing the room and laying down the banjo carelessly on the chair; "just run your eyes over that banjo."

"Some banjo, all right," said the sheriff, "but hurry up with your drink, Malone. We've got to be on our way."

Malone uncorked the bottle and held it under his nose while he inhaled a whiff.

"The old aroma, all right," he pronounced with the air of a connoisseur; "must be a vintage as far back as the eighties. You won't join me?"

Now the heart of the sheriff was a human heart, but his will was adamant.

"Not me, Malone," he answered, "I've been in the game too long. Can't drink on this sort of a job."

"Guess you're right," murmured Malone, letting the amber stream trickle slowly into the glass; "but it's too bad."

He raised the glass to his lips and swallowed half of the contents slowly.

"The stuff is so oily," he mused, "that you don't need a chaser. Just sort of oils its own way down, you know."

The sheriff moistened his lips.

"It certainly is a shame that you can't taste it," continued Malone, as he drained the glass.

The sheriff hitched his belt with his customary gesture.

"It looks like the real thing," he said judicially.

"It is," pronounced Malone with decision, "and after the sort of poison they serve you around here—"

The sheriff shuddered with sympathy.

"I reckon," he said hesitatingly, "that you might pour me just a drop."

It seemed to him that as he spoke the yellow glint came into the eyes of Malone again, but a moment later it was gone, and he decided that the change had been merely a shadow from the wavering torch-light. He took the glass which Malone extended to him under the cover of the pointed gun and raised it slowly to his lips.

"Just stand a bit further back while I drink, pal," he said.

Malone obeyed, and the sheriff tilted the glass. It was, as Malone had said, "the real old aroma," and the sheriff drew a deep breath.

Now there is a saying about liquor that the drink which does the harm is "just one more," and certain it is that one whisky calls for another as surely as a question calls for an answer.

"I reckon it ain't quite as old as you say," said the sheriff, feeling his way from word to word cautiously. "I reckon it ain't more than fifteen years old at the outside."

Malone paused, with the bottle suspended over the glass to consider.

"I thought that myself when I first drank," he nodded; "but that was before I got used to it. All Bourbon is a little sharp, you know."

The sheriff was inclined to agree. He also felt sure that one more drink would quite banish from his memory the taste of that one drink in Appleton. Moreover, the danger, if there was any, was slight, for Malone was taking drink for drink with him, and larger drinks at that. It was a sort of subtle challenge to the manhood of the sheriff, and he was as proud of his capacity for whisky as of his speed with a gun.

It was perhaps half an hour later that the sheriff indicated the banjo with a careless wave of the pistol.

"Play any?" he inquired, "or do you keep it around as sort of an ornament?"

"Both," smiled Malone. "It makes the place more homelike, you know, and then I sing once in a while, but not often. Folks around here aren't particularly partial to my voice."

"I'm a pretty good judge," stated the sheriff; "blaze away, and I'll see you ain't interrupted. Been a long time since I had the pleasure of hearing any decent singin'."

He was, as he said, a fairly good judge, and he was delighted with the rich barytone which rang through the cave. After a time, as the whisky and the music melted into his mood, he began to call for old favorites, darky ballads, and last of all, for the sentimental ditties which have always charmed the heart of the rough men of the West: "Annie Laurie," "Old Black Joe," "Ben Bolt," "Silver Threads Among the Gold."

As he sang the bandit commenced, naturally, to walk back and forth through the cave, and the sheriff sat back in the chair and with half-closed eyes waved the revolver back and forth in time. He failed to note that as Malone walked up and down each time he made a longer trip, until at last he was pacing and turning close to the table on which lay the revolvers side by side. He did not note it, or if he did his mind was too thrilled with the tender airs and the tenderer liquor to reg-

ister the fact clearly. It faded into the pleasant blur of his sensations.

"Oh, don't you remember sweet Alice, Ben Bolt, Sweet Alice with—"

The music stopped. Malone had stooped over the table with the speed of a bird picking up a grain of wheat, and with the same movement he whirled and fired. The gun spun from the hand of the sheriff and he stood staring into eyes which now beyond all doubt flared with a yellow animal fire.

"Now put your hands behind your back after you've thrown those bracelets to me," said Malone. "I naturally hate to break up this party, but I think you've had about enough whisky to keep you warm on the ride back, Lefty, my boy."

There was an insane desire on the sheriff's part to leap upon Malone bare-handed, but he had seen too many fighting men in action before. He knew the meaning of those eyes and the steadiness of the revolver.

"It's your game, Slim," he said, with as little bitterness as possible; "but will you tell me why in the name of God you aren't on the stage? It isn't what you do, pal, it's the way you do it!"

Appleton woke early the next morning. Some one shouted and then fired a pistol. The populace gathered at windows and doors rubbing sleepy eyes which a moment later shone wide awake, and yawns turned into yells of laughter, for down the middle of Appleton's one street came the sheriff. He was sitting the roan horse, with his feet tied below the girth, and his hands tied behind his back. And even the weary roan seemed to feel in his drooping head the defeat of his rider.

Upon the back of the sheriff was a large piece of cardboard, upon which was printed in large letters the following:

I'm sending this back with my signature in token of a pleasant evening in my home in Eagle Head Cañon. I'm sorry to announce that I'm moved.
SLIM MALONE.



THE WIND SPEAKS

BY JOHN RUSSELL McCARTHY

HOW I came here, no one knows,
Where I'm going, no one cares,
Who shall mark how well it blows
(Little wind like me that fares
East or west from rose to rose!)—
Where I'm going, no one knows.

Proud old hill with maple-mane,
Paltry brook with foolish prattle,
Argentine or ancient Spain,
Fields of peace or hills of battle—
Never heed my gay refrain,
Know me not in sun or rain.

Proud old hill shall never know,
Foolish brook shall never care,
Yet I come, and I shall blow
Small eternal gusts that wear
Till the very mountains go
Down the little brook below.

The Head of Arsenjo

by Ray St. Vrain

Author of "On the Night of the Storm," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE HAWTHORNE VASE.

NEW YORK had a new musical sensation—Señorita Dolores Arsenjo. Those who had heard her play declared she was the greatest violinist in the world. This was a rather daring claim. Certainly the partizans of Elman, of Heifetz would not have admitted it for a moment. A woman—a mere girl—outplay the recognized artists of the day? Absurd!

"Why doesn't this Señorita Dolores Arsenjo play in public so the public may judge?" asked the skeptics.

But that is exactly what the *señorita* had never done—at least in New York. She played only in the homes of the very rich—and then for never less than three thousand dollars a program, people said. Her father, Señor José Arsenjo, explained it thus in his startling good English:

"My daughter is very sensitive. There are too many cross currents of magnetism in a public audience. Their jangling inharmonies make it impossible for her to do herself—or the composers—justice. She tried it once at Buenos Aires and again at Rio de Janeiro—we carried her from the stage in a dead faint each time. Money? Señorita Arsenjo does not play in the homes of multimillionaires primarily for the money. It is only in such homes we can find the proper scenic investiture; for I contend that the musician as well as the actor should have a perfect stage setting."

Owen Vaughn, who was frankly curious

to hear Señorita Arsenjo play, was pleasantly surprised to receive an invitation to a recital to be given by her in an exclusive mansion on Riverside Drive. While Vaughn was a well-known private detective he was not of sufficient social importance to have drawn such an invitation on his own account. For it he had to thank his friend and coworker, Margot Dale.

This young woman, an uncommonly clever one, followed her chosen profession of sleuth in the higher circles of New York society. She had had signal success in several sensational jewel robberies and personally had become a favorite with certain members of the smart set who had cause to be grateful for delicate services rendered. One of these was Mrs. John Bashford Whymper, wife of John Bashford Whymper, capitatlist. Mrs. Whymper was giving the musicale and had graciously invited Margot and extended the privilege of bringing a friend.

"It's really a wonderful bid, Owen," said Margot, "when you remember Señor Arsenjo rigidly limits the number of people at his daughter's recitals. Mrs. Whymper says the *señorita* is miraculous—superhuman—hypnotizing you till you lose all sense of your surroundings, fancying yourself in paradise. That sounds extravagant; but Mrs. Whymper insists it isn't unusual for Señorita Arsenjo's hearers to be so overcome they have to be worked over and brought back to consciousness just like people in a dead faint."

"Uncanny," commented Vaughn. "I'm

more curious than ever to hear this prodigy play. And I'll keep my eyes open as well as my ears."

"Why your eyes? You don't think there's any trick about it?"

"Trick?" he laughed. "How could there be?"

On the night of the recital Vaughn and Margot arrived at the magnificent Whympers palace rather early. Mrs. Whympers, an enormous woman in red charmeuse, received them in one of the smaller reception-rooms and they were immediately conducted up-stairs into the music-room, where Señorita Arsenjo was to play. This was a large, double-storied apartment done in gilded columns and Gobelin tapestries. One end had been reserved for the young violinist. The grand piano was already open and several sheets of music were on the music-rack. Señorita Arsenjo's music-stand stood near.

The program announced an "Evening of Russian Music," and Vaughn, recalling Señor Arsenjo's insistence on "atmosphere," glanced around to see if any attempt had been made at a fitting scenic investiture. Directly behind the piano hung an odd old Russian tapestry showing one of the Czars blessing the Neva. Near by stood a rather battered samovar, and Russian brass-ware was scattered about in more or less picturesque confusion. And these trumpery objects constituted the atmosphere without which Señor Arsenjo declared his daughter could not play! The thing was ridiculous.

In casting his quick eye about the room Vaughn was surprised to discover back of the chairs a superb *objet d'art* that was most emphatically not in harmony with the various Russian articles near the piano. It was a large, tall, black hawthorn vase of the K'ang-hsi period, an incomparable specimen of its kind. Why had it been put here? There was certainly nothing Slavic about it.

Vaughn, charmed by its beauty, suddenly recognized it as one that had belonged to a deceased client of his, Mr. Wilmerding Jackson, from whom it had been stolen. The detective had been employed on the case and had found it in a down-town an-

tique shop. On his client's death—which had occurred only a few weeks before—the vase, among other valued possessions of the deceased, had been sold at auction to John Bashford Whympers, bringing the record price of twenty-four thousand dollars.

Vaughn turned to Margot to call her attention to this masterpiece. He found her in gay conversation with a handsome, virile-looking young fellow in khaki whom she introduced as Lieutenant Bateson, U. S. A. The two gentlemen barely had time to shake hands when a short, powerfully built man, his broad shoulders crowned with an abnormally large head covered with masses of snowy hair, entered the room through a small doorway near the piano.

"Señor Arsenjo!" whispered Margot. "Isn't he wonderful?"

Señor Arsenjo was bringing in some music-books, which he placed on the piano. Vaughn looked at him with eager interest. The most noticeable thing about him was his head. It was a remarkable head, not only for size, but for perfect proportions. It would have been an extraordinary head even without the white hair; with that snowy aureole it was a model for an artist. He changed the position of some of the atmosphere, flashed a glance over the room, which was filling rapidly, then quietly disappeared.

Vaughn turned toward his companions again. Lieutenant Bateson was telling Margot how he had disappointed his mother in not following the career for which he had been educated—that of concert pianist.

"She had her heart set on it," he said, "and it was too bad I had such a mind of my own. When I was a little tot I played the piano, like a prodigy, everybody said; that put the idea into mother's head. At the age of seven I was practising five and six hours a day, and later, of course, came the inevitable four years abroad. I returned home, gave my recital in Carnegie Hall and didn't do so badly. My mother was delighted.

"But I had decided the life of a piano-virtuoso was not for me. 'It's all very well for Russians and foreigners generally,' I told her. 'They have the unpronounceable names, the long hair, and the temperament,

I haven't. I'd rather be on a Wyoming cattle-ranch this very minute.' So I enlisted in the army instead of wasting my time lolling over the keyboard. I—"

His speech was cut short by the sudden entrance of a beautiful blonde, very young, very *petite*, fair beyond comparison, with a wealth of hair as yellow as Arsenjo's was white, and big blue eyes.

"Señorita Arsenjo!" exclaimed Margot softly. "Isn't she a dream? But how little like a Spaniard she looks—"

"By Jove, yes!" whispered Lieutenant Bateson, flushing at sight of this supernal vision. "One would swear she's American—or at least English."

The *señorita* was followed by her father and a small, dark-eyed woman, who took her seat at the piano and ran her fingers over the keys. Arsenjo went across to a large, stiff-backed chair, sat down, leaned back and gazed dreamily into space.

"He's not going to hypnotize her at any rate," murmured Vaughn smilingly. "I was wondering if we were to be treated to a *Trilby-Svengali* performance."

The young girl, wholly disregarding the sheet-music on the stand, took her position in front of it and bowed graciously to the audience. The dark-eyed woman at the piano began the prelude to Rubenstein's "At the Window," and in a moment the round, rich tones of the violin, deep and sonorous as a cello's, filled the room.

At the sounds Lieutenant Bateson sprang a new enthusiasm. "A real Stradivarius and the finest I've ever heard," he whispered to Margot. "No wonder she is such a success. That violin—with her beauty—is enough to carry her through."

When the *señorita* had finished playing the piece Margot turned to Vaughn. "Well, Owen, what do you think of her?"

"Dozens just as good play at Carnegie Hall ever season!"

She next asked Bateson's opinion.

"Greater than Elman, Ysaye, any of them!"

Vaughn smiled at this outburst. The young soldier was falling precipitately in love, there was no mistaking it.

Señorita Arsenjo played a few more numbers, all of them Slavic. Throughout the

program her father had sat motionless in the stiff-backed chair, his eyes gazing abstractedly into space. Vaughn watched him closely; but not once had he seen him glance at his daughter, much less try to meet her gaze and hold it hypnotically. So far he had seemed to be a superfluity—though a rather decorative one with that splendid head of his, the detective had to admit.

At length the last number on the program was reached and Señor Arsenjo rose suddenly, bowed, and said in his perfect English:

"Ladies and gentlemen, my daughter thanks you for your very kind appreciation. She will now play the 'Tropical Lullaby,' composed by myself in honor of our beloved native land, Ecuador. The lullaby is an Indian song. An Indian mother, one of the Quinchua aborigines of the country, is singing her child to sleep. As you listen try to envision a mud-walled hut in the shadow of Mount Chimborazo. The Indian mother is sitting outside her door, her baby in her arms."

He bowed and left the room. The accompanist followed him. Señorita Arsenjo was to play alone. She smiled charmingly, then, gracefully inclining her pretty head at an outburst of applause, began.

Vaughn, a bit excited despite his skepticism, braced himself against whatever was to come. He knew the beautiful young violinist made her greatest appeal with the sort of music she was about to play. The first notes of the "Tropical Lullaby" were strangely suggestive of the hot and humid languor of the equator, and he felt himself succumbing to their spell. Miragelike there appeared before him the huge bulk of Chimborazo. At its base the mud-walled hut sprang into being, like trick stage scenery; and there by the door sat the Indian mother crooning her song.

Steeped in the melody, Vaughn glanced sleepily toward Margot and Lieutenant Bateson. They seemed like figures in a dream, oddly far off, small, scarcely alive. Suddenly they faded, dissolved into nothingness; the entire audience became blotted out; even the *señorita's* slender, swaying figure grew blurred, then vanished alto-

gether; and Vaughn, dominated as though by some irresistible hypnosis, had the curious sensation of rising as if on wings into the air.

Suddenly there was a loud crash near that roused him sharply from his dream. The noise seemed to bring everybody else back to consciousness also. In a moment dozens of lips were asking the startled question: "What is it?"

Vaughn, thoroughly awake, glanced around and found the hawthorn vase—the twenty-four-thousand-dollar specimen—shattered on the floor. The next instant there was a shrill cry, and Mrs. Whympfer, forgetting everything else in her grief over the catastrophe—forgetting even her dignity as hostess—rushed to the vase, picked up one of the fragments and burst into hysterical tears.

"My dearest possession! I wouldn't have parted with it for twice what I paid for it. Oh, who could have done this?"

With majestic dignity Señor Arsenjo re-entered the room. Vaughn, who was using his eyes sharply, noted the fact that the *señorita* had disappeared—though her violin lay on the piano and the music-stand had not been removed.

One of the ladies, perhaps the most excited of the company with the sole exception of Mrs. Whympfer herself, sprang up at sight of the *señor* and rushed toward him.

"Oh, *señor*, just look at Mrs. Whympfer's pet vase, that priceless hawthorn, lying tragically shattered on the floor! Now none of us knocked it over, of course. Do you think it could have been *vibrated* over, so to speak—precipitated to the floor by the musical vibrations?"

At the absurd query Señor Arsenjo did not look disgusted or even smile. Instead he not only took the lady seriously but agreed with her.

"I think it quite likely. Such a thing happened at one of my daughter's recitals at Santiago—a magnificent cloisonné suddenly fell to the floor, all due to malevolent sound waves."

A fragment of the vase was lying on the floor near Vaughn. He stooped and picked it up, then began examining it.

"I don't see how musical vibrations could

knock a heavy thing like my poor K'ang-hsi to the floor," said Mrs. Whympfer with unexpected good sense. "Besides, why didn't they knock something else down, too—some of that Russian brass-ware, for instance?"

Señor Arsenjo smiled indulgently. "Ah, but maybe, my dear lady, the musical vibrations have a special affinity for hawthorn vases—"

Vaughn suddenly went to the shattered vase and picked up several more of the pieces. His action was so precipitate the others began watching him curiously.

"Mrs. Whympfer," he said after a moment, "*this broken vase is not the K'ang-hsi. It is only a rather poor imitation.*"

"What!" she gasped—to the accompaniment of astonished murmurs from the rest.

"I happen to know a good deal about this particular vase—or rather the one for which it was substituted," he continued. "You will no doubt remember when it was stolen from the late Mr. Wilmerding Jackson. I was employed to trace it and succeeded—"

"When do you think the substitution took place?" she broke in excitedly. "It must have been very recently, for only yesterday I had the vase placed here at Señor Arsenjo's request. I was present when it was brought in."

Vaughn sprang his climax. "The substitution took place *while Señorita Arsenjo was playing.*"

"Impossible!" cried a dozen voices. Señor Arsenjo gave a derisive laugh. Even Mrs. Whympfer, in the mood for miracles though she was, shook her head.

"My dear Mr. Vaughn, pray don't ask us to believe that—"

"But you must believe it. The genuine K'ang-hsi had the unmistakable Cheng-hua-mark beneath the foot of the Ming dynasty. See, this vase has no such mark. Another thing—do you remember how heavy the original one was? The fall to the floor would never have shattered it. This vase is much lighter in weight."

"How perfectly astounding!" gasped Mrs. Whympfer. "Mr. Vaughn, I put the case in your hands here and now—if you'll take it. You had luck in finding my adored K'ang-hsi before. Maybe you can repeat."

As she spoke the small door near the piano opened and Señorita Arsenjo, followed by her accompanist, entered the room. She looked rather pale and a bit disheveled, a coil or so of her flaxen hair having escaped from its pins. At sight of the shattered vase and the excited group around it she stopped short.

"What is it?" she inquired.

Her father hurried toward her. "Nothing that concerns the greatest violinist in the world!" he cried grandiloquently; then he added tenderly, putting his arm around her: "I want to spare you all the inharmony I can. You know how sensitive you are—"

"But—what is it? I'm interested—"

Señor Arsenjo gently turned her around so she could not see. Then he faced Mrs. Whympfer and her guests.

"Pray excuse Señorita Arsenjo," he said, bowing profoundly. "She has just come out of a dead faint. Usually she loses consciousness after playing the 'Tropical Lullaby.' To-night, however, she fainted before reaching the last measures." And he led her from the room.

"Oh, my poor strayed, stolen K'ang-hsi!" wailed Mrs. Whympfer, bursting into fresh tears. "Mr. Vaughn, do please get busy and find it for me."

CHAPTER II.

THE BLAKELOCK SUNSET.

VAUGHN lost no time in getting to work on the case.

In a few moments Mrs. Whympfer's guests began leaving. The Arsenjos were the first to go. Vaughn stationed himself in the lower hall and with his own eyes saw that nobody took the vase away. Of course, being so large and heavy, any ordinary person would have been unable to carry it at all, much less surreptitiously. But Vaughn, who believed in doing things thoroughly, thought it better to satisfy himself on the point. Next he made a search of the house and questioned the servants, but with no result. Mrs. Whympfer was still in tears when he and Margot said good night and left.

As for the twin mysteries—the mystery of the K'ang-hsi's disappearance and the mystery of the "spell" cast by Señorita Arsenjo's music—he was certain he had them solved already. But he grimly realized he had a good deal of hard work to do before he could fix the blame for the exchange of vases and expose to a gaping world the *modus operandi* of the "spell."

The next morning he telephoned Mrs. Whympfer. Happily the lady was accepting her loss more philosophically than on the night before, but her quavering tones still hinted of tears when she mentioned her beloved K'ang-hsi. Vaughn asked for the address of Señor Arsenjo, which she gave with some surprise.

"Surely you're not connecting *them* with the theft?" she gasped, horrified. "The Arsenjos, of all people!"

He laughed. "Why should I? Listen, Mrs. Whympfer. I see in the society column that Mrs. Lorillard Foulkes is giving an Arsenjo recital to-morrow night at her home on Fifth Avenue. You'll be there?"

"Yes."

"Good. Get me two invitations—one for Miss Margot Dale, the other for me. You can arrange it?"

"I daresay—though of course she has her list already made out. But why do you want to go? In the interest of the case?"

"Exactly—but remember I'm not connecting the *señor* or his charming daughter with the disappearance of the vase at all. Ask Mrs. Foulkes for invitations for your friends, 'Mr. and Mrs. Spencer, of Chicago.' Miss Dale and I will go in disguise—"

"In disguise! Oh, Mr. Vaughn, you frighten me—really. All this smacks of some creepy *coup* or other. How 'll I know you when I see you?"

Vaughn chuckled. "I'll give you the wink. Don't be nervous—and don't be afraid we'll disgrace you. Simply shake hands with us and present us to Mrs. Foulkes, and I'll do the rest. Good-by."

The next evening Mr. and Mrs. Spencer, of Chicago, a rather picturesque, though thoroughly well-groomed and well-mannered couple, arrived at Mrs. Lorillard

Foulkes's palatial Fifth Avenue town house early. Mrs. Whympers was already there, however, and she immediately presented her "friends" to the hostess, a typical *grande dame*, who received them cordially.

A surprise awaited Vaughn and Margot in the music-room, to which a flunkey immediately conducted them. At first they thought the huge, high, dimly lighted apartment was empty, but on looking toward the end where the piano stood they spied, half hidden by a Dutch tapestry, Señorita Arsenjo and Lieutenant Bateson chatting confidentially.

"What!" gasped Margot. "He's made her acquaintance already and they're talking like old friends. How did he manage it?"

Suddenly a white head was thrust into the room through a doorway near the piano—the incomparable head of Señor José Arsenjo—and a voice called sharply:

"Dolores! What are you doing?"

The young girl gave a confused start and blushed to the roots of her fair hair. "Why, just speaking to Lieutenant Bateson, father—"

"Come at once. Señorita Valdez is ill."

Señorita Dolores hesitated, gave the young soldier a naively eloquent look, then ran lightly from the room. The look Bateson flashed after her was even more eloquent than hers.

"Wildly in love," commented Margot. "Headlong fellow! I wonder who that Señorita Valdez is, the *señor* mentioned—"

"The little black-eyed accompanist."

"To be sure. He said she's ill. Oh, Owen, maybe the *señorita* won't play—"

"Sh-h. Stop calling me Owen. Here comes Bateson—"

Bateson, his face still aglow, came toward them. As on the other evening, he was dressed in khaki; and Margot thought as she looked at him that any girl—even the "greatest violinist in the world"—might fall in love with him, he was such a handsome fellow. He gave the Spencers only a passing glance and was about to turn away when Vaughn in cleverly disguised tones spoke to him.

"Pardon me, have you heard Señorita Arsenjo play? We—"

"Lieutenant Bateson!"

The words came in a girlish voice from the doorway near the piano. The three turned quickly. The speaker was Señorita Arsenjo. Rosy, smiling, she was alone—and evidently waiting for the young soldier to join her. She did not have to wait long. Bateson was beside her almost at one stride. She whispered to him mysteriously; he nodded eagerly, and then both disappeared through the doorway.

The room was filling with guests. Vaughn and Margot began taking notes—she of the people, he of the surroundings, the setting for to-night's recital. The room was arranged much as Mrs. Whympers's had been, the piano in one remote corner, the chairs quite a distance from it. No vases or other *objets d'art* were anywhere visible; but hanging on a large black velvet curtain behind the rows of chairs was a solitary oil painting of medium size richly framed in gold. It was a gorgeous sunset done in boldest orange and vermilion.

"I'll wager that's a Blakelock," whispered Vaughn. "We have something interesting here."

Mrs. Foulkes was standing near. Mr. Spencer, of Chicago, approached her smilingly.

"I've just been telling Mrs. Spencer that that stunning painting is a Blakelock," he said. "Am I right?"

People often resist the temptation to boast of their money; but they find it harder not to boast of what their money brings.

"Yes, indeed, that's not only a Blakelock, but it has been picked as quite the best sunset the artist ever painted. It's the celebrated 'Flare Before Dusk.' I paid twenty thousand dollars for it." And the lady went to other guests.

Vaughn sauntered to the picture. It was indeed a Blakelock—the nightmare landscape, the wild coloring were unmistakable. He peered at the lower left corner of the canvas closely and found the artist's characteristic signature.

"And Mrs. Foulkes paid twenty thousand dollars for it," he said to himself. "I must keep my eyes on it while the Señorita plays."

He rejoined Margot and they seated

themselves at the left end of the last row. He turned his chair slightly toward her and then half faced her in quite a lover-like fashion.

"What's this for?" she laughed. "You didn't stipulate we'd have to make an amorous exhibition of ourselves."

He nodded toward the Blakelock. She understood. He wanted to be in a position to flash a glance at the picture every now and then without turning his head.

Señor José Arsenjo, the noble-browed, came out just before the recital began and made an announcement which caused a murmur of surprise.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said without his usual smile—almost with an ugly scowl, in fact, "owing to the sudden illness of my daughter's accompanist, Señorita Valdez, we have had to accept the kindly proffered services of Lieutenant Bateson, who, I understand, was a pianist of some note before he entered upon a military career. Under the circumstances you will not, I am sure, expect too much in the way of a perfectly coordinated performance. They have just been practising together a few moments on the small piano in the drawing-room."

The next moment the *señorita* entered, followed by Bateson who, in his khaki, made a picturesque figure. His broad smile and shining eyes betrayed so unmistakably his boyish delight at being able to assume this unwonted and distinguished rôle that the audience, quickly responding to his frank pleasure, beamed with sympathy. He proved himself no mean pianist, too. He had a sure touch and he read amazingly well. As for Dolores, she outdid herself. Vaughn had to admit to Margot that he had begun to revise his opinion of her ability.

When the first part of the program was finished Señorita Dolores retired amid enthusiastic applause, Lieutenant Bateson escorting her out with great gallantry. The *señor*, scowling, followed. In a few moments Bateson reentered and received the congratulations of his friends for his musically performance.

The intermission between Part I and Part II of the program was unusually long; but at last the *señor* reappeared to make his

little speech. It was the same one he had made at Mrs. Whympers. He asked the audience to visualize the Indian mother crooning to her babe. Señorita Dolores came out and began playing the low, rich notes of the "Tropical Lullaby." Her father waited a moment, casting a half-quizzical glance over the crowd, then vanished.

Vaughn turned toward Margot a trifle farther so as to be able to keep his gaze continuously on the Blakelock without attracting attention. For a time nothing happened. The picture remained hanging on the black velvet curtain; no substitution was attempted—he was sure of it. But suddenly he experienced an odd haziness of sensation; the floor seemed to shrink from beneath him; Margot seemed to be slowly yet surely withdrawing herself from his side; and in a perverse flash he began thinking of the Indian woman at the foot of Chimborazo. At the same moment the music seemed to be taking on divine harmonies not of earth.

"Brace yourself against it," he managed to whisper to her—though already she seemed half-way across the room.

Vigorously he fought the mysterious influence, keeping his eyes on the Blakelock—save when he glanced around to see if Arsenjo had reentered. The South American was nowhere in sight. Vaughn, feeling himself succumbing more and more to the spell, was on the point of rebelling against it physically even to the extent of springing to his feet and interrupting the recital when the curious paralysis of nightmare seized him and he found himself unable to move. He did not lose consciousness—quite. But everything disappeared as on the other evening and he had the sensation of rising buoyantly in the air.

When he came to himself Margot was leaning against his shoulder. The audience, gasping, seemed awakening from some rapturous dream. The music had ceased. Señorita Dolores had disappeared. So had her father. The *Blakelock!* Was it still there? Yes, there it hung—the Blakelock or a perfect copy of it. Had a spurious picture been substituted for the original, as in the case of the K'ang-hsi vase?

Vaughn rose and paced casually to the

painting. Nobody was looking in his direction save Margot. He took a small magnifying-glass from his pocket and began examining certain parts of the canvas—objects on the landscape and queer cloud effects that he knew were typical of the artist. If the picture was a copy it was a remarkably good one. The haphazard technique seemed Blakelock's very own. Wait—what was this? He had turned the glass on the painter's name in the lower left corner. The lettering resembled that on all the Blakelocks he had seen, but a sudden faint smell of *fresh paint* roused his suspicions in a rush. He touched the "B" with the tip of his little finger and discovered that the paint was indeed *wet*.

"What is it?" whispered Margot at his elbow.

He laughed grimly. "Only fresh paint—"

"Fresh paint! But Blakelock painted this picture years ago—"

"Not *this* picture, you trustful child. The one that hung here before Señorita Arsenjo played the 'Tropical Lullaby' was painted by Blakelock years ago. This one was painted by somebody else much more recently—maybe within the last few days. But the copyist, clever though he was, forgot one very important thing—he forgot to put Blacklock's name on the picture till to-day—till perhaps even the last hour or so—which explains the phenomenon of the fresh paint."

"Owen," gasped Margot, "you're going to tell Mrs. Foulkes, of course?"

CHAPTER III.

AT DR. DURANT'S.

VAUGHN waited until all the other guests were gone, and then introducing himself as Owen Vaughn the detective briefly told Mrs. Foulkes of the exchange of pictures. While she was still gasping with astonishment he secured her permission to interrogate the footman who had attended the main door that evening. This man was the typical side-whiskered, bald-headed, solemn-visaged English lackey. He answered Vaughn's questions readily,

and seemed to be a rather perceptive, carefully spoken person.

"Did any messenger present himself here to-night after the guests had arrived?"

"Yes, sir; a man with an enormous box of flowers for Señorita Arsenjo."

"Did you take them?"

"I told the man to give them to me and I would see that the young lady received them, but he refused. He said his orders were to give them either to her or her father and to no one else. He waited while I called Señor Arsenjo."

"The *señor* came?"

"Yes, sir."

"What happened then?"

"I don't know. Señor Arsenjo, who was very hurried and excited, said that Señorita Valdez had fainted and that his daughter was much upset by it. He told me to go and help administer restoratives while he attended to the man who had brought the flowers. He seemed angry because the man had come, and as I left I heard him say he would teach him such a lesson that his daughter would be free in future from that kind of annoyance."

"You went to the ladies?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where were they?"

"In the small reception-room off the music-room."

"What happened there?"

"Señorita Valdez was lying on the divan unconscious. Señorita Arsenjo was chafing her hands and trying in other ways to bring her out of it. I got restoratives, but it was a very stubborn case. The lady was quite a time coming to—ten or fifteen minutes at least."

"Who was supposed to tend the door meanwhile?"

The footman looked rather sheepish. "Nobody, sir. To tell you the truth, I forgot all about the door. Señorita Arsenjo was so excited I grew excited, too—I'm a bit nervous anyway. We were afraid the other lady might not come out of it—so we worked very hard. When at last she opened her eyes I hurried back to the door."

"Had Señor Arsenjo returned to the small reception-room before you left?"

"No, sir; he was still in the hall with the man who had brought the flowers. The fellow was about to leave. Señor Arsenjo was in a towering rage. He was almost literally kicking the poor man out, sir. 'Take these flowers back to the fool who sent them,' he was shouting, 'and tell him if he ever sends any more I'll have him locked up as a nuisance.' The man, who looked quite pale from fright, left."

"He took the box?"

"Yes, sir."

"What was its shape and size?"

"It was quite large—about five feet long, four wide, and maybe a bit more than a foot in thickness."

"Describe the messenger."

"Short, very square, powerfully set up, with big, bulging shoulders, a foreign, yellowish-copper face and very black eyes."

"Thank you; that's all."

By this time Mrs. Foulkes had recovered her composure sufficiently to discuss with Vaughn the mysterious disappearance of the Blakelock. He found her in the music-room with Margot and Mrs. Whympfer.

"Now, Mr. Vaughn," began the latter half banteringly, "please don't drag in the Arsenjos—"

"The Arsenjos!" echoed Mrs. Foulkes blankly. "You don't mean—"

"My dear Mrs. Foulkes," Vaughn interposed, "we have no time for exclamatives. Perhaps I had better say that to Mrs. Whympfer," he added with a dry little laugh. "After I have gone you ladies can marvel to your hearts' content, but just now I want you to answer a few questions. Mrs. Foulkes, you told me before the recital to-night that Señor Arsenjo asked you to have the Blakelock hung on the curtain there."

"Yes; he said it would inspire his daughter. He was here this afternoon and superintended the hanging of it himself."

"You were in the room while it was being hung?"

"Yes."

"How did he happen to hang it on the black velvet?"

"First he hung it on the wall; but the frescoing spoiled the picture—at least so he insisted."

"Why was the curtain hung several feet away from the wall instead of *on* the wall?"

"It was Señor Arsenjo's idea. He said the wall was too far away from where the *señorita* was to stand when she played. He wanted her to see the picture more distinctly."

"H-m—and the small door leading to the hall is *behind* the curtain!"

Mrs. Foulkes was frankly nonplused. "But granting all this, what good did the door do him? How in the world did he carry the picture out?"

Vaughn smiled. "When did Señor Arsenjo propose hanging the Blakelock here in the music-room?"

"Just after he agreed to give the recital—I think about a week ago. He asked me to let him see whatever pictures and *objets d'art* I might have. When I told him I had a Blakelock he was all eagerness and asked to see the picture at once. His insistence on atmosphere had always struck me as being rather far-fetched, so I said: 'But, *señor*, the *subject* of the picture may not chime in with your ideas of atmosphere at all. Just because it's a Blakelock that happens to be worth twenty thousand dollars is no sign it will provide the exact sort of atmosphere your very temperamental daughter requires.' 'Any Blakelock will do,' he replied. 'Señorita Dolores is simply crazy about Blakelocks.' When I showed him the picture he was more enthusiastic than ever. 'Just the thing,' he cried. 'That's a regular Ecuador sunset. Blakelock must have been in Ecuador—or dreamed he was there—when he painted it.'"

Vaughn studied. "Do you know when and where the *señorita* makes her next professional appearance?"

"The first of next week at Dr. Durant's—"

"You mean Dr. Durant, the psychologist?"

"Yes. He's writing a wonderful book about the *señorita*, you know."

His eyes lit. "I know Dr. Durant well—"

"You mean you'll be at the recital—and in another disguise?" cried Mrs. Whympfer.

But he smiled an evasion and in a mo-

ment he and Margot bade the ladies a rather abrupt good night.

The next morning, anticipating a strenuous day, he reached his office earlier than usual; but early though the hour was he found Michael Maguinness McSurely, a quick-witted, good-humored Irishman who had graduated into his service from the New York Police Department, waiting for him. McSurely had ready the report of his activities of yesterday and last night on the K'ang-hsi case. It was a wholly disappointing one. He had made a round of antique dealers, certain picked pawnshops, "fences," and a number of private individuals who dealt in stolen articles of value behind various more or less effective kinds of camouflage; but he had been unable to discover a trace of the missing vase.

And now there was the Blakelock to complicate things.

"Mac," said Vaughn, "you'd better go over the ground again and see if you run across the picture. Wait—" He reflected a moment. "No, that would be a waste of time. The *señor* is too wily to trust professional fences. He'll keep his booty himself until a safe time to dispose of it. The thing for you to do is to take a taxi and watch the man's house for the day. I don't think he'd keep either the K'ang-hsi or the Blakelock under his own roof; he no doubt takes his stuff to some place where he himself is seldom or never seen. But he could hardly have made this particular trip in the dead of night; he must have waited till this morning. Somebody in the game—maybe the foreign-looking fellow who took the fake flowers to Mrs. Foulkes's last night—will take the picture away this morning, wrapped differently, to—*where?* That's for you to find out, Mac. Follow him no matter where he goes or how long it takes you."

Mac looked up Arsenjo's address in the telephone-directory.

"The old Van Loon place away out on Riverside Drive," he said. "Big ancient white pile on the corner in a tangle of old trees behind a high garden wall. There'll be four or five doors to watch all at once—in that prison wall—but trust me, chief, to use my peeps." And he was off.

That afternoon Vaughn called on his old friend, Dr. Durant. Marcus Aurelius Durant, who resided in an aristocratic old house in Gramercy Park, was a rather unique character. A millionaire who had inherited his money, he had lived his life on the boundary between two worlds, devoting himself to psychic research and occult experiment. He had evolved a countless number of bizarre theories on abstruse subjects, and these had naturally excited the ridicule of scientific men; but, nothing daunted, he had written book after book, first on spiritism, then on the phenomena of dreams, then on the "sixth sense," and so on until now in the autumn of his years he was riding a new hobby—the psychic influence of music.

He had always held Vaughn in grateful esteem for having introduced him to several celebrated "psychopathic" criminals whom he had experimented upon and exploited in one of his books; and now he was delighted to be able to return the favor by inviting him to Señorita Arsenjo's recital, which was to take place at his house the next Thursday night.

"Have you ever heard the beautiful young *señorita* play?" he asked beamingly.

"Yes; twice."

"Is she not a wonder—a phenomenon?"

"She certainly is. I have a theory about her playing—"

"So have I!" He was precipitate in his enthusiasm. "I'm writing a book about her. Marvelous girl! Briefly my theory is this: *Music is God*. And the human being who expresses music most perfectly—in other words, who expresses God most perfectly—is a savior of the race. Startling, eh? What do you think of it?"

"Very remarkable indeed. It will create a sensation, my dear Dr. Durant."

Vaughn continued complimenting the susceptible doctor in this equivocal vein until he gradually brought the subject around to the *señor's* ideas on atmosphere.

"My theory," he declared modestly, "isn't so stupendously original as yours. It really has more to do with the *señorita's* atmosphere than with her music."

Dr. Durant gave a triumphant little laugh. "The atmosphere *I* am to provide

for the divine young virtuoso will far discount any that has gone before. I have scoured the New York galleries for Henners—you know Henner, the great French painter, the secret of whose ravishing flesh tones died with him?"

"Oh, yes—I've admired his 'Bather' and 'Mary Magdalen' at the Metropolitan Museum—"

"Well, I've found three companion pieces to the 'Bather'—real Henners—the inimitable Hennesque nudes! Fouldera's Gallery on Fifth Avenue has been holding them, declining to sell, as the price of genuine Henners is steadily increasing. But I succeeded in getting them—and at a wonderful bargain."

"What did you pay?"

"Fifty thousand dollars—"

"What!"

"But that was for all three. And the dealer assured me they are worth twice that—"

Vaughn barely suppressed a smile—and a groan. "Did Señor Arsenjo suggest your buying them?"

"Yes; he said they would inspire his daughter."

"Have you the pictures here?"

"No; they haven't been delivered yet. Señor Arsenjo suggested that we leave them at the gallery till the morning of the recital."

"Why?"

"He didn't say."

"In what room is the *señorita* to play?"

Dr. Durant took him up-stairs to the large drawing-room. It was connected with the library by means of sliding doors.

"I'll push back these doors," he explained, "and both rooms will be one. They will easily accommodate one hundred people. The *señorita* is to play in the library."

"And the Henners—where are they to hang?"

"On a black curtain at that end of the room. The *señor* said they would show better on black."

Vaughn went to the other end of the room. A door broke the sweep of the left wall, and in the right-hand corner was a sort of cabinet or bookcase with glass doors

built in the wall. The doors were curtained with scrim.

First Vaughn opened the door in the left wall. It led into a narrow corridor connecting the main hall with a rear stairway. Thus it afforded egress from the drawing-room either down the front stairway or the rear one. Next he went toward the built-in cabinet.

"Originally that was a china closet," explained Dr. Durant. "This room used to be the dining-room and the room behind was the kitchen. But when I put in the English basement I made this the drawing-room. The closet opens into the other room as well as into this one."

Vaughn's eyes lit. He opened the glass doors and had an unimpeded view into the other room—a kind of study littered with old books and other literary rubbish.

"Excuse its appearance," apologized the doctor. "Nobody ever goes into it. The door that used to lead from this room to that has been walled up."

"There is no means of getting in there save through these glass doors?" queried Vaughn eagerly.

"That is all. I intended to cut a doorway leading into the room from the library, but never got around to it. But, Mr. Vaughn, why does the room interest you so? Has it anything to do with your atmosphere theory?"

"A very great deal," answered Vaughn. And then he astonished the doctor by crawling through the closet on his hands and knees into the other room. After which he glanced around with a satisfied smile. There were no doors; and the window was a small one.

In a moment he had rejoined Dr. Durant.

"Doctor, may I have the use of this room on the night of Señorita Arsenjo's recital?"

"Certainly. But you won't be able to hear the music—"

"I don't want to hear the music." Then, at the other's wondering look, he added quickly: "My theory doesn't require it. Frankly, I want to be *where I can see and yet not be seen*. The entire procedure must be kept secret. Don't let Señor Arsenjo or his daughter know there's a room here at

all. Have some books placed in the closet and let them show through the glass doors—then they'll think it a mere bookcase. You'll do this?"

"With the greatest pleasure," laughed Dr. Durant. "The thing is so mysterious I'm beginning to feel as fascinated as by my own experiments."

Vaughn thanked him warmly and left, promising to be on hand Thursday night, at least an hour earlier than the Arsenjos.

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE HOLLOW OF HIS HAND.

V AUGHN took a taxicab to the Foul-dera Gallery on Fifth Avenue. Foul-dera & Co. were among the largest art dealers in New York, devoting several floors to the exhibition of pictures. Their exhibits were usually popular with art lovers, and to-day Vaughn found the rooms crowded. On the top floor were canvases which were either not for sale or had already been sold, and here the press of spectators was not so great. In a remote corner at the end of the room he found what he had been searching for—an artist busily engaged in copying a picture.

This in itself was not extraordinary. There were perhaps half a dozen artists copying other canvases in the various rooms of the establishment, and they excited only a languid interest on the part of the public. But Vaughn felt almost a thrill at sight of the copyist on the top floor—for the picture he was copying was one of the Henners.

Though he had never seen him before Vaughn recognized him instantly—and that, too, notwithstanding his disguise. He wore a gray wig and a gray mustache, near-sighted glasses, and the regulation artist's smock; but this garment, loose and shapeless though it was, could not hide that strangely short, broad, powerfully set-up figure. The copyist was the man who had delivered the "flowers" at Mrs. Foulkes's yesterday. The footman's description fitted him perfectly.

The pictures were hanging on the wall above him. All three were typical Henners—purplish-blue backgrounds, greenish-blue

skies, mossy banks on which sat Titian-haired nudes.

"My friend," said Vaughn pleasantly, "you're doing a good job."

The man grunted and shrugged his huge shoulders. Vaughn drew a step nearer.

"Those flesh-tones of yours," he continued critically, "need only one thing to make them more like Henner than Henner's own—a dash of pale olive to give a bit more warmth."

The copyist flashed a glance up at the speaker, stopped painting, pushed his stool back, then looked with half-closed eyes at the figure.

"You are right," he growled at last with a mongrel Spanish accent. "I need more green. *Diable!* why not I see it myself? My color-eye no good." And he angrily mixed the paints.

"You're doing very well, indeed," Vaughn encouraged him. "Where have you studied—Paris?"

"Rome — Paris — everywhere," half snarled the man shortly.

He began adding the Henner green to the nymph's flesh, working for some moments in silence.

"Good!" cried Vaughn with involuntary admiration. "That's the tint exactly—"

But suddenly the copyist sprang to his feet with a series of oaths—degenerate Spanish mixed with half-breed Indian, a sort of South American lingo, Vaughn guessed.

"No good!" he exclaimed furiously. "I am fool to paint. I paint no more. Not even for *him*. Not for anybody." He snatched the canvas, crushed the wooden backing with his powerful hands, then, taking a curious-looking knife from his pocket, cut the picture in strips, gathered up his paints, palette, and stool, and rushed out.

Vaughn paid him the tribute of a thoroughly astonished whistle.

"Some temper! A veritable madman when he's roused. I wonder how the *señor* manages him. Well, I can resume my study of this rather extraordinary fellow to-morrow, for he'll be certain to come back to go at his copying again, as his master simply must have those bogus Henners by Thursday."

When Vaughn returned to the office he found McSurely waiting for him. Mac had an interesting report. He had two reports, in fact—the first concerning the mysterious deliveryman-copyist, the second having to do with Señorita Dolores Arsenjo and—Lieutenant Bateson!

“What!” gasped the “chief.” “Is he still storming her heart—and incidentally risking being murdered by the irate papa?”

Mac grinned. “I took a taxi for the old Van Loon place out on the Drive, now occupied by our friends, the Arsenjos, and had scarcely rounded the corner when a big car came shooting out of the garage with the big-shouldered fellow at the wheel. It pulled up at the front door and waited. Meanwhile I directed the cabby to amble down a side street at a speed of about a mile and a half an hour so I could look back and see what was happening. Naturally I had to keep on the move, or, at least, make a bluff at it, as I didn’t want the party of the shoulders to notice me hanging round. He waited a minute or so, then Señor Arsenjo came out of the house carrying a big flat package the size of the Blake-lock—”

“Arsenjo himself? You’re sure?”

“He was certainly true to your description, chief. A black-eyed, white-haired grandee with a head like the one on that biggest statue of Jupiter up at the Metropolitan Museum—”

“That’s Arsenjo. Go ahead.”

“He put the package carefully on the floor of the tonneau and covered it with the lap-robe, and then Mr. Shoulders whizzed off. My old taxi was a bit decrepit, and the cabby had some time trying to keep the other car in sight. We followed Shoulders upon the Staten Island ferry-boat, and then, after reaching St. George, he led us out Richmond Terrace to a road that stretched out toward the interior of the island. We never could have pretended to keep up with him if his car hadn’t gone wrong just after he left the boat. Every few minutes he was out tinkering with the engine.”

“He didn’t turn around and see you?”

Mac chuckled. “He looked back in a casual sort of way whenever he got out to tinker with the engine, and when he began

to slow down I had the cabby shoot off into a crossroad, or stop dead before some house, or turn round. It worked, too. At last he pulled up at a big Dutch house in a thick woods—a regular old-timer painted white with old-fashioned green shutters and a double porch. Shoulders jumped out, took the package to the door, rang, and then disappeared inside—”

“Did you see who let him in?”

“I had the cabby halt behind a clump of trees a good piece from the house, and then I used my field-glasses. A woman opened the door—old, gray, saffron-colored, another Spaniard as sure as my name’s Michael Maguinness McSurely.”

“How long was Shoulders inside the house?”

“Just a moment. When he came out he got busy with his engine again. I drove back to the St. George ferry, and by the time I reached it he had caught up with me. We came over on the same boat; and then I trailed him back to the Van Loon place on the Drive. Fate was staging a luscious little comedy when we arrived.

“That khaki kid, Lieutenant Bateson, was carrying off the stunning little *señorita* in a bullet-shaped aluminum racer—the worst little devil of a car you ever saw. Old Arsenjo, hatless, his head looking big as a dome, ran out after them, raving and shaking his fist. When Shoulders pulled up, he sprang in to give chase. The khaki kid laughed and waved him a good-by as they shot away.” Mac laughed at the recollection. “*Shoot!* goes the bullet-shaped racer. *Shoot!* follows the other car. Then that pesky engine goes wrong again and the car slows down. Result—in about seventeen seconds and a half the bullet-shaped racer is out of sight.

“Is Arsenjo mad? Oh, my! *Is he?* Say, you ought to have seen how he turned and smashed Shoulders on the jaw—”

“What!” cried Vaughn, astonished. “And what did Shoulders do?”

“At first he seemed even madder than Arsenjo. His face goes ultramarine and he foams at the mouth. Out go those big fingers like a strangler’s, and he seems ready to do execution with them when suddenly his arms drop and he turns away—for all

the world like a big, powerful mongrel cur who realizes that the little dog he is about to chew up is a canine aristocrat with a pedigree, hence out of his class and not his meat! Grandee Arsenjo glares at him, then jumps out and streaks it back into the house. Shoulders waits a minute, gazes after the boss with the meanest look I ever saw on a human phiz, then gets busy on that balky engine again. I leave—and that's all."

Toward noon the next morning Vaughn went to the Fouldera Gallery and found Shoulders, disguised in the gray wig and mustache, busily copying the same Henner he had been working on yesterday. At Vaughn's rather sudden appearance he glanced up with a scowl. He had been painting with marvelous rapidity, for the picture was almost done. The new canvas, however, did not show the excellence of drawing and coloring that had characterized the one he had so furiously destroyed. Had Arsenjo struck him again? And was he sullenly indifferent as a consequence?

"What bring you here?" he snarled. "You like Henner so wonderful well? Or you never see anybody paint before?"

Vaughn smiled disarmingly. "I like Henner—who doesn't? I want to buy those three paintings—"

"So? You can't buy. Sold already."

"To whom?"

The quick query caught Shoulders unawares. He flushed a coppery red, looked up at Vaughn with furtive questioning—though as yet with no open suspicion—then smiled nonchalantly.

"Who buy? Friend of mine. Gentleman from Venezuela. He take Henners to national gallery at Caracas as gift. Good man, yes?" And he laughed softly, turning to work on the canvas again.

Vaughn kept after him. "Why does he want copies of the pictures—for himself?"

"No. I make copies for myself—I love beautiful pictures. I study art like madman. I say to myself: 'I will be great painter.' But no go! I am torn away from work I love. So now I am nobody—nothing—last of my race." He sighed bitterly. "Maybe I was born to be slave—he says so; but I hate it—I hate it!" His

eyes flashed behind his glasses; his ponderous chest heaved.

Vaughn watched him, fascinated. What did his curious reference to a state of slavery mean? Had Arsenjo enslaved him—if not legally, then by some stronger power, some life-and-death hold over him? He called himself a slave; he had borne a humiliating blow from Arsenjo without striking back. Did not these things show him to be of an inferior race? Perhaps he was an Ecuadorean half-breed, a *mestizo*, maybe a full-blooded Indian.

But Shoulders was speaking again—and in tense, clicking tones: "I was wonderful fellow. I could do many things. I paint pictures. I make pottery and draw queer figures on it. I make jewelry that look like a hundred years old out of gold and silver. I do everything in world *once*. What do I do *now*?"

Vaughn smiled. "You're copying that Henner—and making a good job of it."

"I don't mean what I do this minute—but what I do all the time."

"Well, what *do* you do all the time?"

He seemed on the point of speaking out. Then, frowning, he shook his head and turned to the canvas. "Who are you? Stranger to me. You think I am fool for telling you so much? Well, what I tell you is fairy story." He chuckled. "Good-by! You are not bad man, but you talk much. I must work like five men to get Henner done before noon."

Vaughn hesitated, made as if to demur at this abrupt breaking off of a very interesting conversation, then on second thought uttered a good-humored good-by and left the gallery. He could afford to wait to get better acquainted with this rather sinister artist. He had him—as well as his master, Arsenjo—and Arsenjo's beautiful daughter—in the hollow of his hand.

CHAPTER V.

THE CENTER OF THE STAGE.

ON the next Thursday night Vaughn was the first of Dr. Durant's guests to arrive for the recital. A close second was Lieutenant Bateson. Each

opened his eyes a bit at sight of the other (Bateson, of course, had not recognized the detective at Mrs. Foulkes's in his disguise of Mr. Spencer, of Chicago); but of the two, Vaughn was the more surprised. How had the young soldier secured an invitation to Dr. Durant's house? Surely he did not move in the old occultist's somewhat mildewed set. But what is impossible to a man in love?

"Mrs. Whympers did it for me," explained Bateson with a rollicking little laugh, reading the query in Vaughn's eyes. "That's a smart woman. She had a lot of trouble getting me the bid, but managed to put it through. But how did *you* get in?"

Vaughn smiled. "I'm lucky enough to know the doctor."

"And you simply can't resist the divine *señorita's* music, eh?"

"Certainly not—who could? I'm almost as interested in it as you—"

Bateson flushed, but took it good-humoredly. "Scarcely! To tell you the truth, I'm falling madly in love with that radiant girl!"

"H-m!" half grunted Vaughn. "What does her father say?"

The young soldier laughed—then apologized for his mirth. "I admit I ought to take the *señor* more seriously, but, by Jove, he's as good as a musical comedy. How that man does rave! Several days ago I met Señorita Arsenjo in Riverside Park. For a wonder she was alone, and I promptly introduced myself, telling her that Mrs. Whympers had arranged to present me, anyway—and so on. I said I had heard her play, that she was the greatest ever, that I banged the piano some myself—well, that's the way it started. Then later, at Mrs. Foulkes's, her accompanist suddenly became ill, and I took her place. Señor Arsenjo didn't like it a bit. Earlier in the evening the divine *señorita* promised to take a spin with me in my little bullet car, so the next morning I called and took her away right under her father's nose. Angry? Good Heavens! His rage absolutely curdled the atmosphere."

"The Arsenjos are extraordinarily interesting persons," remarked Vaughn casually. "Who make up the household?"

"Señorita Valdez, an old domestic or so, and—Miguel."

"Miguel! Who is he?"

"The *señor's* combined bodyguard, chauffeur, valet, and I don't know what else. From what Señorita Dolores says he's a very useful person."

"He's a Spaniard?"

"No, a *mestizo*—that's South American for half-breed."

Vaughn made his way out of the crowded reception-room and hurried up-stairs to the drawing-room, which fortunately he found still empty. Everything was arranged for the recital. The grand piano was standing at one end of the room. At the other were the three Henners hung on black velvet. In the soft pink-shaded light the flesh of the nude figure looked startlingly warm and lifelike. Never had the great Henner seemed so like himself and so unlike all the rest of painters. And Dr. Durant had paid fifty thousand dollars for this trio of fair women. What glorious booty José Arsenjo was expecting!

Vaughn went to the closet in the corner, made a passageway through the books. He replaced all the books against the glass doors, and crawled through to the store-room beyond. Here, in darkness himself, he could see everything that happened in the drawing-room. The position was ideal. He replaced all the books against the glass doors save one or two here and there to afford space through which to see, and then he drew up a chair and made himself comfortable.

In a short while the guests began pouring into the drawing-room and seating themselves. They were a rather motley throng, as Dr. Durant knew many eccentric people. Now and then some well-known society figure, such as Mrs. Whympers, relieved the freakish monotony. Lieutenant Bateson, Vaughn noticed with a smile, had placed himself under that lady's protection.

Everything went off as at previous recitals until the second part of the program had been reached. Here was where the "spell" usually began to work. Arsenjo rose and began to speak. His tones were softly modulated, and Vaughn, behind the glass, could not catch what he was saying.

Whatever it was, it did not seem to be the rather hackneyed story about the Indian mother crooning to her babe. Vaughn opened one of the doors an inch or two to hear.

The Indian mother had been abandoned. Arsenjo was telling a new tale about the ill-starred Atahualpa, the last Emperor of the Incas, whom the treacherous Pizarro put to death. "Señorita Arsenjo will play you 'Atahualpa's Swan Song,' ladies' and gentlemen," the *señor* was saying. "I composed the piece on my last visit to Cuzco, the ancient capital of Peru." And he went on to describe the various movements of the composition in the florid terms so dear to the Spanish-American heart. Vaughn listened with amusement mingled with wonder at the man's fantastic cleverness.

When Arsenjo finished his story he and Señorita Valdez disappeared through the doorway leading into the hall, and Dolores, unaccompanied, began playing "Atahualpa's Swan Song." Vaughn, breathlessly interested, took a small but powerful pair of field-glasses from his pocket to have in readiness when Arsenjo returned, meanwhile roving his gaze from the violinist to the three Henners at the far end of the room. For a while, however, nothing happened. Dolores played on serenely. The audience, though seeming to enjoy the music, as yet exhibited no sign of succumbing to the usual spell. Arsenjo was slow in reappearing. And certainly—so far—the Henners had not been exchanged.

Vaughn was growing a bit restive when he noticed the black velvet curtains part gradually and Arsenjo thrust his splendid head into the drawing-room. Evidently he had reentered by the door *behind* the draperies. He waited a moment, casting his eyes the length of the room to where Dolores stood playing, then casually—yet with studiously soft footfalls—advanced.

This was the signal for Vaughn to do two things. He noiselessly closed the glass doors—as a practical means of resisting the spell—and then lifted the field-glasses to his eyes. Of course Arsenjo was in full view as it was, and not more than fifty feet away; but Vaughn was particularly desirous of keeping the closest possible watch on his

hands. One hung at his side, the other was thrust with apparent carelessness between his coat and waistcoat. That was the hand that Vaughn watched—tirelessly. But it remained hidden—and nothing happened.

The strains of the music had, of course, reached Vaughn in his covert, but he had listened only desultorily. Now, however, engrossed though he was in watching the exact spot on Arsenjo's coat, behind which the mysteriously secreted hand lay, he was thrilled by a sudden deep, vibrant note of the violin; and just after this note had ascended and died away, *the hidden hand suddenly appeared, and by means of a miniature contrivance on the order of an atomizer discharged some subtle gas or attenuated liquid over the heads of the audience.*

The spell!

It was, just as Vaughn had suspected from the beginning, a *drug*—but an incredibly powerful one, vaporized doubtless—a drug distilled perhaps from some unknown plant that grew in the hot, fever-laden forests of Arsenjo's own Ecuador. This it was, then, that had benumbed his victims' senses, giving them dreams of beatific harmonies—and incidentally making the *señorita* famous as the greatest violinist in the world!

But if the drug threw over the audience an enchantment that only fell short of unconsciousness itself, how could Arsenjo and Dolores resist it? Dolores did *not* resist it! She had always fainted before the end of the "Tropical Lullaby"—would she not faint while playing "Atahualpa's Swan Song"?

But her father— Vaughn had scarcely asked himself the question when Arsenjo buried his nose in his handkerchief. This simple proceeding surely was not sufficient to make him immune to the effects of the drug. Perhaps, between times, he went out for a breath of fresh air.

This surmise was correct. Arsenjo used his spraying contrivance several times in succession, then hurried behind the black curtains, the handkerchief still pressed to his nostrils. Vaughn now turned his attention to Dolores. He could not see her face; but certainly her playing was growing

heavy and languorous. As for her listeners, they were becoming markedly somnolent. Vaughn judged the drug to be somewhat similar to Indian hashish in its curious combination of physically depressing and mentally exhilarating qualities. But, after all, its astonishing effects were peculiarly its own.

In a moment Arsenjo returned. This time he parted the curtains and advanced toward the audience with far less caution than before. Señorita Dolores was still playing, but with only the faintest of sounds and the slowest of motions. Had she resisted the full effects of the drug so far? As Vaughn wondered, she staggered suddenly and would have fallen had not Señorita Valdez hurried in from the hall, caught her, and then half dragged her from the room. At the same instant Arsenjo, his handkerchief covering the entire lower half of his face, discharged the drug once more over the heads of the audience.

Now was the moment to begin watching the three Henners. Vaughn, discarding the field-glasses, fixed his gaze on the pictures. But now there was an untoward happening—one he might have anticipated. The lights went out. That was his first disappointed supposition when a sudden pall of darkness blotted out the view; but in a moment he realized they had only been lowered—to a great extent, it was true, but still not sufficiently to keep him in utter ignorance of what was going on in the other room. Of the dozen electric lights that had been turned on, perhaps one of very low candle-power was still burning. This one, hidden behind the frieze, gave only the dimmest and ghostliest of lights. Evidently Arsenjo had familiarized himself with the workings of the switch.

He could easily be located by the white handkerchief over his face. He stood motionless a moment, then went toward the curtains. Immediately they parted and a figure appeared. In the dimness the face was only a pale patch, but by its relatively short distance from the floor Vaughn judged the newcomer to be the undersized *mestizo* Miguel.

Miguel was carrying what seemed to be a bundle about the same size as the three

Henners would have been if wrapped together. He and his master bent over this bundle, and, after a short parley, Arsenjo got a chair, Miguel stepped upon it—and in a moment Vaughn saw the big thing done! Keeping his eyes on the three Henners, he watched them disappear, one at a time, the curtains showing an unbroken surface of black; then, after a minute, the three copies were hung in their place, Miguel doing the job with incredible quickness.

The originals were wrapped, then both men disappeared behind the curtain. Arsenjo was absent a few minutes—long enough to see Miguel safely out of the house. When he came back he turned on the lights, then, advancing, opened the door leading to the hall, presumably to let in fresh air. He then vanished through the doorway—for the purpose, Vaughn guessed, of seeing if everything was going well with Dolores and Señorita Valdez.

He had been gone only a few moments when the crowd began to show unmistakable signs of coming out from under the influence of the drug. Dr. Durant suddenly staggered to his feet, then, after a falsetto laugh began to make a speech. Vaughn, curious to hear what he had to say, opened one of the glass doors an inch or two and listened. Though more or less himself again, it was plain the aged theorist had not shaken himself entirely free of the effects of the drug.

“Ladies and gentlemen! I know all of you will agree with me that we have just had a taste of heaven! More than ever an I—”

He got no farther. At that moment Señorita Dolores, leaning on the arm of her father, appeared in the hall doorway, and the crowd burst into a storm of applause that drowned all other sounds. Dolores, touched by this demonstration, took a step inside the room. Her action displeased her father. He frowned, shook his head, then, assuming the prerogative of a parent dealing with a small child, deliberately took her by the hand and attempted to lead her back into the hall. This roused the young woman. She broke from his grasp, then ran to the center of the room, bowed, and began throwing kisses to her admirers.

This was too much for the impulsive Bateson. He sprang to his feet.

"Three cheers for Señorita Dolores Arsenjo!" he cried, "the world's greatest violinist."

But Arsenjo, white with rage, rushed back and interrupted him.

"We will have no cheering. I won't allow it. This is not an army encampment, a college campus, or a street corner—"

Bateson daredevilishly cut him short. "Three cheers for the greatest violinist that ever lived! *One, two—*"

But he never reached "three." He paled suddenly, gasped, gagged, then ran out into the hall. Everybody gazed after him in surprise, Dolores and Arsenjo no less than the others. Mrs. Whympfer, who looked decidedly worried, turned to the host.

"Dr. Durant, I'm afraid Lieutenant Bateson has been suddenly taken ill. Perhaps you'll go and see—"

"Certainly." And the doctor hurried out.

Everybody was excited—disproportionately so, considering the comparative insignificance of the incident. Perhaps it was its dramatic suddenness that had taken the crowd's breath away. Presently Dolores, who had been speaking to her father in low, vehement tones, left him in a pout and came toward Vaughn's covert. Immediately Arsenjo followed. Both were angry.

"You must come home," he said. (Vaughn could plainly hear every word).

"Not until I hear about Lieutenant Bateson!"

Arsenjo's magnificent brow clouded. "What is this man to you? *Do you love him?*"

She gave a tantalizing little laugh. "I don't know—yet. But he is really very charming."

Arsenjo, forgetting himself in his rage, seized her wrist. Vaughn, who had a full view of his face, was astounded by its malevolence.

"Dolores, I warn you never to speak to this Lieutenant Bateson again. He is a poverty-stricken wastrel, chronic borrower, and breaker of women's hearts. He is hopelessly in debt, and is unworthy of you, in every way. Listen! Even if this man in

khaki were twenty times a millionaire, with a character above reproach, I should still insist that you shun him. You shall never marry—I have consecrated your life to art. You are—"

But she left him abruptly and hurried toward the hall doorway. Her quick eye had caught sight of Dr. Durant returning.

"What of Lieutenant Bateson?" she queried anxiously.

Dr. Durant looked rather serious. "I found him very ill, indeed. He had been seized with a terrible nausea. He recovered sufficiently to take a cab home, and wished me to say good night for him."

This was all Vaughn could catch of the colloquy. Meanwhile his attention had been attracted to Arsenjo, who, at the news of Bateson's illness, had given a perceptible start, after which he had seemingly plunged into deep thought. In a moment, flashing a strange, half-questioning glance at Dolores, he hurried from the room. She did not see him leave, as she was still talking to Dr. Durant.

He was gone scarcely a minute. He made a dramatic entry, rushing to Dr. Durant and crying excitedly:

"*My daughter's priceless Stradivarius has been stolen!*"

Everybody began talking simultaneously. Dolores burst into tears, declaring hysterically she would never play again if her beloved violin was not found. Dr. Durant insisted he was willing to have every nook and cranny of the house searched—the servants' quarters, even his own room. Several of the more feather-headed of the guests, unconscious of the absurdity of the thing, averred their eagerness to have their persons searched. Then somebody (the voice above the din sounded like Mrs. Whympfer's) had the good sense to suggest that maybe Señor Arsenjo was mistaken.

"Mistaken?" echoed Arsenjo with offended dignity. "Come with me and I'll *show* you the violin is gone."

Immediately the excited throng hurried out of the room, Dolores in advance. When the sound of their footsteps had died away down the hall, Vaughn removed the friendly camouflage of the books and crawled from his covert. What an evening it had been!

And what an unexpected ending to the recital! Who would have dreamed the Cremona violin would rob the three Henners of the center of the stage?

Vaughn went the length of the room to take a closer look at Miguel's copies. They were hung rather crookedly, and both technique and color were only indifferent—the *mestizo's* growing hatred of Arsenjo was betraying itself in his work. But, at any rate, Henner's name in the corner of the canvases was not *wet*, as Blakelock's had been!

Vaughn had stood contemplating the pictures for some moments when he felt a tap on his shoulder. He turned and looked into the anxious, ancient face of Dr. Marcus Aurelius Durant.

"Thank Heaven!" gasped the old man, "they've all gone. The violin is still missing; but Señor Arsenjo, at my earnest entreaty, has promised not to put the case into the hands of the police until I have had a little detective work done on my own account. Mr. Vaughn, your presence here is providential. I want you to make a thorough investigation—search the house and question the servants. You'll do this for me?"

Vaughn yawned. "I dare say. But don't be too hopeful. The Stradivarius is not in this house."

"I'm glad to hear you say that. I've always regarded my servants as honest—they've been with me a long time." He gave a sudden exclamative as he gazed up at Miguel's three copies. "Good gracious! I've just thought—What if the thief gets a look at my Henners! Hadn't I better put them in a safety-deposit vault?"

"You needn't feel alarmed," Vaughn answered dryly. "Our thief isn't after Henners just now. Come, take me to the room where the violin was."

CHAPTER VI.

"MISS MARY JANE SMITH."

THE room from which the Cremona violin had disappeared, a small parlor some distance down the hall—which had been used as Señorita Arsenjo's dress-

ing-room—gave Vaughn absolutely no lead. His rather perfunctory questioning of the servants was without result, also. This, however, was only what he had expected; so when he said good night to the half-distraught doctor he exhorted him not to despair. "Give me a day or so," he said, "and I feel confident I can trace the missing instrument."

Bright and early the next morning he set McSurely to work investigating what had happened at the *señorita's* recitals prior to the one at Mrs. Whymper's.

"Now, Mac, the first thing to do is to look up the files of the newspapers and go through the society columns. There you'll find mention of Señorita Arsenjo's recitals, which are purely society functions. New York has been discussing the young lady for a long time, and I figure she must have performed on some ten or a dozen different occasions before her appearance at Mrs. Whymper's. Write down the names of the people who have had her play and bring the list to me."

McSurely had not been gone five minutes when Vaughn was surprised by a visit from the last man in New York he had expected to see—Señor José Arsenjo. The *señor* had never appeared to better advantage. Smiling, suave, groomed to perfection, his up-sweep of hair showing dazzlingly white above the surpassing brow, he surely looked—and acted—the part of proud father to the greatest violinist in the world.

"Mr. Vaughn," he said, after introducing himself with the courtliness of an old Andalusian grandee, "I've come to you because you're declared to be not only the ablest but the most trustworthy detective in New York. I remember meeting you at Mrs. Whymper's a short time ago. With almost superhuman cleverness you discovered that her valuable K'ang-hsi vase had been exchanged for a fake. By the way, have you succeeded in tracing the original?"

"Not yet, Señor Arsenjo."

"No? Too bad. Well, I have another mystery for you to solve. My daughter's thirty-thousand-dollar Cremona violin was stolen at Dr. Durant's last night."

Vaughn's look of surprise was an artistic simulation. "What! How did it happen?"

Arsenjo secured the detective's promise to take the case, then, with considerable circumlocution, detailed the circumstances in connection with the disappearance of the violin. He described the small parlor, stressing the fact that it was near the descending stairway, thus making egress easy; and then he calculated the length of time the instrument had been left unguarded in the room. So far he had not hinted at any suspicion of his own.

"I must ask you a few questions," said Vaughn.

"Proceed."

"Who took the violin from the drawing-room to the small parlor?"

"My daughter."

"Is she in the habit of carelessly leaving it lying about?"

"No. It's too valuable an instrument."

"Why did she leave it last night?"

"She was recalled to acknowledge a foolish, belated burst of applause. It was led by a certain Lieutenant Bateson, who insisted on making himself—and her—ridiculous by proposing three stupid cheers for her *à la* some vulgar football rooter." He paused, emphasizing the next words strongly. "All this, of course, took time."

"How much?"

"Three or four minutes. Then another incident took still more time. Bateson became suddenly ill—as we all thought. He rushed out of the drawing-room, and Dr. Durant followed, to offer assistance. The doctor was absent another five minutes, and when he came back he said Bateson had had an attack of nausea and had gone home. In a moment I returned to the parlor and found—"

"One moment. Where was Señorita Valdez all this time?"

Arsenjo hesitated. "She had gone home immediately after the recital."

"Why?"

"She had a maddening headache, and declared she'd faint unless she could get out into the fresh air. I bade her go on home in my car, as I would call a taxicab for my daughter and myself."

"And so each of you forgot to keep an eye upon the violin?"

"Exactly."

Vaughn smiled. "Well, Señor Arsenjo, I don't think I'll have much trouble tracing it. The case is a very simple one. No doubt one of Dr. Durant's servants is the thief—"

Arsenjo fell into the trap—eagerly. "Never! To me the thing is clear as day. The culprit is—*Lieutenant Bateson.*"

Vaughn pretended surprise. "What! Isn't this a rather far-fetched idea? Why should Lieutenant Bateson descend to the level of a common thief?"

Arsenjo smiled derisively. "As you Americans put it, he needs the money. He is heavily in debt. The violin is worth thirty thousand dollars, at least—a respectable piece of booty even for an army officer! He made his plans some time ago. He introduced himself to my daughter, and then forced himself upon us as her accompanist at Mrs. Lorillard Foulkes's. Later, against my express wishes, he took her motoring. At Dr. Durant's, he led the applause to recall us to the drawing-room, then feigning nausea, took the violin and hurried away."

And this was the basis of Arsenjo's suspicions! Vaughn almost laughed aloud. A sieve was no fuller of holes than this theory of Bateson's guilt.

"Señor Arsenjo, there are a dozen fatal objections to your theory. How did Lieutenant Bateson *know* Señorita Arsenjo would respond to the belated encore? How did he know you would return with her—that she would leave the violin behind—that Señorita Valdez had gone home—that you and your daughter, after his attack of nausea, would remain long enough in the drawing-room to give him the opportunity to go to the small parlor and make away with the instrument? Besides, didn't Dr. Durant go to the door with him when he left? How could Bateson have carried the violin out without the doctor's seeing him?"

Arsenjo smiled blandly. "All this sounds very convincing, Mr. Vaughn, but if *you were to find the instrument in his possession*, you would admit I know what I'm talking about, wouldn't you?"

This time Vaughn's surprise was not simulated. "Do you mean to tell me Lieutenant Bateson actually has the violin now?"

"I'm not saying just that—I don't want

to spoil the zest of the search! Suppose you investigate the thing for yourself. Call on Lieutenant Bateson. He keeps an apartment in the city, and usually, I understand, runs up from camp for the week-ends. This week he came yesterday—a day earlier than usual—to be on hand at Dr. Durant's last night; so I have no doubt he's in town today. You'll hunt him up?"

"At once. Trust me, *señor*, to get at the truth."

Arsenjo rose. "That's what we want. If Bateson is innocent, he, of course, has nothing to fear—"

Vaughn gazed at him steadfastly. "And if he's guilty—if I find the violin in his possession—I am to deliver him to the police?"

Arsenjo studied a moment. But it was rather poor acting—he had the air of a man who had already made up his mind. "Well, no. Report to me first. If we get the violin, and if he promises to cease annoying my daughter, I may waive arrest and prosecution for the sake of his uniform."

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.

He left his address, then, after a smiling good-by, took his departure.

Ten minutes later Vaughn had his second surprise of the morning.

"Miss Mary Jane Smith wishes to see Mr. Vaughn," announced the telephone girl in the main office.

"What is Miss Mary Jane Smith's business?"

"She wishes to consult you professionally."

"Tell her to come in."

The fact that a Miss Mary Jane Smith had called was not in itself particularly astonishing; nor was it any more a matter for wonder when Miss Mary Jane Smith glided into the private office dressed in black and heavily veiled. All kinds of people consulted Owen Vaughn. But when Miss Mary Jane Smith, at his courteous invitation to sit down, hesitated, she laughed softly, and then threw back her veil, revealing the altogether lovely face of Dolores Arsenjo.

Circe or Ruth



BORDEN clasped his hands under his head and leaned back with a luxurious sigh in his swinging Bombay chair.

"Please let me be lazy," he begged. "Talk to me—spin me one of those fairy tales of yours, and just let me sit here and listen."

Nielsene Harwich put her crystal liqueur

glass on the tray and nodded a dismissal to the turbaned Moro who stood at her elbow. She drew one foot in its dark blue satin slipper up under her body, as she sat curled on the broad seat that ran around the edge of the balcony.

The mango-trees were motionless in the still night air; there was the heady scent of some too sweet tropical flower; and from

a cluster of native huts around the corner of the square came the sound of a poignantly tender voice singing a love-song.

"You like me as a teller of tales?" Nielsene questioned in her slow, sweet voice. "It amuses you when I weave dreams for you? Well, enjoy it to its fullest to-night—for to-morrow I go back to my plantation."

"You are leaving Burdanao?" Borden asked in surprise.

The girl nodded and raised her voice. "Mr. Kipp," she called to a group of white-clad officers who talked in low tones over their cigarettes at the other end of the balcony, "did you not say that you expected two of your war-ships to come in to-morrow?"

"That's what I said," and the speaker rose as if to join them; but some one murmured a low-voiced protest, there was a half-smothered laugh, and he sank back into his seat.

"You see?" And Nielsene turned to Borden with a quick gesture of her hands.

"But I don't see why you want to leave just now. The arrival of the ships—"

"So you don't understand?" Nielsene interrupted him. "Why have you not been told, I wonder. To-morrow two of your war-ships come to the island, and at once the wives and sisters and sweethearts follow from Manila. Then I go— Oh, don't you understand at all? You boys all come here when your ships are in the harbor—I like to have you—father likes to have you. We wish you to dine with us—it gives me the opportunity to meet men of my own station; and I don't have many chances like that now that father has settled down, and no longer wanders from one end of the world to the other."

"But the women of the navy—don't you want to meet women of your own station, too?"

Nielsene flashed him a smile. "Oh, no—women, they ask too many questions, and elevate their eyebrows too easily. They are not content to take a girl as they find her. And I—I will not be whispered about and accepted on sufferance." She leaned forward suddenly. "Bob, tell me—do you know anything of me at all?"

Borden shook his head, troubled dark eyes on her face. "I wish you wouldn't talk like this, Nielsene; I don't want to know—"

"Why?" she questioned, looking at him out of intent blue eyes. "Why—do you not care enough to be interested? Of all the men who come here, Leonard Kipp, Mr. Jackson—young Hanson—I thought you were most my friend. And yet you are content to let me drift into your life and out again; to know nothing of me at all."

Borden caught her hand. "That isn't so. I do like you—you know I do—but you don't know how much. Oh, Nielsene—" His voice deepened with growing ardor, but the girl checked him swiftly.

"Just a moment, Bob. I want to talk to-night—oh, I know I always talk!—but to-night I am going to talk about myself. Let me, please."

"Let you! Why, Nielsene, don't you know that I want to hear anything you want to tell me. I have wondered about you—how such a girl as you, beautiful, talented, clever, could be content to spend her days on this little island in a corner of the tropics, with nothing nearer civilization than Manila—and when you've said that you haven't said much."

"But I haven't always lived here—just these last two years. I was educated in the best schools in Europe, and during my vacations father took me everywhere—London, Paris, St. Petersburg, and Vienna. I was young and, I dare say, none too discriminating, and I drank life in deep drafts. It was enough for me if the people I knew were interesting, amusing—although even now, when I am more worldly wise, I laugh at pretensions about position, class distinction. I get that from my mother, I think. She was great enough to make her own social laws, and to know the people who pleased her."

"Do you remember your mother, Nielsene?"

"No—not at all. She left the island soon after I was born. She was unhappy here. Father met her in Manila, you know—long ago, years before the Americans came. She was a beautiful Danish dancer,

so beautiful and of such charm that men fell down and worshiped at her feet whenever they looked upon her. But she loved father best of all; and they were married, and he built a wonderful place in the interior of the island here, and brought her home, a bride.

"But her spirit died, and her heart cried out for lost gaieties. As she had danced into my father's life, so she danced out again. But she left me here with him, so that he would always remember that she had loved him. Poor father, he must have suffered dreadfully." She paused a moment. "Father is odd, you know. He doesn't belong out here at all."

Borden nodded. "I've often thought that. He told me once that he came from New England—how on earth did he ever drift to this part of the world?"

"Oh, he listened to siren voices, and followed the will-o'-the-wisp, looking for the answer to the big riddle. But he never found it. And he is still seeking, although his wanderings are over; his adventures are now between the pages of great books. I liked the other way best. Except when there come war-ships to the harbor, I am very bored."

"Why don't you travel? Surely you have plenty of friends who would be glad to have you with them."

"No, I would not leave father. The only reason I will ever leave him will be because I have learned to love some other man so well that I cannot live without him—that I will have to follow him wherever he may go."

Borden drew a deep breath. "Will you ever care like that, Nielsene?"

The girl clasped her slender, long-fingered hand about her knee and stared into the black shadow of the mango-tree. "As to that," she was beginning, when there was the sound of chairs being pushed back from the other end of the balcony.

"Going now," Kipp sang out of the darkness. "Come along, Bob."

"Will you let me come out into the country to see you?" Borden asked eagerly, as he said good-by. "I want to—I must!"

The light from the room beyond fell across the sleek blond braids of the girl's

hair, and lit up her sea-blue eyes. "You want to—you must," she repeated mockingly, although there was a hint of something softer in her voice. Then she lifted her beautiful bare shoulder. "I will see—if I find the days contain too many hours without you, I will send for you. No—no, I will not promise."

Borden walked ahead down the street toward the bay with a laughing group of the younger men, while Leonard Kipp and Tom Jackson fell behind. Kipp was protesting irritably.

"I don't see why you take that tone with me," he was saying. "It's not up to me in the first place—and, anyhow, if Bob Borden sees fit to lose his head over this pretty siren of the tropics, I, for one, think the experience will do him good."

"Still," Jackson maintained, "I think you should have warned him."

"What about—and how? Is there anything definite about Nielsene Harwich? Of course there isn't. I'll admit that she isn't—Of course, her father—their position— Oh, hang it all! Bob isn't serious, you know."

"And what's a flirtation? It's the expected thing."

"And Nielsene Harwich is lovely enough to be a temptation to any man! To begin with, she's a golden blonde in a country of dusky women—I think that is what first sent Bob off his head. That wonderful golden fairness of hers; that white skin with the rose of the northern countries in her cheeks, and the cold blue of the north in her eyes—that, and her angular slimness, when you've been fed up on black-eyed women who are all dumpy curves and undulating hips!"

Jackson shrugged and stopped to light a cigar. "All right; you've been Borden's chum since your academy days—you ought to know. But I tell you, Leonard, Bob Borden is a man of dreams; he's an idealist—a man of his sort takes love deep into his soul."

"I can't see that his soul is concerned with this at all," was all the satisfaction he got from Kipp.

But romance moves with winged feet in the tropics, and men will cling to that old creed of theirs; that a man must go his own

way in an affair of the heart; so that while his fellow officers were by no means blind to the state of Borden's infatuation for Nielsene Harwich, none of them were ready to be the first to man the life-boat.

Three days after the war-ships had dropped anchor in the little harbor of Burdanao, when the one street of the tiny town was bright with the light dresses of the women who had followed their ships from Manila, Borden received a note from Nielsene. She said he could come out to the plantation if he cared to.

And he cared to. In the three days she had been away he had not been able to get her face out of his mind, and the sound of her voice, with its thousand minor cadences, out of his ears. He wanted to see her, to have her laugh at him as she so often did, to watch her idly swinging in her deep chair, her slim, white hands folded in her lap, and in her deep blue eyes the mystery of dreams.

He knew now that he loved her, and that when he went into the interior to see her, after a wonderful evening of her laughter, her songs, and her intoxicating companionship, he would tell her so, and ask her to marry him. But first he would have two or three golden hours.

Then a streak that was very predominant in Borden asserted itself. Back in the old Annapolis days—and they were not so far back, after all—Borden had captained his football team. The men used to laugh at him, argue, and finally shrug and accept the fact that Borden always tackled the hardest struggle first; the team that would give them the biggest battle was played as early in the season as Borden could manage.

"Get it over," he used to say, "and then you know where you stand."

And this is the way he came to feel about Nielsene. He had no way of knowing whether the girl cared for him or not—but he had to find out as soon as he could, even if he lost forever such few hours she had been granting him, and drew a black mist of misery over the rest of his stay on the island.

Nielsene was waiting for him the night he went out to see her. She rose from her

chair at the edge of the wide veranda that overlooked a garden full of heavily scented flowers, with both hands outstretched.

"You see," she said softly, "the days proved by actual count to contain more than their allotted number of hours."

Before he left her that evening Borden asked her the question that had been in his heart for days. He looked about the luxurious room in which they sat drinking their black coffee.

"I haven't much to offer you, dear," he sighed. Then he took her two hands, and pressed them to his lips. "But I love you—very dearly."

Nielsene slipped forward in her low chair and dropped to her knees at his feet. She released her slim, white hands and clasped them about his neck, drawing his face down to hers.

"But you love me?" she demanded, her blue eyes searching his. "You love me—there will never be anybody, or anything, but me in your life?"

Borden's arms folded about her. "Never! With a love like mine, everything but you would be crowded out."

She seemed content with this. Presently she raised her head. "You must love me like that, oh dearest, because my love is like that—and I could never exchange a big love for a little love. I must be all to you."

"And are you not all? Look right at me, and tell me you do not know that."

But, instead, she laughed softly. "I know, I know—I think I have always known."

"Always?"

"Yes—from the first moment my eyes met yours. At that moment I wanted you—you will never know how much—and I made up my mind to have you." She laughed with one of her quick transitions of mood. "Bob, boy of mine, you never had a chance from the first."

Man, the conqueror, was not so well pleased at this. "Could you be so sure?"

"All my life I have known men," Nielsene told him—"the best and worst of them. Many have loved me—many have wanted me—"

Borden placed a protesting finger on her soft lips. "Don't talk so—I don't like it."

The girl sank back on her heels and looked up into his face with wide blue eyes. "But why? If I had not seen love in all phases, under all circumstances, how could I know I love you the way I do?" She let him take her in his arms again. "Let me tell you just how much you are loved—oh, *caro mio*."

And of course at this Borden's protest died away, and his heart leaped to the sound of her vibrant, caressing voice, as sweet and as full of love as that of the nightingale's, singing outside the window.

Borden's new-found joy was too deep to keep to himself. Jackson had the deck at the hour of his return, and he told him at once of his great luck, and demanded congratulations.

Jackson gave them to the best of his ability, and an hour later he knocked at the door of Kipp's room. He seated himself on the edge of the bunk and regarded his friend with a malevolent, I-told-you-so expression.

"What's your trouble?" Kipp inquired, throwing aside a battered magazine which he had been reading.

"You are an authority on love, aren't you?" Jackson demanded dryly. "When it comes to knowing the signs of the tender passion, going and coming—when it comes to judging the real things for the pastime—you are in a class by yourself. Humph! Did you ever notice that it is always the expert swimmer who gets drowned?"

"I've noticed that the tropics don't agree with you," Kipp retorted at once, "and that if you want to save a vestige of what you are pleased to call your brain, you had better apply for leave."

Jackson dropped his levity. His news was important enough to stand without rhetorical dressing: "Bob Borden is engaged to Nielsene Harwich!"

Kipp glanced quickly at his friend. "How do you know?"

"He told me so."

"Good night!" Then, after a sober moment: "Now, what are we going to do?"

Jackson rose and laughed shortly. "The time has passed to do anything but make the best of it."

"I guess you're right." Kipp shook his

head regretfully. Then suddenly he chuckled. "I am thinking of the day when Bob presents Nielsene, barbarously beautiful, and with the manner of a Sultan's favorite, to the wives of his fellow officers."

"Yes, and it's the one thing that has to be done—it ought to be done at once, too. I'll have Molly ask her in to tea or something—she'll hate it; but Molly is wise, and the thing will be managed as well as it can be managed."

But, in spite of good management, much tact, and the best will in the world, the afternoon Nielsene came in from the country in her rickshaw, with its gaily liveried runners, was an awful occasion. A spirit of impish mischief seemed to possess the girl. To begin with, there was her gown. It was of blue—the blue of gleaming frost—and the illusion was helped out by unexpected bits of crystal glittering here and there in its folds. It was elaborately lovely—but scarcely the thing to wear to a simple afternoon tea in the tropics.

Against the background of a modern, luxurious drawing-room in Paris, or possibly Budapest, it would have been wonderfully effective; here it was merely startling. And her manners! Nielsene laughed now and then, a sweet, drawling laughter, with no particle of warmth in it; but she didn't trouble herself to say more than fifty words during the whole afternoon.

The women looked her over, talked among themselves, shook their heads—but decided to be nice to her, for Borden's sake. And instead, they found the girl Bob Borden was going to marry being nice to *them*. That is, when she saw them—which was as seldom as she could manage. She explained sweetly to Borden that she didn't care much for women. She could think of nothing to talk to them about, and she absolutely refused to drink tea with them and listen to the traditions of the navy of the country she was going to marry into. She didn't understand much about the ways of the service, and her lack of understanding didn't seem to trouble her any.

"Of course, I love Bob's country," she drawled to the amused captain of the flagship—"it has such a pretty flag."

Borden remonstrated with her—oh, very

gently and tenderly—and forthwith she put her two soft arms about his neck, and with her lips almost on his, invented new love names for him until he forgot there was a world outside her arms.

But things couldn't go on like this. A man's life-work and his love could not be at such utter variance and not bring disaster somewhere.

One day Nielsene sent for Borden, and when he entered the long, dimly lit drawing-room, he found her in a mood of wild excitement.

"Something wonderful has happened!" she exclaimed. "I've been waiting, watching, and hoping—and now it comes—the way out of everything."

"The way out?" Bob's voice was full of astonishment.

"Yes. Did I ever speak of a friend by the name of Deauvan—no, I don't suppose I ever did. Well, no matter. He's a man we have known always—a coffee planter. He came to-day, and we have talked for hours!"

"Yes?" There was quick jealousy in Borden's eyes, but the girl was too intent upon her theme to notice.

"He has bought a plantation in Mexico, and is going to build a railroad of his own to transport his coffee to the coast. Well?" she asked impatiently. "Don't you see? Oh, Bob, you are going to build his railroad! I told him all about you, your work in the navy, and he says you are the man he wants. We can be married at once and go with him—"

Borden interrupted her with gentle firmness. "But, dear, what on earth are you saying? It's kind of him to offer this to me—although, of course, he did it for you—but naturally the whole thing is out of the question."

"Out of the question? But why—what do you mean?"

"Why, Nielsene, don't you see? I'm not a free-lance engineer. I'm in the service—"

"Oh, that! You will resign, of course."

Borden looked at her and grew slowly pale. "Resign my commission! Nielsene, do you realize what you are saying?"

"Certainly I do! It's a way out of

everything. Why, Bob, you don't think for a minute, do you, that I ever had any intention of permitting you to waste yourself by remaining in the service; and as for myself, I hate everything about it. I wouldn't be the wife of a man in the navy for anything in the world. The long separations—rushing about into all sorts of impossible places to meet the ships— Oh, I couldn't stand it!"

"But, dear, you knew all of this— Surely we care enough about each other—" He kissed her with sudden anxiety. "Nielsene, I don't know you in this mood."

The girl released herself. "You say we care," she repeated slowly. "I hope you do—and I know I do. I care enough to make something of you. Why, Bob, you will be a big man in your profession. I know it—I feel it—and rich! The salary that Deauvan offers is princely. And you will go on—"

"No, I will not go on," Borden interrupted firmly, "because I will never start. Now, Nielsene, let's talk this thing right out."

The girl looked at him smilingly. "Very well—but you talk."

Borden disregarded her light tone. He went on to tell Nielsene just what the service of his country meant to him, that whatever he came to be was due to her teachings. He had received his instruction at his government's expense, for his government, and what he had learned belonged to the service, and could not be used to further his own ambitions. He finished by saying resolutely that nothing would induce him to resign his commission—nothing.

Nielsene only laughed when he finished. But there was a metallic ring in her laughter.

"What a child you are," she said coolly; "and, like a child, you do not consider the future, and can see nothing but your own point of view. And you say you love me! And you told me that I was all in all to you, and that nothing should ever come between us."

"I am going to tell you something, Bob," she continued, her eyes becoming grave—"something that nobody knows who has seen the luxury that surrounds us, the

ease of our lives. Things have not gone so well for us since father buried himself in his books—investments have proved unfortunate—there have been two heavy losses—altogether, it is serious. At any time a crash may come—and then what? So you see what this offer really means to you and me? It is nothing that we can consider at all, discussing whether we will accept it, or whether we will not accept it. It is something we grasp at once—and offer thanks to the god of luck that it came our way. It means money, sure money, at once—”

“Nielsene, money is not everything. As my wife, whether or no you have money, your position will be the same—”

“Position! Child’s prattle! The only position I want in this world is the position that money will give me—that is real position. And I mean to marry a man who can build me a throne of gold—and hold it for me!”

“Gold! Now, Nielsene, it is you who talk like a child! What is gold that—”

“The jingle of gold is the national anthem of the world!”

“What a fanciful maker of phrases you are, dear! And you listen to them, and convince yourself you are very wise.”

Nielsene looked at him speculatively for a long moment. Then swiftly she leaned toward him and placed one cool hand on his cheek.

“We run in a circle, oh dearest! Suppose you go now—back to your ship, and shut yourself up in that tiny, stuffy cabin of yours— I pray you may not bake, this smothering night! I fear I have put this thing stupidly. But when you are face to face with it yourself—when that clear brain of yours takes hold of it—pouf! All these fancies of the dreamer will float away into the nowhere, like gray mists of the morning before the wind of the dawn. No—no—no! Not another word—please me, oh dearest.”

Borden rose. He was still pale, and there was the shadow of great trouble in his dark eyes. “I’ll go, of course—but it won’t change things; it can’t, Nielsene.”

She laid her soft cheek against his, but her eyes were as hard and cold as bits of driving sleet.

“*“La nuit porte conseil,”*” she quoted, “and to-morrow is my name day. You will have dinner—here on the balcony—with me alone. We will be so happy—and there will be soft candles and iced cakes, and chilled things to eat and drink. We will sit together afterward, and I will be sweet to you—ah, how sweet!—and Rodriguez will sing to us love-songs—and we will watch the moon swinging in the sky, and be very quiet, so that in between the music we may hear the ripple of the sea along the beach.”

“You draw a picture that goes to my head.”

“Yes? Good night, dear. And while you are making up that so clever mind of yours, you will think of that picture?”

Borden held her hands and smiled down into her eyes. “Dear, I wouldn’t dare.”

Borden walked slowly down the narrow street to his ship; but, strangely enough, the proposition that Nielsene had made that night, the offer she had given him, was the farthest thing from his thoughts. He had never considered it from the moment she advanced it, and there was no possible chance of his ever considering it.

But not for a moment did he doubt his ability to make Nielsene see the question from his point of view, and it was mainly this that kept his thoughts busy all that night and the day following. He would take her in his arms after their dinner and, to the music of Rodriguez’s song, tell her that she must put this impossible dream away forever—and he would masterfully kiss away all her protestations.

Then he shook his head. “No, I’ll have to get it over the first thing,” he said. “I have to know where we stand. If I can’t make her see—” He shut his eyes. He dared not consider this contingency.

Nielsene, in a marvelous creation of gray chiffon, gray like the waves of the sea under a storm-cloud, and with a sash of blue as deep and vivid as her eyes wrapped about her slim hips, met him at the edge of the balcony.

For a long moment he held her in his arms. And he found all his fine words had deserted him, all his convincing arguments—and he was afraid.

"It's no use," he said quickly; "I've got to tell you now—I can't wait; it would not be fair. Nielsene, I can't take that offer. I belong to the service." And he didn't try to hold her when she withdrew slowly from his embrace.

She looked at the table spread with its fine linen and glittering crystal; her eyes rose to where the moon cast a shadow of dusky red through the thick foliage of the mangoes; she lifted her head, with its regal crown of golden braids, and listened to the sound of a guitar and a plaintive voice that came from below the balcony, not really singing as yet, only a fugitive note of exquisite sweetness now and then, as if the singer's heart was too full of music to be silent. Then she laughed, throwing back her head, her slim throat pulsating with her mirth. But there was no music in her laughter, and when she spoke her voice held the ring of steel on stone.

"I am amused—at myself," she explained with the ominous calm, the chill, of a frozen river creeping to the sea in her voice. She placed her slim hand on the edge of the cloth, with its heavy embroidered lilies; she caressed their petals with her long fingers, on one of which gleamed a sapphire, a magnificent stone, as deep and blue—and as coldly glittering—as her eyes. "I was thinking," she continued, "how great a fool every woman is when this madness we call love sweeps over her. It is only a sickness of the heart, after all; yet everything goes down before it—her reason, her calm, her power of thought. And she never knows the man for whom she cherished this delirium until she marries him—and then it is too late. Well"—she raised her head and drew a slow, deep breath—"I thank whatever gods I have that I knew before it was too late."

"Nielsene!" Borden could hardly frame the words; his lips were stiff, and his heart was pounding until it threatened to smother him.

"Do not think that I am reproaching you. I am not. You are you—and I gave my heart to the man I thought was you. I made him myself—out of my own imagination—and surely I could not hold you to blame for that! So now"—she held out

her hand, cool and smooth, without a sign of tremor in it—"we come to the day when all things are clear, when my eyes are opened; we arrive at the forks of life's highway—our roads divide. Good-by."

And to Borden, at that moment, came the revelation that all arguments, all explanations, even the soft words of lovers, would all be quite useless. Nielsene's words seemed to crush his soul beneath an icy weight.

Two days later Leonard Kipp met Nielsene and a distinguished gentleman of foreign appearance on the deck of the mail-boat, just leaving for Manila. She nodded and stopped him with a smile.

"I want to say good-by, Mr. Kipp," she said, shifting her crimson parasol to the other shoulder and extending her hand. "And—have you met my husband, M. Deauvan?"

When Kipp got out to his ship with all possible speed, he forced Borden to open the door of his room—after he had knocked for almost five minutes. But at sight of Borden's face, everything he had planned to say passed completely out of his mind.

"I know you mean this kindly, Leonard," Borden said, speaking with difficulty and staring out of the port-hole, "but I don't want to talk about it—I can't."

Kipp sat down on the narrow bunk, and put his arm about his friend's shoulder.

"You don't need to talk, old chap," he said gently. "I'll attend to that, and you just sit and let me go on babbling, even though you don't believe a word I say. You are going through a pretty tough time, but remember this—you will go through. Women, mostly, are devils, but some merciful saint whispered in the Almighty's ear when He was making men—to put some ingredient in us that would help us forget the hellish things they do to us. And," he added thoughtfully, "I am not so sure that you really loved Nielsene—"

"Leonard!" Borden interrupted harshly.

"Oh, all right. I was just going to say," Kipp persisted stubbornly, "if it was merely infatuation—well, let it go at that. I suppose one is as hard to get over as the other."

Borden turned and faced his friend. There was death in his eyes. "I am going to tell you something about it—and finish it up forever." In quick, jerky sentences, ill formed, and often incoherent, he told of his break with Nielsene Harwich, and as much as he knew of her subsequent marriage.

"You're well rid of her," Kipp growled savagely, as he finished. "I'll bet she married that fat little French coffee planter just for spite!"

This had a startling effect on Borden. "God! You don't think that, do you, Leonard?"

"It would be just like her."

"But— Oh, I don't dare believe it! To condemn herself to years—to marry— Poor Nielsene! And the blame is all mine!"

"Nothing of the kind!" Kipp denied, alarm in his voice. "And you don't need to waste any sympathy on Nielsene Harwich—her kind don't need any. She's a cold-blooded, money-mad, heartless woman, and if anybody is going to suffer, you can bet it won't be Nielsene!" He rose. "Now, you get right busy and concentrate every ounce of your brain and will to putting this behind you."

Borden still stared into space. "You don't know Nielsene," he said. "I think I do—I love her, you see. That hardness, that glitter—it was all on the surface. Underneath, the real Nielsene was capable of great things. And I let her do this thing—I let her stifle forever the best in her. I should either have done as she wanted me to or have made her listen to me. Why did I leave her like that? There must have been some way. There was everything wonderful in Nielsene's soul, and I couldn't reach it! If I had only married her—"

"I wish to God you had!" Kipp burst out. "In six months you would have known Nielsene thoroughly, and have been utterly sick of what you knew. And then when the break came—as, of course, it would be bound to come—you would have been free, free absolutely. Now you will be held by a dream of what might have been; you will feel you never knew—that there

was a nobility in that girl that she never possessed. Nobility! She doesn't understand it when she runs into it!"

"You're wrong — absolutely wrong. When I held her in my arms—well, there were moments—"

"Moments!" Kipp interrupted grimly. "Yes, there would be—with a girl like Nielsene. But you can take it as truth from me that these moments had little to do with the nobility of what you are pleased to call Nielsene's soul!"

Two years went by, and the men who knew and loved Bob Borden told each other that he was forgetting Nielsene Harwich. Apparently he was the same except perhaps he was a bit more silent, was given more to hours of dreaming by himself. From time to time he heard of Nielsene, everybody did who followed the politics of a certain turbulent South American republic.

She had fallen into far deeper scandals than belonged to her Philippine days. She had long since left Deauvan; nobody knew whether he had divorced her or not. She had gone to Nicaragua, and dabbled in the troubled political waters of that unruly country. Her name was mentioned in two definite scandals and hinted at in half a dozen others. Her jewels were famous, and the greatest artist in Europe had painted her portrait. If these tales of the girl he had hoped to marry affected Borden, nobody knew it.

It was almost two years after Borden's disastrous affair with Nielsene Harwich—which Leonard Kipp always declared could have been far more disastrous than it was—that he had an attack of typhoid fever, and, on his recovery, left his ship in Boston, and returned to his home on a two-months leave. Borden came from a small town up in New Hampshire, and he hadn't been back since he graduated from Annapolis. As he stepped from the train at the neat little station and looked about him he could scarcely realize it had been that long, for nothing was changed.

It was June and the rambler roses were in bloom, creeping over the hedges, and piling in rosy falls of pink and crimson over the gates and prim white picket fences;

the sky was blue, and there was the clean, healing breath of the pines sweeping down from the mountains.

Everybody was glad to see Borden; the town put aside its chill reserve and welcomed him whole-heartedly. And Borden was glad of their welcome, glad to be home again. He slept like a top in the old four-poster bed under the patchwork quilt, and demanded doughnuts and currant pie, and the molasses cake that his mother was famous for. He tramped out into the country where the bobbing hill was, and he rowed on the lake where he had hunted water-lilies and learned to swim.

One day when returning with his mother from a visit to an aunt who lived on the edge of town they met a girl who stopped with a smile that was vaguely familiar.

She was a little thing, with a mass of dark curls about her odd little three-cornered face, and soft, gray eyes that danced mischievously when she saw that Borden did not recognize her.

"Oh, don't tell him," she begged his mother. "We used to fight dreadfully when we were little—"

"But Bob is a better boy now," his mother smiled. "It's Ruth Lavery," she went on to explain to Borden. "You must remember her."

Borden took Ruth's two hands and held her off for a better view. "Certainly I remember her; she was the worst little torment on the block. She used to wear a plaid dress with very stick-out skirts, which she used to flirt around the corners after she had made a face at you; her sunbonnet was always white, and always hanging down her back."

Ruth regarded him gravely, although a dimple danced in and out of her left cheek. "I was like that, exactly. And," she continued severely, "as to being a torment—who used to snatch my books away from me on the way from school? Who used to throw snowballs at me and put black ants on my arms at the picnics—and told Cora Merrill that I was too little to ask to her candy pull? I always held that against you." Her eyes fell on her two hands still clasped in his, and she laughed as she released them.

She turned and walked up the street with them. When they came to the house Mrs. Borden insisted that she come up on the porch and talk to Bob while she got supper; but Ruth laughingly said she cooked much better than she talked; and walked right out into the kitchen. Here Borden was initiated into the intricacies of making baking-powder biscuits and ham omelet.

Later, when Ruth said good-by at her gate she laughed up into Borden's face. "Your mother was right," she said; "you are a better boy now; a much better boy."

"Well, I can't return the compliment," Borden answered, "because you were always—"

"Don't say I was nice," Ruth warned him, "because I wasn't. I used to make your life a burden, and you must have hated me. But," she explained brightly, "I was too young to know any better."

Borden smiled down at her, his eyes sparkling with amusement. "And now time has remedied your youth," he said.

As the days went on Borden saw more and more of little Ruth Lavery. And, strangely enough, she brought back to his mind the thought of Nielsene Harwich. But now he found that he regarded Nielsene from an entirely different angle. Ruth was cool, clear water to the thirsty, after surfeits of too sweet champagne; she was the tenderest song of the thrush after the shrilly arresting notes of the mocking-bird.

Is the love of a man always like a pendulum, I wonder; does it always swing from one extreme to the other?

Something deep in Borden's soul stirred at the light in Ruth's gray eyes; they were the eyes a man could tell things to, eyes that would be kind—and understand. And his heart that he felt empty of the power to care for another woman awoke to the dawning of a different, a deeper love.

The wedding was beautiful. The church was decorated with balsam and the pink and lavender blossoms of the hydrangea, and the bride, in her floating tulle dress, walked from the church under the high crossed swords of Borden's jubilant fellow officers.

There was a brief honeymoon spent at the edge of the Canadian wilderness, and

then Borden rejoined his ship, a different man—the old Bob Borden. But instead of the dreams that were always, in the old years, just back of his eyes, was a better thing; the clear, shining light of ambition, ambition to do great things for the girl he had married; the girl who had slipped her small hand in his and taught him to laugh again.

He was as happy as he thought a man could be. He looked forward to Ruth's letters; he read and reread them, treasuring them carefully. He counted the days to their brief meetings and lived them over again, those precious hours, during his solitary watches at sea. He dreamed of a fine, manly little son. Oh, heaven was born again for Bob Borden.

And then, one night in the tropics, he came upon Leonard Kipp and Tom Jackson sitting over their cigars in a corner of the deck, and the first words he caught halted his footsteps as if they had rooted his feet in the deck. He listened with no thoughts of intrusion; too whirled on his own tossing feelings to realize the shame of eavesdropping.

"Well, of course, I knew her at once; she is the old Nielsene-Harwich," Kipp was saying. "And beautiful—ye gods, Jackson, she's a vision! Cold, calm, and stately; but with that old hint of hidden fires as dangerously close as ever. And she hardly waited to get her greeting over before she asked about Bob—everything about him; where he was, how he was—she fairly bombarded me with questions."

"You told her of his marriage, of course, what did she say?"

"She laughed, Jackson; and such a laugh! Like the crackling of frost on a still, cold night! Then she placed her long, white fingers on my arm, and fixed those bright, cold, blue eyes on mine.

"Do you believe," she asked, "that dead loves ever rise from their graves?" I could have cursed her to her face!"

Jackson laughed shortly. "You must have felt like the wedding guest when the Ancient Mariner got hold of him."

"I laughed at her," Kipp declared, "and I said:

"I believe, Nielsene, that there is noth-

ing so dead to a man as a dead love; that no matter what the call, he never comes back!'"

"I hope that held her for a while," Jackson said.

Kipp rose and stretched his arms above his head. "I would have been all right, only I happened to be lying about what I believed. And some day," he continued impressively, "that sleek-haired siren will meet Bob Borden. And she will hold out her arms to him and call him: 'Come back to me.' Do you remember Nielsene's voice at all, Jackson? It was the call of the wild, all right; and then some!"

And Borden turned without a sound and went down to his room. Every nerve in his body was tingling and he felt oddly shaken. Why should he? He hated himself for it. He sat down on the edge of his bunk and tried to face squarely this absurd feeling. But instead, when he closed his eyes, a picture of Nielsene floated out of the mist and smiled into his eyes. He snatched up his cap and returned to the deck; he must get away from himself, find some one to talk to!

Well, from that night, a thought which at first could have been no more than a faint wisp of mist floating out of the past, began to take hold of Borden. Imaginative people's thoughts may soon become obsessions, and it was so with Borden. Had he not forgotten Nielsene Harwich? Was she not buried deep—past all resurrection? How could a memory of a love that was dead—as dead as if it had never been—haunt him? Why should he fear? He didn't fear! But above his desperate denial rippled the mocking notes of Nielsene's laughter, and always she said: "Come back—to me."

Ordinarily, Borden's emotions were as shut up in his heart as the houses in his home town behind their trim, white picket fences; but things finally came to such a pass with him that one night he confided his troubles to Leonard Kipp. He told him that he had heard his conversation with Jackson on the deck a month ago; and then tried to discuss sanely and dispassionately its effects on him.

Kipp determinedly made light of it.

"You're overworked," he declared, "and you worried too much about Ruth when she was sick last spring and you couldn't go to her. Your nerves are shot to pieces. Your imagination took hold of this thing, and now you're deliberately scaring yourself to death."

"Deliberately? Do you think a man deliberately tortures himself as I have been tortured these last weeks?"

"Oh, that's the trouble with you men who dream; you are slaves to your imaginings! Stop thinking about the whole thing. You're like a man who's had yellow fever, worrying himself sick about whether he's immune or not when he's caught in an epidemic. That part of your life is over and done with. As far as you are concerned, Nielsene Harwich is dead."

Borden shook his head. "But she is not dead. And we are both wanderers. And lately I feel as if I am going to meet her again."

"Oh, forget it!" Kipp stared curiously at his friend. "Are you that afraid?"

The knuckles on Borden's hand whitened as he held the rail. "You didn't know Nielsene. She was like some cursed witch-flower whose perfume will never leave the thing it has touched."

"Bob," Kipp said sternly, "does it ever occur to you that you are in no position to be raving like this? It isn't—square. Your bark is anchored in the home harbor. You no longer have the freedom of the seas. All this"—he hesitated—"all this is rotten of you."

Borden pulled himself together. "Of course it is," he agreed, after a moment, in a calmer voice. "I guess you are right—my nerves are playing tricks with me." He smiled and held out his hand. "I'm steadier now, old chap, and—thank you."

But Kipp looked after him anxiously as he walked down the deck. Then his eyes swept the little harbor of Palancia. "The world is so small," he mused. "Well," he added with a shrug, "I hope if Bob ever does meet Nielsene, he will have sense enough to go while the going is good, and not wait for the fireworks. But it would be just like him to face it."

And later he told Jackson that he wished

he had asked for shore leave and gone ashore with Bob. No, there was no reason. Then he wondered aloud if presentments were merely an old wives' tale.

Borden was turning away from the desk at the hotel when he saw Nielsene. She had risen from a small, marble-topped table near the door, and was coming swiftly toward him; evidently she had been watching him for some time. She was dressed from head to foot in the white of the tropics, some sheer stuff, heavily embroidered, that hugged her silken ankles, and almost concealed the square, ivory buckles on her white slippers; under the wide, flaring brim of her lace hat her bright hair lay in shining folds against her white, white neck.

She held out both her white, slender hands. They were bare of rings except for a magnificent sapphire on the little finger of her right hand. It was square cut and flashing with blue fire.

"Bob!" she exclaimed. "I am glad to see you—and so surprised. When did you get in?"

"This morning." Borden took her hand, and stood looking down at her. Kipp had been right. Time's finger had touched Nielsene Harwich but to caress her—her Philippine days might have been yesterday.

"And you stay—how long?" Nielsene's voice was friendly, but only that. There was no Circe's song in its cool depths; only the pleasure of one who meets an old and valued friend.

"I don't know how long we will stay," Bob answered. "We came in to coal."

"Oh, yes; I remember now. I was talking to the governor general this morning, and he said that you would be here a week. Then—why, I will see you—many times!"

"I don't know—my duties—"

Nielsene nodded with swift comprehension. "Yes, I know; and then, too, there have been so many things planned for you. I expected to leave the city to-day—the heat, you know. So"—she held out her hand—"it seems to be, 'I greet you—and we part!' That's an old Danish folk-song. I used to sing it in the dead days; do you remember?"

Borden nodded. "Yes, I remember. It

—was a beautiful song," he added thoughtfully.

Nielsene clasped her hands over the gold handle of her parasol. "Do you know, now that I have met you, I don't want to leave; there is so much to say—"

Borden suddenly fixed his dark eyes on hers. "What is there to say, Nielsene, between you and me?"

Nielsene's lashes fluttered down over her blue eyes. "You are right," she sighed. "What is there to say—between you and me?" And her voice was as sweet as honey dripping from a rock.

Suddenly she smiled, one of those astonishingly fascinating transitions of hers. "Come," she begged, "I go out of your life—perhaps to-morrow—and you, too, are but a bird on the wing. What can it matter, one brief hour?" She leaned forward and talked rapidly: "It's a wonderful place," she finished, "perched high up on the rocks, miles above the city, like the nest of an eagle. We can dine there, and watch the lights flare up in the city like stars in an earthly sky. Afterward—good-by! A long good-by, a real one—a good-by that means forever. What do you say—yes?"

"I am sorry, but it's impossible." And Borden had said good-by, and was half-way down the veranda of the hotel when something within him made him pause. Why did he run away? Wasn't it better to face this thing now—to get it over with—and know once and for all whether he was a mean-spirited thing who depended upon flight to keep him out of danger; or a free man, free to come and go as he liked, with no shadow of memory, the dream or the reality, to mock his security? He turned and deliberately retraced his steps. Nielsene was standing where he had left her; she might almost have been waiting for him.

"You have changed your mind," she said at once. "You will go; I am so glad! Now, I wonder if you can find my car out there? It's bright blue with a silver running gear."

Borden found the car, a small, showy thing, but with a powerful engine; and slowly they climbed the steep hill that rose behind the city, to the little café that hung

over the bay, and seemed to laugh mockingly at the waves that dashed against the rocks hundreds of feet below.

Nielsene sat opposite him, and, resting her chin on her interlaced fingers, regarded him out of deep blue eyes.

"You have changed," she announced at last; "but the change is a good one—and I like you so. There is more purpose in your eyes, the set of your mouth is stronger, although your smile is the same; but you don't smile so often. Tell me"—she leaned forward, lifting her blue eyes to his—"do you find me changed?"

Borden regarded her long and steadily. His eyes took in every feature of her face; the broad, low brow with the sweep of warm, golden hair above it; the wide eyes, as deep and as richly blue as the sapphire on her finger; the finely chiseled nose, and the soft-lipped, red mouth, with its insolently curved upper lip. The woman watched him intently, fearlessly lifting her beautiful face to his.

"No, you have not changed—at all," Borden said at last. "You are still beautiful. Do you know, Nielsene," he added reflectively, "I don't think I ever saw a woman as flawlessly lovely as you are."

Nielsene nodded. "I am like my mother, and perfect fair women are rare. And we do not change—women like me. For years we are the same; our eyes are bright; our lips still retain the color and texture of youth; our bodies remain young and supple. But then—pouf! Like that, all in a breath it is gone, back to where it came from."

"Still the fanciful fashioner of phrases, aren't you, Nielsene?" Borden smiled, watching her intently through his cigarette-smoke.

"And you do not like it? Time was when you called it dream-weaving—fairy tales that you loved to listen to."

Borden laughed lightly. "Of course I like it. It adds piquancy to what you say, and few women possess the gift. But I interrupted you; where does all this witching beauty go?"

"To the regions of the inferno—need I tell you that?" she added daringly; she swayed forward and touched his hand fleet-

ingly with the tips of her slim, cool fingers. "We are the devil's daughters—women like me. Father always said that—exotic flowers of the nether world. We blow and bend to the wind of Fate; we are lovely to look upon, but fatal to touch; and calamity falls upon those who breathe too deep of our perfume. My father was something of a poet, you know, and often talked great nonsense; but often, too, there was truth in what he said. We are passion flowers, he said, and we live on love."

Borden gave her a brief glance and turned away. "And would you call it—love?"

Nielsene's eyes deepened and became full of the soft mystery that lies in the heart of a moonstone. She waited, white hands clasped in front of her, until Borden's eyes returned to her.

"And you?" she questioned meaningly. "You loved me—once. What would you call it?"

There was a long moment of silence, in which the booming of the surf on the rocks below came faintly to their ears.

Borden looked at the woman opposite thoughtfully; he shook his head. "I don't know, Nielsene," he said after a moment.

"I have called myself many things in my time," Nielsene said, infinite weariness in her voice, "but never until to-night have I called myself a fool!" She leaned forward until the perfumed lace on her sleeve fell across his wrist. "Oh, why—why did I ever let you go?"

"Why will you women persist in delving into the past with useless questionings?" He lifted his shoulder restlessly. "Is it ever wise?"

"And when was I ever wise?" Nielsene questioned mockingly. Then she abruptly pressed her fingers to her temples. "When I think of what I had—and what I lost! And I did love you—yes, I did; although afterward—" She checked herself with an impatient gesture, and the ring on her finger flashed blue fire. "Do you know, Bob, that in the life of every woman like me there is one good man. You are that man with me. But I was so young when you came. The dreams you brought me were beyond my understanding, and I tore your

ideals with careless fingers." She stopped and spread her hands with their white, tapering fingers upon the dark cloth of his uniform-sleeve. "They are pretty hands, are they not? Soft and white; and they look as if they might be gentle. If you had kept them fast in yours, Bob, who knows? There might have been different writing concerning Nielsene Harwich in the big book. I wonder—do you?"

He did not answer her. Why was he silent? On this question hung the end of things for Bob Borden—or the beginning.

"Do you never think of me?" Nielsene persisted, her fingers closing upon his arm—"never?"

Borden was still silent. His cigarette had gone out in his fingers, and his eyes were fixed on the harbor lights.

"Bob, listen to me." Nielsene smoked furiously for a moment, and then tossed her cigarette, with its outlandish-looking crest, over the railing. "Some time—fight it off as long and as hard as you like—but *some time* the memory of me is coming back to you. When a woman loves a man as I love you; when she thinks of him, dreams of him; when her thoughts travel the wide world to find him"—she bent forward swiftly and pressed one hand on each side of his face so that he must look at her—"some time, I say, they will find him. You need not look at me. Are you afraid of my eyes, I wonder? You may keep your gaze fixed on the riding lights of your ship down there, with a smile on your lips; but I know the truth of what I am saying.

"I was your first love—I mean to be your last! I won't let you forget me.

"Other women—another woman—may possess you for a while, but deep down in your soul you know, the best of you, your youth, belongs to me. And your heart will grow hungry for the fulfilment of our dream. Bury the memory deep, if you will, but you cannot bury it so deep that it will not rise some day and come seeking me."

Somewhere down on the steep slopes that lay between them and the city was a straggling native settlement. Here and there the lights of the huts could be seen set like jewels in the black velvet darkness. A wo-

man began to sing down there, softly, but with now and then a sweetly crooning note that floated up through the silence of the tropical night.

"A love song," Nielsene sighed.

But Borden shook his head. "Even I know better than that, and I do not understand the words of her song. But it is the same as a hundred others that are being sung at this hour, just after sunset, by women of every creed and color in the world. It is a lullaby—and I can hear its echo in my own home, a thousand miles away."

"And what of me?" There was almost a sob in Nielsene's voice.

Borden laughed into her eyes. "You will go on as you always have—what is one man to you? Even should he give up everything in life that counts—faith, honor, and decency—to follow you to the end of the world, it would only mean to you that another victim had listened to your song. You see, Circe, I know you better—now." He nodded as the blue eyes flashed into his. "Oh, yes, you are still beautiful, your voice is still full of music, and you still talk with a charm that is quite your own. But to me—you have lost your poetry. I could not love you—if I would."

"And my dreams—they mean nothing to you, then?"

Borden carefully extinguished the glowing end of his cigarette. "Nielsene," he said gently, "don't delude yourself with impossible dreams; they are dangerous things, dreams. They clutch you with phantom fingers of unreality, and sometimes it takes months of suffering before you can free yourself—convince yourself that they were but ghosts that you conjured up in your own mind of something that never was." He stopped and breathed deep of the cool night air. "I know. But tonight—ah, to-night I set my sails to the sky and laugh that they ever held me at all!"

For a moment Nielsene looked at him, her blue eyes wide and her slim, white hands clasped tightly across the lace of her gown. Then she bowed her head and laughed lightly.

"Good-by. I give you leave to go."

"You are not coming?" Borden asked in surprise.

"No." She pointed to the horizon where the moon was rising. "I'll sit here and try to pierce the veil of Thanet."

At the head of the stairs Borden turned. He clicked his heels sharply together and lifted his white cap high above his head.

"Good-by, Nielsene—and good hunting!"



EIGHT

BY DIXIE WILLSON

I'VE heard folks call the age of eight
A "*tender* age." Well, gee,
I ain't no sage,
But that's an age
That seems darn *tough* to me!

A guy can't go out any place
But what he's got to wash his face!
He can't stay up for fun at nights—
He gets his pants tore if he fights—
And if they think *that* ain't enough
His mother's slipper *makes* him tough.

Eight may be "*tender*" for a saint—
But for human guys like me—it *ain't!*

The Great Burmese

by Charles Wesley Sanders

Author of "The Master Fraud," "Toop, Third-Trick Op," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE GIRL WITH THE HOE.

ALICE stopped hoeing, rested on the hoe, and wiped beads of perspiration from her forehead.

"Whee, it's hot!" she said.

It was hot. Though the sun was slipping toward the west, its rays still beat down on a dry earth as if they fiercely desired to wither all vegetation. There was no breath of air stirring. The corn which Alice stood among was so still that it seemed as if it would never rustle pleasantly again.

"However," said Alice, "I've stirred up what there was."

What she had stirred up was not a breeze, but the earth's moisture lying beneath the crust which the heat had baked hard. Alice was a pretty good farmerette, and she knew that when there is no rain you must keep the old hoe busy if your crops are not to die. So, for three weeks, she had resorted to capillary attraction to save her plants.

It was not a big garden in which she stood, but it was a very well-tended one. The rows of corn and potatoes and cabbages and tomatoes were straight, and if there had been a weed among them, Alice would doubtless have got out a warrant for it.

Alice didn't have to make a garden. In fact Alice—or so she believed—didn't have to do anything that she didn't want to do. Her father, dying a few months before, had left her more money than she could have

squandered in a eon or so. But the year before, while the war was at its crisis, she had, with many another young woman of wealth and refinement, gone to the country to help out the hard-pressed farmers.

There she had learned the rudiments of farming. She had found that growing things had a fascination for her. So the next winter she studied soils and fertilizers, methods of cultivation, all the what-to-grow-and-how-to-grow-it literature that she could lay her hands on—and when your purse is deep and never empty, you can lay your hands on almost anything. So this year, in a plot in the rear of her suburban home, she was a farmer in her own right.

In the country she had learned that digging in the soil has any tonic beaten a whole section. She ate and slept, as she said, like a horse. The phrase was not hers. She had picked it up in the country, though the farmers should have known that a horse is not an especially good sleeper, and that he can very easily overeat. However Alice had never felt so fit, so that a bit of misplaced language made no difference.

She had learned another thing, and that was that air and wind will produce a beauty which shames cosmetics. She had always been a pretty girl, slender, graceful, dark—the usual thing in brunette good looks. But the first night she had togged herself out in her customary habiliments, on her return home, she had stood in front of her glass and stared at her reflection.

"By gosh," she had said, reverting again

to rural idiom, "there is something to me now. There is certainly something *to me*."

Certainly there was something "to" her, and she was not referring to *avoidupois*. It was an olive face which looked out from the glass—a face whose cheeks flamed from sun and wind. Her lips were scarlet. Even her nose seemed to be more shapely. But it was the eyes which at last held Alice. They were bigger. She was sure of that, and she was right. Alice hadn't an ounce of superfluous flesh on her anywhere. The face, which had been plump before, was now thin, with the thinness of sweet health. Thus the eyes were larger. And bright! They shone and sparkled in the light from above the dressing-table. Alice had fled from their gaze in a moment, because, she confessed, she was afraid she might get to thinking too well of herself. But she hummed as she went down-stairs.

The verdict of the glass was made unanimous by the men she knew, and they would have made an army corps. Before she had farmeretted, she had been popular, as any wealthy, pretty girl can't help being. But it was a mild sort of popularity. Men danced with her and paid her compliments quite in the ordinary way.

But she soon found herself the storm-center of many desires. She had been proposed to many times, but mildly. She was too keen not to know that these languid swains wanted her a little, perhaps, and her money a whole lot. Now, however, she couldn't escape being aware that men were ready to fight for her. For the first time in her life she was looking into men's souls, where the elemental things were stored. More than once she had quietly lifted her eyes to refuse a man, and had been shaken by the passion which she had seen in his eyes.

And she soon realized that if ever the right man came along, be he rich or poor, she would respond to him with a tempest of emotion of her own. She did everything harder than she had ever done it before, and if she came to love at last, she would, as she insisted upon phrasing it, treat it lightly for the time being, love at high speed.

The man had come in the person of one

Henry Matteson. He was a lawyer—a rising young lawyer, so people said. Alice saw him four times. After that he might have been a lawyer or a bribe-taker. It would have been all one to Alice. She would have married him if he had come clothed in rags on his wedding morn.

Fate was kind, however, and the good fairies were on guard. Matteson was everything he should have been, except that, as a usual thing, he was a little shy of cash.

"Get it soon," he said. "Used the bit I had to acquire a legal education. Costly business nowadays."

He dropped his pronouns because he had proposed just a moment before, and his heart was pounding so that speech was difficult. But Alice had seen that he wished her to understand his financial situation.

"Nothing like that matters," she had said; and she might not have said it if she had never been a farmerette, if she had never been energized by the outdoors.

"You mean—" he asked.

"Yes," said Alice.

And so, as Alice stood in her garden at five o'clock on this afternoon, she was an engaged young woman. It was because she was an engaged young woman that she had stopped hoeing. When you are clad in overalls, with a blue handkerchief round your neck and a battered straw hat on your head and you are barefooted just to feel the earth on your feet and your sweetheart is due at half past five—

"Whee," said Alice now, "I'll have to hustle! If he ever saw me like this, he'd get a divorce before he married me."

Matteson had been in a dangerous condition all along. It is probable that if he had seen Alice like that, with smudges on her cheeks, but with lips gleaming and eyes shining, he would have expired immediately. He must have known that so glorious a creature was not for him.

Alice ran to the house, hoe in hand. She stood the hoe against the side porch and went into the kitchen. The old colored cook knew that something flew past her, and she guessed it was Alice. In the dining-room Alice almost upset the housekeeper. But the housekeeper was a good sort and didn't mind.

Alice reached the bottom of the stairs, still going strong. She was half-way up when her maid appeared at the top.

"Bath ready?" Alice asked.

The maid did not speak. At the top of the stairs Alice stopped abruptly. She had not abandoned all her old habits, and she did not care for maids who did not reply, maids who just stood and stared at you as if something were the matter.

"What is it?" Alice asked frigidly.

"There is a man in the library waiting to see you," the maid said, then.

"Good gracious," said Alice, "he's ahead of time."

"It isn't Mr. Matteson, miss," the maid said. "It's a strange man—a very strange man."

Alice's nerves were so steady now that you couldn't startle her or scare her easily.

"What's strange about him?" she asked with her acquired directness.

"His eyes," the maid answered simply.

"What do you mean by that?"

"They're so dark, and so bright, and shine so—wicked eyes, miss."

"He asked to see me?" Alice asked.

"Yes, miss."

"I suppose I shall have to see him," Alice said. "Go down and tell him I'll give him just a moment—in about twenty minutes."

"He said that he was to see you as soon as you came in."

"Where did you say I was?"

"I said you were out. I didn't like his looks."

"What was his manner? Was he insolent?"

"Polite, but—ah—stubborn, miss."

"Stubborn? What do you mean by that? Surely you didn't argue with him?"

"Oh, no. Why, I mean that he seemed to be used to having his own way, and he said he was to see you the minute you came in."

Alice saw that if she interrogated the maid any further, the latter would only go over the same ground. Alice supposed the man had frightened the girl by his abruptness. Well, she said, he had his nerve. But no! She mustn't talk like that. The slang of the corn-field and the potato-patch,

which she used only to herself, but which had amused her vastly when she had listened to it the year before, sufficed, perhaps, in its place. This was a situation which demanded dignity. She'd go down to meet the man.

We never know how far-reaching our experiences are. Alice thought she understood perfectly how she had been benefited by her life in the open, but she only guessed at the benefit. Her memory was no longer than that of most people.

As she retraced her steps down the stairs, it did not occur to her that a year ago she would have waited for Matteson's arrival, and have had Matteson deal with the intruder. She had come now to a point which, by subconscious decision, she handled her own emergencies. She'd see just what the gentleman meant by assuming that he could dictate the time at which he could meet her. She had little time, but if he were not too obtuse, she might convince him that he could only request and not demand an audience with her.

In a moment she stood in the door of the library. A man was seated by a table midway of the room. She had arrived soundlessly, but he perceived at once that she was there. For a moment Alice had forgotten her workaday costume, but the stranger appeared to find nothing grotesque in it. Indeed, he seemed not to be interested in it at all.

He rose with slow grace.

Alice saw a man six feet tall. He was not slender, precisely, but there was no suggestion of largeness about him in any particular. The word "compact" flashed through Alice's mind. She had a fleeting notion that he was heavily muscled. Probably he was very strong.

And then she noticed his eyes. They were very dark and brilliant, but they were not uncertain eyes, as are some dark, brilliant eyes. They fixed themselves on her face unwaveringly. Alice had a curious sense that he did not wink at all. The eyelids seemed rigid.

And then the girl did a curious thing. She said in a little, hushed voice:

"You're a foreigner, are you not?"

The man smiled. It was not a cynical

smile, nor was it quite mirthless. But it was cold, icily cold. And it was a thing of the lips alone. It did not change the impassiveness of the face nor lend itself in the slightest degree to the eyes.

The man seemed to become a little more erect. The smile faded as swiftly as if he controlled it by an electric switch. He bowed.

"You wished to see me, didn't you?" Alice asked.

She had put out a groping hand, and the hand now found the door-casing. Alice steadied herself with the contact. Again the man bowed.

"Will you tell me your business?"

The man spoke abruptly then, but his voice was low and soft:

"I come to tell you that you are not to marry Mr. Matteson."

Again the girl put a curious question:

"What is your nationality?"

"I only wish to say that you will not marry him."

"And you—are you—" the girl faltered.

"And that is all," the man said. "I will bid you good afternoon."

He took up his hat, which had been lying on the table beside him, and moved toward the door, blocked by the girl. She took two quick steps forward and two sidewise so that he might pass without coming nearer to her than necessary.

He passed her, paused. Now his tone was deferential:

"You will accompany me to the door."

He passed into the hall and the girl followed him into it and along it. At the outer door, which opened on a screened porch, he stopped.

"I have left my card on the library table," he said.

He opened the door quickly, bowed low, passed through the door, crossed the porch, opened the screen door, and descended the steps. The girl stood looking after him, to ascertain whether he would look back. He did not. He climbed into a car which stood at the end of the drive, and sped away in it.

The girl cast an apprehensive glance over her shoulder. No one was in sight.

She fairly ran to the library and through

the library door. She slammed the door shut and leaned against it. The color had gone out of her face now. It was still dark from her tan, but lifeless. Her long lashes drooped over her eyes. She shivered.

She stood thus for five minutes. Then she lifted her head and listened. Matteson must be almost due. She had to get her ordeal over with before he arrived. He must not see her in this condition, but she could not command herself till she had looked at the stranger's "card." She quoted the word in her mind. She knew it was not an oblong of pasteboard which lay there on the table.

In her subliminal mind she knew that she was giving thanks for the new, glad strength which had blessed her. But with all her conscious mind she was using that strength to raise herself to an erect position. Even when she had gained that, she could not see what her staring eyes sought. A pile of magazines intervened. She brought herself to the very tips of her toes, but with no better success. She took a forward step.

The sense of movement banished her hesitation. She sprang to the table.

The card lay there in full view. She snatched it up as if it had been a living thing which menaced her, and flung it from her across the room.

Then she felt herself slipping toward the rug. She caught at the edge of the table. A scream rose to her lips. But before she articulated the scream, she slipped into blackness.

CHAPTER II.

MISSING.

HENRY MATTESON was a man well blessed by the fates. He had abundant health—"had never been ill a minute in his life," he said. His desires were normal, as great a blessing as can come to any man. For booze he had no use—didn't care for it, according to his own statement. He wanted a competence, a home, a wife, children. He had the willingness to work for the competence and the brains to carry him to it without exhausting effort.

He was not a handsome man, but he had a strong, frank face, good eyes, and a chin that was square beneath a full, firm mouth. He said he was as sound as a nut, and to himself admitted that he would take on any man he had ever met—if he had to.

Till he had met Alice Wendell he had gone straight along doing the things which he wanted to do, and getting the results he wanted to get. He was kind and courteous without effusion. Men liked him, and he liked men, if they played square with him. He himself always played square to the best of his ability.

He admired good women, and had been moved by one or two. But he had never been sufficiently hard hit till he had met Alice. Then, characteristically, he did not stop to consider that he was poor and she was rich. He might never be rich, but he would have his competence. He supposed that any good woman who loved a man would be satisfied with that. In which he was quite right.

As a rule he was a very punctual man, and he was annoyed this hot afternoon as he speeded his car toward Alice's suburban home. His car was not much of a car. It had apparently never had a good home, and it made its owner safe from prosecution on a charge of breaking the speed laws.

Just now he was urging it and coaxing it to its utmost, but the poor thing could do no more than it could do; and at last he just settled back and let it take its course, getting, as he always tried to, as much out of the things to be seen as he could.

As a lover will, he had overestimated his tardiness. When he stopped in the drive alongside Alice's house he was twenty-one minutes late. The exact computation was his own.

"That's bad enough," he told himself as he hopped down, "but it might be worse. Guess Alice 'll forgive me this once."

It never occurred to him that he might shield himself behind any one of the auto-driver's subterfuges. He'd just tell her right out that he had remained in the office on the off chance that a possible client might drop in. He'd gamble that she'd not ask him if he preferred the company of a possible client to her own. They under-

stood each other, those two young people, and got along finely together, as they both agreed.

He rang the door-bell confidently, and he was not taken at all aback when the maid said that Miss Wendell was engaged in the library. He said he would just sit down out there on the porch.

The maid moved to retreat. Matteson, being a very observant young man, saw her start and pause. She stared into the drive.

"Well," she said, "thank Gawd he's gone!"

As a rule she was a rather well-trained maid. In ordinary circumstances she would have cut off her right hand before she would have permitted Mr. Matteson to hear her use such language. But when you've been thrown off your balance, and then have a sudden and unexpected emotion of relief, you're likely to say almost anything.

Matteson noted the tone. He sensed immediately that there was an unusual situation here. Any unusual situation in Alice's house was something for him to step right into.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "What do you mean? Who's gone?"

The maid was confused because of what she had said. Her training dropped from her as if it had been a loose garment. She flushed and avoided Matteson's direct gaze.

"I'll tell Miss Wendell you're here, sir," she said. "I'll tell her right away."

"Of course!" said Matteson, for he disliked to press questions on Alice's maid.

The girl fled. Matteson stood in front of the screen door, waiting. He had no notion that anything serious had happened. At worst, Alice might have been annoyed. In that case he wanted to see her at once. He would promptly and efficiently take care of anybody who annoyed her. He flexed the muscles of his right arm with a sense of his ability to do that.

And then there was a woman's scream within the house. Whatever Alice had been, the maid was not inarticulate when it came to sounding a vocal tocsin.

The screen was still echoing when Matteson tore open the screen door and burst through it.

"Where are you?" he cried.

The maid staggered through the door of the library. Matteson ran to her, steadied her to a chair with one hand, let her slip into the chair, and sprang to the library door.

On the floor by the table Alice lay supine, motionless. At first Matteson thought she was dead. With his blood turned to ice he wavered over to her and dropped beside her on his knees. He touched her cheek and found it warm. Her pulse beat regularly beneath the finger he laid upon it at her wrist.

"Thank God!" he breathed.

He gathered her up in his arms and sat down in a chair which stood behind him. He held her as he might have held a child. He murmured endearing names softly, quietly, so that when she wakened he would communicate no new alarm to her.

For several long minutes she did not stir. She just lay in his arms and breathed through parted lips. Then her eyelids seemed to shiver. Her lips quivered. She took a deeper breath.

"I—I threw it into the sea," she said.

Her words were distinct, but no more. She added:

"That should have been the end of it. That *should* have been the end of it."

Then she opened her eyes.

Matteson forced a smile to lips which were somewhat unsteady.

"Did you faint, honey?" he asked.

For ten seconds she regarded him with eyes in whose depths terror lay. Then she relaxed against him.

"Henry," she whispered, "give me a minute here. It's so real."

Love flamed in him, but he would not take advantage of her.

"Sure," he smiled. "Take your time. These infernally hot days are likely to put a person out just like this. Worked in your garden too long. Topped over, I see."

Alice began to cry, a rain of tears, and he let the rain fall. He knew that, no matter what had happened, tears were the best for her.

At last she stirred and he let her slip from his arms to her feet, and then, holding her, rose and put her into the chair he had occupied.

"Want anything, dear?" he asked. "Glass of water?"

She nodded with closed eyes. He went to the door without sign of haste, but quickly.

"Glass of water," he told the maid.

He spoke in his usual tone, but he caught the girl up with his eyes, and so informed her that she must forget her nonsense and be about her business. The look appeared to steady the girl. She rose and in a moment was back with the water. Matteson knelt beside Alice and held the glass to her lips.

"Now I'll send the maid in," he said, still with his warm smile. "Then you must rest a while. Just rest! Don't think a thought about old me. I'll be kicking about the place somewhere when you want me. Maybe I'll have a look at the lil' ol' garden."

Some color had come back to Alice's cheeks she rose. She saw that Matteson was going about the business of restoring her, to the exclusion of everything else. He let no curiosity interfere with this. He offered the excuse of hot weather if she wished to take it. She might take it, and that would be an end of the matter, except that he would be a little tenderer than usual with her, if that were possible.

She looked into his eyes, and then she suddenly threw her arms about his neck and kissed him as she had never kissed him before.

"You're the finest man beneath the sun, Henry Matteson," she said.

Still Matteson would not take her off her guard.

"That's what everybody says," he laughed. "Run along now, and rest! You're getting stronger every second."

"You'll wait for me," she whispered.

"Till the stars grow cold," he assured her.

Whatever her trouble was, his love enveloped her. It was that love which was strengthening her. Unquestioning loyalty might save a sinner or ennoble a saint. She was neither. She was only a very human girl, and it might have been that she drew more from his affection than either sinner or saint would have drawn.

At any rate, after a long, loving scrutiny of him, which he withstood smilingly, she withdrew, and there was no uncertainty in her movements.

Matteson went out on the porch, sat down, and lit a cigarette. The sun had set by now, and there was a suggestion of breeze from the direction of the lake. But there was no coolness in it. It was merely the hot breathing of the dying day.

When he had smoked his cigarette, Matteson got up and went down on the lawn. He walked about there for a few minutes and then he wandered back to Alice's garden. The corn had lifted its many heads as if it sought the vagrant breeze, and there was a faint rustle among them.

If Matteson had been a different sort of man, that whispering of the corn might have been symbolical to him. But there were no whispers in his mind. He trusted the woman he loved!

But he wondered about the man whom the maid had spoken of. His keen brain sought a connection between Alice's fainting spell and the man's visit. The man must certainly have done something, or the maid would not have "thanked God" that he had gone.

Matteson thought of Alice's father. There had been rumors about him before his death. He'd been a queer combination, Matteson recalled. Or at least people had said he had been a queer combination. Matteson had paid little attention to the talk. As a lawyer, he knew that most men—and most women, for that matter—are queer combinations.

Wendell had made his own money, but he was not the typical self-made American. People said that in some ways he had an astonishing education, which he had dug out of books for himself. He had been interested in Indian lore—or was it Hindustan? Matteson couldn't remember.

There had been a story about a trip which he and Alice had taken to some Eastern country. He had come back from that trip ill and broken. His death had followed shortly after his arrival home. He seemed to have a leaning toward mystic things—had a "bug" on them, Matteson had supposed. But again, there was nothing

strange in that. Most very practical men had bugs on something or other.

Well, in her own good time Alice would tell him about all those things, if their telling was worth while.

He returned to the porch. The maid came out with a tray of sandwiches and cold tea. Matteson ate all the sandwiches and drank all the tea.

He lit another cigarette and leaned back in his chair. The stars were out now, and the full moon was edging up above a purple velvet band in the east. The world was silvered over. In a tree near Matteson an owl uttered its tremulous evening cry, and far back of the house a whippoorwill began to snap out its mandate.

Some time, before long, said Matteson to himself, Alice and he would be sitting together like this, man and wife. She'd be sitting by him there, all in white, dim, ethereal.

And then, quite wonderfully to him, she was there, all in white, with flowers at her waist—silly, old-fashioned flowers that she had grown herself.

He stood up, and she came into his arms with lifted face. But the lips which his own touched were cold.

"Did you rest?" he asked.

She slipped down into a chair behind her. He leaned over her.

"I couldn't rest," she answered.

An indefinable terror struck at Matteson's heart then. Something *was* the matter. The last time he had been with her, she had been warm, palpitant, buoyant with health. Now she was cold, subdued, seemed ill. He felt the same gentle consideration for her which he had felt before, but he had to know something.

"Dear," he said, "tell me what you can. As I arrived this afternoon, the maid thanked God that a man had gone. Who was the man?"

"Just keep on as you were this afternoon," she beseeched him.

He knelt beside her, and his arms encircled her.

"You know how it is with me," he said. "I'd ask no questions except for one thing: you might need help. If you didn't care to tell me anything in the way of en-

lightenment, you might just tell me what to do."

"You can't do anything," she said.

"You mean no one can?"

"Of course!"

"You know my questions aren't idle. What caused you to faint?"

She did not answer, as he had paved the way for her to answer, that the heat had been the cause. She sat mute.

An echo of what he had pondered in the garden came to him, as sharply as that far bird uttered its whipping cry.

"Was it something concerning your father?"

She shivered in his arms. For a while, still, she did not speak. Then she said abruptly:

"Don't ask me about my father, dear. I saw him changed from a robust man to a wreck almost overnight. I saw him die."

He, too, became silent. She was suffering, and he was helpless. He was helpless, in spite of the fact that he would have died for her, fought in her defense till he gasped out his last breath.

"You'll just have to trust me," she said.

"Oh, trust you!" he breathed.

She would go no further, and he could not urge her on. He rose and drew a chair to her side. He put his arm about her, and her head fell wearily to his shoulder.

"I am tired," she said at last. "I'll try again to rest, to sleep if I can."

He left her regretfully, holding her hands in his and letting them slip from his slowly. He stood bareheaded while she went into the house.

He went down to the old car and drove noisily away. When he thought the sound must have died from her hearing, he ran the car to the roadside and stopped. He descended from it and made his way back to the house. There was a big row of trees on the opposite side of the road, and he sat down in the shadow of one of these.

His conscience hurt him. He felt as if he were spying on her, and yet what could he do? A strange man had visited her. She had fainted. He had a growing feeling that a danger which was not quite tangible threatened her. The thing to do was to make it tangible, at whatever cost.

Undoubtedly it was a matter which concerned her father. She might be trying to protect his name. She had no right to sacrifice herself in an effort to do that. Oh, he'd give a good deal to get his hands on the man who had visited her. He'd get at the bottom of the thing then. You bet!

He sat there under the tree for a long time. The big house was dark. No light showed anywhere. He thought every one must have gone to bed. He didn't know what to do.

And then he saw two dim figures coming down the drive. He could not distinguish their features, but he made out that one was a man and one a woman. He rose.

There was no throb of jealousy in his soul. He was not afraid that Alice was clandestinely meeting some one for any evil purpose. His only thought was that he was going to lay his two hands on the man who had visited her in the afternoon.

Then he had a swift and ludicrous reaction. The two figures had emerged into the moonlight. One of them was that of the maid. The other, Matteson inferred, was her fiancé. At least, for her peace of mind, he hoped so.

He turned his back while they made their good-byes in the shadow of the trees across the way. The man hurried off down the road. The girl stood looking after him. When he was out of sight she turned toward the house.

Matteson stepped into the road.

"Here, my girl," he said.

The girl wheeled about. Matteson crossed over to her swiftly.

"It's Matteson," he said. "My car broke down. There's a wrench in the tool-house. I'll get it. By the way, is Miss Wendell resting? I was afraid to-night that she was going to be ill."

"Do you wish me to find out?" the girl asked.

A vague and nagging worry had been in Matteson's mind. He wanted to make sure, before he left the house, that Alice was safe. It seemed rather silly to stay on guard all night. He couldn't keep a continued vigil. If he were reassured, he would go home and see Alice in the morning.

"I wish you would," he said.

The girl was gone five minutes. At the end of that time she came hurrying toward him along the drive.

"Miss Wendell isn't in her room," she said. "And as far as I can make out, she isn't in the house."

CHAPTER III.

THE SECOND STONE.

MATTESON fully realized now why he had come back to the house, instead of proceeding to his own home, when he had left in the afternoon.

Looking back, he could see that he had feared some such calamity as this. But where had Alice gone, and how had she left the house without his seeing her? Had she known when he left her that she was going away? Doubt flickered through his mind, but he quenched it stoutly. No, he would not be that kind of lover. He would trust her to the end.

He was a man of action, and he thanked God that action seemed to be needed here.

He would have liked to assume a casual air, to make the servant believe that he was not alarmed. But that was a kind of hypocrisy, and with hypocrisy he had never had anything to do. He was not a good enough actor to be a hypocrite. Besides, he didn't know that anything was to be gained by concealment.

"We'll search the house," he told the maid. "Go around and turn on all the lights. Don't be agitated. But keep calling Miss Wendell's name. She may have been in a room in which you have not looked, and have fainted. Hurry!"

"I—I'm afraid," the girl whimpered.

"I'll go with you," Matteson said.

They went into the house and searched the lower floor. Matteson kept calling, "Alice! Oh, Alice! Where are you?"

This brought no response from the girl, but it roused the housekeeper and the old negro cook. They came down-stairs. Matteson explained what had happened.

"When did you see Miss Wendell last?" he asked them.

"I haven't seen her since she went out

on the porch in the evening," the housekeeper said.

"Ah ain't seed huh sence this afternoon," the old colored woman stated.

"And you?" Matteson asked the maid.

"Not since she came in from the porch," the maid answered. "She said she didn't need me, and I—I went to the kitchen."

"That's all right," Matteson said kindly, remembering that the girl had a love-affair of her own.

He pondered Alice's dismissal of the maid. There was something irregular in that. Alice had been unstrung, half ill. In those circumstances, it would have been natural to suppose that she would require the services of her maid if she ever had required them. It was a suspicion-rousing incident. Matteson could only make up his mind that Alice had been intending to go away all the time he had been with her.

He could place the pieces of the puzzle so that they seemed to fit now, but whether he got the correct pattern of the whole he could not tell. Alice had had a strange visitor. She had received a shock. The man must have conveyed a startling message to her. He must have requested her to meet him that evening. He must have held some sort of threat over her.

"You three go over the up-stairs," he directed. "I'll wait here."

The competent housekeeper, a woman of avoirdupois and good nerves, assumed the lead. They mounted the stairs, and Matteson, waiting, heard them moving back and forth up there.

They came back in ten minutes.

"She is not in the house," the housekeeper said. "Besides, her motor-coat and a veil are gone from among her clothing."

"When were they there last?" Matteson asked.

"This morning," the maid answered.

"She wasn't out in her car to-day?"

"Not to-day."

"No one called here after I left this evening, of course?" he said.

"No one," the maid answered.

"Was there a phone call for Miss Wendell?"

"There *was* a phone call," the housekeeper answered. "It was about half an

hour ago. I didn't know that Miss Wendell had come in. When the bell rang I started for the library. Before I got to the door I heard Miss Wendell say 'Hello!'"

"She hadn't gone to bed then."

"I suppose not. She must have been sitting in there."

To himself Matteson said: "She must have been waiting for that phone call. Strange!" Aloud he added: "Did you hear what Miss Wendell said over the phone?"

"When I heard her voice I withdrew," the housekeeper said rather frostily.

"Of course," said Wendell absently. "We'll have a look at the library."

They went into the big room, and Matteson stood looking around. Nothing was disturbed. There was the same order here as there was throughout the house. The bookcases, the long table, the leather chairs, were just as he had seen them a hundred times.

It struck him that Alice might have left a note.

He walked over to the table and examined the things upon it. But there was no note. There was nothing.

"You might as well go to bed," he told the women. "I will remain here, possibly for the night." They withdrew.

Matteson sat down before the table. He hoped, of course, that Alice would return. But he had no feeling that she would do so. Her absence created a void. He had a sense of increasing loneliness. If he had had a touch of mysticism in his nature, he would have said positively that she would not return.

That filled him with bewilderment. He had never experienced such a sensation before. He rose and paced the room.

"She has gone some distance," he told himself, and he pressed his hands to a forehead suddenly grown hot.

He returned to the chair, and sank into it with a shrug of his big shoulders.

"Nerves," he said aloud. "And no wonder!"

But that thought pressed in on him. It was like a mental tugging at his sleeve.

"But if I left here," he asked himself, again aloud, "where should I go?"

There was no fact to take hold of, and he realized that that was his trouble. He had been on guard and Alice had somehow slipped by him, as if she had been invisible. She had garbed herself for a motor ride. Had she got the car out of the garage?

In other circumstances he would have laughed at himself for his next step. But he could laugh at nothing now. In a few hours a perfectly strong, healthy, normal girl had changed into a fainting and then a distraught one. Then she had vanished. That was the way he phrased it. Alice's going was not a disappearance; it was a vanishing. Such things didn't happen in his matter-of-fact legal world, where there was a law for everything.

He rose and went out to the garage. It was locked, but through the window he could see that the car was inside.

"Of course!" he said.

He stood for a few moments in the scented moonlight, head bent. He never had any difficulty in picturing Alice to himself in her absence from him, and he pictured her now. He moved her before his mind's eye as if she were a figure on a slowly revolving screen.

She lay there on the floor of the library, in her working clothes. Sweet, grotesque little figure. Altogether lovable. She passed through the door of the library. She came to him on the porch. Always there was an aura of love for himself about her. It seemed to shine about her even in these pictures he was making. But she had been—just what?

She had been controlled. That was what she had been. He remembered now that her buoyancy was gone. It was as if a spirit had stood beside her, but a spirit which had the power to keep a heavy, fleshly hand upon her shoulder.

"Hell!" Matteson ground out. "I'm getting nutty. She was ill, I tell you."

He argued aloud as if some one besides himself were there.

He raised his head and looked about him. The moon was almost over his head now, full-orbed, a great silver shield in space. The world lay still beneath it. The beauty of the scene penetrated to Matteson's inmost soul.

"I've got to find her to-night," he told himself.

He returned to the library. There was a silver bell on the long table, and he struck it sharply.

Almost at once the maid appeared in the doorway. "Did you ring?" she asked.

She was red-eyed and pale. Matteson felt sorry for her, and that touch of human feeling quieted him. He was his normal self instantly. The girl's emotion was simple and natural. It was something which he could understand and sympathize with. Alice's emotion had been one of terror. He realized then that about terror—feminine terror—he knew nothing. That was why he had had those shivery moments.

The thing to do was to keep normal, not to entertain a thought which was not based upon the sound, good sense which was his dearest possession.

"I rang," he said quietly. "Sit down. Don't be frightened."

The girl sank to the edge of a chair.

She did not wait for him to question her. She began to speak rapidly:

"That man gave me a shivery feeling. He kept staring at me. His eyes were black. They weren't just black eyes, like people sometimes have. Not natural black eyes. They weren't natural at all. And he never moved them. He didn't seem even to wink. And you couldn't tell from looking at him what he was thinking about. That was the worst of it.

"Don't you know, sir, you can tell what people are thinking about you most of the time if you give them a good look in the eyes? You can tell whether they feel kindly toward you, or whether they don't like you, or whether they think you are a good person or a bad person. Don't you know what I mean, sir?"

Matteson nodded. He would give her rein.

"But this man, he just sat and looked. Sometimes I felt as if he didn't know I was there, and then I felt as if he was—was—"

"Going to tell you to do something—when he had made up his mind about you, and about the thing that he wanted you to do," Matteson suggested. "You wanted to run away from his eyes."

"I knew I should run away, but I didn't," the girl answered simply.

"How was he dressed?" Matteson asked. The girl looked at him blankly.

"I don't know," she answered. "I only remember his eyes—and that his face was kind of sallow."

"Was he an American?"

"No, he wasn't. He was some kind of a foreigner."

Matteson knew that it would be useless to try to establish the man's nationality through the girl. He forebore questioning her along that line, because her answers might confuse him. What he gathered from her he wanted to be based on fact.

"Tell me about his arrival and departure," Matteson said.

"The bell rang. I answered it. This man was standing beyond the screen. His eyes took me first. He said:

"I will come in."

"Before I could do or say anything, he just opened the door and pushed past me. He told me to take him to the library. I did. He asked me where Miss Wendell was, and I said out. He said he would see her the minute she came in. And that was all."

Matteson leaned forward in his chair and stared at the rug. In his helplessness a blind, raging desire to lay his hands on Brilliant Eyes possessed him. There was the sound of a sob. He looked up. The girl was crying, her handkerchief to her eyes.

"What is it?" Matteson asked, rather impatiently.

The maid removed the handkerchief.

"Don't be angry with me," she whispered. "I haven't told you everything."

"In Heaven's name, what else is there?" Matteson asked. "Come, now. I'm not going to hurt you or say anything to you to wound you. But if you have any clue in this crazy business, let me have it."

The girl fumbled in the pocket of her apron and drew out a second handkerchief. She unfolded this and a brilliant stone rolled out into her hand. She passed it to Matteson. Matteson held it in his hand and stared at it.

Matteson was not sure, but he judged it to be a great, uncut sapphire.

"Where in the world did you get this?" he asked.

"I found it here in this room after you and Miss Wendell had left this afternoon," the maid answered. "I came in to see if Miss Wendell had dropped anything, and I noticed a jagged hole in the wall. You'll see, it's over there."

Matteson rose and walked to the end of the room. He found the hole. He placed the stone in it and found that it fitted. He turned about to the maid and shook his head in new bewilderment.

"What does it mean?" he asked.

"I don't know," the maid answered. "Is it valuable, sir?"

"If it's a genuine jewel, it's valuable," Matteson answered. He looked at her keenly. "Never mind," he added. "You say nothing about this and neither will I. We are all tempted at one time or another."

"I—I never stole before," the girl protested. "I—I was going to be married and—and—"

"You haven't stolen yet," Matteson said. "Go to bed now. And say nothing about this. Say nothing about anything."

Apparently glad to be let off so easily, the maid scurried away.

Matteson, being a lawyer, had to discount her testimony now. He knew that, since she was a thief at the time she had testified, she would make her testimony to him as interesting as possible. Doubtless she had romanced the gentleman with the brilliant eyes. The man was probably no more than a smooth crook who went about intimidating women.

But if that were so, how had he got Alice to leave the security of her home? How, above all, had he persuaded her to keep a secret from the man she loved?

And there was the stone. He sat with it in the palm of his hand, staring down at it. He was sure Alice had not owned such an uncut jewel, if jewel it was. It was a curious thing to be owned by any one but a lapidary. If Alice *had* owned it, she would have mentioned it to him.

As he sat thus staring at it, there was a premonitory click from the telephone, Matteson straightened up with a jerk.

The bell whirred.

He snatched off the receiver and put it to his ear.

"Yes?" he said eagerly.

There was no immediate response, but somehow Matteson knew that some one was at the other end of the wire. It was a kind of breathing silence which he waited in.

And then, without preliminary cough or clearing of throat, came over the wire, a smooth, clear, even-controlled voice:

"An uncut sapphire is the sign."

The circuit was clicked shut.

CHAPTER IV.

THE THIRD.

MATTESON jiggled the receiver up and down on the hook impatiently, till sleepy central answered. She "didn't know who had called him." She would connect him with the supervisor. But the supervisor didn't know, and Matteson hung up the receiver in dismay.

He looked down at the gleaming stone again. So it was a sapphire, and it was a sign. He tried to recall some knowledge of sapphires which he might have picked up in the past, but he had none. The only jewel which had ever interested him was the diamond which Alice Wendell wore on her engagement finger.

There was crookedness in the whole thing somewhere, he could see, but it was a strange crookedness. What sort of criminal was it who went about giving away sapphires. As a sign! A sign of what? Evil, certainly, but evil to what result?

He stayed on in the house, turning these puzzling questions over in his mind. Day broke with a red sun, giving promise of more stifling heat. The servants came down-stairs.

"I am going back to town," Matteson told the housekeeper. "There is nothing I can do. No, there has been no word of Miss Wendell during the night. I haven't the slightest idea where she is. When I get to town I shall go directly to my office. If there is any development of any kind, call me on the phone there."

He scribbled his office phone number on his card and left. He found his car where

he had left it. When he got to town he went home and bathed and had his breakfast. Then he went to his office. He entered it at half past eight.

"Anything up?" he asked his clerk in the outer office.

"There was a man here to see you. Wouldn't state his business. Said he would leave a message for you on your desk. Said you were expecting him."

"Know him?"

"No. A strange fellow. Some sort of foreigner. Chinese or something, I think."

Matteson paused with his hand on the knob of his private-office door.

"Just what did he look like?" he asked, rather thickly.

The clerk looked at his employer rather curiously. Usually Matteson was the picture of well-groomed health. This morning he seemed pale and a bit unsteady. The clerk wondered if he had been "out" the night before. The clerk knew, as the world knew, that Matteson was engaged to the wealthy Miss Wendell. Perhaps she had "given him the shake."

"Why, he was very smooth," the clerk said. "Pulled a lot of the courtesy stuff. Bowed to me as if I were a woman. Spoke low. Kept looking at me steadily. Queer eyes. Seemed all pupils. Looked as if he might be a dope fiend."

"How was he dressed?"

"Ordinary clothing. Some kind of a light suit. Straw hat."

"All right," Matteson said.

He went into his private office and closed the door. Even before he looked at his desk he knew what was lying there. He took off his coat, the heat having become suddenly very oppressive, and hung up it and his hat.

Then he sat down at his desk.

A sheet of note-paper wrapper some object lying there. Matteson picked it up. Through the paper he could feel the rough edges of an uncut stone. He opened the paper and took out another sapphire.

"A man could get rich playing this fellow's game," he said grimly.

He smoothed out the paper, half expecting to find a written message on it, but there was none.

Matteson was not a detective. He was a lawyer who gave his time to civil matters. He knew he would butt his head against a stone wall if he tried to solve this mystery unaided.

He went to the door and opened it.

"Call police headquarters and see if Detective Jack Doyle is in," he directed. "If he is, ask him if he can give me ten minutes of his time at once."

The clerk took down the telephone receiver. Matteson closed the door.

In his own office he went to the window and stood looking down into the street. He saw that the man he was dealing with had at least unlimited nerve. He wasn't afraid to appear in the homes and offices of the people he was "after."

Matteson could not decide whether he had been foolish in summoning Jack Doyle to his aid. If his office was under observation, Doyle's arrival would be noted, and Doyle would be what might be termed a "marked man." If he were so marked, Matteson wondered whether Doyle would be a recipient of a stone. There would be grim humor in that. Doyle was honest but poor. One of those sapphires would fill his purse.

The clerk knocked on the door and said that Doyle said he would be right up. Matteson was glad of it. He would not long have to argue as to the wisdom of summoning Doyle, and he had a notion he would feel better when he had enlisted Doyle's aid.

Doyle was no great criminal catcher. He was a policeman who had graduated into the plain-clothes squad. But he had been a good friend of Matteson's in the past. He would loyally do what he could. And he would keep his mouth shut. Besides, he was a painstaking policeman, and he knew every criminal of note who had ever worked in the city, unless the criminal had got away clean.

Doyle arrived within a few minutes—a red-faced man, a little out of breath, beads of sweat on his forehead.

"What can I do for you, Mr. Matteson, or what are you going to do for me?" he asked. "Either way, I'm at your service. I wouldn't mind turnin' up something good."

It's dull. Not even a robbery and a get-away to keep us on our mettle."

There was something reassuring to Matteson in the presence of the homely policeman. There was nothing odd about Doyle. He was all man, physically, and he was all man mentally, so far as his mentality went. He was clean and sane and honest—all of which was a good deal when one was up against the machinations of a brilliant-eyed stranger who was elusive and mysterious.

So Matteson decided to tell Doyle all he knew.

"Know anything about stones?" he asked in conclusion.

"Paving stones," Doyle said. "Lemme see one of them rocks, or, better, both of 'em."

Matteson handed the stones to him.

"They look real pretty," Doyle said. "But I don't know what they're worth. Not much, I'd say. A gink who would go about strewin' jools would be bugs, wouldn't he?"

"I have no doubt this fellow is bugs," Matteson said.

"Them's the worst kind," Doyle said, and that held little comfort for Matteson. "You take a sane man and you can figure a little bit what his next move is goin' to be. But you take a nut and all hell can't tell how he'll run. He's just as like to lie down in the meadow grass and snooze, or he's just as like to jump off the highest bridge he can find.

"I know a guy over on Second Street that can tell a real stone from a bogus one. He isn't a nice man to deal with as a rule. I been layin' for him for years, but I ain't got him yet. I will, though. You just take one of these things and send it over by your clerk and tell the clerk to tell this gink that Jack Doyle sent him. No, send both of them pieces of glass. One might be good. The other might be phony. Here's the number."

He wrote the address on a piece of paper. Matteson summoned the clerk. Matteson handed him the sapphires with Doyle's instructions.

"Hold one of them in each hand and let him look at them there," Doyle said. "If you let them out of your sight, they might

be real when he took them and phony when he handed them back."

When the clerk had gone, Doyle led Matteson over the whole affair again step by step.

"I'm wearyin' you, I know," Doyle said, "but that's only because you didn't sleep last night and because you are worried. You keep right on tellin' me about this, even if you do repeat yourself."

Matteson talked on in endless repetition, it seemed to him. He watched Doyle's square face for some sign that the policeman saw something which was hidden from Matteson. For a long time there was no such sign. Doyle only sat leaning one thick arm on the desk. Now and then he wiped sweat from his face.

And then, all of a sudden, he straightened up.

"Repeat that again," he said.

"'I—I threw it into the sea,' she said."

"Now, tell me about the finding of the stone that this gink left with Miss Wendell."

Matteson described the finding of the stone, omitting mention of the maid's attempted theft.

Doyle wiped a particularly heavy dew of sweat from his forehead.

"Well," he said, "we got a line on them sapphires, anyhow. Miss Wendell threw that stone just before she fainted. I don't think she really knowed that she was throwin' it. I guess it was what the docs would call a reflex. You know about that? Sure you do.

"Well, then, this stone must have give her a shock. She had throwed something into the sea. What did she throw in the sea? Well, when she was down and out, she throwed one of these jools. When she was comin' to, she wasn't quite all there. Mebbe her mind was travelin' back to somethin' that had happened before. What was that? Why, these two stones are the second and third. There was a first. She throwed it into the sea.

"'I—I throwed it into the sea,' says she.

"Association of ideas. Huh?"

"It's logical," Matteson had to concede. "But where in the world did you pick up all this, Jack?"

Jack had the grace to blush.

"It ain't my stuff," he said. "I borrowed it from Sheldon, the Bertillon shark up to headquarters. I'm hangin' round his place when I ain't got anything else to do. He's a wiz on that what-d'ye-call-it-stuff—about the mind—"

"Psychology."

"Yeh; that stuff. He's told me a book full, and I've remembered mebbe half a chapter. If I had an education I could pose as a *Sherlock* and get away with it. But this Sheldon guy is better 'n *Sherlock* ever dreamed of bein'.

"Now, I'll tell you, Mr. Matteson: This girl and her father had been to—where? India? Yeh. He was nuts on that mystery stuff. Lots of them go that way. I've saw limousines in front of the shop of a clairvoy'nt who wore a red kimona with grease spots on it.

"Well, Miss Wendell's father got mixed up with some of this here dope, and there was a sapphire in it as a sign, and they give him the Indian third degree, whatever that is, and he couldn't stand the racket. And his daughter brought him home to die, and on the way she threwed the sign into the sea.

"Them foreigners has plenty of jools, as a rule. There was a foreign prince in this town once, on a visit, and he had a bushel of them. That's how it happens that this brilliant-eyed gink can go strewin' these here jools around and not mind the price. I'll bet a new hat that they are genuine. You'll see when your man comes back.

"Well! In the mean time we'll get a good man on the job. I'll just use your phone to call up Sheldon and have him hop over here. He's busy, but if I say this is something unusual he will come a runnin'. You listen to his flow of language. This phone?"

Matteson nodded.

Doyle took up the phone and called headquarters. Sheldon said he would come right over, with a camera to take fingerprints.

"He'll get this guy located if he's ever been mugged," Doyle said. "He'll know him before another sun sets."

Sheldon came presently. Matteson had

expected to receive a serious, high-browed superpoliceman, whose manner would show that he didn't exactly dislike himself.

The man who came was rotund and red-cheeked. He had lazy, blue eyes, and he never seemed to stop smiling.

And so they sat down, three normal men, to consider what seemed an abnormality. Sheldon listened while Matteson told his story over again.

When he had finished, Sheldon leaned back in his chair and lit a terrible pipe. Even as his lips closed about the stem of it, they did not cease to smile.

"What's your theory, Jack?" he asked.

Doyle played a repeater for his benefit.

"Sounds reasonable," Sheldon said.

"But why, Mr. Matteson, do you suppose Miss Wendell would want to keep this thing a secret from you, of all men?"

"I can't tell you," Matteson said.

"Her father is dead. She is alone in the world?"

"Yes."

"Except for you?"

"Except for me," Matteson conceded, with a flush.

"She is a particularly loyal sort of girl?"

"Very."

"The kind," said Sheldon gently, "who would give herself to protect the man she loved?"

"Good God!" Matteson said, starting up. "You don't imagine she went away willingly with this man, in order to protect me from some peril, real or imaginary?"

"She went away," Sheldon said quietly.

"And the man left you a sign, as he calls it. Everybody seems to have noticed this man's eyes—enlarged pupils, I should say, changing eyes of any hue to black. *Bella-donna*. Probably uses it internally, too. It's done once in a while. Rare dope, to be used that way, though. We find strange cases nowadays, since the drug-restriction law went into effect. Some one at the door, Mr. Matteson."

The two other men had been so intent upon what the Bertillon expert was saying that they had not heard two knocks on the door.

"Come in," Matteson called.

The clerk entered.

"Here," said Doyle, with pardonable pride, "is where I don't buy a hat for Mr. Matteson."

The clerk put the two "jools" on the desk. He turned to Doyle with a little smile on his lips.

"Your friend said you needn't have been so particular about instructing me to keep those things in my hands," he said. "He said he wasn't quite *that* cheap yet. He told me to tell you that they were silica, greenish rock-crystal. He said if you'd come in person he'd possibly lend you fifty cents on them."

CHAPTER V.

A NIGHT VISITOR.

"WHAT do you make of that?" Matteson asked Sheldon, while Doyle sat looking at the stones disappointedly.

"Nothing, except that those pieces of glass are a good deal cheaper than real sapphires would have been," Sheldon returned, with a smile.

"Ah, it's hocus-pocus," Doyle said. "I think that this is a case that calls for a little rough work. One thing, Mr. Matteson: wherever you go from now on, till this business is cleared up, I'm goin' to be on your trail. I'll arrange it with the chief. Here I go and build up a beautiful theory, and it's knocked into a cocked hat. You ain't got no friends that would be playing a practical joke on you, have you?"

"Miss Wendell's disappearance isn't a joke," Matteson said. "She wouldn't be a party to a joke that would keep me in suspense like this."

"Well, that's a fact," Doyle conceded. "Well, I got my lay, and I'll follow it. What you goin' to do, Sheldon?"

"Follow the usual procedure," Sheldon answered. "Will you take us out to Miss Wendell's home, Mr. Matteson?"

"My car is down-stairs," Matteson said. "Come on."

They drove out to the Wendell home. Sheldon first went over the house, bringing up at the library. Here he produced a

camera and made photographs of the places which the stranger's fingers might have touched. "Now that maid," he said.

Matteson rang the bell, and the maid came in answer.

"Have you dusted this room since yesterday?" Sheldon asked.

"No, sir, the maid answered. "I've been so upset—"

"It's all right," Sheldon assured her. "A good thing. Now tell me all about the man who called to see Miss Wendell."

The maid repeated her inadequate description. Sheldon took up each several statement when she had finished, and by close questioning made her embroider it till not a detail was lost.

"That's all," he said; and the maid withdrew.

"I don't 'make' this man at all," Sheldon told Matteson. "I don't think he's ever come under my observation; and he certainly doesn't work like anybody we know, does he, Doyle?"

"No," Doyle said, "he don't. It's poor stuff, though mystifyin', to my way of thinkin'. He ain't got a thing but nerve, so far as I can see."

"He's undoubtedly an intelligent man, and under the hypnotic influence of dope has developed a rare cunning and courage. They will do it. And we've got to look out for the unexpected. He may do anything."

"You think Miss Wendell is in danger, then?" Matteson asked.

"I don't believe that she is, just yet," Sheldon answered. "This fellow is going to make another play before long. That play will undoubtedly involve you. Doyle will go to work on the case, he says. The best thing you can do, Mr. Matteson, is to wait for the next move."

"It's awful to be idle when Miss Wendell's situation may be almost anything," Matteson said.

"Even in police work patience is a virtue," Sheldon said. "You'll just have to take hold of yourself and wait. I'd suggest that you go to your office and spend the day as usual. From there go home. Doyle could give you a man to stay with you, but that might delay developments. I take it you have nerve yourself."

"I'm not afraid, if that's what you mean," Matteson said.

They went back down-town, and Matteson returned to his office. He spent the day there, but nothing happened. As he was leaving Doyle called him on the phone.

"Nothin' doin', eh?" Doyle said. "Well, you're goin' right home?"

"Yes," Matteson said.

"Good enough," said Doyle, and rang off.

Matteson went home and had his dinner, which he had sent up from the kitchen of the apartment-hotel in which he lived. After he had eaten a little, he had the dishes removed, and stretched out in a chair to ponder on his unhappy situation.

He had not thought he would sleep. He had never seemed more wide awake. But he was unused to losing rest, and sleep came to him swiftly. He stretched out a little farther in the reclining chair. Sleep swept over him.

He awoke with a start. Even in his somnolent condition he wondered about that. Ordinarily his waking was a slow, lazy, stretching process.

He sat up in the chair and rubbed his eyes. Unconsciously his hand reached out for the electric-light switch. Then he came wide awake.

When he had gone to sleep the lights had been burning. Who had turned them off? He started to rise, and then there was a movement behind his chair.

"I am here," said a deep, resonant voice.

Matteson had a feeling that the voice would match those brilliant eyes which the maid had spoken about.

"Well, what do you want?" Matteson asked.

"The great pleasure of your company on a short trip and then on a long trip, a very long trip."

"You're the gentleman of the sapphire tendency, are you?" Matteson asked sarcastically.

"I am."

"Where's Miss Wendell?"

"Safe—in the place whither you are going."

"Whither—hell!" Matteson ground out.

"You're putting on a good deal of side, aren't you?"

"Will you go in peace?" the voice asked.

"I'll think it over," Matteson answered in a changed tone. "Just give me a minute."

"The dawn is two hours away," the voice said. "We have time."

Matteson was surprised that he had slept so long. He reproached himself for having rested so well while the girl he loved was in danger.

He was playing for time now. By means of the man's voice he had placed him as standing directly behind the chair, close to it. Matteson was trying to figure out just how he could reach the man in one spring. He raised his head cautiously and looked about him.

There was no light in the room. Because his income was not large, Matteson lived on the top floor. He was beyond the glow of the street lights.

But he knew just where every object in the room was. There was nothing between him and the stranger.

He edged a little forward on his seat, gathering his legs under him for a spring which would carry him around the side of the chair. He expected every second that the man would speak again, telling him he was wasting time; but he seemed to be a fellow of infinite patience.

Crouching, Matteson listened for a sound of his visitor's breathing, but there was no such sound. There was no sound of any kind in the room.

Then Matteson, his right hand grasping the arm of the chair, sprang and swung round all in one movement. He was behind the chair, his hands wildly groping for the stranger. But the hands met nothing.

"I am not there," said the sonorous voice. "I am here."

"Here," Matteson knew, was beyond the curtains hanging between the sitting-room and the dining-room. Matteson ground out an oath. He would have sworn the man had not moved.

"I was there only in the voice," the stranger said.

A shivery sensation went up and down Matteson's spine.

"What're you talking about?" he demanded.

He expected the man to laugh at his discomfiture, but evidently that was something quite foreign to the man's nature. Laughter, Matteson supposed, was too human a thing for him to indulge in.

"A voice obedient to the soul's whim," the man pursued.

Matteson wheeled about, expecting an attack. The voice now had come from the other end of the room opposite to the place where the curtains hung.

There was no attack; there was no sound, even. With a hand which was suddenly somewhat unsteady, Matteson reached out and snapped on the lights. He was alone in the room.

But there was a movement of the curtains, and the voice said:

"I am here in the flesh."

"Show yourself, then," Matteson challenged.

The curtains swayed—for theatrical effect, Matteson supposed. He waited.

"You are a conventional man," the voice said. "I shall have to use conventional methods to make you obey—at least for the present. I am armed. I am here."

He stepped forth and stood looking at Matteson. Matteson was not surprised now that the maid had seen only his eyes. They were big eyes, perfectly black and amazingly brilliant.

Matteson stood looking into them for a moment and then he swiftly scrutinized his visitor. He would memorize the details which had escaped the others.

The man's face was sallow. There were odd splotches of faint purple on it. His nose was big and his mouth wide. The lips were colorless, but they were not unsteady, as Matteson expected they might be.

The man was conventionally dressed in a dark suit, and wore a modest tie, straw hat, and black, low shoes. Except for his face and his eyes, he would have escaped observation anywhere.

In his right hand he held a pistol, and Matteson saw that he held it in a loose, familiar way, as if he were perfectly at home in the use of firearms.

"What next?" Matteson asked angrily. "If you'll put down that gun I'll knock your head off. I'd just like to get my two hands on you for a moment. You go about preying on women, frightening them. You're a spineless pup."

"And now we will go," the stranger said smoothly.

Matteson saw that there was no good in railing at him, in calling him names. He seemed impervious to abuse. His face did not change expression, and his brilliant eyes did not move from Matteson's face.

"Go where?" Matteson asked.

"To far countries. To places men rarely visit, least of all white men. To inner temples—to shrines. Until you are initiated."

"Into what?"

"As Wendell was," the man said imperturbably.

"What happened to Wendell?" Matteson demanded. "What broke him? What, in fact, killed him?"

"He threw his talisman into the sea," the man answered. "*She* threw it into the sea. It is a fatal act."

Unconsciously Matteson thrust his hand into his coat-pocket. The stones came into contact with his fingers. He clutched them and drew out his hand. In a sudden, furious burst of anger he hurled the stones straight at his visitor's face. But swift as light the man moved his head. The stones struck the curtains and fell to the floor.

"We will go," he said.

He pointed the pistol full at Matteson's breast. He seemed to lose some of his impassiveness. His eyes did not change. They could not grow brighter than they had been. But the purple splotches on his face grew more distinct.

Matteson believed he had a madman to deal with. He took up his hat from the table upon which he had tossed it.

"Go ahead," he said grimly. "But I'll bet you ten dollars I'll get you before we go far."

The man stepped into the room.

"Behind you," he said politely.

Matteson passed through the curtains with the man at his back. They went into the hall, and the man closed the door.

"The elevator isn't running," Matteson said. "We'll have to walk."

"I'll be just behind you with the pistol in my coat-pocket," the man said. "Pray do not attempt to escape. The consequences to you would be dire, and I should regret violence."

They went down the four flights of stairs and came out on the street, encountering no one at that hour.

A car with the curtains down stood at the curb. The man unhooked a front curtain. "Get in," he said.

Matteson stepped past the wheel and sat down. The man climbed in beside him. With one hand he pressed his pistol into Matteson's side. With the other he fastened the curtain. Then dexterously he started the machine, guiding it with one hand.

So they rode, speaking no word. The stranger was like a statue, except that now and then his lean hand moved to turn the wheel slightly. He did not look at Matteson. His eyes were fixed straight ahead of him. He continued to press the pistol into Matteson's side.

The man seemed in no hurry. He did not speed. To all appearances the car was taking its occupants about some leisurely business. Once Matteson saw a policeman on the sidewalk before a half-lighted store, but the policeman did not even look in the direction of the car.

"Smooth, aren't you?" Matteson sneered.

The man made no answer. Except for the pistol pressing into his side, Matteson might have thought that his captor was unaware of his presence.

They passed out of the residence district and came to a long paved road. Matteson saw, with a start, that it was the road which led out to Alice Wendell's suburban home. He wondered if the man was taking him there. If he was, Alice might be there and might so far be safe.

He voiced that notion. The man again did not answer.

"Tell me one thing, you hell-hound!" Matteson ground out. "Is Miss Wendell safe?"

"Safe for the present—till the moment arrives."

"A-a-ugh!" Matteson grunted in disgust; and he was tempted to turn in his seat and grapple with his enemy, but he swiftly saw the futility of that.

He had observed that the man had extraordinarily long-fingered hands. One index-finger was now wrapped about the trigger of the pistol. Matteson had seen with what indescribable swiftness the man could move. If he so much as stirred in a way to rouse the faintest suspicion, he supposed that long, brown finger would press the trigger.

He stared straight ahead of him, as his companion was doing.

They rode perhaps a mile. Then, of a sudden, Matteson felt a jab, like that from a needle, in his leg. He winced and started. He glanced down at the hand which held the gun, but apparently the hand had not moved.

In a few minutes he began to grow drowsy. His head went to his chest, but he shook himself awake. Drowsiness came back swiftly. He reviled himself for being sleepy on an occasion like this, when so much was at stake. But his eyes closed and his head drooped again.

Again he shook himself awake. He understood the meaning of that jab in his leg now.

He reached out to seize the man beside him. But his hands dropped helplessly before they could reach their object.

"Doped me," he muttered thickly. "You—you—"

CHAPTER VI.

WEIRD.

HE revived to a sense of motion. For a moment he sat in complete dullness. He was conscious of a burning thirst.

"Water," he muttered.

A glass was instantly held to his lips.

"Drink, friend," said a woman's voice.

He tried to raise a hand to take the glass which was pressed against his lips, but he found he was securely bound. He bent his head and drank the water as the glass was tilted.

"Who are you?" he asked.

There was a low laugh, a pleasant, contralto laugh. A garment, silk, Matteson thought, rustled, and Matteson knew he was alone.

He lifted his head and stared about him.

He was in complete darkness save for a patch of light at his left. He saw, as his eyes became more normal, that the patch of light was a window, perhaps two feet square. Beyond that there was more light, dim, flickering, uncertain light. A landscape was rushing past him.

"I'm on a train," he muttered again. "Where the devil are they taking me, and where's the porter? That was a woman. Am I awake?"

He struggled against his bonds, but they held him. He looked from the window once more. Still the landscape rushed by. He closed his eyes and tried to reverse that motion. Often while riding in railroad trains he had seen the train suddenly stop and the landscape appear to move. But he had been able to rectify the motion by closing his eyes. When he opened his eyes now, however, the landscape still whirled by.

"We're going like the devil," he said. "I'll say that much."

Suddenly there was a crash of thunder and the sound of rushing wind.

"Storm," said Matteson dully.

He knew that he was not yet free of the drug which the man had injected into his veins. His mind was sluggish and he only half realized what was taking place. He felt as if he wanted to sleep again.

"Porter," he called. "Oh, porter; where the devil are you?"

But there was no answer. This seemed to be a train without conductor or porter. There was only the woman who had held the glass to his lips.

"Where is that woman?" he cried.

Silence.

He gritted his teeth and tried to bring his mind back to normal. But he felt almost as if his reason were toppling on its throne. His situation was sufficiently terrifying. Again he felt that jab in his leg.

He struggled violently, cursing.

"Don't put me to sleep!" he cried.

"Free me and let us meet man to man. That's all I ask. Man to m—"

His voice died on that letter. His head dropped to his breast again, and he slept.

He awoke to nausea. He waited for that sense of motion again, but it didn't come. Without his asking for it, a glass was again held to his lips. He gulped a sour drink and the nausea passed. He found that he could move his arms. They were unbound.

He tried to rise, but discovered that his legs were bound from hips to ankles. He stretched out his hands and they came into contact with what appeared to be dry grass. Though he was in utter darkness now, he believed he was lying on a sward.

Suddenly the darkness was shot through with an unearthly light. It came with a flash, hung trembling for a moment, and then disappeared. But it revealed to Matteson long avenues of trees with some sort of building at the far end of them.

"Where am I?" he yelled. "What place is this?"

His only answer was a shrill whistle of wind across his body. It passed and seemed to die away in the trees. He sat staring at the spot which his eyes had been focused upon when the light had disappeared.

Now there was a tiny spot of light there, a mere white speck in the blackness. The speck grew, widened, and rounded. Presently there was an illumined space.

Into this space a woman's face and bust were at once projected. It was a beautiful face, in a barbaric way. It was large, but well molded. The lips were extremely red, and the eyes were black and surrounded by long, heavy lashes. The red lips curved in a seductive smile and the face disappeared.

It disappeared, but it was instantly replaced by another face. And that was the face of Alice Wendell.

Matteson cried out her name, but there was no response from her. Matteson saw that her face was pale beneath its summer tan, and that her eyes were closed. From the position of the head Matteson judged that she was reclining, but he could not see what her head rested upon.

Then the ghostly light widened and grew till her whole body was revealed. She was dressed all in white, as she had been when Matteson had last seen her on the porch of her home. He leaned forward and stared at her, his lips dropped apart.

For though Alice Wendell was reclining, her body rested upon nothing. The light revealed her fully now, and there was nothing beneath her nor above her. She seemed to float in space.

"Is it not well, O stranger?" said the voice of the man who had forced Matteson from his apartment.

"I'll kill you for this," Matteson ground out.

That was the only thing he could think of to say. His mind was whirling between reality and unreality, but he still had a healthy desire to get his fingers on the man's brown throat. He'd bet he'd throttle him till his tongue hung out.

"What are you going to do with that girl?" Matteson added.

"She is held as hostage, you are held as hostage, till she frees herself of the dross of wealth."

There was a gurgle of feminine mirth, a deep, contralto gurgle, beyond the man.

"Oh," said Matteson savagely, "you're holding us up, are you? Clean case of robbery, if you can get away with it. But the police 'll have you before you can go through with this, or I miss my guess."

He had thought of Doyle and of Doyle's promise not to lose sight of him. Doyle might come to his aid.

"We know no police," the man asserted.

A sarcastic rejoinder was on Matteson's lips, but something convincing in the man's tone arrested him.

"Why not?" he asked. "Where are we?"

He remembered the train with the landscape rushing by it. He did not know how long he had been unconscious. He did not know how many injections of drug he had had.

The man's voice, deep with feeling, intoned:

"He who died at Azan sends
This to comfort faithful friends:
Faithful friends, it lies, I know,
Pale and white and cold as snow;

And ye say, 'Abdullah's dead!
Weeping at my feet and head,
I can see your falling tears,
I can hear your cries and prayers;
Yet I smile and whisper this:
'I am not that thing you kiss;
Cease your tears and let it lie;
It was mine, it is not I.'"

The voice stopped abruptly, the light died, and Matteson was in darkness again. He almost doubted that Alice had been suspended there before his eyes.

That sense of unreality which had clutched him grew. Then a terrible fear seized him. Alice, he recalled, had not moved a muscle.

"Is she dead?" he called out. "Is Miss Wendell dead?"

"She is not dead. She dies."

"Can anything save her?"

Again the voice intoned:

"I worship Agni, who is the priest of the house, the divine priest of the sacrifice, and the priest of oblations. He gives wealth."

"You're after Miss Wendell's money, aren't you?" Matteson asked, seizing upon that as something he could understand.

"He gives wealth," the voice repeated.

"Is it your idea to keep us here till Miss Wendell makes some sort of agreement to pay you?" Matteson asked. "Is that the big idea? If it is, why don't you say so? Have you talked to her about it? What does she say?"

"She is saturated with conventional sanity and stubborn with health," the voice replied.

A picture of a strong young figure in overalls came to Matteson. He saw the face of the girl he loved, bright with health, shining with the consciousness of physical and mental well-being. Thought of her helped him to sanity in this exotic situation.

"She's game, too," he muttered.

He resolved to "hang a bluff."

"You can go on with your show," he said. "I'm not going to be frightened into anything."

"Not you. She."

"Oh," said Matteson, "you're going to do things to me till she yields. Is that your game?"

"She comes back now from afar," said the voice.

Matteson felt that unearthly rush of wind across his body again. There was a crash, like thunder. Then there was complete silence.

Out of this silence came a small voice—Alice's:

"Henry."

"Yes, dear."

"Are you injured?"

"Not a bit of it. I'm all right. Are you?"

"I have been asleep a long time," Alice said weakly. "Where are we?"

"I give it up," Matteson said. "They drugged us, Alice. I was on a train a while ago. I don't know where we've been brought to. But you just stand pat. Don't yield to that fellow. I'll get my hands on him after a while. Then we'll see."

"You're bound, aren't you, Henry?"

"Yes, but don't give up. What has he asked you to do?"

"He wants my fortune—all of it."

"Sure," said Matteson. "It's a hold-up; but it won't go through. There is still the law."

"He is mad, Henry," Alice said, and her voice seemed to recede. "He will torture you. I—"

"You what, dear?"

"He won't let me talk any more," the girl concluded wearily.

There was complete silence again. Matteson called Alice's name, but she did not answer. In his disappointment and his alarm at what might be happening to her, he screamed at the man a "Hey, you," followed by an oath, before he realized that it might reach Alice's ears.

"Will you yield?" the voice asked suddenly.

"No," Matteson shouted. "You can go to the devil. Don't yield either, Alice."

He was in the clutch of red anger now. He struggled violently to free his legs of the thongs which bound them, but he could not. His hands groped down to his feet, seeking a knot, but they only found that a leather thong ran away from his feet beyond his reach.

"Staked out in the grass, I guess," he told himself.

As he straightened up his eyes were arrested by another speck of light. It was of a greenish hue now, and it grew with extreme slowness. Matteson thought he must have sat there for half an hour before it became as large as an egg.

It began then to radiate a greenish light. Tiny, wavering tongues licked out from it and receded into it. Still it grew. Presently it was as big as Matteson's hand, an oblong of sickening green.

Matteson gazed at the light in complete fascination. He had not known that such a glow could be generated. Suddenly the light stopped growing. It paled, and then in the center appeared the head of a snake.

It was a dull, mottled head at first, and it hung there in the center of the light perfectly motionless. The eyes were closed.

Then, as Matteson watched, the head moved slowly from side to side. The mouth was opened. The inside of it was blood-red. A red tongue darted out. There was a single hiss, and then the air was full of a rushing, hissing sound.

Matteson felt cold sweat break out on his body. Like most normal men, he loathed and feared snakes of all kinds. To be lying here helpless with that moving head, red-fanged and venomous, within a few feet of him, was enough to shake any man's nerve.

He thought of Alice's father. Doubtless he had been through some such ordeal as this. But he had been in India. Matteson was in America.

And yet, was he in America? How long had he slept? There had been that railway journey. He had heard of suspended animation, too. Could he have been transported over the sea without his knowing it. Was he beyond the help of Jack Doyle?

While these thoughts and questions had flashed through his brain he had kept his eyes on the snake's head. Now he saw the light waver, and then it ran swiftly along the snake's body. The body writhed. There was a full twenty feet of it.

"God, keep me sane," Matteson groaned.

The body of the snake slowly undulated.

It began to move toward Matteson. Its mouth was open. It hissed. And again the room was filled with that hissing sound.

"And now?" said the voice.

The tone was as implacable as death itself. Matteson understood from it that this was the crisis which the man sought. Matteson must yield or suffer himself to be embraced by the coils of the snake.

He tried to speak, but no words came. He never knew afterward just what it was that he had been going to say.

There was a crash back of him. He heard some object fall to the ground, or the floor, or whatever it was that he sat upon. Three flash-lights shot their rays across the room. They illumined Matteson's captor. He stood just beyond the snake, the lovely woman whose face Matteson had seen beside him.

There was a gleam of metal in the man's hand. But back of Matteson there were two pistol shots, one after the other. Matteson saw the man's hand drop. His other had clutched at his breast.

Then there was the snap of an electric switch. The place was flooded with light. The lovely woman stood with her hand on the switch. She was staring at the man.

He had been swaying. Now he suddenly pitched forward on his face and lay still.

"A little rough work," said Jack Doyle's voice behind Matteson. "I said a little rough work would do it, and I guess it has. I've been within fifty feet of you ever since you and this crook left your apartment. Some good shadowing, if I do say it."

"You have killed the Great Burmese," the woman at the switch stated.

"I don't doubt it," said Doyle. "But I guess he had it coming to him, my dear. Just who is the Great Burmese?"

CHAPTER VII.

WHO HE WAS.

"THE Great Burmese—" the woman began.

"Just a moment, please," Matteson interrupted. "Rip these thongs off me, Jack, will you?"

Doyle cut the thongs and Matteson stood up. For a moment he could not move. Then, when he could, darts of pain shot through his legs as restoration of circulation began.

He walked slowly and painfully over to the woman.

"Where is Miss Wendell?" he demanded.

Before the woman could reply Alice appeared at the other side of the room. Matteson ran to her, despite his stiffness, and swept her into his arms. Before them all he kissed her.

"What you must have suffered," he said.

Alice freed herself and held up her head. She was a little pale still beneath her tan, but that proud lift of her head belied weakness.

"Thoroughbred," Doyle murmured.

"No," Alice laughed to Matteson, so low that the others could not hear, "just health from the lil ol' garden."

Matteson gazed into her eyes for a long, fond minute. Then he turned about and surveyed his surroundings curiously.

He saw that he was amid stage settings. What he had lain upon and had thought was dry grass was a large mat. The avenues of trees were mere drops.

"The ride on the train?" he questioned the woman. "That utter darkness?"

"A window before you and a revolving mechanism beyond the window," she answered. "The other, black velvet curtains dropping down from those rollers."

Matteson looked up and saw the rollers with the heavy curtains wound around them.

"They moved on oiled springs," the woman said.

"That unearthly light and that whistling wind and the hissing."

"Stage effects, all."

"Well, who was the Great Burmese?" Doyle asked.

"Don't you ever go to the theater? Didn't you ever see the Great Burmese on the big time? He was the best of them all till a couple of years ago, when the dope got him."

"Oh, that gink," said Doyle. "Yeh,

"I've seen him. He was a wiz. What happened him?"

"He *was* a Burmese," the woman said. "He came to this country years ago and was educated in one of the big colleges here. He had a lot of stuff—magic stuff—at his fingers' ends. He was a hypnotist, a ventriloquist, and a sleight-of-hand man.

"You saw how he held that girl suspended in the air, Matteson. That used to be one of his tricks on the stage. Other people did it, too, but nobody ever did it the way he did. Of course it was a trick, but he always put it over big."

"Did he know Miss Wendell's father?" Matteson asked.

The woman uttered a low chuckle.

"Of course he knew Wendell," she answered. "The Great Burmese went to India every year or so to get stuff for his acts. Wendell had gone over there with his pretty daughter to see what there was in the Indian dope. The Great Burmese got him in tow. It wasn't hard. Wendell was looking for something, and the Great Burmese set out to make sure he got it in good measure."

"But the Great Burmese had left the stage then, according to your statement," Matteson said.

"Sure, he had left the stage then. He had been using dope for years. Queer stuff, too. Not often used. Belladonna. Well, on his way to India he stopped in London and got an engagement. He had to have it. His money was most gone. Besides the dope he had another weakness. He played the American stock market. He had a system all his own. I don't know just what it was, but it kept him poor.

"Well, I was with him, you might as well know, and we got so low in funds that he was without his medicine for nearly two days. Then when he got some he went to it hard. Just before he was to go on with his act he took a big dose, an overdose, I guess. Anyway, in the middle of his act he got a kind of a stroke of paralysis. They had to carry him off the stage. For a good many hours he was delirious, and then he went into a stupor and almost smothered to death.

"I thought that when he come to he

would be broken-hearted, because that story would travel all through the theatrical world—and did. But he had nerve, the Great Burmese. He had a few blank minutes. Then he sat up in bed and said:

"'Well, that's the end of the Great Burmese so far as the world will know. I'm done with trickery on the stage. But we have to have the money. We will get the money.'

"I'd been on the stage myself. After four years of hard work I made the big time. I met the Great Burmese in Pittsburgh. He thought pretty well of me from the start. My engagement ended in Pittsburgh, and the Great Burmese married me.

"When we found ourselves broke in London town, I went singing in the music halls. We saved every cent we could, and then we went to India. There the Great Burmese met this Wendell. Wendell was looking for something, and the Great Burmese had that something right in his mitt. Excuse me. He nearly had it, I mean.

"In four days he had Wendell so confused that Wendell didn't know whether he was coming or going. He put Wendell through this stuff he was beginning to put Matteson through to-night. Then he gave him a piece of glass and told him it was a sacred sapphire.

"Oh, yes, I forgot. He didn't let Wendell know, of course, that he was playing a game. At the proper moment, when snakes were all around Wendell, and bats were flying, and the wind was whistling, and the air was full of that awful hissing, he rescued Wendell. Then he gave him the sapphire.

"He told Wendell never to part with the sapphire. That was pure bunk. The girl threw it into the sea when she persuaded her father to take ship for home. The old man couldn't stand the gaff and died.

"The Great Burmese thought he could put it over on the daughter, and he left a stone for her by way of preliminary. It got her nerve, too, at the start. She told us last night that she fainted.

"But when we got her here she was just plain stubborn. She wouldn't agree to give the Great Burmese her money. So

after he had left a stone for you, Matteson, he had you brought here and started to put you through his third degree. He thought he could break your nerve as he had broken Wendell's. He expected then that the girl would yield. And I guess she would have if these gentlemen hadn't broken down the door when they did."

The woman sighed deeply.

"We'd have been on easy street," she said.

"Why didn't the Great Burmese, as you call him, get Wendell's money from him?" Doyle asked.

"He had the promise of it as soon as Wendell got to the U. S. A.," she answered. "We followed him and his daughter right over, but the old man died, don't you know? That made the Great Burmese start all over again with the girl."

"But Wendell surely didn't believe that he had to give up his money to the Great Burmese, did he?" Matteson asked.

"Believe," the woman said with a touch of real scorn in her voice, "why, he didn't believe anything. He didn't have to believe anything. He was just plain rattled. The Great Burmese had him tied up in a knot. Wendell's brain was right on the edge of the precipice when the Great Burmese got through with him. One little push would have sent it over."

"You ought to know the nervous condition he was in, Matteson. You had got only a sample of the stuff that Wendell got and you were beginning to sweat blood yourself, weren't you?"

"I wasn't very comfortable," Matteson admitted.

"You weren't born in India, were you?" Doyle asked. "You ain't no Burmese yourself."

"I was born in the East," the woman said. Then she laughed a low, mocking laugh. "The East Side of New York," she added.

"The Great Burmese was crazy, wasn't he?" Doyle asked.

"He said he wasn't," she answered. "He said he was sane. He'd say that oftenest when he was fullest of belladonna. Along toward the last he said everybody else was crazy, though."

"Plain nuts," said Doyle. "A good sleight-of-hand man, but a bum black-mailer. A little old policeman's gun will spoil any trick like that ever invented—in this here Burmese place or in this village."

"Are you going, Matteson? You might as well. The rest of this will be disagreeable. I guess you can borrow the car the Great Burmese had. He's got a white chariot of his own now. Well, s'long. G'-by, Miss Wendell. I don't claim your acquaintance. I'm just a policeman. But I'm glad I laid eyes on you. It does a man good to see the likes of you when he goes up against the tricks of folks like the Great Burmese. Get out of my way, you!"

He kicked the mechanical snake aside and walked over to the fallen magician.

Matteson and Alice went into the street and got into the machine which had borne Matteson to the house. Matteson started it. They did not speak for a long time. Alice leaned against Matteson's shoulder and rested.

At last Matteson looked down at her.

"Why did you leave home without letting me know, Alice?" he asked. "Why did you leave at all? And how did you go?"

"The Great Burmese told me I was not to marry you," she said. "He explained to-night that that was the first lesson in obedience for me. He wanted to know if I had broken my engagement to you."

"He had his nerve," Matteson said. "You couldn't break that engagement with a sledge-hammer."

"When I went into the house he phoned me to meet him," she went on. "We are only two miles from my house, you know. He said he would get you in his power and kill you unless I obeyed. I believed he would do it. I took a coat and a veil and let myself out the front door without being seen by the servants."

"I was hiding in the shadow of the trees when you came back. I had seen the light of your returning car. I didn't know it was your car, of course, but I hid just the same."

"The Great Burmese met me up the road and brought me to that house we have just left. I was stubborn, as he said."


He made me weary. But when he brought you to the house and began to try to scare you, I didn't know what to do. Doyle came just in time."

They fell silent again. Presently they neared Alice's house.

"My, that looks good to me," Alice said.
 "Would there be room for two in that lil ol' garden of yours, Alice?"
 "Right away?" she asked.
 "Right away."
 "You b-e-t!"

(The end.)

A Double Double-Play



by Jacques Belden

THERE'S nothing the matter with the English language except the words in it. If you say 'em separately they don't mean anything, and if you say 'em in bunches they generally mean something that ain't so. "They never come back," for instance. You hear that and you believe it, until all of a sudden you begin to see it the other way. I guess the truth is that most generally they don't never come back, but sometimes they do.

You can't tell that to Macklin, though. Him and me are likely to agree once in a while, in spite of bein' pals for twenty-five years, but whenever we take a vote on this comeback question, the result is unanimous. He says they never *do* come back, and to prove it he's got two arguments nobody can't answer. The one he uses when the Fly-by-Nights are winnin' is that if a fellow comes back it's a sign he's never been away; and when we're losin' he gets real clever and allows that he hates to hear any person talk like a damn fool.

What started us quarrelin' about it was somethin' that happened in 1914.

We had a regular team that year. Our battin' order would remind you of March 17, and our infielders could most generally stay in the game, even if they did fall over a piece of chewing gum.

Macklin had four of our suits sittin' around, disgraced by what was in 'em, from April to the end of August. Mack had picked 'em out of the crowd of youngsters we took to Texas, for reasons which he confided to me voluntarily after I asked him. He says: "Well, I suppose there must be some reason why that bunch of bushers we started with should live and call themselves a ball-player, but, if so, it has been hid from me in the case of all except these four. Perry," he says, "lays out to be a right-handed pitcher, and you can see for yourself he's got a right arm, even if he ain't got any speed or control or judgment or experience. Nelson and Bigbee," he says, "assures me there ain't no mistake about their being outfielders, and says they'll make Ty*Cobb look sick, showin' that they are cultured and read the classics, which is the kind of fellows you want to uplift your

team. And that there little Radford that aims to be an infielder," he says, "of course he looks like little Eva, and ain't got any pep, and don't never field a ball he ain't been introduced to, and thinks a bat is a ornament. But he's got brains," says Macklin, "yes, you can see he's got brains, because he don't never say nothin'."

So that there male quartet stayed with us right through the season, drinkin' up the water and drawin' their pay. Up to the 18th of August there wasn't a one of them had ever took part in a regular game.

We sure had some team, though, leavin' out them drawbacks on the bench, and we had figured to walk away with the flag, so it jolted us considerable to have the Whirlwinds grab the lead late in June and hold it right through July and on up to the middle of August. Most of the time they weren't more than a half a game ahead of us, but when they'd lose, we'd lose, and when we'd win, they'd win, and every time we'd play each other we'd take turns winnin' and finish up where we began.

It was on the 18th of August that they come to town on their last Eastern trip, with their little old half-game lead tucked away in their bat-bag, and every man on the team ready to go the limit to keep it there. We'd got it through our head by this time that there was something besides days between us and the World's Series, and when we went on the field for the first game, we knew we'd got to either win it some way or else win it some other way.

There was a big crowd in the stands, and they went crazy over the stunts our infield pulled in practise, but Macklin didn't. After he'd batted 'em out a few, he let Mason take his place and come over to where I was hittin' to the outfield.

"Keegan don't look very good," he says.

Keegan was the guy that played short.

I looked just in time to see him scoop a grounder with one hand and curve it across to first. The stands went wild—they always fall for that one-handed stuff, and they didn't notice the throw was three feet short.

"He never was no star," I says.

"If I had a short-stop to match up with the rest of the team," says Mack, "I'd

never lose a game. I'd have an infield," he says, "like we had twenty years ago, when you and me and Tex Harvey batted 400 and won all them pennants for the Bluebirds."

I hate anybody to start talking about the old Richmond Bluebirds—even Mack. It always takes me back to that year when our great team was broke up, and makes me feel the way I did after it was all over, and I hadn't anything left to do but sit around and remember that the standing of the clubs wouldn't show the name of Richmond any more, that the two best pals I ever had was gone—Macklin to New York, and Tex Harvey dead of pneumonia—and that I didn't have no job.

I like the Fly-by-Nights. They're a great little bunch of ball-tossers. But there'll never be another team like the Bluebirds, and Mack knows it as well as I do. In them days him and me could field a bunt without fallin' over our stomach, and, along with Harvey and Blair, we made an infield you couldn't have broke through with a machine-gun.

Most folks have forgotten old Tex Harvey, but he was the best short-stop ever lived, and a regular guy besides. He was a black-haired, brown-eyed fellow, big and tall, and he would kill a sure two-bagger with one hand as if it wasn't any trouble at all, the same time he was tellin' the pitcher how great he was goin', and the umpire what a piece of cheese he was, and the batter, how you can't hit 'em when you can't see 'em. He wasn't afraid of nothin', on the field or off, but when he got outside of his suit he was pretty quiet and retirin', like you wouldn't expect. He used to think a lot and read books and tell Mack and me about what he read until we'd josh the life out of him.

I know one day he sprung this here re-incarnation stuff on us. He says when you die you ain't through with this world: you come back and have a lot more lives. He believed it, too—used to plan what he'd do in his next life. Silly, wasn't it? Most as silly, maybe, as plannin' what you'll do in this life. We guyed him a lot about the idea, but he was strong for it.

"You wait," he says to us about a hun-

dred times, "until after I'm dead. Some day you'll need me, and then I'll come back and show you."

I think the reason he rooted so hard for this here reincarnation was on account of Ivy Waverley. He figured, I guess, that him and her hadn't had a fair chance, and that the only way they'd ever get one was by startin' all over again. Of course it wasn't their fault they never met each other until after they was both married, and if they had been a lot of people it wouldn't have stopped 'em for more than a minute at the outside. But, like all good sports, they was so narrow-minded that all they could see was to play the game out, and that's what they done.

One day in the summer, Harvey told me, they met and figured out just where they stood, and after that nobody ever seen 'em together again. Once in a long while she'd come out to a game and sit in a field-box down back of third, and she'd seem to be lookin' at every fellow on the team except old Tex. And him out there spittin' on his hands and hittin' home-runs over the fence—hittin' 'em just for her, you know, like another fellow 'd wave his cap to his girl if he seen her in the stand—but never once lookin' her way.

And once, in the winter, Tex and I went to New York to see "The Skyrocket" when she was starrin' in it, and it ran three hundred nights on Broadway. We sat in a stage-box, but if Tex ever give one look at her or her at him, they done it while I was winkin'. But did she play to him? Oh, boy!

I don't know whatever became of Ivy Waverley after Harvey died. Richmond was her home, and she was there at the time, but she didn't come to his funeral, and I seen in the paper where she'd had a baby only the day before. I kind of forgot her, I guess, for I was feelin' bad about Tex bein' dead, and then about the team bein' broke up all of a sudden, and finally about findin' out that the clubs there was left in the League was able to get along without me on their payroll. And now, whenever anybody says anything about the old Bluebirds, them same feelin's come back and make me grouchy.

So when Mack says if he had a short-stop he'd have a team as good as the Bluebirds, I says to him: "Yes," I says, "and if you had a team like that, they'd probably be lookin' for a manager to match up with them, and if they found him," I says, "where would you go to?"

There was plenty of ways he could of come back at me, but he didn't, so we laid off the repartee and started out to win that game.

I've seen some rotten ball-playin', but I never in my life lamped anything as bad as what Keegan pulled that day. He only stopped one grounder all afternoon, and that was the one he heaved ten feet over Jackson's head into the grand stand, and when he was up to the bat he missed the signs half the time, and the rest of the time he missed the ball.

"For the love of Mike," I says to Mack, "take that guy out of the game before he loses his last chance to die a natural death."

"Sure," says Mack. "And then who'll I send in? Johnson, on crutches? Or that little Radford you're so crazy over? Or maybe you're figurin' to play short yourself. You sure would cover a lot of ground," he says, "if you would lay down on it."

I didn't say nothin' back. You couldn't blame old Mack for bein' sore, and, besides, he owed me one for what I'd said before the game. So I set around and prayed for a lucky break.

It come, all right, only when I first seen it I didn't exactly call it lucky. It was in the seventh, with us one run behind and Keegan on second—where he'd got to by strikin' out on a wild pitch—and two out. Darragh lines a single to center long enough to have scored a elephant if he had of started at the crack of the bat, but this here poor dub of a Keegan forgets how many's out or something, for he holds his base till he sees where the ball's goin'. Even then he has a chance to make it, but Fraser cuts loose with a great throw, and Riley tags Keeg out just as he slides into the plate.

And as if that wasn't bad enough, Keeg gives a sort of a smothered choke and rolls over, and when they straighten him out, there they find my lucky break in the poor boob's left leg, just above the ankle.

It hurt him pretty bad, I guess, for in a minute he started to groan, and when they carried him off he hollered so everybody could hear him. But he didn't get much sympathy from Mack or me. We was both tryin' to think what we'd do for a short-stop. Then I turned back to the bench and seen this here little Radford throwin' a few to Anderson.

"I forgot you was alive," I says to him. "You act like you thought you was goin' to play short."

He give me a queer kind of a look, and so help me, he was the color of a new ball!

Our team started to take the field, and Mack nodded to him. "Go ahead," says Mack, cheerful as a ball-park in a snow-storm. "There's a rule says we've got to put nine men in the field, so I can't help it. Don't get in the way."

I'll bet the boys in the center-field bleachers could see that kid shake when he walked across the diamond. As long as I've lived in this world I've never seen anybody so scared. I had a vision of a parade of gray suits crossin' the home-plate, and a box-score showin' "Errors—Radford 8."

Jimmy Wendell was the first man up, and he started kiddin' like he always does.

"Hey, you little busher," he yells to Radford, first thing, "you better get out of the way. You can't hold the one I'm goin' to hit."

The kid didn't even spit in his glove. He stood there all out of position, like a man only half awake.

Wendell looked at two low ones, and then one come to him high and on the outside and he landed on it. He sent it sizzlin' down to short, and I give him a base hit the second it left his bat. A good short-stop might have got it, but this here poor little simp—well, he scoops her up and shoots her over to first while I'm still watchin' for her out in center.

"Hey, you big busher," he yells to Wendell. "You better go sit on the bench. Who told you you could hit?" And, "Come on, Paddy," he yells to old Bates, who he was afraid to say "Hello!" to in the clubhouse. "Put 'em over, and show up this bunch. They can't get nothin' past this infield."

I set there like a fool and stared at him. I swear he'd grown a foot. His face had changed so you wouldn't know him. All the lines in it had straightened out, as if they'd found out, all of a sudden, where they was goin'. His color had turned from quittin'-white to fightin'-red.

'Twasn't so much the change in his looks that got me goin', though—I've seen men before who looked different once they was under fire—but the easy way he dug up that grounder, and the lightnin' snap of his throw, and the aggravatin' nerve of him prancin' around on one foot and guyin' old Wendell, and every expression of his face and every motion of his body—each one of 'em sent me further up in the air, until finally I flew clear back over twenty years and come down and found I was in Richmond—back in old Richmond, with Tex Harvey playin' short in front of me just as sure as he ever played it in his life. Somewhere in my head I could hear his voice: "Wait till I'm dead. Some day you'll need me, and then I'll come back and—"

Just then Wilson fans for the third out, and the kid come walkin' into the bench, with the crowd, that always loves to see a youngster make good, givin' him a cheer that made the flagpole shake. Sure's you're born I was gettin' up to go out and meet him and give him the glad hand, when all of a sudden it come over me: Does he know he's Harvey, or don't he? And I looked and seen him laughin' and wavin' his cap to the crowd, just a happy kid, and I knew he didn't know.

In a minute old Mack was by me. "What's come to him?" he says. "He looks like a different man."

I seen Mack hadn't recognized him. That wasn't as queer as you'd think, though. Mack is a different kind of a guy from me. He's always thinkin' about what he's doin' now, instead of what he used to do once, or what he's goin' to do some time. I guess he's right. If I had of done that way, maybe I'd be a manager, too, instead of a Second Assistant Nobody. If a guy's dead, Mack ain't interested in him—his business is with live ones—and I don't believe he thought of old Tex more 'n once in a year. So I played up to him.

"I kind of think he looks like somebody I've seen before," I says.

"Sure he does," says Mack, just beginnin' to get it. "He looks like—like—say, Buck, he looks like old Tex Harvey!"

"You said it," I lets out, and then I starts in with the don't-you-remembers. Believe me, I had some speed, for I got the whole situation mapped out for him while we was walkin' out to the coachin' lines. He listened hard, and I thought I had him as excited as I was, but when I got done he spit and says: "Ah, your gran'mother! Are you supposed to be coachin' on first or tellin' fairy stories?" So I had to beat it over to first.

Willis was up first, hittin' for Bates, whose battin' average ain't much more 'n a rumor. He singled to left. Then Kelly and Sullivan popped out, but Darragh walked and McCullagh singled to the infield.

Of course the crowd was crazy, standin' up and wavin' their arms, and yellin' for a homer, like they always do when a single is all you need, and when they seen young Radford comin' up with a bat pretty near as big as he was, they went crazier than ever and hollered: "You can do it, kid!" as if he had of been Ty Cobb.

The way he swung his stick, and the way he stood up to the plate showed he was votin' with the majority and believed he *could* do it. I'll bet the players, and maybe some of them rummies in the press-box, was the only people in sight who had a suspicion that maybe he couldn't.

He was too green, or something, to look around for orders, and the funny thing was Mack never offered to give him none. From that I figured Mack hadn't really no more doubts than I had about who it was that had crowded himself into the line-up. Nobody ever would of dreamed of tellin' Tex Harvey how to hit.

"There's only one thing left for him to do," I thought to myself, and I hadn't any more than thought it when he done it. He landed on the first ball and cracked it on a line over first. It hit the fence a foot from the top and caromed off down toward the gate. Wendell was lucky to get it back in time to hold him on third.

He might as well have let him go home, though. That wallop put us two runs to the good and give us back our confidence, and in their half of the ninth they went out one-two-three.

I was crazy to get Mack alone, but he sneaked off some place, and it wasn't until next morning that we got together. I come out to the ball park early, and he was in the clubhouse.

"Well," he says to me first thing, "how's 'Grimm's Fairy Tales,' or is it the 'Arabian Nights'?' Seen any more ghosts since yesterday?"

"What I seen yesterday I was strong for, and I'm just as strong for it to-day—I come back at him. Tex Harvey," I says, "told us if we needed him after he was dead, he'd come back. He always done what he said he'd do, and—he *has* come back, that's all."

Mack looked at me a minute, and then he says: "Lewis, you sure are an easy mark. I ain't denyin' this kid did look like Harvey, once he got out there and got started. It give me an awful jolt, I'll admit, and for a while I was dopey enough to fall for the same fool stuff you're fallin' for. But Jack Coleman, that developed this boy, is over at the Colonial, and I seen him last night, and what he told me cleared the whole thing up.

"Seems this Radford's mother was an actress. Coleman knew her—that's how he come to take the kid. He says she was a dandy, once the show got started, but at rehearsals she was a dub—couldn't do a thing, and acted scared to death into the bargain. Her managers would nearly go crazy, thinkin' she'd be a frost, and then, on the openin' night, she'd jump in and put it all over everybody in sight. Just about what the kid done yesterday, if you notice.

"Well, her name on the stage was Ivy Waverley. Ever hear it before? She was married to a man named Radford. And this youngster was born in Richmond the day before Harvey's funeral."

He stopped and looked at me like he'd handed me a knock-out. I set there a little bit, and then it begun to come over me what he was drivin' at. And then I started gettin' mad.

"Looka here, Mack," I says, "you've got a great little idea there, but there's just one thing you've left out."

"Shoot it!" he says.

"You've left out Tex Harvey," I says. "You've forgot the kind of a guy he was. Nobody can make me believe he pulled off anything like what you mean. He was a regular fellow," I says, "and he didn't do such things."

And as much as we've talked about it since, we've never got any further than that.

Of course we've got used to seein' Radford show the way to all the short-stops in both leagues, and we've got wise to how he'll change, the second he gets into the game, from the original Yellow Kid with the frostbitten feet, into the gamest guy in the world, that ain't never licked, not even when he's beaten.

But sometimes, when I look up all of a sudden and see the livin' image of old Tex scoopin' a grounder or takin' a crack at a fast one, it's all I can do to keep from goin' up and mittin' him and askin' him what it was like out there where he was after he died.

And Mack keeps right on claimin' there's nothin' to it. His way of figurin' it, he says, is the only one worth talkin' about.

Just the same, I've heard there's guys with big league brains—guys that knows how to use their head for somethin' besides to stop an inshoot—that allows this here reincarnation stuff is the right dope, and are willin' to lay their bets on it up to the longest odds in the book.

Well, as I said to start, I guess most generally they don't never come back, but sometimes they do.



AFTER A DAY AND A YEAR

BY VIOLA BROTHERS SHORE

I MET you after a day and a year,
And you said: "Well, well, will you look who's here!"

*There was a day we walked through the park
Before the twilight was lost in the dark—
Dreams are made of the things you said that day,
And the things you did not have to say.*

And I said: "Winthrop! How've you been?
My saints and stars, but you're getting thin!"

*Once we wandered hand in hand
Along the edge of the sea-kissed sand—
Along the edge of the sand-kissed sea
Together into Arcady.*

And you said: "Well, upon my life!
Vi! I want you to meet my wife!"

*There was the day we said good-by,
With tears that life could never dry—
Our youth lay buried—our sun had set—
Love like ours could not forget.*

I met you after a day and a year,
And you said: "Well, well, will you look who's here!"

Four Quarts of Rubies

by H. Bedford-Jones

Author of "Rajah of Hell Island," "Malay Gold," "Nuala O'Malley," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

IT was in Singapore that Dave Perkins, American and broke, met Buck, another American, in a restaurant where Sultan Lumpur, of Kuala Gajah, attended by Candelario, a half-caste, was also lunching. Buck offered Dave a position as interpreter on an archeological expedition that he was joining, in spite of the fact that Dave could speak no language other than English. On their way to the ship they met Captain Fong T'sai, a Chinese friend of Buck's, and skipper of the ship that was to carry the party, the *Maria Buck*, named after Buck's wife, who had returned to the United States.

The scientific status of the members of the expedition was questionable, at least. It was made up of Traddle, a stout trader who was paying the bills; Kelpy, an Irish-Australian; Macfarlane, a Scotchman; Captain Marshall, an English remittance-man; and Findlay, an American. They had secured a permit from the Sultan to make excavations on his royal preserves on Hell Island, in the Godung River, and it was at the Sultan's request that Professor Graves and his niece, Leora, were allowed to join the party.

When they reached the river, Candelario tried to poison Professor Graves, and when his guilt was discovered jumped overboard and disappeared. They hired some natives to clear the under-bush. Dave fell into the room of a house of a buried city, and while there heard Traddle kill Macfarlane, who, before he died, accused the half-caste of being in league with the Sultan in a plot to rob the adventurers of the treasure they were seeking.

They were to look for four statues of Buddha, and after they found these Traddle came back to the ship and told the others that he had found Findlay dead. By this time Kelpy and Marshall were becoming suspicious of the stout trader.

CHAPTER VI.

SULTAN LUMPUR.

THAT same night, Kelpy came out flat-footed with the truth. Whether the death of Findlay had anything to do with it, I don't know; but Kelpy asked us all, except Fong T'sai, of course, down to the cabin, and there laid bare everything.

We sat around the big mahogany table, Buck and I and the Graveses, and Marshall. Fat Traddle was there, not looking very humorous, and Marshall sat and pawed his mustache and watched Miss Graves. Kelpy did most of the talking.

"We must be askin' your pardon, Professor Graves," said he, with his most en-

gaging smile. "You see, we're not archeologists, in the strict sense of the term.

"I thought as much," said Graves dryly. Kelpy gave him a cheerful grin.

"We thought ye did, maybe! Well, some time ago our late friend Findlay, may he rest in peace, heard about a treasure that had been found here on Hell Island. He got us together to come and pick it up. Findlay had got the tale from a sick native, and he was a little vague in places, but not on the important points. I'll now relate it to you!"

Treasure! I glanced at Buck, feeling pretty excited. But I felt a lot more excited when Kelpy told us what the native had told Findlay.

It seemed that the native had got lost in

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the ruined city. He had found four statues of Buddha, and one of those statues had a swastika carved on the base—the others did not. The one with the swastika had a hollow base with a room inside; it was gained by a loose stone in the back, and the native had found a tremendous lot of jewels there. He had carried off a few, leaving the rest, and before he died he gave one to Findlay.

Findlay had given it to Traddle as his share of the expenses, and as proof of his story. It was a ruby, and Traddle had sold it for five hundred pounds, which is five times as much in dollars.

"That, ladies and gentlemen, is why we're here," said Kelpy. "We had no intention of imposin' on you, Mr. Graves, but we were forced to cover up the motives of our expedition very carefully. By this time to-morrow night we hope to be at sea with the loot aboard; and so Captain Marshall and I agreed that it was only right to lay bare everything. Mr. Traddle agreed, too."

He gave Traddle a look, and I judged that Traddle had agreed because he was forced to. Kelpy and Marshall were not missionaries by a long shot, but they were not so bad as they might have been.

"Furthermore an' besides," went on Kelpy, with a smile at Miss Graves, "when we find the jewels to-morrow, we would be charmed to present our queen of beauty with her choice of the lot, in token of our high regard and esteem. I might add that we have decided to take care of Mr. Buck also, who has served us faithfully, and out of his share he may do what he desires for Mr. Perkins—who is not strictly our employee."

That looked mighty white, and Miss Graves said so. She made a beautiful speech and wished them all kinds of luck, and said that maybe she would take the smallest stone in the bunch just for a souvenir. Then Buck spoke up, with his wabby grin.

"Don't perspicutate your chickens before they're hatched, Kelpy," he said. "How d'you know that Findlay told you the truth about where the jewels are?"

That staggered them all for a minute. They had not thought about that.

"Oh, I say," spoke up Marshall, "don't be a blooming pessimist, Buck! Cheer-o!"

"Buck's right," I said. "Besides, you're forgotten something mighty important."

"What's that?" said Kelpy sharply.

"Did Findlay have any map or chart of the place?" I asked.

"No," said Kelpy, studying me. "There was none needed, of course—"

"All right, that cinches it!" I said, leaning back. "Yes, sir, that cinches it!"

Everybody was staring at me, and Kelpy, Traddle, and Marshall were the most disturbed men you ever saw.

"Here!" snapped Kelpy quickly. "What are you drivin' at anyway?"

"Why, the map!" I says, calm and confident. "Now, gentlemen, I've read considerable about treasure hunts and buried cities and so on; I've made a study of it, you might say, and it's always done the same way. Yes, sir! Everybody has to have a map to begin with, or a chart; and if there is none, then it stands to reason something's wrong. Now, if that Malay had only drawn a chart for Findlay—"

They all started to laugh, and pretty soon they roared.

"All right," I said, getting up and going to the door. "If you think it's a joke, just you wait! I mean it."

That started them laughing again, and I went up on deck, feeling angry.

I went over to the rail and filled my pipe. Just as I was lighting it I heard a step behind me, and looked over my shoulder to see Traddle coming. I dropped my hand to my coat-pocket in a hurry, but he stopped and looked at me.

"Perkins," he said, "I believe you have brains! Did Findlay ever mention a map to you?"

Of course he had not, but I did not like Traddle, so I thought I would worry him.

"I've got nothing to say about it one way or the other," I returned, watching him pretty close. "Maybe I should not have butted in that way, not being a member of this party. But you found Findlay's body—didn't you find the map?"

"No," said Traddle, before he thought. "There was none on him—that is, we didn't see any when we looked him over."

I was feeling rather angry at everything in general, and I turned on him.

"Look here, Traddle," I said, "that's enough from you. Believe me, I've got your number, and you'd better be careful! You murdered poor Macfarlane; I know it all right, and if I can get his body dug up I'll prove it! I judge that you murdered Findlay, too, and you were in cahoots with Candelario when he tried to poison us. Now you keep away from me, and from Miss Graves, too, or I'll make you pretty sick!"

Traddle was mightily astonished, but he was mad in a minute. As he stood there in the starlight I saw his big face get dark with blood, and his fat hands began to shake. Then he gave a swift glance around and saw that there was nobody in sight aft, and he took a quick step toward me.

"Quit it!" I said, shoving my automatic toward him. He was so surprised that he jumped about a foot. Then he shook his head.

"Poor young man!" he said in a solemn voice. "Still suffering from delusions!"

"You'll suffer from something worse than that if you come around me any more," I said.

He turned around and beat it. I felt mighty thankful that Buck had given me that gun, because old Traddle had been all ready to jump me. However, I thought I had better not say anything about it even to Buck, so I kept quiet. I could see that Buck was worried about Miss Graves, though I did not know why, and I did not want to add to his troubles just then.

That night Kelpy had paid off the Malays and had sent them home, because he did not want them around when the jewels were brought out. So the next morning we were all up bright and early and Fong T'sai put the boat with the engine out for us, and we all piled in, even Miss Graves and her uncle. He and I were able to walk all right by this time.

I judged that Buck had maybe told Fong T'sai about the jewels, and that Fong knew Kelpy did not trust him; because, as we went toward the island, Fong T'sai stood on the schooner's rail and watched us with a faint, stony smile on his face.

We landed, and started off through the

jungle by one of the tunnels which the Malays had cut in the trees and vines. All of us except Miss Graves had hatchets or axes. After we had struggled along quite a spell, Kelpy, who was ahead, turned and waved his hand.

"Here's the statue!" he said to Miss Graves. "If you'll wait here with your uncle, we'll scatter around and locate the others. We must find the one with the swastika."

Well, that statue was certainly a wonder! It was bigger than any statue I had ever seen; Buck, who paced off the shadow that came down among the tree shadows, said it was forty-five feet high. I judged he was lying pretty free, because a body could not tell anything by the length of a shadow; but the statue was a big one. It was a seated figure, with no particular outline except the head, away up among the trees, and the head must have been ten or twelve feet in diameter.

There was something majestic and grand and solemn about that big stone figure, sitting there with its head up in the tree-tops; and its face had the most peaceful look of repose you ever saw.

"Just think," I said to Miss Graves, "he's been sitting there a thousand years or so, and has hardly seen a human being in all that time! I bet he has mighty little respect for humans, if he could only say so."

She looked at me, a sparkle in her blue eyes.

"That's a good thought," she said quietly. "You're rather a surprising person!"

"Why? Because I have good thoughts?"

She reddened a little. "Of course not, silly! Because—"

Just then everybody called me all at once—they had been calling me, only I had not heard them—and I had to get busy.

That statue faced south, so we struck straight north to find the opposite one. All of us, except Professor Graves, who was busy with the statue, fell to work and chopped out a passage through the jungle. Here it was not such hard going as the rest had been, and we figured that there must have been a plaza here in the old days, for there was nothing but plain stone paving underfoot, and no buildings.

In half an hour we reached another statue. This one was lying on its back in the jungle, and Marshall climbed up to its base, only to find that there was no swastika on this one either.

So we went half-way between the two statues and headed east. We knew about how far we had to go, and sure enough in another half-hour or less we sighted the third statue ahead, up among the trees like the first had been. Kelpy was in the lead when we got up to it, and he slid in through the trees around the base, and let out a wild yell.

"Here it is, lads!" he yipped, and we came around to where he was. We could see right away that this statue was different from the others, because the base was all carved up something scrumptious, and right in the center, about as high as my head, was a big swastika, which was very conspicuous.

At that, we all rushed around to the back and began hacking away the jungle there. I guess all of us were pretty well excited, but Traddle was not so excited that he overlooked a good bet; because I was working at one corner of the statue all by myself, when suddenly something streaked out from the trees and missed me by two inches and was gone again in the jungle. It was a knife, and it had meant business.

I jerked out my automatic and fired it into the trees where the knife had come from. There was a wild yell and a minute later Traddle appeared in a hurry. Everybody wanted to know what was up; so did he.

"What's the matter with you?" he roared at me.

"Nothing," I said. "You pretty near hit me with that knife, that's all."

"It got jerked out of my hand," he said.

"That bullet got jerked out of my hand," I returned. "And you look out or there'll be another—"

"Shut up," snapped Kelpy, wiping off the sweat from his brow. "You two fools, keep quiet! Perkins, put that cursed gun away—first thing you know you'll kill somebody!"

"Well," I said, "I'd be better suited that way than having some one kill me."

He told me to shut up again, but I saw

him look at Marshall, and knew that they were getting old Traddle sized up pretty well by this time. Buck tipped me a wink, and seemed mighty relieved. There was no more said, and we all got to work again.

Professor Graves and Miss Graves came along, having heard the shooting, just as we got the back side of the statue cleared away. Then, I can tell you, there was some excitement! Right in front of us, and about eight feet up, we could see a big stone set into the base of the statue—set pretty loose, too.

"That's it!" yelped Traddle. "Here, Kelpy, let me get on your shoulders—"

"Not me," said Kelpy, grinning. "You're the one to stand under—you and Marshall. Here, Perkins! You're the lightest one. You get up and try to budge that stone."

"With us standing underneath?" said Traddle. "Not yet!"

However, I got up and tried the stone, and found that it would move a little. Professor Graves chipped in and said to wedge it over to one side, which I did with a couple of hatchets. A minute later we could move out the stone and there was a hole three feet square in the statue, and everybody was trying to reach it before the others. Kelpy got there first, so then we stood back and took turns getting up and crawling into the hole. Traddle pretty near got stuck going through, but he got inside finally.

It was a pretty sad business, taking it all around. Inside the statue's base was a room about eight feet square. Kelpy lighted it all up with an electric torch, and it was as empty as Jonah was when he got out of the whale. There was not a solitary thing in it! Not even a smell of a jewel. The ceiling was less than six feet high, so we had to stoop.

We did not stay very long, any of us. We had found the right place, and that was all the good it did us. Professor Graves and Leora were as disappointed as anybody when they heard about it, and Kelpy stayed inside longer than the rest, so that he could relieve his feelings without offending Miss Graves. Traddle swore right out, but Marshall turned on him and shut him up pretty curtly.

Well, we had brought a lunch-basket along, so we sat right down there and ate our lunch, and it was the unhappiest meal I'd eaten for a long while. But by the time we got to our pipes we were able to discuss the matter, which we did.

No one else had been here for years; the condition of the jungle proved that. So either that native must have lied to Findlay—only he had described everything right—or else Findlay must have lied to his partners.

"Findlay did not tell us everything, that's all," said Kelpy. "Mac thought as much all along. Poor old Mac! He had brains."

"And Findlay is dead," put in Marshall, giving Traddle an ugly look. "Beastly luck, I say. Beastly! Blooming queer how old Findlay came to trip on a vine, eh, what?"

Maybe Traddle judged that the talk was getting too personal, or maybe he really thought I had the map. Anyway, he pointed at me and diverted the conversation.

"Ask him!" he said, his fat face looking pretty mean. "What did he talk about a map for, last night, unless he knew? Stole the map from Findlay, the whelp did!"

Kelpy and Marshall looked at me, and they were disappointed enough to be suspicious. I saw right away that Traddle was out to make trouble for me, so I hit him first.

"Traddle," I said, "you confessed last night that you had searched Findlay's body. What did *you* do with the map?"

That was stretching the truth a little, but it served to get everybody mixed up, and I heard Buck chuckle to himself. He was the only amused one in the crowd. A good many things might have happened, but Miss Graves intervened.

"There's no use staying here, I think," she said coolly. "It's frightfully hot, and I don't believe it's very healthy. Uncle, let's go back to the boat!"

That gave me an opening, and I said I would go along. Kelpy and Marshall and Traddle wanted to stay and investigate more, but Buck came along with us, and we hit for the big stone dock and the boat.

Buck said that this was the way treasure hunts usually turned out, except in books, which was a dig at me. However, I didn't care what Buck said, because I was walking ahead with Leora, and we were talking about nothing in particular, but I felt mighty proud to have her holding my arm and to be protecting her against snakes and animals. I was just telling her about blue being my favorite color for eyes, when we came out on the edge of the stone wharf. And then we stopped dead.

For, out beside the Maria Buck, there was a second ship anchored—not so big, but gaudy and queer-shaped, with flags all over her. And about twenty feet away from us, where a boat had just put him ashore, was a little man who looked like a brown monkey, except for his red fez and his frock-coat and the diamond in his necktie. I knew him right away, too—it was Sultan Lumpur, himself! Behind him, as always, was Lim Perak, the body-guard, looking as ferocious as usual.

CHAPTER VII.

FINDLAY'S CHART.

BUCK says that first impressions are apt to be misleading in the right direction; which, after you get it straightened out, is pretty good sense.

Seeing Sultan Lumpur from a distance, and hearing about him, had not made me like him; but meeting him made me think maybe I had been wrong. I don't know much about the general run of Sultans, but Lumpur, in spite of his physical disadvantages, must have averaged pretty high. When he laid himself out to be agreeable he was as pleasant a man as you'd meet anywhere.

Leora introduced me, then Buck and Graves came along and Buck was introduced, and Sultan Lumpur stretched himself trying to be friendly. He had been educated in England and he spoke English just like Marshall's. There was nothing stand-off about him, either; he was democratic and about like any ordinary mortal.

He was quite concerned to hear about Graves's illness, and he took us to his boat

and had us rowed out to his ship. He showed no interest whatever in Kelpy's party, and of course we did not say anything about treasure or the things that had happened. The Sultan had just come from Singapore and was going to stop at his royal preserve for a while, on the way to Kuala Gajah.

We went aboard his barge, as he called it, and then I began to see that the books had told the truth after all. There was a big silk awning aft, and Lumpur got out cigars and cigarettes, and wine and lemonade and cakes, and had a royal party. In spite of his looks, he was no slouch as a Sultan, either. All his personal possessions were slathered with jewels, and we had solid-silver cups and gold-plated plates, and his cigar humidor was studded with rubies. I began to feel that I was moving in high society at last.

After we had talked for a while, and the Sultan had taken quite an interest in Buck and me, we saw Traddle and Marshall and Kelpy come down to the schooner's boat at the island wharf, and start out. The Sultan said to bring them aboard, so Buck hailed them and they came alongside. It was easy to see that they had discovered nothing, for they were hot and mad and tired.

They felt a little better after coming aboard and getting a couple of drinks. Sultan Lumpur did not bother them about archeology, but was quite polite. I could see that Marshall riled him up considerably. Marshall was one of those Englishmen who think a native is a native and should stay so, and he was barely polite to the Sultan, being stiff and haughty. Then the Sultan sent a boat to get Fong T'sai, which I thought was mighty handsome of him; but it made Marshall mad again, because he took Fong to be a common Chink.

However, Miss Graves gave Marshall a little talk on the side and straightened him out, and Fong T'sai came aboard, and we had a very pleasant afternoon. Then the Sultan said we made up a very cosmopolitan crowd and he enjoyed it, and he asked us all to stay aboard and go up to his royal preserve with him and make him a visit. He said there would be some shooting and a general good time — and he was right

about that, too, only not the way he meant it, maybe.

Well, Kelpy said he was a bit tired of archeologizing, and the others agreed that they needed a rest. I said I must get a clean shirt or two, which made the Sultan laugh, and Miss Graves wanted some more clothes, so we decided we would get our things and go along with the Sultan. Fong T'sai did not say anything, until the Sultan pressed him, then he bowed and said he would be charmed. So we got into a boat and went back to the Maria Buck.

I was feeling pretty good over being a Sultan's guest and hobnobbing with royalty that way, but I noticed that Fong T'sai and Buck kept quiet and looked anxious. Back on the schooner, I slung some things into a suit-case, and then I went into the stern cabin to find Buck. He was there and so was Fong T'sai, and so were the two Chinese mates of the schooner. Fong was talking to them.

Not wanting to disturb him, I went over to the table; and there was the same chart of Hell Island and the lagoon which Findlay had used, when he was talking with Candelario that day. I looked over the chart, and then suddenly I saw something down in one corner. It was a lot of squares, and the square in the center was heavy and black, like some one had been absent-mindedly using a pencil while he talked. Then I remembered that Findlay had had a pencil in his hand, that day. The truth came to me in a flash.

"Buck!" I said, excitedly. "Come here!"

Buck ambled over, and I showed him the markings and told him about Findlay.

"Listen here!" I said. "Do you remember that room inside the statue? It was made of square flagstones all around, wasn't it? Well, I bet you a dollar that this is the missing chart! Findlay had it on his mind and he scribbled it down here, knowing that no one would make anything of it! Those squares stand for the square stones in the floor, and that black one in the center is the one that comes up, and the jewels are buried underneath it!"

Buck looked at me and grinned.

"Son," he said, "your previsual percuity

is pretty good—but don't bank on it. If I had your imagination I would be a charlatan of industry! No use, Dave. Kelpy sounded that chamber for hollow places, and there was none."

"That don't prove anything," I shot back at him. "The center stone—"

"Was laid in cement like all the rest," broke in Buck. "Forget it, Dave!"

I shut up, but I did not forget it. Just then Fong T'sai opened up a big chest that he always kept locked, and inside I saw all kinds of revolvers and automatics, and he said something to the two Chink mates. Then he locked the chest and gave one of them the key.

"What's Fong got on his mind?" I asked Buck.

"Nothing much," said Buck. "Only we don't trust Sultan Lumpur very much. He's a slimy centralpede and he's got some game afoot."

"That's all talk," I said. "He told us himself about introducing law to the country and how there was not a thief in all his dominions and so forth. Remember? Well, I judge you've got excited from reading dime novels, Buck. This part of the country is just as tame as South Dakota."

"You've taken quite a shine to the Sultan, haven't you?" says Buck, sarcastically. "All right, son. Wait and see!"

I was thinking more about that chart than about the Sultan, however. It looked to me like I had struck the nail square on the head, but there was no use talking to Buck just then, so I kept quiet. There was no use telling Kelpy, either. I was not in his employ, and if I could locate those jewels on the side, that was his loss and my gain. So I said no more about it to anybody, but began to scheme how I could get to the island and do some exploring on my own hook. I had no chance for a while, though.

The afternoon was about two-thirds gone when we went back to the Sultan's barge, which had been laid alongside the schooner.

The Sultan told his Malay skipper to go ahead, and the barge put out long oars and began to row us into the river, while we waved good-by to Fong's Chinese crew.

As we went in toward the river, every-

body was settled around the Sultan, who was talking about Candelario, and saying that if he could locate the half-caste he would certainly hang him for trying to poison Graves. He was most emphatic about it, too.

Buck touched my arm and indicated the Sultan and Fong T'sai, who was big and silent and inscrutable.

"There are the best and worst of Asia, Dave," said Buck softly.

"Yes," I said, "and across the table Traddle and Miss Graves—the worst and best of America!"

"Right," and Buck laughed to himself. "You seem a lot interested in Miss Graves!"

"Never you mind—you're married!" I retorted, and he shut up.

On the way up the river Sultan Lumpur talked just like he was an ordinary person, and made himself agreeable. He did not try to hide that he was a Mohammedan, or that he had his own notions of enjoying life; he was quite frank about it, and did not put on any civilized airs either. We all liked him fine, and if Fong T'sai or Buck did not, they kept quiet.

We got up to the Malay village and the barge tied up at an ironwood wharf among the trees, a little farther on. The Sultan had sent a boat on up the river that morning, so at the wharf we found a whole reception committee. There were bullock carts fitted up pretty grand, and Malay soldiers with rifles and swords and gay silk robes, and a fat, little man who was the Sultan's steward. His name was Tock Gump. Then there were drummers and flute players and a crowd of ladies who did not believe in hiding their light under a bushel, as Buck said; they danced and the soldiers fired their guns, and everybody was happy because the Sultan had come home. I judged they must think a heap of him.

So the band started to work, and we got into the carts, and off we went. It was a gay and gaudy procession, with the women dancing on ahead and singing, and the band tootling, and the jungle all around us. But all of a sudden the jungle opened up, and we came into the open at the top of a hill to see the Sultan's palace down below.

It was close to sunset, and that palace, in the red sunset light, was the most beautiful place you ever saw! It was just like what I had read about, only more so. There we were, processioning along with a royal escort, when that palace burst upon us! As I have said, the Sultan had built it out of an old temple, and it had the same queer architecture that the ruined city had, full of curlicues and fancy work.

Off to one side was a regular little town, where the Sultan's lady friends and soldiers lived. The palace itself was the main thing. The whole front was gilded, and some of the roof, and we could see the shimmer of glass windows and a hothouse, which made it real up to date. The building was of stone, and mighty beautiful.

Out in front of the palace were paved terraces, two of them, very wide and with little pools of water running through them, and flowers growing in spots. Out beyond these there was a lake, perfectly round and maybe three hundred feet across. From the edge of this lake, on the side facing the palace, a narrow stone walk ran out almost to the center—but not quite. Just beyond the end of that walk, and separated from it by about two feet of water, there was a big bronze Buddha, with his base down under the water so that he seemed to be sitting right on the lily-pads that were scattered around. He reached about twenty feet high.

Buck was sitting next me. He leaned over.

"It's mighty pernicious that a Moham-medan Sultan should have a statue of Buddha in his front yard!" he said to me.

"It's got the greenish sheen of bronze," I said. "Maybe it's a relic that he found there and did not disturb."

Buck guessed that it was so, and we later found that I was dead right.

All around that lake there were gardens and trees—it was a mighty well kept place, to judge by the looks. Over beyond the lake was another building, not so ornate as the palace, and this was where the regular wives of the Sultan lived. Our driver was pleased when Buck talked Malay to him, and he explained everything; seemed quite proud of the place, too. He was just like

a hackman back in the States, explaining points of local interest to his fares. He would not say anything about the bronze Buddha in the lake, however, which seemed odd.

When we got to the palace, there were slathers of servants all bowing to the Sultan, and he welcomed us all with a flourish and a speech, but he welcomed Miss Graves particularly. That was only proper, she being the only female in our party. He gave her two pretty Malay girls to wait on her, and we were all escorted to our rooms by brown men; Buck and I stuck together, because we preferred not to be separated.

The inside of that palace certainly laid over any work of fiction that I ever read. Some of it was Occidental and some of it was Oriental, and all of it had the Arabian Nights faded completely. There were gold pianos, and no end of rugs and such, and cut glass chandeliers, and electric lights, and marble columns, and more things than I can begin to tell about. When we got up-stairs to our rooms, we found them fitted with brass beds and wash-stands and everything as modern as you would find in San Francisco.

"This beats the books all hollow!" I said to Buck, when we had sent away the servants and had our bedroom to ourselves. "This Sultan has electric lights and a water-works, and I never saw *them* mentioned in any fiction-book about the Far East!"

"Yes," says Buck, looking out the window at the lake. "And there are crocodiles in that lake, Dave!"

"What of that?" I asked him.

"Darned if I know, but I conticulate they aren't family pets by a long shot!"

Getting washed up, I slid into a clean shirt and borrowed a fancy red necktie from Buck, and went on down-stairs, leaving him to primp.

It was a gorgeous place, right enough. I roamed around, enjoying things right and left; electric lights were blazing in every room by this time, and I discovered all sorts of queer places. There was a picture gallery, which was maybe all right for a picture gallery but would have been pretty shocking in a saloon; thinks I, this Sultan

is not afraid of the naked truth anyhow! Then there was a music-room, with all kinds of wonderful instruments in cases, and a library, and a gun-room filled with varieties of guns, and a court with a fountain playing around colored lights. I was not alone, because plenty of servants hung around, to keep me from stealing anything, I judge. After a while I came to a smoking-room, and Traddle was there. He looked just as fat and dirty as ever.

I was not going to back out because he was there, so I went up to the table and took a cigarette from an open box, and lighted it.

"Well, Traddle," I said, thinking to tease him, "you guys did not find anything in that statue, eh?"

He growled at me like a dog, with a few swear words sandwiched in.

"Mac said that the Sultan was after the loot, too," I went on, giving him a dig. "But I guess Mac was wrong about that. Any Sultan as rich as this one, wouldn't bother his head over a mess of jewels, would he?"

"You're too blanked smart!" said Traddle hoarsely. "These native Sultans are the worst loot-chasers you ever seen, young un! You needn't give me no more of your innocent ways, Perkins; I'm wise to you! And you'd better come across with that map before it's too late. You've got it, and you needn't lie about it."

I looked at him, feeling good over getting him worked up that way.

"Well," I says, "I wouldn't bother to lie to you anyhow, Traddle; you're too mangy. If you were as smart as you think you are, you would not have made so many mistakes. You murdered poor little Mac, who might have told us some informing things about this Sultan; then you got busy and murdered poor Findlay, who might have told you where the loot was; then you tried to murder me—and if you'd done it, you never would see the loot!"

"What!" His mouth opened and shut, like the mouth of a fish, and he stared at me. "What! Then you admit it? You've got the map?"

"Well," I says calmly, "I've got the only map Findlay left, or at least I know

what it said—and nobody else knows! Nobody else will ever see that map, either. If you make any more mistakes, you might just as well leave that treasure lying in the ruins, because it will never be found. So you'd better nurse me right along into good health, Traddle, if you ever hope to grow rich off me."

I said this, hoping it would take his mind off killing me. If I had known that any one else was around, I would never have said it, of course. Just as I got through, I saw Traddle's eyes leap from mine, and go over my shoulder at somebody else. I turned, and there was Sultan Lumpur not far behind me, his feet making no noise on the carpet. He was all togged up in evening clothes, and had a big jeweled decoration on his shirt front.

"Well, gentlemen!" he said with a snaky grin. "It's ripping fine to have you make yourselves at home—corking, I call it! I'd like to show you my trophy-room, if you would care to see a few heads before dinner—"

We talked about trophies the rest of the time, but all the same I knew that the Sultan had heard what I had said, and had tucked it away in his mind.

During dinner Buck told me that Candelario was on the place, and that the Sultan was keeping him hidden, thinking we would not know it. You can judge whether I enjoyed my dinner after *that!*

CHAPTER VIII.

GUESTS OF THE SULTAN.

THE Sultan did himself proud over the dinner. There must have been twenty courses, and several different kinds of wine with each course, and we ate off real gold plates. I know they were real because I nicked my plate with my fork to see.

After dinner we went out on the first big terrace. We had coffee there, and more drinks, and just as the full moon came up over the trees and the lake, a couple of native women appeared on the second terrace and danced for us, with a hidden orchestra. It was queer dancing, but pretty good at that.

By this time it was late, so Miss Graves and her uncle went to bed, and the Sultan proposed a poker game. Fong T'sai and Traddle and Kelpy joined in, so did Buck; but it was beneath Marshall's dignity to play with a Chink and a native, so he stayed out. I did not play either, but stuck around a little while then went to bed.

All this time I had no chance to talk with Buck. He came to the room long after midnight, and unloaded a bunch of money, so I judged that he had played his cards this time.

"Well?" I said. "What about Candelario? Where did you see him?"

Buck did not answer, but went to the window. There was a balcony running along the house outside, and Fong T'sai had the next room to ours. A minute later Buck turned out the lights, and I heard him say something at the window; and Fong T'sai came into the room that way.

We held a council of war, sitting there in the dark.

It seemed that, while we were arriving, Buck had caught a glimpse of Candelario's face at a window, watching us. There was no mistake about it, and there was no mistake about the half-caste being here with the full knowledge and consent of Sultan Lumpur, either.

"Then Candelario is working with the Sultan, just as you said all along," I stated. "But who are they working against?"

"That's what we can't perfigure," returned Buck.

"Yes, we can," came the cool, steady voice of Fong T'sai out of the darkness. "We've been terribly blind not to have seen it from the first!"

"All right," said Buck. "Pelucidize the aerosis, Fong."

Fong T'sai lighted a match and held it to the little pipe he always carried. In the darkness the flame illumined his big, strong face, with its cruelly curving nose and its chiseled outlines; and thinks I to myself, I'd sooner have old Fong at my back than any one else I know! His face alone gave me a comfortable feeling of security.

"It is terribly simple," said Fong slowly. "As we suspected, Candelario is working hand in glove with the Sultan. Remember,

Lumpur is a wise old man and has plenty of spies to serve him. He doubtless knew from the start that Kelpy had a treasure-hunt planned. This dog of a Candelario was instrumental in what followed.

"Remember, gentlemen, the things that happened at Singapore before we sailed! Through the wiles of Candelario, Professor Graves came aboard us—with Miss Graves. Why did not the Sultan take them on his own barge, as his guests? Because he dared not. He knew that the authorities would give Graves a warning."

"But," I broke in, "you said back at Singapore that the Sultan hated Americans?"

"Exactly," said Fong T'sai gravely. "For some time the Sultan has set his heart upon adding a white woman to his harem—a white woman who is not an out-cast of the treaty ports. If he brought the Graveses up here himself, he would be responsible for them. If they came with our party we would be responsible should they disappear!"

That struck me all of a heap. I could not believe it at first.

"I think you have the Sultan figured wrong," I said desperately. "Why, Fong, it just can't be true! The Sultan is a good old sport—"

"My dear Mr. Perkins," said Fong T'sai coolly, "in this country anything can be true. Two men of our party have already been murdered; you have seen how plausibly these murders were covered up, how little stir their deaths occasioned! If Professor Graves died and Miss Graves disappeared, even if every man of us perished, the Sultan could produce witnesses and lies and evidence which would absolve him utterly from any wrong-doing. And remember, the British would not dare search his harem! They would not dare investigate this palace, even, without indisputable proof. And would they ever get such proof? No. They might suspect, but they have suspected Lumpur of many things, and he laughs at them."

"Lord!" exclaimed Buck, drawing in his breath sharply. "I suspected some of our own gang had designs—but the Sultan himself! I guess I was blind."

It made me feel cold up my spine to hear Buck talk that way, as though he believed Fong's theory to be quite true. I could not help believing it myself. Now I knew what Buck had meant about "treasure dead and alive."

"We must face the facts," said Fong T'sai calmly. "It was not until to-night that I fully realized just what was going on. Now let me set forth the situation, and do you correct me if I am wrong."

So he started in, first with the treasure part of it. Kelpy and Marshall were at present baffled by not finding the jewels; they more than suspected Traddle, now, of having killed Mac and Findlay, and they were up a stump. Traddle was baffled too, but he suspected me of knowing the secret of the jewels.

"And so I do, Captain Fong!" I broke in, and told him about Findlay's tracings.

Fong dismissed my theory just as Buck had done; because Kelpy had gone all over the floor and walls of the room in the statue. There were no loose stones, and there were no hollow stones; the room was tight as a drum, and that ended it.

"To conclude, so far as the treasure is concerned," went on Fong, having shut me up, "the Sultan is as anxious as any one to get the loot. Kelpy and his friends do not know that Candelario was an agent of the Sultan; but because Kelpy was nearly poisoned, they will shoot Candelario on sight. So will I, for that matter. But mark the reflex! Candelario is here under Lumpur's protection—and Lumpur is capable of killing us all."

There was another facer, because we could see that it was true.

"Miss Graves is in no immediate danger," pursued Fong, "but her uncle is certainly marked for death. I shall warn him to-morrow, and I shall charge myself with his safety. I am not sure whether Traddle designs anything against Miss Graves; he is an unspeakably dirty rascal, and would stoop to anything. However, Traddle does not know that the Sultan is interested either in the jewels or in Miss Graves. But Candelario has doubtless warned the Sultan against me—because I was particularly invited here. Now let us consider it all."

The affair was more or less involved, certainly, although Fong T'sai had straightened it out to some extent. When I told about meeting Traddle before dinner, and the Sultan overhearing what I had said, Fong and Buck were a heap interested. They agreed, however, that this put me out of any danger, because Traddle and the Sultan would both think that I knew where the jewels were, and they would not kill me until I had told. This was not so comforting as it might have been. They had a cold-blooded way of talking about folks being killed, which I did not relish very much.

We decided that there was nothing to do for the present, except to wait and see what might happen. Buck believed that there was a wireless somewhere on the premises, and we knew that the Sultan had one on his barge, so that Candelario could have kept him informed. That was all past and done with now, however.

Whichever one of us saw Graves first in the morning was to tip him off, and Fong was to arrange some action with him later on. So we let it go at that, for the present, and adjourned our meeting. We were not sure of Traddle or what he intended; in fact we were mighty wobbly about him, and wanted to find out what was on his mind if we could. It was bad enough in the Sultan wanting to force Miss Graves to marry him—that was about the limit; but Traddle was so low down he might do anything, and he was not even gentlemanly like Lumpur.

The next morning before breakfast there was a blowout for fair, and it showed things up pretty well. Fong T'sai, as it happened, had gone out looking for Graves, and had come to the first terrace above the lake. He found Traddle there, all alone. Buck and I, who were getting dressed, saw the whole thing from our windows, and Fong later told us what passed.

Fong T'sai would have gone on, but Traddle stopped him. Now, like the rest of his crowd, Traddle thought that Fong was just an ordinary Chink from the Straits settlements, and would be up to any deviltry.

So, seeing that there was nobody else around, Traddle up and tells Fong T'sai that he knows where the jewels are, but he

does not want them particularly; all he wants is Miss Graves. He tells Fong that he needs the schooner to get away in, and offers to give Fong T'sai all the jewels if Fong will help him get off with Miss Graves.

Fong looks at him steady for a minute, then asks what about his partners.

"Oh," says Traddle, with a dirty grin, "I should worry about *them!* Let them stay here, if they like it. When we get away with the girl—"

Just at that point Fong T'sai lit into him. I never saw a fight to beat it, either. Traddle had all kinds of sand, and I judge he had all his guns on him, but Fong never bothered going after a gun. He just stood there and began to whale Traddle with his fists.

He landed about six times before Traddle woke up to what was going on, and by that time old Traddle was reeling and cursing like the bum he was. Fong doubled him up with a solar plexus blow, and Traddle jerked out his armpit gun. Just as he fired, Fong hit him again and knocked him flat, so the bullet went up in the air.

Fong took the gun from him and hit him as he got up, but Traddle jumped away and started to fight with his fists. He was no slouch, either, but he was up against a human whirlwind. Fong T'sai had a kick in both fists, and in about ten seconds backed Traddle down on the next terrace and with a few more blows had Traddle at the edge of the lake. Traddle stood there, his fat face all red and purple, and hollered for help. He put his hands down and quit fighting altogether.

At that, Fong T'sai turned away from him in contempt. But I saw Traddle's hand slip into his pocket, and I remembered that queer little gun with four barrels. So I let out a yell through the window, and Fong turned just as Traddle fired. Then Traddle fired a second shot, but Fong T'sai did not seem to be touched. He walked right up to Traddle and gave him one awful blow that lifted fat old Traddle off his feet and sent him head first into the lake.

By that time, of course, there was a crowd gathered, including the Sultan and all the rest of us; even Buck had rushed for the scene, though I stayed at the win-

dow. Some of the Sultan's men grabbed Traddle out of the water just in time to get him out of the way of a monstrous big crocodile. Traddle lay there unconscious.

Fong told everybody exactly what had happened. Miss Graves was not on the spot, so he kept back nothing. The Sultan wanted to hang Traddle immediately, but Fong says: "No, send him down to my schooner in irons and I'll take care of *him.*" The Sultan said all right, and gave the orders. His fat steward, Tock Gump, called some of the soldiers; they tied Traddle hand and foot and carted him off.

Thinks I, that finishes Traddle and all his fine schemes!

I hurried down to the terrace, and found everybody agreeing to tell Miss Graves that Traddle was sick and had gone to the schooner, which was to spare her feelings. She had seen the fight from her window, however, so that scheme fell through, and the Sultan cooked up another story which she believed. Fong T'sai had a bullet hole in his left arm, but it had not touched the bone and had done no harm to mention. He was mighty thankful for that yell I had given him, and said he would repay me some day. He did, too!

I think I have already said that the Sultan had taken quite a shine to me. While we were at breakfast, the steward presented me with a big tray, by the Sultan's orders; and on the tray was a complete outfit of native clothes. And they were grand, I tell you! All was of the finest silk. The vest and sash were embroidered, the sarong and trousers were bright red and yellow like a Spanish flag, and all over the vest were little dangling gold crescents that tinkled when I walked. Then there was a gorgeous sword with a blade like a flame—a kris, it was—and it was all inlaid with gold and silver.

The Sultan said he hoped I would honor him by wearing the costume. Of course, I had to go to our room and change, and everybody made all kinds of fun of me. Buck and Fong came along and helped me into it.

"Hunting party this morning," said Fong T'sai. "Lumpur is trying to make us all forget the disagreeable incident, I imagine."

"Traddle is the one to want to forget," said Buck, grinning. "I emisculate why he sent Dave this outfit, though! Does it look right to you, Fong?"

"It looks mighty grand to me," I said, looking at myself in the mirror.

"Sure," said Buck. "The suit is all right—but why did the Sultan give it to you?"

"Why, to honor me, of course! I'll leave it to Fong if that wasn't the reason!"

Fong T'sai smiled his queer, inscrutable smile, as though he was waiting for something to impress itself on us. He motioned toward my automatic, which was lying on the bed.

"You'd better not go around without that implement, Mr. Perkins," he said quietly. "And would you mind letting me have a look at that kris? It is a real beauty."

I gave him the kris, and then picked up the automatic. But there was no place to stow it, unless I stuck it in the sash; that way it was mighty unhandy, and would show to every one. There was not even a pants pocket. I began to think that looking like a gaudy humming bird might be fine and grand, but had its drawbacks. Then I saw Buck looking at Fong T'sai with a glimmer of admiration.

"Fong," says he, "how did you guess it?"

I was puzzled, of course. Then I saw that if I wore this outfit, like I had to, I could not possibly carry my automatic.

"What!" I broke out. "Do you mean that he gave me this so's I would not be armed?"

"Exactly," said Fong T'sai, with a little nod. "And this kris—watch!"

He took that beautiful kris in his hands, gave it a little snap—and it broke in two!

"That is an old trick," said Fong T'sai. "A Dyak chief gives a man a kris like this, and then takes his head without any trouble at all. But I have something here that belonged to Mr. Traddle. It will blend excellently with your native dress, and no one will guess that you have it—"

He produced Traddle's armpit holster, with a small but powerful automatic, and put it on around my left shoulder. It fitted

snug, and was quite out of sight. He and Buck showed me how to use it. However, I did not feel exactly happy about the whole affair.

"Well," I said, "do you think he means to have me knifed or something?"

Fong said no, not at all. According to him, the Sultan was just taking precautions, because Kelpy had told him what a dead shot I was supposed to be, and the Sultan took a neat and smooth way of preventing me carrying a gun, as he thought. That cheered me up some, and we went back to the crowd down-stairs.

There was a heap of fun made of me, naturally. Miss Graves said if I was only dyed brown she would expect to get kidnaped or something, so I said that if I was brown she might certainly expect it; that made her blush considerably, and tickled the Sultan.

We went hunting and had a grand time. Whether he was at meals or anywhere, the Sultan always had that bodyguard, Lim Perak, standing behind him; and on this occasion Lim was gun-bearer. We went into the woods a piece, and natives drove different animals past us, and we shot whatever we had a mind to. I said I did not care to shoot, having hurt my shoulder when I got buried under the stones and dirt on the island; so I got out of showing my ability.

But Miss Graves was a wonder with the rifle! She and the Sultan, between them, did the best work. Captain Marshall had been drinking and was unsteady, and he was mad at the way the Sultan laid over him. Kelpy enjoyed himself a lot, though, and so did all of us. They shot deer and two panthers and some birds and a jackal and other things that I did not recognize. We had lunch out there in the woods, and came back when it got too hot for comfort.

On the way back we passed the place where the soldiers and servants and lady friends of the Sultan lived; not the harem, which was a separate building, but the little town. We stopped there a while, so that the Sultan could execute justice on one of the soldiers who had knifed another man. The Sultan ordered him hanged, and they took him off. Then the party went on home, all except me and Buck.

Buck stayed to flirt with a brown lady who had made eyes at him, and I stayed to look after Buck, and that was one time old Buck certainly got us into trouble!

CHAPTER IX.

LEORA HEARS SOMETHING.

BUCK spoke Malay, which he had learned while he was managing a gold concession; he told me later just what was said.

It seems that while everybody was watching the Sultan execute justice, which he did with considerable pomp and enjoyment all around, Buck sauntered around a corner of the building and came pop on an open window with a girl sitting in it.

She was one of the Sultan's particular lady friends—not his regular wives, of which he had four, but the other kind—only Buck did not know that. So when she spoke to him, he did the same. Then I drifted along, and Buck introduced me. The girl slipped me a cigarette from a pile beside her on a brass stand, and out of politeness I smoked up while she and Buck conversed.

Her name was Kapit Ai Perang, which was Malay for one reason why men leave home. She was golden brown, with pink under it, and as pretty a girl as you'd ever want to see; there was considerable jewelry on her, and not much else to speak of, so that I felt sort of embarrassed. She did not mind herself a bit, however, and started in to make Buck feel right at home. I judged that Buck had made a big hit with her, for some queer reason.

Then she asked Buck if he had brought the Sultan's new white bride, and Buck quit his fooling right away and asked what she meant. Kapit Ai Perang waved her cigarette and laughed.

"Why," she says, "it is no secret that the white bride arrived yesterday! Was she not welcomed with music and dancing and flowers?"

"Oh!" said Buck. "I thought that was for the Sultan!"

"For both of them," said she. "An apartment is being made ready even now."

Well, of course that confirmed all Buck's suspicions; but that was not all of it. When the Sultan took his new white bride, his present favorite would be fed to the crocodiles in the lake; and Kapit Ai Perang was the present favorite, or the late one. So you can figure out for yourself just how much she wanted to see the Sultan marry Miss Graves.

As a matter of fact, the young lady was pretty desperate, with those crocodiles staring her in the face every day. Buck, he sympathized a heap with her, and he explained how matters were with us. She was right glad to hear that Leora had no notion of marrying the Sultan, and she was so grateful to Buck that she insisted on kissing his hand.

She did it, too; and just as she did it, along comes that fat Dyak, Tock Gump. When she saw him, Kapit Ai Perang made just one dive out of her seat and was gone. The steward had seen her kiss Buck's hand, so naturally he concluded that Buck and she had been kidding each other along on the road to ruin. I thought Tock Gump was going to start something, and slid my hand to the gun under my arm; but he only bowed and smiled and chattered to Buck.

That steward was a slimy devil, like his master. He told Buck that the rest of the company had gone on to the palace and he had come to escort us there. So Buck said all right and motioned me to come along. I thought it was all over, but I was wrong; it had not yet begun! It was a private matter, too.

When we got up to the palace, the steward apologized, mighty polite, and asked if we would step into the throne room. We stepped along, thinking little of it, and found Sultan Lumpur transacting some business. The room was a gorgeous big place, with soldiers lined up on the sides and the Sultan sitting in a high canopied seat made of gold. None of our crowd was there at all.

Tock Gump said something, and the Sultan ordered everybody out, even the soldiers. The only one left was the body-guard, Lim Perak, and he stood right behind the Sultan, watching us pretty close. Then Tock Gump told the Sultan about it.

Lumpur looked at us and grinned, friendly enough, and spoke in English.

"I am sorry you were troubled by the impertinence of my steward," he said, in the haw-haw fashion he had learned in England. "Of course, gentlemen, a guest is sacred and is welcome to whatever he may desire, and this bally rotter is hard to educate in such matters. I apologize very profusely, y' know."

"Don't mention it, Sultan," said Buck airily. "There was no harm, anyhow. The girl just passed the time of day with us, and was so obfuscated when she found that I spoke Malay, that she grabbed my hand and kissed it."

The Sultan's monkey-face grinned again.

"Exactly, old top," said he. "Of course, since she has been contaminated by contact with a foreigner, she will be disposed of. And that ends it."

"Hold on!" exclaimed Buck, pretty hasty. "What do you mean, contaminated? That is not very polite to us, is it?"

The Sultan had not looked at it that way, and Buck's argument disconcerted him. Of course he was mad down under his silky grin; these Malays are the worst you ever saw for not letting their lady friends so much as speak to another man. But Buck went after him strong, saying it was all his fault and Kapit Ai Perang should not be punished and so forth; until finally the Sultan seemed to agree with him.

"Very well, my friend," said Lumpur. "Of course we understand these things, but my subjects are a bit dense, haw, haw! 'Pon my word, old top, it is very trying at times. So have patience, and after two or three days, when she is properly adorned and made ready, Kapit Ai Perang shall be sent to you. A present—a small token of my favor, eh, what?"

Buck was stumped then, right enough!

Since there were two or three days of grace, and he did not want to offend the Sultan, Buck said all right, he would be charmed; and then we bowed and left the royal presence. I was rather curious to know what Buck aimed to do with the lady when he got her home, and what Mrs. Buck would say when he led her into the parlor; but Buck says to shut up—he was short

and curt about it, too! So I did not press the point.

I saw Leora that afternoon. It was tremendously hard to see anything of her around that palace, because Marshall and Kelpy were both very fond of her company, and the Sultan was already laying out a program of entertainments in her honor. However, I saw her for ten minutes without any interruption, and if it had not been for my seeing her, that way, there is no telling what might have happened to us all.

As it happened, I was in the up-stairs corridor, going to my own room. As I passed the door of the suite where Leora and her uncle were staying, the door popped open and out came Miss Graves. She shut the door and stood there, staring at me.

I could see right off that something was wrong. She was as white as a sheet, and was trembling and shaky, and stood looking at me as if she was paralyzed; her breast heaved up and down, and there was the most terrible look in her blue eyes that I had ever seen.

"Here!" I broke out. "What's the matter?"

She jumped. Then she called me by my name for the first time.

"Dave!" she whispered. "Help—help me to get away from here! Where is uncle?"

"I don't know," I said. "Probably around somewhere. But what—"

"Listen! I've just heard—heard the most terrible things!" She broke off and closed her eyes for a moment, then looked at me again. I saw by her eyes that she was horribly frightened, yet underneath it she was cool enough. No hysterics or anything like that.

"What do you mean?" I asked. "About Buck and the lady?"

She shook her head. "About—me! I—I wanted some water and—you know the house telephone that's in all the rooms? I took it off the hook and pressed the button for the steward's connection—and right away I heard two men talking. One was the Sultan, and the other was—"

"Candelario!" I exclaimed. Her eyes widened.

"How did you know?"

"Well," I says, "I know a lot of things. Go on! What did they say?"

"They were talking Spanish," she went on, growing a little calmer, "and I understand it pretty well—they were talking about me, Dave! Oh, I can't tell you—"

I knew right then that she had uncovered the Sultan's game, and I was glad of it. Buck and I had been worried about who was going to tell her, and how she would take it.

"Well," I broke in, "don't try, Leora—I mean Miss Graves. I know all about that, too. We found out for certain about an hour ago, and I guess Buck is trying to find your uncle and Fong T'sai right now—"

"There's no time to lose!" she exclaimed, fear in her eyes again. "It—it's horrible! Dave, I've simply got to get away from here to-night!"

I thought it over, quick and sudden. I did not see much sense in lingering around the premises, myself; I was still in that Malay costume, which I had come to like pretty well by this time, and as long as I wore it, they would think me unarmed and helpless. It looked to me as if I had better take action myself and let Fong T'sai and Buck trail along.

"All right," I said to Miss Graves. "Now, it's about three o'clock and I judge the Sultan is taking his siesta. He laid out the program that way this morning—said he always took a nap from about two thirty to three thirty or four. He was on the phone from his room when you got in on the wire, likely."

"Yes," she said, watching me. "Go on!"

"You've got to act quick and sudden—catch 'em by surprise," I said. "All we want is to get aboard the schooner; we're safe there. You've got to make a stall that you want to see the Malay village down by the river, see? Once we get that far—"

"But no one speaks English except the Sultan!" she broke in. "How can I talk to them?"

"Well," I said, "you leave that to me. We'll find a way, somehow. Get your hat and come along!"

Most girls, I reckon, would have asked a lot of questions and hemmed and hawed

about what was proper and conventional, and all that; but not Leora. No, sir! She opened that door and ducked inside, and in two seconds she was back again with a straw hat in her hand.

"Go ahead," she said.

So I did. What was mainly in my head was to pick up Kelpy and Fong and the rest on our way, but nobody seemed in their rooms as we passed, and we went on down-stairs. Whether we found the others or not, I meant to get Leora safe aboard the schooner without wasting any time. But I did want to collect the rest of our party.

As we got down-stairs, I remembered something, and it made me feel sick. On the way in from the hunt, just before Buck and I had paid our visit to Kapit Ai Perang, I had heard Professor Graves and Kelpy talking to the Sultan about visiting his model plantations, which lay a couple of miles off to the north of the palace, away from the river. So I judged that they had all gone there, and I was right. Fong had gone too, he being interested in such things because he had a big rubber plantation of his own, somewhere near Singapore. The only one who had not gone was Buck, and we met him just as we came out on the terraces and started toward the soldiers' quarters to rustle up a bullock cart.

Lordy, but I was glad to see old Buck drifting around there! He came up to us, and I gave him no chance for any argument, but told him quickly what Leora had heard over the wire and where she was going.

"Now, Buck," I says, "none of your talk! She's going down to the schooner, and she's going this minute, and you've got to work it with the Malays yonder. Get her over to the river settlement, and it'll be a cinch to lay out a boat and run down the river—"

"Sure," said Buck, sarcastically. "I'll not interfere with your program, Dave; it looks pretty sensible to me. But what about Graves and Fong T'sai? They'll not know what has taken place, and the Sultan will sure permiscerate them out of revenge!"

"All right," I said, giving him a shove forward. "You talk Malay, so you get Miss Graves down to the schooner, somehow! I'll come over to the stables and

wave good-by, like I expected you back in a few minutes, then I'll find Fong, and tip him off. Leave that to me! And, Buck—if anything happens that you can't make the ship, run over to Hell Island and hide in that treasure chamber, and take a look at the central stone. Maybe there's a hidden spring that releases it."

"You talk as if we had a motor-launch," said Buck, laughing. "Come along, Miss Graves! We'll commigulate these Malays and get a bullock cart."

I was more or less worked up and earnest about it, but Buck took the whole thing like it was a joke, and I was mighty proud of the way he conducted himself. On the way over to the stables, he chatted and laughed and joked with Miss Graves, but I noticed that there was nothing loose about his voice or his words now. He had tightened up considerably.

Well, when we got to the other buildings, out came the steward, Tock Gump. He and Buck conversed for a minute, and I judged the Sultan had given orders that Miss Graves was to have anything she wanted, because Tock Gump called out a bullock cart in a hurry, and six of the soldiers with it. Buck protested at that, and said that he would sooner have the company of Tock Gump than that of the soldiers, which flattered the fat steward and made him suspect nothing. So the soldiers stayed home, and Tock Gump climbed into the cart.

"Watch out for him," I said to Buck. "They'll obey him down at the village."

"By the time we get there," said Buck, looking a little desperate, "Tock Gump will be somewhere else, son. Good-by—and good luck!"

Leora said she thought it was fine and grand in me to stay behind to warn her uncle, and although she tried to be perfectly natural so Tock Gump would not suspect anything, her eyes were misty. So they got into the cart and we all waved our hands and laughed, like it was nothing important, and off they went.

I watched them out of sight. I tell you, it made me feel blue to see them going that way, while I stayed behind to get old Fong out of it! Of course, I was anxious about Graves, but not in the same way.

Not knowing what else to do, I started back to the palace. All of a sudden something struck me as mighty queer—the steward, Tock Gump, being about the place! He had been sent to the schooner that morning with Traddle; when had he returned, and why had we heard nothing more about what he had done with Traddle? It did not look right to me. The more I thought about it, the more worried I got.

At the palace, there was no one to whom I could talk, because the Sultan was not yet on the job, and he was the only one who spoke English. Without a guide, it would be foolish for me to chase off into the jungle trying to find the rest of the crowd; so I got my pipe and went out on the upper terrace and took a chair.

From there I had a good view of everything on the location. The harem, over across the lake, was enjoying some kind of a hen party, because I could hear music and song; but to the eye it was dead and deserted. I was just thinking about it and wishing I could have a peep at what was going on inside, to see if the books told the truth about such things, when I saw a man riding away from the stables and barracks. He was on horseback, but I recognized him right off, and it was Candelario.

Some of the soldiers stopped him, then I saw him turn his horse and come toward me, by himself. Other soldiers were slouching over toward the palace, behind me, but I was mainly paying attention to Candelario; his coming out in the open, that way, looked bad. However, he did not seem to be armed. He rode his pony right out on the second terrace, a few feet below me, and waved his hand to me as he came along. He was grinning, and the gold rings were shaking in his ears as he jogged along.

"Hello, *señor!*" he called, his voice mocking. Then he reined up, close to me. "Well, I understand that you, and you alone, know where the treasure is to be found! Congratulations, my caballero! Come, tell me the secret and we shall share it!"

I told him where he could go, and I said a few more things as well, hoping that he would start something so that I could pull my gun on him. He got furious enough,

for a minute, then he laughed and rolled a cigarette, his dirty eyes fastened on me. When he had lighted it, he blew out a thin cloud of smoke and picked up his reins.

"Lucky for you, my son," he said silkily, "your life has been ordered spared—for the present. Later, perhaps, we shall talk of these things. *Adieu, señor!* I go to bring back the charming *señorita*—and to leave the foolish Mr. Buck in the river!"

He waved his hand, laughed and shook his earrings, and rode away. I did not try to stop him, because he was in no hurry and evidently suspected nothing at all of Buck's real errand; he probably thought he would find Leora looking over the Malay village, and Buck interpreting for her. As Buck was sure to be gone by the time he got there, I let him go.

There was no longer any doubt that Leora had got away just in the nick of time. Some of the soldiers came down from the

palace gates, where they were lounging, and looked me over, pointing at the haft of my broken kris and laughing. I took out the kris, and when they saw it was broken, they laughed some more. I started for the palace, but they would not let me leave the terrace, although they were respectful enough. Then they loafed back toward the gates again.

It was plain enough. I was supposed not to have any weapons, and it was quite manifest that I had none—only they did not look under my armpit, for that was a new wrinkle to them. I was to be kept here, so I could not get a gun. But why? What had happened?

A moment later I knew. From the Malay quarters came a burst of sharp, yelping shouts, then I heard the drumming hoofs of a galloping horse, and turned around quickly to see Kelpy riding like the devil for the palace.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the conclusion of this story without waiting a month.

Such a Nice Man

by

Thane Miller Jones



DAN MACDONALD'S desk-telephone rang sharply.

That mild-faced lawyer hurriedly concluded a sentence to the stenographer at his elbow as he reached for the receiver.

"Yes?"

"Hurry right in, will you, Dan?"

The voice was altogether too calm.

"Oh, you back, McQuillin? Yes, yes."

Macdonald's ruddy face had gone white. He sprang from his swivel-chair and almost ran to the door, swiftly directing as he did so: "No carbon copy, Miss Simpson; it's just a tentative draft," and hurried down the corridor.

His partner's voice. The dead coldness of it! It sounded like sheer disaster. And such a disaster spelt ruin for them both!

He sought hard to control his panic as he entered Joe McQuillin's rooms.

The big, handsome man at whose side he had fought through many a legal battle, sat dejectedly at his desk, his broad shoulders hunched forward. As Macdonald entered, he raised a gray face and drew in his breath quiveringly. Mechanically he reached for his brier pipe and stuffed tobacco into the bowl. Macdonald's heart throbbed in dumb sympathy at the sturdy fight for non-chalance. "Well, Joe?"

"Yes! Drysdale has gone!"

"Gone—actually gone?" gasped Macdonald, sinking into a chair.

"He never even went up to Michigan at all! He went—I don't know where."

The two lawyers numbed with apprehension. It was so big a calamity that for the moment its realization—chilled into grim knowledge now that there was no longer uncertainty—stupefied them like a crushing physical blow. Joe McQuillin puffed at the cold pipe he had forgotten to light. Macdonald's plump face puckered itself into lines of savage irony. He gritted sarcastically:

"So J. Rankin Drysdale, of the law firm of Macdonald, McQuillin and Drysdale, has severed his connection with the firm, without the usual prosy formalities; and his silver tongue will no more—cajole—hereabouts! Nice, gentlemanly sort of fellow, that partner of ours! True as steel!"

The bitter, ironical twist of speech exhibited a familiar mannerism—the habit of years. His partner understood him as though he had snarled a curse.

"Yes, it's as bad as that!" agreed McQuillin despairingly. He sucked miserably at his pipe. The stamina had oozed out of him. And in the presence of the man who had known him in his hours of strength, the virulent prosecuting attorney felt a grim luxury in taking the count without even a pretense of stolidity.

"I'm—I'm flabbergasted, Dan! Lord! this is frightful!"

Macdonald got up hurriedly without answering and went to a window. He turned slowly as McQuillin muttered:

"I suppose you realize that—that we're completely done for."

It was an assertion, but there was a pitiful question—was there *any* hope—in the low voice.

Macdonald whistled tunelessly, but said nothing. He was a mild, commonplace looking man with scant, colorless hair and a querulous trick of raised eyebrows. His remarkably successful career would have proved a disconcerting problem to the phrenologist. Yet there was a noticeable breadth between his deep, blue eyes. The ironical keenness of his mind had served as a check on McQuillin's impulsive Irish pugnacity.

The two made a law-court combination that usually left dazed opponents trying to explain to irate clients. Upon a signal victory Macdonald's comment was: The good old firm did manage to blunder through somehow.

"Yet I wonder," he now queried mildly, "if we've got to the bottom of our genial partner's—borrowings—"

"Borrowings!" stormed McQuillin, clenching his big fists helplessly. "Dan, say what you mean—for once! He's stolen over seventy thousand dollars of our clients' money—that's what he's done! And we're personally responsible for every cent of it! We simply can't make it up—can't begin to make it up!"

Discovering the pipe in his hand he impatiently flung it on the desk, and, regretfully profane, he stormed on:

"Here we've been working along together, Dan, these twelve years; side by side, bumping along against mighty heavy opposition. The name of Macdonald and McQuillin meant something when that damned shyster Drysdale came. Some imp of mischief put it into my head to attend that meeting of the American Bar Association six years ago. I heard Drysdale speak in one of the committees. Man, man, but he could talk! Smart as a steel trap! He hypnotized me. I suggested that he come on to Springfield—come in with us! That was the big mistake!"

"Oh, well, now," soothed Macdonald, "you shouldn't—"

"And you said something at the time that should have warned me. You said, you remember: 'So good a man needs no

past.' I didn't get you then. You did not want to chill my enthusiasm, but—"

"He looked pretty good to me, too, in some ways."

"And when we set him on former District Attorney Robinson in the Meagher murder trial, he carried us both off our feet—the same as he did the whole court. But—but even then we should have kept him merely on salary—like the others. Our rules would then have required a bond from him. But we took him right into the firm—or, rather, I did—and thus invited him to take our financial life into his keeping. Trusted him with the firm's signature and a partner's power to act so that each member of the firm is bound. Oh, I thought a man *could* trust his partner!"

"He can!" said Macdonald stubbornly, his eyes glinting; "if that partner's a man like—like big Joe McQuillin, and not a pirate!"

"I might have known two years ago," accused McQuillin, "when I used to get hints of his gambling tendencies—knocking about with that fast Bixby crowd. Damn it, I get to think a man's a man because I've asked him to trust *me*."

McQuillin sat restlessly pounding his fist on the corner of his desk.

Macdonald admitted slowly: "I had a disquieting hunch at the time of nomination for district attorney last year, Joe, that Drysdale's being thrust aside for you rankled in that gentleman's manly bosom. He is not the less merry now in the thought that this little *coup* of his will prove—er—embarrassing to you."

McQuillin's face sagged, heavy with anger. "The devilishness of it, Dan!" he snarled. "I'll dig him out of his hole, wherever he is. I'll—I'll—"

"No!" proposed Macdonald. "Let me see what *I* can do. In the mean time we must keep the thing under cover. We'll try to trace him, too, through your friend, Mason's agencies. Have our Mr. N. Brown check up everything, see exactly how far the thing has gone."

"Yes, yes. We'll do all that; but what can *you* do?" McQuillin's face was without hope. "He's spent the greater part of the money by now, no doubt. And if we arrest

him or try to extradite him from some outlandish place, he'll pull us into it with him. He'll swear we're all in—deep. So in any case it's the ruin of us as a reputable law firm. Even if our mealy-mouthed protestations of being victimized would convince some, still—they'd pass us up—as suckers."

A clerk entered, extending a card.

McQuillin glanced swiftly at it.

"Miss M. V. Allen!" he gasped uneasily. "Now what! I hope her securities are intact!"

"I didn't know that Drysdale had charge of those securities!" broke in the other, startled.

"Yes. Like a fool I—our N. Brown was rushed to death with those expropriation cases, and I asked him to send in these matters to Drysdale's department."

"Interesting!" murmured Macdonald sardonically.

Miss Allen was courteously received as befitted a rich client. She sat primly on the extreme edge of a deep-cushioned chair and, disregarding its invitation to ease, announced:

"I find that Mr. Drysdale is absent!"

"Ah, yes; he—"

"And I thought it best to consult—to bring this letter to you, Mr. McQuillin. I can't understand it!"

McQuillin reached out a polite hand. His heart was thumping. *What next?*

"I never authorized that letter," complained Miss Allen.

Macdonald had reached the door when McQuillin's voice stopped him.

"Just a moment, Mr. Macdonald. Er—allow me to"—he glanced at the lady—"to make you acquainted with Miss Allen."

Macdonald had shut the door carefully and had come back into the room. He bowed. McQuillin explained:

"Miss Allen is a daughter of the late Senator—"

"Yes."

"This letter is from our firm to a Mr. T. E. Harley. It is dated the 20th of April. We invested some thirty-two thousand dollars of Miss Allen's funds in a mortgage from Harley—"

"Yes."

McQuillin was puzzled at his partner's

pretense of ignorance. He pondered a moment, then went on:

"The letter runs:

"DEAR SIR:

"Your mortgage to Miss M. V. Allen is, as you know, overdue, and we are now instructed to require a payment on account of the same of at least twenty thousand dollars by the tenth of May next. Otherwise foreclosure proceedings will be commenced.

"Trusting that we may not be forced to take this extreme measure to protect our client's interests.

"Yours very truly,

"MACDONALD, MCQUILLIN AND DRYSDALE,
"Per J. R. DRYSDALE."

Macdonald stifled an exclamation, then sat in grim silence.

"Mr. Harley came to me this morning," explained Miss Allen to the two lawyers, who sat intently listening, "and asked me not to press him further on the mortgage. He said that he had relied on my former assurance to him that so long as I got the interest promptly I would not compel him for a while to withdraw his funds from his business. I assured him that I had not instructed the firm to ask for payment, and that he might rest easy."

As expression of intense relief had laxed the mobile features of Joe McQuillin as the lady explained, he glanced at his partner, who nodded briefly.

"There must have been some mistake," excused McQuillin. "We have another client, a Miss Margaret Allen—a niece of Mr. Allen of the Consolidated Electric—and possibly our Mr. N. Brown, who handed these securities over to Mr. Drysdale, did not make it—er—clear to—"

The lady nodded. "Poor Mr. Harley had the greatest difficulty in raising the first payment of twenty thousand—"

"Raising the twenty thousand—"

"Yes—that this letter asked for. He should have come to me then."

"Do I understand you, Miss Allen, to say that Harley raised twenty thousand?" McQuillin spoke with difficulty, as though a hand were clutching at his throat.

"Why, yes, Mr. McQuillin! He paid it in to Mr. Drysdale."

"Oh! Ah! Exactly!"

"And it was when he made this payment

that Mr. Drysdale told him he would have to have the balance in ten days."

"Humph—pardon me—I see," said McQuillin.

The lady glanced curiously at the lawyer, then asked:

"This twenty thousand dollars is still, I presume, uninvested—unless you have—"

"Just so," broke in McQuillin. "I'll send for the papers in the matter, and we'll see how it stands." He touched a bell. "We are extremely sorry that this mistake should have—"

"Just one moment, Mr. McQuillin," interrupted Macdonald swiftly. "I was about to see our Mr. N. Brown on the—the Irving matter, and I will personally ask him to bring the papers. He has the keys of the security boxes."

He hurried out without waiting for a reply. Encountering a clerk at the door he dismissed him with a word. Presently he returned, empty-handed.

"Mr. Brown is at the equity court. Will return at about three thirty," he apologized. "Will you wait, Miss Allen? Or I might suggest that the matter—er—stand as it is until Mr. Drysdale's return. He will have some satisfactory explanation, presumably. In the mean time we will at once write Harley, assuring him that he need have no further uneasiness."

"W-e-ll, per-h-aps that would be as well," hesitated the lady. "Mr. Drysdale is—well, such a nice man! I cannot think that he has done this thing oppressively—without reason."

"Oh, he had the very best of reasons. I have no doubt of that," jibed Macdonald bitterly. "It will indeed be most humiliating to him to realize that he has caused unnecessary distress."

McQuillin stole a warning frown at his ironic partner.

"Indeed!" sighed the spinster, happily confirmed in her personal estimate of the dashing Drysdale. She just knew that a cozy talk with Rankin Drysdale would make everything right. These prosy men knew very little about their own office affairs, it would seem. She was sure that Mr. Drysdale was much cleverer, anyway. One felt such confidence in him.

As the door closed upon their fair client, Macdonald put his back against it, the set look of studied professional decorum vanished from his tense face, and he burst into a sort of hysterical giggle.

"It cannot be said, with any degree of exact truth, that our esteemed associate is a piker!" he snickered bitterly. "And how ardently he wanted that other twelve thousand—just to make it an even hundred! But he found it inadvisable to tarry." His face twisted into a rather pitiful grin. "My eloquent friend has a very taking disposition. Still, much as I admire him, I for one did not wish to assume criminal as well as civil liability for him."

"How do you mean?"

"Supposing you had got those papers, looked them over, noticed some penciled memo of the receipt of the twenty thousand and admitted its receipt by the firm—which you would have then been forced to do to save our face—wouldn't that have linked us up actually with the money instead of as now only legally—as partners?"

McQuillin nodded slowly. "I'm—I'm not used to walking over thin ice with the men I trust," he excused. "Thank you, old man. *You* kept your head."

"Everything else is gone, though," sighed Macdonald. "Professional reputation—'safe as a church'—oh, hell! It'll be a scorcher!" McQuillin nodded dejectedly. "Dan, I'm about ready to—to cave in! I can't stand the gaff!"

He stopped by a window, and when he turned his face was set in hard lines of resolve. Men's first impulses in crises are much the same. The fineness of a man's stamina lies in the texture of his second thought.

"We'll stick by the wreck till—till hell freezes over!" he gritted.

"That's the way to talk, man!" exclaimed Macdonald. "Let's put on our workin' clo's and jump right in. Business as usual. And, till we see, keep the thing under cover. Ascertain the exact extent of the silver-lipped Drysdale's expropriations. Might have to test the securities, send our check statements—"

"Oh, yes! All that—after the horse has been stolen."

McQuillin was suffering a slight relapse from his sturdy resolve. Well, who wouldn't? Joe McQuillin was neither a quitter nor a coward; but a glimpse of his home and all that it meant to him had rushed across his vision. It is unselfishness, not conscience, that doth make cowards of us all.

Macdonald stood squinting moodily at the other's renewed dejection; then, shrugging his shoulders, he walked slowly to the door. There, however he paused, balanced uncertainly, then coming swiftly back, placed an unaccustomed hand on McQuillin's arm. It was an awkward personal caress. Deeply ashamed, manlike, in the act, yet he gritted his teeth and pulled off the rest of the movie stunt, his heart beating oddly. "Buck up, old horse! Dan Macdonald and Joe McQuillin have been through *some* before this came. We've got our health. We're young, and we can work like wildcats. We can pay this thing up in three, or four, or five years—if we can finance it somehow in the mean time. I've got about nine thousand and—"

"Couldn't get the money without security," reminded McQuillin, with the calmness of absolute unbelief.

"Difficult, I know. Might, somehow, though! We'll promise ourselves now, for all time, anyhow, that we'll climb onto the water-wagon against intoxicating partners!"

McQuillin glanced admiringly into his old friend's face. Here was a man! And he had been hard hit, too.

"What about your brother at college?" sighed McQuillin sympathetically.

"He can come home from college!" snapped the other, and went out, slamming the door.

II.

NEAR the end of a busy afternoon in the criminal court McQuillin trudged wearily back to his offices, and sought out his partner.

Macdonald was talking, pleasantly, to Arnold, the drafting expert of the firm.

"And locked up by a charming yet chilly testamentary oversight."

Macdonald paused and lit a cigarette. Arnold, red as a poppy, broke in hurriedly:

"I will—perhaps I'd better consider this—and prepare another draft—"

As the crestfallen attorney hurried out, chidden but grateful, Macdonald turned nonchalantly to his partner.

"Well?"

"Oh, the court? A good day enough, but—"

"No 'buts,' Joe, till the big splash!"

A clerk knocked.

"Mr. McCracken, of McCracken, Hines and Risinger wishes to see you, Mr. McQuillin."

"Tell him to come on in here."

Mr. McCracken appeared in the doorway, smirking his perpetual smirk. He was a little, squat, oily lawyer, with a hard mouth and a harder eye. He grudged McQuillin's force and Macdonald's restraint, and despised them both for their rectitude. Deep down in his soul he envied them this quality, and deeper still he hated himself for his envy. He was a brilliant shyster.

"Mr. Drysdale is away, I learn."

"Yes, McCracken."

"Ah! That matter of the pulp limits in Michigan—"

"Yes, our Mr. Drysdale went up to look into the matter."

"Oh, no! He started, but just before he got off I met his offer for an option."

"Wha-at!"

"Oh, didn't he tell you? Yes; I paid him five thousand dollars to bind the bargain."

McQuillin flinched; then swiftly:

"At what figure?"

"Seven hundred and fifty thousand."

McQuillin and Macdonald were past mere gasping. They felt like aloof spectators, queerly unconcerned with their own doom.

"Oh! And do you happen to have the—the option with you?"

"Sure! I brought it over to close the deal."

McQuillin scanned it. "Our client, Colonel Manning, had previously, I believe, been holding out for seven hundred and sixty-five thousand."

McQuillin paused and glanced dully at his partner, who grinned sardonically.

"I know that!" smirked McCracken. "And in fact Drysdale told me several times that Colonel Manning would not take a cent less. At last he told me that he was being sent up there to get a first-hand opinion. But that same afternoon—it was the last Tuesday week—Drysdale came to me and stated that the colonel had changed his mind—I don't know why—and so we closed the deal."

McQuillin blinked. "Yes. Well, there was some other business that Drysdale had to attend to, it seems."

McCracken smirked with unusual gusto. His little eyes snapped at some hidden jest. "When can you have Colonel Manning's conveyance ready, gentlemen?"

"Perhaps we'd better wait till—till Mr. Drysdale comes back," suggested Macdonald. "He's in personal touch with the affairs, and it's in his department. I personally don't know very much about it."

"Nor I," said McQuillin, remembering the Harley mortgage.

"Well, all right—for the time," hesitated McCracken, "but my clients wish to have the papers in such form that they may use them with their bankers as collateral—"

McCracken left his sentence unfinished, pursed his thick lips, smirked and started to go out. He paused at the door and scrutinized the two men covertly. "The colonel climbed down mighty sudden! Drysdale acted as though he had instructions to get the ready money as soon as possible. Perhaps the colonel needs it. Drysdale wanted a deposit of ten thousand, but I thought five would cover the possible damages for a month's option. You'd better get in touch with the colonel, or I will!"

"The matter will naturally receive our immediate and foremost attention," snapped Macdonald.

McCracken smirked an oily farewell and retired.

McQuillin sank into a chair and stared heavily at his partner. Macdonald turned to his desk and, snatching up a pen, calculated whimsically:

"Let's see; I made about fifty-five dollars to-day. How much did you make, old top?" gaily. He grinned banteringly at his partner, daring him to be glum.

"Why—oh, I don't know. Why? About a hundred, I s'pose."

"Then let's see now," suggested Macdonald. "Here's a sum for your boy Bob! He's ten, isn't he? Good! If one lawyer earns one hundred per day and the other fifty-five; then if they both work like hell for three years and have luck, by what amount will they fall short of making up the sum of—what's the whole thing come to?"

"What's the use!" growled McQuillin. His boy, Bob! His partner had inadvertently touched him on the very quick of his despair.

Macdonald took his cigarette from the little tray at his elbow, relit it carefully, ejected a soothing cloud of smoke from the depths of sentient being and essayed a bit of song.

"*'When you come to the end of the perfect day—'*"

A phonographic flattening of the high notes rasped McQuillin's frayed nerves beyond endurance.

"Stop it! For God's sake, man, I—"

"Why, certainly. Yet music can express subtler feelings than mere words—which sometimes seem inadequate." Then, persistently: "That makes—let's see: ninety thousand, plus five, plus what we've got to make up to Colonel Manning to meet his minimum price, say, fifteen thousand, equals the charming sum of one hundred and ten thousand. Oh, frabjous day! Cal—"

"Go to blazes!" said McQuillin.

III.

FORTY-THREE hours later Macdonald set out on foot from a hotel in Woodsville, New Hampshire. The Drysdale homestead was, he had been credibly informed, about a mile right along that road; can't miss it; a big, red-brick house, settin' down in a hollow.

Five minutes later he found himself glibly explaining his presence to the father and mother of his former partner.

"Came up here on business," he said, glancing keenly at the pale, bearded face of Drysdale, senior; "and before I left, your son"—he turned and smiled genially at the tired New England mother who sat listening

with a sort of wistful eagerness to her son's law-partner from the city—"he asked me to call and see his mother and father—and his little sister"—glancing with concealed pity at a delicate child of fourteen who lay stretched upon a couch in the shabbily clean living-room—"and—"

"Rankie has been away from Springfield since—when was it, John?" asked the tired little woman of her husband.

"Nearly two weeks, I think," said the father. "He wrote your sister, Nora, from San Francisco—"

"Ah, yes!" swiftly interposed Macdonald. "We had been planning this trip of mine for—for some time."

"And Rankie spoke in the letter of going to—what was the name of the place in South America, John?"

"Uraqua," hazarded the father.

"Ah! Uruguay?" suggested Macdonald with sinking heart. Now that he had a hint, he put into his question something of the force of a statement. It wouldn't do to show ignorance of such an important trip!

"Yes, Mr. Macdonald. On some very important business matter—"

"Of a very delicate and personal nature!" sneered the lawyer.

"It's—it's nice that Rankie is getting along so well with you—these years!"

Uruguay!

"Yes! Oh, splendid! He has done so much for us!" He had!

Probably no extradition from that place.

"I'm so glad!" sighed the little woman. "Uncle George"—to an old, unkempt, shabbily dressed man who had slouched into the room—"Mr. Macdonald, of Rankie's law firm, you know."

The old gentleman put out a bony hand.

"How long has he been with you, Mr. Macdonald?"

"Some six years, sir."

"Humph!" grunted the old man, glancing sharply at the lawyer, with an enigmatical grimace.

"Well!" mused Macdonald, his eye despairingly upon the faded rugs, the carefully darned window-curtains through which the sun softly caressed the wan little girl's transparent fingers. "There's nothing to

hope for here. Our silver-tongued friend has been here first! Judge Eastman told me the place was mortgaged to the cupola. It looks it!"

And there were spiritual mortgages here, too. On the mother's face he had been reading the settled look of astonished incredulity that her boy, her pride, had not—yet—fulfilled those whispered, sacred promises whose non-fulfillment left her wondering, wondering. There was, too, the money he had promised to send—oh, it was two years ago now—so that that expensive operation might be performed for the little sister, that would make her—God willing!—well and strong again, running about among the flowers, dancing up the path. Ah! The tears came. Her Puritan austerity scolded them back.

"He—my son—is doing quite well—pardon a mother's inquisitiveness!—quite well—with you, financially?"

Macdonald was fidgeting to get away from this house of hope deferred. It made his heart sick. The whole place spelled disappointed hopes, sacrifice at the futility of which devils gibed.

His own trouble—arising out of the same cause—obsessed him. A bitterness burned in his brain. Twenty years of decent living and hard-earned success crippled by the airy passing of a degenerate! As he reached for his hat and stick he answered with a veiled, characteristic bitterness: "Financially? Why, he's in a fair way to become rich!"

He went over and bent down to the little girl. "I—I hope you don't suff—that you are resting easily."

She put out a wan hand, and smiled. Her eyes were clear and candid like her mother's.

Mrs. Drysdale stole a searching glance at Macdonald's serious face. She seemed satisfied, and explained:

"An operation is necessary, the doctors say. Uncle George"—she paused a moment and looked over to where the two men were complainingly discussing the drought—"Uncle George says that to meddle with God's dispensations is—wicked and blasphemous! But then Uncle George is old-fashioned, queer. I wish he—"

She stopped and stood biting her twitching lips. The girl placed a white hand on her arm caressingly. "Never mind, mumsy! Don't bother! Things will come out right. I'm sure of it!"

The mother absently patted the girl's thin arm.

"Mr. Macdonald, I am going to ask you to—to find a good opportunity—when Rankie is not too busy—and tell him about his sister. He knows of course, but—but he's so busy, so ambitious. Men have to be—heedless—a little—don't you think?—self-centered to succeed?" What a special pleader is a mother when a son's honor is at stake! "But his heart is torn by all this—he has said so to me in such *beautiful* letters! I could show you—"

"I see," murmured Macdonald, chilled to the heart. "Of course!"

"So—won't you—you will—tactfully—explain?"

"I will explain—as soon as I have an opportunity!"

When he turned away from the couch his teeth were clenched and he fiercely blinked his eyelids.

"I'll be moving along now. How good it is to see Drysdale's folks! Little visits like these"—cheerily courteous—"well, they are like oases in the desert of professional—dryness!"

The father broke in heartily: "Can't you stay a day or two? Stay and go fishing!" He had not risen from his rheumatic chair. "Rankin used to enjoy these streams—"

"Why not, Mr. Macdonald?" joined in the mother. "Take pot-luck with us! Some one who had been near Rankie—"

But Macdonald, pleading pressure of business, bade them good-by. The old uncle trudged along the road with him.

"Great day, isn't it? Too fast for you, sir?"

"No!" said the old man, sturdily lengthening his stride.

The two moved along through the afternoon sunshine. The air was balmy. Birds sang. Nature was gracefully erect. There seemed no room for sense of wrong. And yet men—

Gone to Uruguay! The damned scoundrel! The actual knowledge was a decisive

and final adjudication on Macdonald's faint hopes that somehow—yet—some unexpected twist of whimsy event might bring all out—decent! A great laugh at a bad scare and— But Uruguay!

"The boy was somewhat of a—in fact—I shouldn't say this, Mr. Macdonald. An old man's scolding tongue—a deep disappointment to his folks! But it appears that during the six years he had been with you he has developed; got over his excesses—yes—mere excesses—and grown into a man; a man provident and honorable—"

Half-heartedly Macdonald listened to the old man's chatter. It was all of a piece. Wistful hopes. A fierce, tenacious wish to think well of the boy who had laid the family low.

"Oh? Honorable? Why, Mark Twain once described a character as possessing a hare-lip, a kind heart, and everybody said he was as true as steel! Well, Rankie hasn't the hare-lip—"

"Ah!" cackled his companion.

At the hotel Macdonald absently shook hands with the old farmer. He ascertained the address of the aunt of whom Mr. Drysdale had spoken. There was a slight chance.

He then had a long, hopeless interview with Judge Eastman, who, providentially persuaded him to spend the evening with him and take the early morning train for Concord. Well, there were plans to make before he played his last card. He would wait.

We have said providentially, for as Macdonald lit a cigarette and glanced at the morning paper in the smoker the next morning, he noted that the evening train had been wrecked; some vague details, two or three killed, many injured. "A man's in luck so long as he keeps alive!" he mused optimistically.

The aunt, Mrs. Colthurd, was a comely woman of forty. She folded her large, capable hands in her lap and listened quietly to the tale that Macdonald, after a minute's scrutiny of the woman's face, felt perfectly free to tell her. She nodded from time to time in sad understanding.

"Yes," said she, "I know. I know!"

"I—we are in desperate straits, Mrs.

Colthurd; I could not forego employing every means within my reach—"

"It is—dreadful! Have you told—you have not told the father and mother?"

"No."

"Then, why me?"

"Because—we lawyers can judge—" Then with a wince: "Yes, I know! But a partner is—a partner! We trust a partner!"

"I know," said the woman again. Then she sighed and explained:

"I have lent money to Rankie till he has—bled me white! I have paid for his youthful scrapes. I even lent him money to go to Springfield when you people took him up. I was so hopeful that he would do well there! He promised at any rate that I would not have to bother about the interest on the mortgage—"

"You mortgaged!"

"Yes. And I am a little doubtful if I shall be able to pay the interest money this summer. Still I may manage." She twisted her long, capable fingers about each other nervously. "I am well and strong. And I have a boy growing up who is going to help me all he can! Of course he was to have—"

"Gone to college!" snapped Macdonald with a scowl.

"Well, yes—dental school. But Rankie was the family's hope. He was—in our foolish hearts—we thought great things for Rankie."

Macdonald took up his hat and snarled into it:

"Rankie is that sort of chap to justify the sacrifice of many obscure lives in order that he—exist beautifully!"

"I beg your pardon. Oh, I see! You are ironic! Oh, well—"

The woman smiled; then sighed, and her eyes grew full of wistfulness. She looked at a large photograph of the hope of the house; it beamed out from its ornate frame on the old-fashioned center table—superb! "Such promise!" she sighed.

"Really, I do think yet that—"

"Oh, certainly. He is—er—a king among men! I really beg your pardon! Forgive me—I had not meant—" For the woman was crying.

He went out quickly, cursing beneath his breath.

He took the next train back to Woodsville, and wired non-progress to his partner. He ended laconically: "What's the score?"

IV.

GRIMLY, standing the gaff somehow, McQuillin maneuvered through the next four days. Twice he sent out frantic S. O. S. messages to his partner. What in the world was the man doing? Why was he loitering about in New Hampshire? His carefully worded messages brought back but vague responses. "Hold her down!" Hold her down! It was mighty hard work. It was a matter now of hours.

Tuesday morning at ten fifteen Macdonald suddenly appeared at the door of McQuillin's rooms and tossed his attorney's bag carelessly to one side. There was no greeting between the two. The soul is rawly awake in crises. The petty and non-essential go by default.

McQuillin tossed a letter to him. "Read that!" he grunted.

"Eh? When did you get this?"

"This morning."

"Well! Well! From our bold and wayward boy orator! Eh! Let's see—what's he say?" He studied the address again, then read slowly:

"En route for South America.

"MY DEAR EX-PARTNERS:

"You have, no doubt, by this time—by means of your unusually efficient bookkeeping system—debited me with some \$110,420.00. Against this I presume that your Mr. McQuillin will be glad to make a credit entry as follows: 'Compensation allowed Mr. Drysdale re giving way for McQuillin on nomination for district attorney, say, \$50,000.00.' Then, as to balance, the present heavy rates of exchange deter me from remitting this at present! In the mean time I feel that during the time I was with your firm, my services were worth far more than I received, and that the account is practically square!

"For your solace, I may say that I am in funds!

"A letter sent to Buenos Aires will be forwarded to me. Do write! Any agency business you have in this south country, you have but to command me!

"Yours sincerely,

"J. RANKIN DRYSDALE."

"The damned insolent pup!" stormed McQuillin.

The other silently reread the letter.

"Interesting! A very interesting letter!" he announced. "Have you answered it?"

"I'd like to answer it in person!" snarled McQuillin. "We'll extradite him—"

Macdonald grinned. "He'll land in some unextraditable country: trust him!" He sat silently tapping the letter on the desk. At length he arose.

"Tut, Joe!" he scolded. "Our correspondents should be treated with unflinching courtesy! And especially our foreign correspondents. This letter must be answered at once!"

He went over to the corner of the room, lifted a leather cover from a typewriter and found some letter-paper and carbon. He began clumsily to pick out the letters on the keyboard.

McQuillin eyed him disgustingly. What a curious make-up!

"For Lord's sake, Dan, if you're going to acknowledge that cursed letter, get one of the girls in and dictate it!"

Macdonald grinned whimsically. "I haven't done much at this for several years, I admit," he said, back-spacing to remedy a wrong letter; "but here is something I have headed: 'Private and Confidential—unless you wish otherwise,' and so I've got to dig the letters out myself."

McQuillin complained: "Well, then, why not a little later? This damn situation—I've held it down in a kind of way till this morning, but something's got to be done right off! I don't know how you do it, Dan!" as his partner continued to painfully indicate on the keyboard his preferences of spelling.

"You're a queer make-up!"

McQuillin returned to his desk, sat heavily down and passed a nervous hand over his forehead. How the temples throbbed! He knew Macdonald—he knew him well. But this—triviality, it puzzled him. Was the man as *big* as he had thought him? Wasn't he, after all, a sort of personified irony—a sneer. Nothing substantial behind it—no human feelings.

At length Macdonald ripped a second sheet from the machine and, gathering up

the papers, came over to McQuillin's desk, lit a cigarette and, taking up the letter, said:

"Want to hear this? A nice, chatty letter! You won't understand some of the details—I'll explain them later. However, you'll catch the gist of it:

"OUR DEAR MR. DRYSDALE:

"Your letter received this morning. We note with poignant regret that you have severed your connection with this firm, but hope that you will prosper in the south country and speedily attain to some position in a public institution there which your varied talents had already qualified you for here—had you remained!

"And now for some news, dear comrade. Our Mr. Macdonald had occasion recently to go up to New Hampshire, and while sojourning in your native State he visited your people. He saw your mother, whose hands were rough with household drudgery, which, had you but witnessed it, your filial heart would have been cruelly torn! Your father, crippled with rheumatism, your little sister fading, awaiting the money that would give her back her life through a simple though somewhat expensive operation; your aunt worrying over maturing interest which you had inadvertently omitted to send her. All this our Mr. Macdonald saw—and his heart bled for you, poor wanderer! Your Uncle George—a kind though uncouth old gentleman—is dead! He was killed in a train-wreck last week on his way home from a brief visit at your father's. Our Mr. Macdonald had an opportunity of conversing with him only a few hours before he was killed. He was an interesting old gentleman; rather eccentric, and with strong notions. Shortly after our Mr. Macdonald parted with him at the hotel, your uncle went to his solicitor, Judge Eastman, and executed a new will! The former one had given his surprisingly large estate, some \$122,000.00 in readily convertible bonds, to certain rather eccentric charities. But somehow—and our Mr. Macdonald does not quite comprehend yet—your uncle gathered from our Mr. Macdonald's remarks that you had now acquired certain admirable qualities formerly conspicuously absent! Our Mr. Macdonald admits a tendency in himself to be ironical—at times—and it may be that your uncle did not quite catch the veiled pathos of his remarks! The upshot of it all is, anyhow, that it served to shift the current of his testamentary intentions, and he left the whole estate to you—"

"Good Heavens! Is that true? Then we can—" burst in McQuillin.

"We have!" remarked Macdonald calmly. "Listen to the sweet tidings:

"Therefore you need not fret over the heavy rates of exchange, for, the will having been duly probated, with Judge Eastman as executor, we

have filed an attaching order against your fortunate legacy for the amount of \$110,420.00, which your letter this morning admits to be due us! So this will very nearly square our account."

"Dan!" shouted McQuillin, grasping his partner's hand in an excess of jubilation. "Why, we're saved! You're a wonder! You—"

"Listen, Joe," interposed Macdonald, "the worst is yet to come!

"We have, however, in addition to the above, included in the attaching order against your legacy the following items, paid by us at your *implied* request, namely:

Money paid to hospital in Boston to cover expenses operation <i>re</i> your sister	\$800.00
Money paid your father for treatment at Hot Springs	700.00
Money paid your mother to employ scullery maid, <i>et cetera</i>	500.00
Money paid, being balance of principal and interest on homestead	4,327.00
Money paid, being balance of principal and interest on your aunt's property....	2,244.00
	<hr/>
	\$8,571.00

"These items are, as we say, paid by us at your implied request. From our happy intimacy with you, we felt that were you on the spot the money would have been so employed! We have taken the occasion to witness the gratitude and tender love which is singing in the hearts of your folks over your loving care. They have enthroned you in their souls as indeed their king! The hope of the homestead! Our Mr. Macdonald is visualizing your warm gratitude when you learn of his brotherly act on our part. Oh, that's all right. Don't mention it. We know that you would do the same by us! *What is life, anyhow, without loyalty to one's friends?* There there! Spare our blushes!

"If for any reason—which we find it difficult to think—you feel disposed to contest the legality of these payments, you have only to return to the United States to fight the same, and in that event we can assure you of a *warm welcome!*

"As you assure us that you are in funds, it will be agreeable to you to know that Judge Eastman—calculating to a nicety—figures that there will remain—after all payments are made and commissions and expenses are deducted—some thirty-five or forty dollars—the balance of your splendid legacy. We congratulate you again on the remarkable outcome of our Mr. Macdonald's chat with your late uncle. It has saved you several perfectly good dollars—by way of exchange! And these little things are so annoying! Yours, with equal sincerity,

"MACDONALD AND MCQUILLIN."

The Clean-Up

by Captain Dingle

Author of "The Pirate Woman," "The Coolie Ship," "Steward of the Westward," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

THROUGH the medium of a fight in a saki-shop on the Japanese island of Kyushu and Lynn, the aid of a British official, Jim Gurney, wastrel, was asked by a British government official to make a "clean-up" of a gang of pearl-pirates and all-round criminals, lead by a woman of unusual beauty, who made their headquarters on the island of Tarani. Jim accepted, and resolved to make a clean-up of his life, too. In a small boat, and supplied with pistols, binoculars, and some supplies, he was purposely cast up on the beach of Tarani, but he miscalculated the strength of the sea, and was rescued by Barbara, the eighteen-year-old daughter of Ronald Goff, an English trader.

Barbara had been brought up as a child of nature, free from conventions of any sort. Her father still regarded her as a child, and so did Jim; but she objected to that. She was an expert swimmer, and helped Jim salvage the contents of his boat, including his pistols. Goff had natives build Jim a house, and Jim helped Barbara build a new canoe. One night some no-good whites, who lived on the other side of the island, came to Goff's store, and while Jim was sitting alone before his hut, a woman of rare but barbaric beauty came to him and suggested that he leave the Island. Jim laughed at her, and later his house was set afire and partially destroyed.

Next day Jim went into the mountains and was captured by some of the woman's followers, from whose conversation he learned that she was Mme. Miriam Jobert, the leader of the gang. After a fierce fight, he was left on the beach to die, but slipped out of his bonds and started to swim to his hut. Mme. Jobert covered him with a pistol—but didn't fire.

Barbara had budded into womanhood suddenly, and loved Jim. She had seen his capture, and arrived in her canoe in time to save him from drowning. Yet when she changed her usual unconventional attire for the clothing of civilization, Jim gave her but passing notice—and for a moment she hated him. But her father realized that she was no longer a child.

While Jim was sitting in front of his repaired hut in the moonlight, Mme. Jobert appeared to him again. "I come in peace," she said. "Such a night lends itself to such words as I shall say to you, man of the lion heart."

CHAPTER XVII.

A VISIT OF PEACE.

GURNEY fell into his hammock in mock astonishment at her high-flown speech, and began humming "Just Before the Battle, Mother." But his indirect derision fell very flat. Silence alone came from the shadowy corner where the woman had seated herself on a box, but through the very silence itself quivered and crept a strange, insidious quality which worked a spell upon Gurney and speedily changed his mood to one of more or less embarrassed attention. An electric tremor attacked him, and he stole a glance at that dim corner, to shiver more acutely at the queerly luminous eyes that regarded him

unwinkingly from the gloom, visible when all else was invisible.

For some moments the silence held unbroken after his humming ceased, and for all his worldly experience a cold moisture broke upon his forehead. Then, as if at a cleverly chosen instant, the woman uttered a low, seductive laugh and reached out her hand to gently touch his face. He started, but subsided again as she spoke vibrantly:

"I have sought such a man as you for years. Such mortals are not made in duplicate. I have need of you. Serve me, and you may place your desires as high as high heaven. Speak to me!"

The soft hand at his face moved with a caress in every pink finger tip; the vague shape beside him came nearer, and the

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for May 31.

beautiful face with its alluring eyes leaned close to his. The woman emanated an intoxicating aura of utter desirability, warm and of exquisite perfume; her smile was rendered clear to him even in the shadows by the glistening of her moist red lips.

When she spoke first, he had felt a jumping elation in the prospect of actual contest with this his arch opponent; as she proceeded, the chords of his being leaped from disuse into hot response to her mood, for she had taken the line, by chance or by clever selection, best calculated to discover his vulnerable points. As he had confessed to Lynn in Moji, Gurney's somewhat hectic life had been largely spent in more or less sweet dalliance with women whose trade was that of Thais, and the red corpuscles in his blood ever leaped into hot eruption at touch of such hands as now trembled on his cheeks.

But he had undertaken his present task in no idle moment. Knowing every circumstance, even to the presence on Tarani of such a woman, he had seized the chance to make a clean-up in his life while performing that other clean-up so close to the heart of his employer; and the remembrance came to him in the same flashing moment as he recalled what he had already suffered at these caressing hands. Brushing her fingers aside from his lips with a shiver, he flung his feet out of the hammock and sat on the edge, staring hard into her glowing eyes and rallying his wits to meet her seductive mood with one of brutal sarcasm.

"You have looked for a man like me for years," he mocked. "Yes, to burn him alive, to have him lashed fast where the sea and sun could boil and fry his marrow. Oh, I know how you must have looked for me! And serve you, you say? Place my desires as high as heaven? I aim higher than that, right now. There is nothing in your power to give that which can compare with the prize I aim at."

"And what is that, pray?" came the whisper, sweeter, more seductive than ever. Gurney shook himself savagely to throw off the spell of her.

"That is my own affair, lady," he returned brusquely, "and if I may repeat a

question I put before, who in thunder are you, that I must consider you at all?"

The woman laughed deliciously at his method of meeting her advances. She seemed to be hugely gratified, as if she had sought to arouse in him just such a temper. She permitted a period of throbbing silence to intervene again before she spoke, and then her words brought Gurney sharply out of the maze of his conflicting thoughts.

"Please give me some water, will you?"

A simple request, made in a simple tone, not to be refused. Jim got out of the hammock and fetched water from the terracotta jar that always swung in the breeze under the eaves of the hut. When he re-entered the dim room, the woman had usurped the hammock and swung easily back and forth, the embodiment of feline grace. She took the pannikin of water with a word of thanks, and he sat down on the box she had vacated. It was nearer to the hammock than before; he moved it back, and she gurgled with delight.

"You are difficult, my friend," she said, handing him the water vessel to set down. "Let us see. Perhaps we shall yet be good friends. Come nearer. I will answer all those questions you have asked me. Come. I do not bite."

"Fire away!" growled Jim uneasily. "I'm not deaf."

"As you will, then. First, I am, in thunder or in sunshine, Miriam Jobert. You, I remember, told me you are called Jim Gurney. I shall call you Jim; I am Miriam to you, if you like. Jim—that is a name with charming possibilities when uttered by the proper tongue. Jim"—she gave the name a bewitching little French accent, and it sounded like music, even to Gurney's stubborn ears—"Jim, I like it, it is good.

"So, Jim, that is one question answered, and we are correctly acquainted, are we not? Let us go on. As Miriam Jobert, I am mistress of Tarani, and her people—"

"Like fun you are!" blurted Jim derisively.

"I am mistress of Tarani and her people," she went on with a little frown that was swiftly changed into a smile. "Goff, the trader, is not of Tarani's people,

nor are you—yet. The natives recognize in me the supreme power over them; the other people are my own people, some of whom you have encountered.”

“A very pretty crowd, lady; a nice, clean, villainous mob of piratical scum! I congratulate you on your subjects, your imperial highness. Carry on.”

“I am so glad you appreciate my fellows, Jim,” she rippled. “It makes easier what I shall presently say. Now let me tell you why on various occasions you escaped death by bullet. What did you do when you found your hut on fire? I had hoped you were inside, but since you were not, I watched every movement you made. Do you recall your actions?”

“No? Then I will tell you: You did not run madly to put out the fire that was destroying your entire belongings; you first sought out the agent and paid the bill before taking stock of damages. That was the first hint I received of your difference from other men. Then the man I had sent to burn you out, Joe, was the hardest, most formidable of my fighting ruffians, and ought to have handled you like a baby. But did he? No, my Jim, I saw you make clay with him!

“One shot was fired at you—not by my hand—then I stopped the shooting and watched you fight. I saw my fighting man made to put out the fire he had made, and I ran away from my rascals in order to laugh with exultation. So you were not shot that night, Jim, because I knew I had looked upon a man. And why were you not shot later, when I came upon the ledge just as you had slipped from it?”

“Search me! I couldn’t guess that any more than I could guess why you should want to broil me alive after discovering that I was such a lallapaloosa of a man. Make it short. Tell your tale.”

“I will. Years of habit are not to be lightly obliterated by one swift circumstance, Jim. When I thought more deeply, I knew I could not afford to have a stranger here, no matter what breed of champion he might be; my men would not submit to it; and, above all things, my domain here is one surrounded by perils you can know nothing of.

“I decided that you must go. And since you appeared unlikely to quit the island willingly, I ordered your removal in the manner you saw.”

“Charming creature! Pity you couldn’t find a man who kept tigers for pets to marry you! But I guess tigers couldn’t teach you anything.”

“Droll Jim,” she laughed, and patted his arm. “Have you not heard that in love or hate a woman knows no limits? I hated you when you almost defeated my men, bound though you were; but do you think I could lose sight of the terrific courage in you? Your indomitable spirit appealed to me; your bold contempt of myself and my people enraged me. Between two fires, of hate and—let us call it, for the present, admiration—I at length determined to let you suffer the penalty allotted to you.

“So I went down to the ledge at meridian of the moon to feast upon your torments. You had escaped even that deadly net, and in my anger, humiliation, too, I would have shot you. But, above all else, anger, humiliation, I saw again the man of men who alone could serve me in my increasingly difficult situation. Thus you know why you were not shot in the moment of your flight, Jim.”

Gurney had listened with keen curiosity, for he had not hitherto encountered an antagonist who refused to seize the chance to jump on his neck when down. And through the curiosity there leaped the conviction that this astounding woman would overreach herself and impart more than she intended did he but play her at her own game. But that seemed difficult. He was too much like tinder and not enough like flint to join battle successfully with steel.

He edged his box closer, however, and tried to ask without eagerness: “And what lies back of this, Miriam?” Her hand stroked his face softly when her name came from his lips. She positively purred, and he thrilled to her touch in spite of his resolve to fight her wiles with skill like her own. “I understand all you have said, and appreciate it, of course. But tell me how I can serve you. Want me to fight somebody?”

He uttered the last sentence jerkily, for

it had cost him an effort; but with it he recovered some of his control. It was, at all events, far removed from her own suggestive line of conversation.

"Perhaps," she replied, and now there was a languorous note in her speech. He knew those great eyes, half closed though they were now, never left his face; her hand moved softly upon his forearm, she spoke as if in dreamy reminiscence; but he knew she was speaking straight out from a hot, imperious heart, the dreaminess but a cloak.

"Perhaps," she said again. "By entering my service, Jim, you can be master of my affairs, and they are far-reaching, indeed. Those rough men you saw are but a small part of my people. A hundred such call me mistress and do my bidding. My wealth is such that a prince might well turn pirate to secure it. But I want none of your princes or pirates! I have governed these men of Tarani by my own will; they render me dumb obedience; my business with the outer world goes on and remains secret.

"Goff yonder has lived here for more years than a woman of my age cares to count; yet how much does he know of me? Nothing—less than nothing. If you wonder why he is permitted to stay, I will tell you that he is useful to me through his very indifference to me. Once a year he receives stores; he supplies my community, and I am saved the necessity of visiting ports for supplies through which I might be traced here.

"But, Jim"—she put a thrill into her voice now and leaned over until her warm body touched his shoulder and her hair brushed his temples—"I am weary of my lot. I am lonely, and need a strong heart on which to lean. Until I saw you fight, I derided the thought of any man on earth being fit to mate with me. Now I know I have met my mate, and, oh, Jim, I want you up there to be my king!"

At the first touch of her body against him, Gurney got up from his box with a bound, and she uttered a little cry of alarm and anger when his sudden removal almost dropped her from the hammock. He swiftly got matches and lighted the lamp, trem-

bling and in a cold sweat, but determined to avoid the toils she spread for him. The light shone on her face, white as chalk, from which her blazing eyes glittered in raging humiliation.

"Sorry, Miss Miriam, but the king business ain't what it was before the war. I like a fight, that's true, and maybe we can get together some time in that way; but call off the king stuff for your truly, Jim Gurney."

She sprang from the hammock and stood before him panting heavily. Then, with tremendous will, she governed herself and showed him her smiling face again, not soft or seductive, but quizzically humorous.

"So the prospect of being Miriam's king frightens you, eh?"

"Don't say frightens," he retorted. "Nothing frightens me. Say rather I don't want any part of your business, and you'll hit it. All this secret community stuff always makes me feel like taking my gun and going hunting on the mountain."

There was a struggle in her face, a struggle between hot-rage and cool-reason. Not lightly had she taken the step to offer him partnership. Her end must not be defeated by undue hastiness of temper. She regarded him curiously for a moment, and he gave her back look for look; then there was an interruption that wrenched them both out of their pose of wariness of each other.

A sharp little cry burst from the open door, and both turned as one to see framed in the entrance the wide-eyed, dark-flushed face of Barbara, staring at them both in unbelieving amaze.

"Hello, Barbara!" greeted Jim, then stopped, for the girl presented a picture of awful disillusionment. Slightly crouched forward, her lips were open in a round "O" like an opened rose; in the dark pools of her eyes shone a glitter cold as the stars; at the bosom of her white dress the laces billowed like waves over her panting breast; her small brown hands were clenched so that the knuckles shone white through the skin. With a sharp wrench she summoned back her wandering powers of motion, and, casting a glance of hatred at the woman and a pitying stare at Jim, she gathered up her fine white skirt and

plunged madly along the beach, sobbing hysterically.

CHAPTER XVIII.

JEALOUSY.

FOR a moment he stood speechless, then, laughing awkwardly, Jim turned from the door.

"Wonder what's the matter with Barbara now," he grinned. "Too bad to see her like that. She's a bully little kid."

Miriam regarded him sharply, suspicion in her darkened face. So they stood for a long breath, each searching the other: he with curiosity as to the cause of her shattered calm; she with rising evidence that she believed he was shrewdly playing with her. Her figure quivered and her breast heaved as she steadied herself, and in a voice of deadly earnestness she flared:

"Bully little kid! Idiot! She is a woman—a pulsing, passionate woman—fruit ripened overnight from a wild blossom! Kid—"

Gurney was grinning at her now. In his impudent face was all his own wilful disregard of Barbara's claim to maturity, reinforced by irrepressible amusement at the woman's anger. His grin brought swift response, and the situation tensed. She glared at him more fiercely and raved:

"You sneering dog! And blind that I have been. So there lies the reason for your slighting of my proffered favor! That wild island girl—kid you name her, with lying lips while your false heart knows her a woman—she is your flame, your—" Jim's face hardened, and danger flashed from his gray eyes. She ignored the signals and raved on: "She is your woman, eh?"

"Then hear me, beachcomber: Again I tell you this island shall not hold us both. Leave while you are able; for from this moment it is war between us—war that can only end when, with death at your heart, that insolent sneer dies on your face!"

Her tone snatched Gurney back to cool poise, and now that threats were in order, he felt his old-time elation at battle-prospects. He dismissed the fury that had seized him when Barbara's name was being

hurled at him in insult, and joyfully took up the gauntlet flung down before him.

"Madam flatters me," he mocked, and bowed theatrically. "On with the war, lady; let death be unconfined. Just to put in an oar on my own account, I will simply say that all your crew of husky toughs, assisted by their adorable mistress, can't scare me one little bit. Let 'em all come! The more the jollier! They're a bunch of amusing fakes as pirates—"

"Insolent fool! I will gladly shoot you with my own hand the first sight I get of you after this night!" she cried. She turned to the door and flung back at him: "That is the last word. I go to give orders that you are to be shot on sight!"

"Go to it, sweet Miriam!" he taunted. "You must be thick if you don't know by this time that Jim Gurney is proof against all you can do. No joking, lady, it can't be done. I carry a charm that turns bullets into plumbago."

His smile maddened her beyond limit. She snatched her pistol from her bosom, and the cold, round muzzle was presented straight at Jim's head.

"Then let me see your charm work!"

She pressed the trigger slowly until the hammer rose a fraction of an inch, and her blazing eyes seemed to shoot forth red-gold fires. The taunting smile never left his face, and his clear, keen eyes met the fires in her own with glint of steel. She let the hammer down again and repeated the action, like a beautiful demon of exquisite suspense.

"Go ahead—shoot!" he smiled.

"Stubborn fool! Must I destroy another crab before you believe my bullets fly true? See, I press the trigger a little more, then what of your charm?"

If she sought to uncover the raw nerves of him, she revealed inhuman skill in her methods. But now she faced a man, such as had never crossed her path hitherto; a man in whom Nature had planted unfertile seeds of fear that had never fructified. Gurney had faced out many a bluff before—bluffs perhaps not as perilous as this, but still bluffs—and he had acquired a clever gambler's instinct for detecting them. He watched the slow, governed rise and fall of

her pistol-hammer curiously, and refused to throw down his cards.

"Why don't you shoot?" he asked coolly. "Try the power of my charm. I'm sure you'd be highly interested."

Their eyes held each other while perhaps three tinkling waves splashed like tiny silver bells on the dark beach outside; then the woman lowered her weapon, a tumultuous sigh that was almost a sob burst from her breast, and her face softened. For an instant she seemed to grow old, and the fire of her gaze was quenched in a mist of yearning. Then her self-possession returned, her scarlet lips curved full and smiling, and she offered her hand.

"We should not be foes, Jim," she whispered. "Such a man is not fit food for sniping bullets. Let us declare a truce a while. Think over my request. You are my man—my man by every law of nature. And I need you, Jim; doubly now I need you. Think over this in the solitude of your couch, and when you seek me to tell me you have decided, you will find my mountain paths open to you."

She left him impetuously, as if not daring to remain longer in his presence, and his reply was called after her dim vanishing form as she entered the bush.

"You declared war, you proclaimed the truce. Neither is of my suggestion, so don't bank on what I shall do. I'm a free-lance in all things!" He called his message out with laughter in his voice. She gave no sign that she heard, and he filled and lighted his pipe, chuckling with glee at his victory.

The encounter left him far too wakeful for sleep. The moment he succeeded in dismissing Miriam Jobert temporarily from his mind, the vision of Barbara flashed back to him, and his chuckling mood was chastened. He pondered over various reasons which might have induced the girl to visit him at that late hour, but none satisfied him. In their intercourse since his arrival, he and the girl had not felt the need of respecting conventions, and Goff himself had been the first to assure him that such things were idiotic burdens to ultracivilized life and not at all called for on Tarani.

Their comradeship had been free and frank; he had gladly made a chum of the

girl who showed astounding capacity in every sort of outdoor pursuit, and who treated him as she might have treated a big brother who had grown up with her. Reciprocating, he treated her much like a sister, a tomboyish sister, perhaps, he thought, but the sort who appealed to him by reason of her very tomboyish unaffectedness. Only since she had discovered the desirability of personal adornment had she changed, and that he put down to a natural vanity that perhaps had been awakened by the chance discovery of some long-hidden store of feminine fripperies.

He remembered that when occasion demanded she had no scruples in casting aside her finery and resuming the much more suitable attire in which he had first seen her. Now, while he vividly recalled her standing in his doorway, disheveled and panting, anger blazing in her pretty face, he blindly refused to see what Miriam Jobert had seen in a flash.

Miriam Jobert's mature loveliness was self-evident. Such women had often come into Gurney's lurid life, and it required no very keen perception for such a man to appraise such a woman—least of all, to weigh up and number her physical attractions as they appealed to his own physical self. But such women as Barbara Goff were not likely to be found in the coverts he had hunted in, and he failed utterly to recognize in the sweet, wholesome product of God's outdoors, backed by the subtle influence of inherited culture, a budding woman of physical charm outmatching in its subtlety the flamboyant attractions of the older woman, and a sweet desirability as widely different from the seductiveness of Miriam as a nectarine differs from an apple of Sodom.

"Poor child, she must have come to show me some new ribbon or something," was the decision he arrived at, and he felt sorry in the same way as he would feel sorry had he broken an infant's doll.

His pipe was smoked out, and he filled it again, undecided whether to walk along shore to Goff's place or not. He wanted to make his peace with Barbara, for he believed the girl must have gone to bed in tears. He tried to detect a light in the trader's house which would give him an

excuse for paying such a belated call; but the house was dark and still, he stopped irresolutely, persuaded that it might do as well in the morning. And while convincing himself that this course was best, he heard the crunching of sand down by the rocks, and in a few minutes he received his third visitor of that busy evening.

"Oh, hello, Goff, I was just deciding whether to come down to your place or not!" he cried in welcome when the trader stepped out of the darkness into the circle of lamplight. "This has been a busy night. Anything the matter?"

Goff wore a look of perplexity strange to him. His habitual expression of bored indifference was still visible, but as a face seen through a transparent mask—the new expression partially covered without obscuring it. He leaned against a veranda post and looked steadily at Gurney for some time without speaking, merely acknowledging the greeting with a curt nod. He held under his arm a book, but seemed to be unaware of the fact; his shoes and the bottom of his trouser-legs were soaked with water, and a trickle of salt had dried on one cheek.

Altogether Gurney sensed that nothing less than a tremendous crisis in his affairs could have happened to shake the trader out of his detached placidity. He waited patiently for Goff to speak, pushing forward a stool and placing tobacco and knife handy for his guest. When at length the trader opened his lips he touched on the very subject that had given Gurney cause for reflection a moment before.

"I think there is nothing the matter worth while making a fuss over," he said. "But perhaps I may want to leave Tarani for a while. Something seems to be giving my girl considerable fits, Gurney, and I'm afraid it's the everlasting solitude here. I had lost all sense of solitude myself, and forgot that a child does not see things through adult eyes."

"Fits!" gasped Gurney, taking the trader's vernacular literally.

"Oh, not convulsions!" Goff replied irritably. "That's a figure of speech, perhaps. I mean she's cutting up capers lately and acting like a peevish child. I can't im-

agine what's the cause of it, unless, as I have said, the solitude is beginning to overbalance the fun she had contrived to get out of the sea and the open."

"I thought she seemed peevish," remarked Gurney wisely. "She was here tonight, just for a moment, but she didn't speak a word, and cut back home like a scared rabbit."

"Yes, that's why I came here to see you about it. Thought perhaps she was angry with you for some childish reason. She ran up to the house, dived in through the screen, and in a few seconds I saw this come flying out, and she was crying out all the angry little words that serve children for swear-words."

He placed the book on the table, and Gurney saw that it was saturated with water; but there was no mistaking the book: it was Barbara's treasured volume of "The Round Table."

"I got the book out of the sea," continued Goff. "Can't permit things like books to go adrift in a place like this, you know. Far too scarce. But while I was wading into the sea to rescue Arthur's 'Knights,' Barbara flew past me along the beach, and put to sea in her canoe.

"No doubt she tired of such tales, after years of them. Too much quail is a poor diet. I really think I must take her away for a trip and let her see things. She will come back freshened by the change, and glad to return to the very solitude that is irritating her now."

"It might be a good notion," agreed Jim, feeling sorrowful at the prospect of losing his chum, but thinking that perhaps the child did need the change.

"I'm glad you agree. You see, I'm the only regular white resident here, and as such I am in much the same position with the authorities as an official resident, though the parallel is a joke, and nobody ever bothers me as such. But as trader I have certain duties, and there is my stock to keep replenished when the yearly ship comes. That will be here in a few months now, so I want to ask you how you feel about assuming charge of my place while we are away."

Goff appeared doubtful as he put the

suggestion, as if fearing he asked too much of a casual friend. But Gurney saw only a fine opportunity to do a good turn for his girl-chum in making it easy for her father to take her away, and he replied with a cheery grin:

"Glad to, Goff. Anything on earth I can do is at your call. I owe you more than that for your favors to me."

"Not at all, not at all," dissented the trader hastily. "I have done nothing for you that calls for any return. But I am obliged to you for your ready offer. Come along to-morrow morning, and we will all talk the matter over. I'll keep Barbara at home until you come. By the way, come for breakfast, then she will surely be home. Thanks, ever so much. Good night!"

The trader left as suddenly as he had come, and Gurney watched him until he was out of sight. Then he scanned the vague, dusky sea for sign of the canoe; but Barbara had sought the open bosom of old ocean with her troubles, and her tiny sail was not visible. He filled another pipe with shredded plug, less than ever disposed to sleep, and while he puffed his eyes fell upon the water-soaked book on his table, forgotten, apparently, by Goff.

He picked it up with a whimsical smile, idly opening the damp pages and carefully freeing some that were adhering. The crude wood-cuts forced a chuckle from him, but his chief thought was that here was a treasure belonging to his friend, a treasure flung out, certainly, in a fit of pique, but a treasure, nevertheless, and as such not to be lightly disposed of.

"I'll dry it out and keep it for her," he thought, and cut a stick to run along the back binding so that the volume might be hung up in the sunlight in the morning. But still his thoughts persisted in following Barbara, in a train which did nothing to help solve the problem of her sudden vagaries.

"Sure she got tired of this junk! A steady diet of lords and ladies and halidoms ain't very nourishing for a growing girl. Father ought to get her some real girl's books like 'Aunt Jane's Hero,' or 'Poor Prim, The Crippled Canary.' I'll give him a hint when I see him."

So thinking, he decided to woo sleep, and, before getting into his hammock, took a last look around. From point to point his vision searched the sea; then from point to point along shore taking in mountain and forest, salt brush and highland crag; and his gaze lingered longer than elsewhere upon the heights which sheltered Miriam Jobert.

CHAPTER XIX.

INTO THE MOUNTAINS.

"WHAT d'ye think of a girl like that?" complainingly demanded Goff at breakfast next morning. Gurney sat opposite Barbara, puzzled at her expression. He had answered the trader's invitation to breakfast in a state of trepidation, for he knew that, in her father's presence, he could scarcely ridicule the girl out of a petulant mood by his usual methods.

Goff took things far too seriously for that. Perhaps he did not make a really heavy burden of life; but his sense of humor was buried under many layers of toughened epidermis, and his remark of the night before about taking Barbara away proved his inability to dismiss the girl's sudden change in behavior lightly. Now his demand for an opinion caught Gurney at a moment when he was himself puzzled out of all belief.

Barbara had a moment before retorted to her father's suggestion of a trip to civilization by furiously declining to quit the island under any circumstances whatever. Until the instant of her hot refusal she had behaved toward Gurney with very precise, obviously studied politeness; her eyes met his coldly, almost disdainfully, and her pretty face was colorless, except for shadowy rings of dusky trouble about her eyes. She spoke to him, when she had to, in level, painfully proper tones; his first bantering attempt to rouse her had been met by such magnificent superiority of aspect that even Jim Gurney was silenced.

But now, with her father's demand yet audible, flames leaped from her eyes, and the rich blood mantled her face and throat;

she sprang from the table panting, and fled to her tiny sanctuary on the veranda. Gurney and the trader stared after her, then at each other, and Gurney felt compelled to give an answer.

"She beats me, sir," he said. "I thought she would jump at the chance to go away for a while. Perhaps this is only another phase of the trouble, if trouble there is, and when she has had a chance to think it over quietly she may gladly consent to go. You may count on me, if you want me to look after things. Let me know. I'm going to take a ramble over the island to-day, and may be gone a couple of days. But I guess you can always find me, hey?"

"Oh, if I wanted to send a native after you no doubt I could bribe one to visit that mountain by giving him my house and store, and giving him a mortgage on my immortal soul, Gurney. But I don't think I'll do that. I'll wait until you come back. By the way"—there was no alteration in the cool, indifferent tone—"my girl told me you had a narrow squeak a little while back. Those people up there are best left alone, old chap. You can find good sport in far less smelly places than among those crags."

"Thanks, I'll look out," grinned Jim. "I never let a man roll me over without getting even with him, though. When those brigands took so much trouble over me, they stirred up my inquisitiveness more than they imagined. I want to see why now. Have you got a spare gun? I lost mine on the cliff."

"There is a box of pistols somewhere in the store, and some ammunition, too. Take what you fancy, but take my advice, too; don't meddle with those chaps. It's bad enough to have them near, without stirring them up."

There was a faint sound at Barbara's screen, and the quick ear of Gurney detected distress in it. He sought the trader's eyes, but that bored man was already moving toward the storeroom, apparently oblivious to the sound. Jim's impulsive heart went out to the troubled girl, yet he could not understand her malady, and therefore hesitated to apply a remedy.

He wanted to talk to her, to perhaps

snatch her up and make her chase him through the surf; but her breakfast-time mood frightened him, and he could not attempt it. He thought, however, of a means whereby he could tell her he was not indifferent to her troubles, and as he stepped after Goff he called out aloud:

"Have you got a lantern, too? I'd like to carry one along with me, if you've got one of those small hurricane lamps. Then you need not worry about me. I'll flash you the all's well at dark every night, from some point on the crest—if I am kept away more than a day or so."

The suggestion was for Barbara's benefit, and, though, Jim Gurney knew nothing of it then his thoughtfulness brought rich results. The girl drew away from the screen, her agitation gone, and sat down on her couch muttering intensely:

"I care nothing for you and your lamp, red-headed clod! I care nothing—nothing!" But the words were given the lie by the glow of her darkened, softened eyes. Even her father, impression-proof though he was, might have suspected her reason for refusing to leave Tarani had he seen her face in that moment.

But neither he nor Gurney saw it, and, manlike, the moment the trader's store was opened before them they forgot the girl and her little childish troubles. Gurney rummaged through the cases for what he needed, and the trader stood idly by as if permitting a man to go through his stock on trust was his sole aim in life. Not once since his arrival had Gurney been refused anything the store afforded, yet he had told Goff that there was small likelihood of his ever being able to pay.

But it seemed to make no difference, and now, with a very useful revolver in his hand and a case of cartridges open at his feet, the wonder of it struck him afresh. He had wondered before, but had been satisfied with the trader's explanation that he might more than pay for the stores he took by services rendered reciprocally.

"There's your lantern, too," Goff drawled, pointing to a hook. "I think it's filled with kerosene. That size will burn for about six hours on end. Anything else you want?"

"Yes," replied Gurney, lifting down the lantern. "I want to ask you something. I'm scooping things out of your store, and you're getting nothing for it. If you're keeping tally it's all right—I shall surely settle some day. But there's not a chance that I can see of you getting anything back for your goods while I remain here. You're not forgetting that, are you?"

"My dear chap, don't talk bally rot," protested Goff lazily. "I never saw such a fellow for hunting trouble. Surely I may do as I will with my own? I shall be repaid satisfactorily, I have no doubt. Why don't you leave it for the merchant to complain? Never in my life have I known a customer kick because he wasn't dunned."

Jim took his purchases home in thoughtful mood. Every turn he made lately he seemed to encounter white men who persisted in seeing something desirable in him. He frankly could not understand it, but the fact started a warm spot glowing at his breast. He more than ever determined to justify his strangely acquired friends' estimate of his worth by making such a thorough job of his clean-up that even the germs of dirt should be destroyed utterly.

Before leaving his shack on his journey he conned over in his mind those written instructions he had committed to memory before destroying them, and the truth impressed him that he had been on Tarani for weeks now and had really accomplished nothing. He had not even found the actual community he came to rout out, although its denizens had forced themselves harshly upon his notice. And apart from a brief sight of a single vessel leaving the secluded harbor he had seen nothing to give him a hint of the activities that had aroused the attention of powerful interests.

The more he considered it, the sterner his resolve became to cut out all subterfuge and go direct to his object. Miriam Jobert's announcement that he should be unmolested he dismissed with a shrug, and started off up the track muttering:

"That's up to her. I have given her no promise to consider her proposition. She can do as she likes. It's the business, and business only for mine."

There was a freshness in the air that ren-

dered the high sun pleasant, yet it carried a dampness, too, and the trees and whispering surf gave forth a note like the sighing that precedes a change of weather. Once within the dark jungle the coolness was routed by the hot mugginess of steaming verdure, and a hundred yards of upland toiling through it persuaded Jim that easier going might be found in the open.

He struck off to the westward, toward the point where he understood the native settlement lay. He had not yet visited that region, and knew nothing of the layout of the land; but as he proceeded he found while no plain path existed, the bush was less dense and the slope less steep.

The spur of the central cone of the island dwindled away to a gentle declivity on which the trees took on a different aspect, changing from mountain timber to longer-stemmed, more unbrageous subtropical growths; and he came across a little singing stream that swirled merrily downward toward the sea beyond the island's further point.

Here he flung himself down and unpacked his lunch, thrilled with the contrasting vista of wild grandeur speared by the silver shaft of the pretty brook. His back rested against a mossy old boulder, his feet overhung the stream, above him crooned the wind in the cheeping fronds of a palmetto, and his appetite was a thing of joy in tune with his surroundings.

Into his hungry solitude crashed swift alarms, and his teeth remained parted in the act of crunching into a biscuit. The rock behind him clanged sharply, something brushed his shoulder, and a short, iron-tipped arrow fell across his legs. He remained still, not even moving his hands down, but eyes and ears were busy. His eyes failed to discover, but his ears detected a very faint rustle of brush different from the rustle of the breeze, and it came across the stream.

Action replaced outward indifference. With a bound he gathered his feet under him, took a flying leap, and landed on the other side of the water; plunged into the thicket and caught a whisk of brown darting deeper into cover. In a dozen long strides he overtook his quarry, and gathered to his bosom as he flung himself forward

a palpitating little brown man whose eyes blinked up into his with animal-like submission and fear.

"Here, what fashion?" he demanded, turning the man over and shaking him savagely. "What for you skewer me, hey?"

The native lay still except for his trembling, and made no answer. Gurney peered hard into the man's face, seeking for a motive for murder other than savagery. In that small brown visage lurked no such bloodthirstiness as should urge to murder; it was rather the face of a martyr in the presence of unmerited death, willing to suffer.

"You poor little devil," breathed Jim, leaning back and regarding the man less ferociously. "I'll bet you didn't take a shot at me for nothing. What's the fuss, hey?"

There was no answer. The man lay dumb, waiting for his punishment; and Gurney rapidly decided what to do with him. Picking him up bodily he carried him back to the big rock, and set him down beside his interrupted lunch. The fear in the little man's eyes intensified, then grew into stark wonder when his captor put biscuit and meat into his hands.

Like a wild beast newly taken, he refused to eat, but his appearance belied the absence of hunger. Gurney went on with his own meal, appearing not to notice his prisoner, but all the time he plied him with questions between bites, seeking to draw the reason for the attack. He tried every tack fruitlessly until a chance remark of his brought open doubt and faltering belief into the brown eyes.

"Johnny, I think maybe you think me one man all same bad fellow up topside, hey? That is wrong. I look for catch those men. You tell me."

Perhaps the failure of reprisal acted as potently as his words; whatever the agent, the brown man gradually lost most of his fear, he ceased to quiver, and once he raised the food almost to his mouth. And every second his soft brown eyes were fastened in fascination on the white man.

Gurney persevered in his method, apparently leaving the man unwatched, talking

soothingly the while, eating his lunch without interruption; and presently he noticed the native eating ravenously, and waited then the few minutes he believed would bring a reply to his questions.

"You no lie?" whispered the little brown man at length.

"No lie, sonny. I look for catch those bad fellows. Now tell me why you shot at me. I won't hurt you."

"I think you one of those men. I wait many days to find one alone."

"I thought so," nodded Jim, and he bent an irresistible grin of reassurance upon his captive. "Well, you're my friend, if that's so. Now tell me why you want to shoot those fellows. Maybe I help you some time."

"They very bad, very bad." The native shook his head from side to side dolefully, but there lurked a hard gleam in his brown eyes. "All time they steal our men, take them away far, far in boats, and make dive deep for pearl. Plenty shark; not many men come back.

"And all time they steal our women. Take them up to mountain, and beat them, and fetch more. Only old, old women left in our village now, and young womans too much frightened for wives. They steal our food, and break up our canoes, and beat us with sticks—see!"

The man sprang up, flashed around, and showed Gurney a back scored and corrugated from neck to thighs with livid welts.

CHAPTER XX.

THE REVEL.

WHEN Jim resumed his journey he was hard put to keep in sight of the flitting brown figure that sped before him, showing him a hidden and hazardous goat trail over a shoulder of the mountain, which seemed to have been devastated by eruption long ago. There was no vegetation there, no moisture, no moss; but that very fact made for security, for neither were there any signs of human traffic, nor any visible inducement for such to intrude there.

And ever before his eyes was the cruelly

scored back and loins of the brown man, fuel to the flame of his anger at the brutes who called Miriam Jobert mistress. He could only thank his lucky star that perhaps the native's very thirst for vengeance, which had induced that sly shot at him, had of itself rendered his aim shaky and inaccurate; he could not find it in his heart to blame the man for trying, even though he himself had come near paying another's debt.

He soon found himself puffing painfully from the pace set, and watched longingly for the turn in the trail that should reveal his journey's end. All around him lay arid volcanic débris, so old that its character was almost lost in the excoriations made by perhaps centuries of elemental erosion.

The high sun blazed down upon heat-absorbing pumice and heat-reflecting rock, rendering the going like traveling through a crematorium; underfoot and overheard and all about him intense heat waves scorched his perspiring body; the imperceptible dust made its presence felt at his chest after a mile of scuffling travel.

Still the little brown man ahead showed no fatigue, no discomfort, flitting from point to point like a chamois. Gurney began to cast longing glances backward where the hazy blue of the sea looked so cool and refreshing to his seared vision. He was on the point of calling a halt for rest.

Then, in a moment, the outlook changed. His guide suddenly stood out in sharp silhouette against the sky, waved back eagerly, and vanished in a little puff of dust. Jim ran forward, expectant of disaster, and caught his breath sharply at the vivid contrast in the scene. Rising to the crest, prepared to look down upon a wall cliff and perhaps a crushed brown body far below, he found the native squatting comfortably on a small green ledge of grass, almost entirely concealed by a clump of bushes that blazed with floral color like a rich jewel in a heap of dross.

"By Hickey, you've got a fine nose!" he cried, jumping down beside his guide. The native laid a finger to his lips and clucked warningly, pulling some branches aside in front of him and pointing through. Gurney leaned forward and peered out of

the leafy window, and slowly his old-time grin stole over his hot face, and stayed there.

"It's the box-seat of the show!" he chuckled, and softly patted the brown shoulder beside him.

Here was a new outlook indeed, and one which could hardly be improved on. Where he crouched, the mountain top seemed to be carved in the shape of a great armchair, upholstered with mossy velvet and short, green grasses; at his back the volcanic rock stood, black as time-weathered oak; in front the ledge, the seat of the chair, rolled over in a gentle curve, to continue down a hundred feet through more stunted mountain timber.

But farther down, twinkling like a silver shield in the sun-rays, lay the panorama of the harbor which he had such excellent reason to remember. From his height the expanse of sheltered sea was sharply defined in every detail of forbidding entrance and treacherous submerged reef; the S-shaped barrier that made the place inaccessible to strangers could be traced as clearly as if drawn in dark paint on silver paper, and a small schooner at that moment threading the passage gave an object lesson too useful to be ignored in solving intricacies.

Studying the schooner's course with every faculty alert, Gurney forgot everything else for the moment. He noticed nothing save that one small ship until she let go her anchor, snugly embayed under the cliff, in deep water easily estimated by the amount of chain paid out. Then, raising his eyes, another vessel hove in sight, another, and another, all stout sloops, and in line they sailed the serpentine channel to come to anchor with the schooner.

"Her ladyship's fleet!" Jim grinned, and now had leisure to examine further.

Nestling in a lovely recess in the great cliffside, surrounded by gorgeous foliage, shaded by both trees and rock, carpeted by vivid green as level as a built floor, lay a cluster of huts, and it was not difficult for Gurney to realize that from almost any view-point except his lucky one the settlement was entirely concealed.

Behind the foremost habitations, surrounded by palms and colorful bushes,

stood a more imposing structure, and its immediate surroundings gave evidence of scrupulous and industrious attention at human hands. Sand of dazzling whiteness lay flat and evenly traced in paths that wound prettily through the vivid green of the grass; in circles and crescents, masses of flowers splashed the green and silver with color; their scent came even up to the mountain crest in faint, sensuous incense.

Jim was aware that the native's face had come close to his own, and he smiled up into two brown eyes full of inquiry. The unspoken question undoubtedly was regarding his next move, and there was also a trace of reviving suspicion. The native's cruel experiences at the hands of those people down there were much too fresh in his mind to permit so sudden an acceptance of Gurney's real status; and now that the end was attained, and the white man's animated face indicated his intense satisfaction, the little brown man harbored doubts if, after all, he had not served the enemy. Jim hastened to reassure him.

"What's your name, Johnny?" he smiled, pressing the man's arm softly.

"Mgwai," was the response, "those mans call me Useless when I dive for pearl."

"H-m—a poor choice—but suppose I call you Useful, hey? It suits you better than their name, and I'll make a bad mess of it if I try to say your real tally. All right, then, Useful it is.

"Well, Useful, you're a good scout, and I'm going to show you very soon that those bad fellows down there won't bother your people much longer. You're my good friend, Useful, and I want you to do as I tell you. Now you run along home, and tell your folks to keep away from here for a while. You can come back if you want to, and maybe I can use you. If you come to this place, keep out of sight, and I shall come up to find you. How's that?"

While he was speaking Jim opened his pack and laid out food again, for the hours had sped since lunch. He shared his dinner with Useful, then considered a while, and wrapped up the remainder and handed it to the native, saying:

"Take it along with you. I'll get plenty

more, and if you come up to-morrow I'll give you enough to take home to your family."

Useful took the food with wolfish eyes, and the last trace of doubt vanished from his face.

"I come back when the sun go in the water," he said, and turned and vanished over the crest like a streak.

Jim's reckless disposal of his food supply was not quite the piece of foolhardiness it seemed, for he had come to a definite decision while gazing down at the stronghold of the magnificent Miriam. The moment those vessels swung back on their ground-tackle, securely moored, boats had left their weathered sides, and their jubilant shouts left small room for doubt that the fore-gathering was to be properly celebrated.

Now that Useful had gone, Jim took closer notice of the intervening ground between himself and the settlement, and waited longer in the expectation of seeing the woman appear. But Miriam either was taking an afternoon nap, threatened by the arriving disturbance, or away from home, and his binoculars failed to tell him which. His judgment, however, persuaded him to the latter belief, since he could not visualize such a woman calmly suffering her repose to be broken by the uncouth noises rising from her shaggy rascals.

He closely inspected every yard of the visible cliff to find the answer to his question, but no woman came into the field of his glasses; and at length, with the sun yet two hours high, he stretched himself luxuriously on the moss and watched the doings of the landing sailors beneath him.

There were roaring greetings, and boisterous hailing of cronies in other vessels, indicating that all these men seldom met together. Little knots gathered on the beach, and from time to time Gurney caught sight of flitting brown figures frantically busy among the huts, as if in deadly fear of the sailors. They were undoubtedly the women whom Useful spoke of as being forced to serve the sea-jackals. But in the first flush of their landing the vessels' crews were full of raucous jollity that had not yet turned to drunken cruelty, and more than once a shivering little brown woman was snatched

from her feet into the arms of a burly ruffian and fiercely kissed.

Presently a movement among the gangs resolved itself into semblance of order, and all hands trooped a little way along the beach to a hut from which the walls had been removed, and in which were set tables laden with food and liquor. The feast vanished so swiftly before the onslaught of ravenous teeth that the uproar of voices scarcely paused before it was renewed and redoubled in the pleasanter bout with the plentiful bottles.

Tables were soon littered with food scraps and empties; the scraps were flung roughly to the serving native girls, the empties as often as not were flung at them. And uproarious mirth took on a deeper note as the orgy proceeded, and the light began to fade into sunset, and still the bottles went the rounds.

Gurney watched the scene with reminiscent eyes, for many were the similar bouts in which he had engaged. Memory stirred more keenly when a hulking great negro sprang up, overturning the table as he rose, and continued on his course until every table in the place was sent crashing out. Then a deep bellowing voice boomed out, calling for a dance, and the demand came up to Gurney, mellowed by the distance into a tuneful roar.

Jim now sought once more for traces of the woman, but saw none. He shrewdly surmised that were she down below there would be less unruly behavior among her men; yet there was no sign of human being on the face of the cliff, and he commanded a view of wide scope. He saw the crews hang lanterns to the rafters of the hut and heard preliminary protests of a murdered fiddle, and the bright yellowness of the lantern lights warned him that sunlight was done for the day. It reminded him of Useful, and he waited to see if the native came back, for he had resolved to pay a visit to that dance, and preferred not to risk having Useful lose control over his nerves and take pot shots at his foes in the dark.

True to his promise, the little brown man appeared like a shadow at Jim's elbow a few moments after the blood-red sun had dipped in another hemisphere's rosy dawn.

And the soft brown eyes hardened sharply at the sounds and sights below; sights were limited to black shapes passing across yellow shafts of lamplight; but sounds were more generous in their revelations; hoarse laughter and gruff oaths mingled with sharp, frightened little cries of women, and at times a shriek was smothered before it was fully born. The native was in a frenzy of uneasiness, and Jim hurried to get him away.

"Here, Useful, I have a job for you," he smiled, and unpacked his hurricane lantern. "I have good friends other side, and they look for my lamp at this time. See? You take him to the mountain top where you can see trader's house, savvee? Sit down there one hour, two hours, and make flash all same this."

He lit the lantern, and showed the native how to work the slide to make a succession of flashes. The novelty impressed Useful, and he departed willingly, the more so when Jim told him he was going down to stop those women's cries.

"You come back here and wait for me, hey?" concluded Jim. "Sit tight here, and I'll come back to you. And don't try shooting arrows down there, son, or else I won't be your friend any more—see?"

Useful disappeared into the darkness, and Gurney waited until he was sure the man had gone; then, with a cheerful tune whistling through his teeth, he crawled over the ledge and walked, clawed, and slithered down the slope toward the settlement.

Making no effort at concealment, he reached the more accessible paths in a shower of falling rock fragments; but the racket in the dance-room was now too strong to permit a few stones falling to make an impression on it, and he proceeded whistling on his way until he passed into the glare of the lights. There were no stragglers about the place; every man capable of shaking a leg was shaking two to the racking screech of a tortured fiddle in the paws of a drunken fiddler. On board the anchored vessels no lights were shown; even the after decks were black, unshot by a single gleam of companionway radiance or skylight glow.

Gurney did not stop to hitch his belt, button his jacket, pat his pistols, or do any of the other queer tricks that fiction heroes are supposed to perform before walking into a crisis; he walked straight ahead exactly like Jim Gurney would, sauntered into the glaring entrance to the dance-hall, and stood against the post, still whistling, his eyes twinkling, and his freckled face presenting a care-free grin to the crowd.

The lurching fiddler spotted him first, and the music stopped as if suddenly cut off. Over the chinned fiddle a ragged, loose mouth hung open; above it two bleary eyes stuck out like knobs

CHAPTER XXI.

DANGEROUS PARTNERS.

THE cessation of the music went unnoticed for perhaps a brace of breaths, simply because the dancers, in the heat of their ardor, hung amorously over their small partners, breathing whisky fumes and lurid love into frightened ears. The trembling native women, for the greater part swung off their feet in the rough embraces of their clumsy gallants, saw nothing except the hated bodies to which they were clutched. Only when the fiddler's expression was accentuated by a curse did a man look up; and in a second the place was blanketed in silence, to change as swiftly into uproar.

Gurney looked on in keen amusement. Fearing no man, he regarded the entire scene critically, mentally comparing it with others in which he had played a part. He recognized his old acquaintance Joe, and looked for the others whom he had met; and everywhere he looked he saw ferocity glaring at him. A muttering growl, hoarse and menacing, filled the room, and the dancing partners separated, the women scurrying to the corners in affright as they were flung aside.

Jim grinned cheerfully back at the lowering crowd, and maintained his position against the door-post. He caught growling sentences, queries, and retorts in half-doubtful undertones, and the men's regard seemed to be divided between himself and

some point out of his immediate vicinity. Soon came louder voices, and a fiercer note crept into them.

"She'll give us scorching hell," grumbled one; and another snarled back: "Let her scorch! She's up top. Won't be down for an hour yet." The debate was ended when another tough specimen added: "She'll stay on the lookout as long's that steamer keeps her lights in sight, anyway, and it takes a long time to sink a light from the top o' this cone. Dump th' red-headed bobcat over the rocks!"

There was little uncertainty about the rush that followed. The gang came crouching, with hands crooked like cargo-hooks, ready to tear the presumptuous intruder who seemed to be there for the sole purpose of mocking at them for previous failures. And those failures were communicated, by the parties to them, in curseful words to the men lately arrived. The time elapsing in that rush from the mid-floor to Gurney's position was measured in swift seconds, perhaps the longer on account of the identity of the leaders. Those were men who had handled the red-headed one before, and Joe was careful to be behind center-rush of the wedge.

They were maddened by the glinting gray eyes and care-free grin beneath that crest of flaming hair, maddened further by the absolute indifference to their fury shown in Gurney's cool attitude. His back was against the post, his hands behind him, and thus he stood until the swarm was within five feet of him. Then he moved, but the rage-reddened eyes confronting him failed to detect what he had been quietly preparing for them.

Jim's keen perception had early revealed to him the structure of the hut; it was similar to his own except in size; roof, walls, flooring, all were removable in sections, and the walls had already been taken down to give free air to the dancers. The posts of corners and doors simply fitted into sockets, and when he first took his stand against his particular timber his hands tested its solidity. Now, as he leaped back, he tore up the post, a stout piece of timber four square and seven feet long, and his cheery smile changed to a contemptuous laugh.

The gang came on, murderous and half-blind with fury, and the foremost found himself suddenly sitting back in the midst of his mates, clutching his breastbone in gasping agony. He had met Jim's post, end on, and had been hurled back like a ball from a billiard cue.

"Come on; spot him again!" grinned the red-headed billiardist, and mocked them with his pointed post.

His challenge was taken up with a roar, and he was forced to give ground to find room for his next shot. Grinning, ever cheerful, he made two shots with his big cue in rapid order, and two human billiard balls caromed off their fellows to fall breathless to the floor.

Up to that moment no weapon had been flashed, but leaders became scarce after the second visitation of that awful post, used in a manner never before imagined by any of the bestial crowd; the next man who rushed upon Jim came tugging at his knife. The post went to meet him, taking him squarely in the stomach before his knife could flash. The steel clattered on the boards, and the man crashed down beside it. Eyes that had blazed murder at Jim began to smolder in cowardly fear.

"Come on, bullies," pleaded Gurney, temptingly lowering the end of his post. "Don't spoil a good scrap by funkng. Here, this is the sport!"

With the cry he leveled his weapon again, stamped his foot twice on the floor, and charged the mob like a flaming streak, jabbing and thrusting with his unwieldy spear in approved bayonet fighting fashion. The crowd tumbled backward in swearing haste, and he rested in the middle of the hut, regarding the scene humorously.

"Well, well," he grinned, "such fine fellows to be wicked pirates! Your dancing was rotten; your fiddling was punk; your deportment toward your partners was awful. But for really truly stock-yards smelliness, your scrapping ability scoops the pot!"

"D'ye mean to tell me you're quitting, after starting out to dump me over the rocks? Don't be so unkind. Here, give a fellow a run for his white-alley, won't you?" and he flung the post clattering to the floor behind him.

He was aware that some unseen influence was at work—unseen, that is, by him. Unseen, too, no doubt, by the crowd as a whole; yet some of the men were surely subject to it, and it was not many seconds before all were wise. When he cast his fearsome weapon from him he stood lightly poised on the balls of his feet, hands loosely closed beside him, ready to drive in a punch or to grapple. And he hoped somebody would take up his gauntlet, for the old fighting blood in him was bubbling to a boil, and of the feast he promised himself he had swallowed only the appetizer.

But his challenge was accepted in a manner not to his idea of sportsmanship. At the back of the halting gang a one-eyed ruffian shoved his ugly face between the shoulders of two of his mates, and Jim spotted a gun-barrel dropping to his level in front of that single red-shot eye. The cheery grin vanished, anger sat in its place, and he leaped back and stooped to pick up his post again to make a punishing onslaught upon the treacherous gang.

As he bent down the place was filled with the roar of a shot, and of a sudden all other noises were hushed. Queerly, thought Jim, the shot was accompanied by no smoke or flash; but his sharp eyes speedily took in the picture in its reality. No bullet had come near him; that he felt sure. But the report had scarcely terminated when the one-eyed man's single eye glazed in terror, his gun fell unfired, and the crowd split aside from him, leaving him a specimen of whimpering cowardice, holding a shattered hand that dripped red.

On every face sat confusion and fear; every eye was fixed upon a point behind Gurney, and he swung around to see for himself. And his gaze lighted upon the figure of Miriam Jobert, splendid in her anger, her beautiful face ablaze, and her eyes seeking among the crowd as if for another mark for the pistol in her hand.

Her aspect softened when her eyes met Gurney's, and she swept majestically into the hut while her rascals cowered in the wings and watched her with faces full of apprehension.

Recalling what he knew of her, Gurney waited for the explosion of imperial wrath

he felt surely must follow, and all of her unruly crew apparently anticipated nothing less. Jim's chief curiosity was as to just how such a woman ruled such a gang, and nothing in his experience of women gave him a hint of the actual truth which was swiftly to be shown.

Miriam advanced to the cowering mob, and after she had smiled reassuring at Gurney, her face was set in an emotionless mask that gave a shivery impression. The man she had winged stood sullenly where she had shot him, the red dripping monotonously on the boards; his mates herded apart, very unlike the bold brutes of ten minutes before. And until she stood within touch of the one-eyed ruffian Miriam spoke no word, gave no sigh; but the moment she could reach him, her slim hand flashed out and left the imprints of her fingers across his swarthy face.

Gurney grinned gleefully, wondering if by such methods that crowd could ever be brought to subjection by a woman. He was quickly undeceived, and the smile faded from his face. The woman now spoke, in a tone so soft, so utterly calm, that the words seemed a horrid jest.

"Take this beast away. Tie him well with green withes, and leave him on the ledge at the foot of the cliff. Away with him!"

"Don' do that, lady; let him fight me with his hands. I'll punish him," protested Jim, feeling guilty when he heard the same fate meted out to this man as he himself had barely escaped.

"Peace," the woman smiled at him, "he has earned this, friend Jim, for he would have disobeyed me and injured you." She assumed an air of geniality and stepped alertly apart from the men, crying: "Come, let this be enough! Start up the dance again! Here, you fiddler, have you lost the use of your fingers? Play, play!"

A short conflict took place when four men seized their luckless comrade and carried him away, but it was silenced and forgotten in the renewed whirl of the dance; for now every sullen face forced a grin of enjoyment before the mistress, and whether he felt like it or not, every man fell to capering madly with his girl, as if striving to

outdo his fellows. Gurney was not kindly disposed toward the author of the freshly recent condemnation of a fellow man to tortured death; but he could not withhold a meed of admiration for the perfect control Miriam exercised over these uncivilized brutes.

He met her gaze upon him, and there was challenge in her eyes. Moving with perfect grace, she glided toward him, her feet in rhythm with the screeching music that had at least the merit of fair tempo; and as he caught her meaning the old Adam in him was resurrected, the spell of the familiar scene seized upon him, and meeting her challenge with his irresistible grin he sprang to meet her, and in a breath they were among the dancers, swaying to the tune, their bodies touching, their faces very close.

At touch of her, Jim sensed a subtle intoxication surrounding him that rendered him oblivious to every other human being in the crowded hut. Her lips were parted in a seductive smile, her great eyes glowed with soft, red-gold fires filmed with dusky allure. And as she swayed in time with him, her corsage gave forth a perfume of sensuous insidiousness; her hair swept his cheek, the scarlet lips were open by his neck, breathing warm fragrance upon him that stole to the roots of his soul.

Never in a full life had he danced with such a creature. Snatch back his thoughts as he would, everything outside the present moment vanished from his memory; at the fourth circle of the room his eyes had darkened, and his breath issued hot and impetuous from his lips.

And then she laughed; low, musical, thrilling.

CHAPTER XXII.

A VISITOR.

WHILE the crew of Miriam danced, the steamer's light, which she had been watching from the mountain, stole into sight from Barbara's beach. It was not yet time for the regular schooner to arrive, and at any time a steamer was something to gaze on with curiosity.

Barbara sat outside the house, with her pretty eyes straining into the darkness at the hilltop where, half an hour before, she had seen the gladdening flash of the lantern which told her that her *Lancelot* was safe that night. She stared at the invisible spot as if still hoping for yet another signal; Goff's cry of the steamer in sight diverted her attention to seaward; and while she never forgot *Lancelot* for one moment, natural curiosity made her join her father in a vigil of watching.

"Potty little tub, whatever she is," remarked the trader. The dimness of the lights and the slowness of her approach hinted at least that much, and that she was seeking the island was apparent by the unwavering bearing she maintained. "Wonder what on earth she wants here?" he mused, half to himself. "I hope we're not going to have bally tourists start bothering us, Barbara."

"Oh, perhaps the steamer is taking the schooner's turn," the girl replied, with no very deep interest in her voice. "Why don't you go out in the canoe and meet her, dad? Maybe she won't want to anchor if you tell the captain how bad the holding ground is here."

"By Jove, I think I will!" cried Goff eagerly. "That may stop nosy people, perhaps. Will you come, Barbara?"

"No, I don't want to. I'm tired."

Goff put to sea in the girl's canoe, and the tiny sail soon disappeared in the darkness, leaving Barbara peering at the unwelcome green and red and white lights steadily drawing in closer. She soon wearied of looking at them, and turned her gaze again on the mountain, for there at least her heart found sweet relief in the bare thought that somewhere beyond the shadows *he* was probably sleeping.

"I know he is thinking of me," she whispered to herself. "He teases me, and laughs at me, but he does think of me; he must—he must!"

The thought warmed her gratefully, and it induced another thought which intensified the glow in her blood. He had sent his signal, as he had promised her father, but it did not say that he could not possibly return that night.

"Of course he made the signal to please me," she thought. "That is only his kind heart. But he will come back, if possible. I know he will. And oh, he may be here at any time, and find me like this!"

This was her old garb, her wildly tumbled hair, her pretty bare feet and ankles, her wriggling, unrestricted toes.

"That would never do!" she went on as if to the twinkling stars that leaned from the sky in great luminous clusters of celestial jewels. "He would think I didn't care, and—and he always calls me kid when I'm dressed this way!"

She sprang up after searching the mountain blackness for hopeful signs without result, and fled into her holy of holies behind the veranda screen. The light gleamed through the screen, and her shadow passed and repassed as she hurriedly assumed her more gorgeous attire; in five minutes she emerged, breathless but happy, and peered mountainward again before going back inside to spend another five minutes in improving the result of her hasty robing.

With delicious coquetry she placed the lamp on the table in the main room and turned the light up fully, then seated herself outside but in a position where the shaft of yellow radiance touched her and rendered her plainly visible from a point far along the beach. She blushed when she thought how he would discover her sitting there, and in anticipation she saw the merry gray eyes of him fastened on her in soul-gratifying admiration.

Her thoughts helped nature to make her at that moment the fairest vision eye of man could long for; if a more perfect flower ever blossomed, it was surely not on earth; nowhere outside of the seventh inner circle of heaven could Barbara be matched as she sat there aglow, eyes soft and dusky, the pure, true heart of her throbbing and fluttering the laces at her breast. She noticed no flight of time; her gaze was fixed on the dark mountain with unwavering faith, and hope that a well-known shape would presently detach itself from the general shadow and come striding blithely to her.

A steamer's whistle snatched her thoughts back to the sea, and she was startled to find the canoe almost at the beach again.

The steamer's lights had disappeared, and that circumstance gave her hope that the intruder had decided not to remain. The whistle simply meant farewell, she surmised, and in no fear for her father's safety she resumed her watch on the cliffside, knowing that soon she would hear all about the strange ship that had come and gone in the night.

She passed out of the immediate world for the moment, and to one approaching the house she appeared in the lighted veranda like some blessed spirit of beauty, fresh and fragrant as a dewy rose. She heard the canoe grate on the sand, and then her father's voice; her mind flitted back to her *Lancelot*, and earthly sounds had no meaning for her. She clasped her small brown hands about one knee, and an especially happy fancy sent the warm flush charmingly to her face again.

In that moment she was startled out of her abstraction and brought to her feet in flaming confusion by a man's voice near by—a strange man's voice, softly modulated, pleasant with the pleasingness of perfect breeding.

"Oh, I beg your pardon! I was not aware that I should find a lady here."

She looked into the face of a tall, gentlemanly stranger, well dressed, but quite fittingly for Tarani, and her eyes fell before his amazed but frankly admiring gaze. In his face was the expression of one astonished who was a stranger to astonishment. Plainly he was a man not easily shocked, yet as plainly his sudden emergence upon such a fair creature as Barbara in such a place came in the category of emphatically new experiences. He quickly recovered himself, however, and hastened first to help the girl out of her confusion.

"Mr. Goff sent me on up," he said with a smile. "He is right behind me."

His smile was soothing, and Barbara returned it confidently, feeling somehow that this stranger was a man to be trusted; but she told her secret self that his smile was not so sunny as *Lancelot's*, his eyes less kindly, his perfectly groomed hair of raven's-wing black not nearly so beautiful as certain other locks of blazing red. She found her fancies wandering again, and

colored deeply when his low laugh told her that he had noticed it; her father's voice broke in and saved her from embarrassment by saying:

"Barbara, Mr. Lynn is to stay with us for a few days. See that the couch is ready for him, and show him over the place."

Lynn—it was our acquaintance of Moji—extended his hand and murmured:

"I am charmed, Miss Barbara. This is a pleasure so utterly unexpected that I can scarcely believe I am awake. May I say that Tarani seemed a forbidding black rock when I first saw it from the sea, but closer acquaintance makes it pure Paradise?"

Frankly pleased, Barbara met his smile with her own merry eyes; but the next moment she frowned and turned away to attend to the guest chamber, for she told herself that no man but *Lancelot* should say such things to her. Goff, as usual, saw little of Barbara's changing expressions; he saw nothing of his guest's open admiration for his daughter, thought nothing of it until Lynn's quiet voice reminded him that he had such a daughter.

"By Jove, Goff, if I may venture to say so, Miss Goff is a stunning beauty. What a gem for such a setting!"

"Yes, I believe the child is growing fairly good looking," drawled the trader, busy with supper preparations. Lynn stared at him blankly, doubtful if such indifference could really be genuine. He decided it was a pose, and during supper he tried to draw the father out by engaging the daughter in intimate conversation which he led around skilfully to the great outside world, of which, he soon found, she knew nothing.

Surely, he thought, Goff could not intend to keep the girl cut off from everything such a girl could obtain in civilized life, and he hinted at such things as he guessed would arouse Barbara's curiosity. And the trader rose to the bait readily.

"I suggested taking Barbara on a trip," he said; "but she wouldn't go—would you, Barbara?" She shook her head vehemently, and her serious aspect made Lynn smile.

"But you have no idea what you are missing by remaining shut up here, Miss Barbara," he said. "You should visit a big city at least once, and see how people live."

She replied simply, meeting his eyes with a full and unaffected stare:

"I have no interest in the cities, or in how people live in them. I like the island, and I have all the people I want right here." Then she avoided his gaze and colored hotly.

Lynn walked on the lonely beach late that night, his mind too wakeful to make his couch attractive just yet; and he could not tear his mind from Barbara Goff: try as he would to accept her father's estimate of her as yet a child, he could not blind his own eyes to the true status of her—that of a budding woman of a charm surpassing every woman he had ever seen; and he had, in his official capacity, met many of the butterflies of the capitals and courts he had visited.

"An amazing little beauty!" he repeated over and over. "Perfect Venus, and just full of natural good breeding, for all that she has never been to school. Jove!"

So he continued far into the night, lying on his couch later on, striving first to sleep, then to fasten his wakeful mind on the business that had brought him there. And after a struggle he got the threads of his thoughts to join, arranging details in order until his well-ordered mentality soon began working in its accustomed channels.

He had come to Tarani on an errand similar to many others which took him to queer places. The principal aid of a great official, it was part of his business to find men for certain tasks, and another part of his work was to follow up and see that the men he selected played their parts.

One thing about his selections was that quite often he knew nothing concerning the destination of the man chosen; he simply carried out orders of his own chief, going to a designated place at a designated time and checking up results. For it had been known, not often, but occasionally, that his man had found the difficulties insurmountable, and then Lynn had been forced to return home to find a man to replace the dead one. That was yet another phase of Lynn's work; so keen had he become in his selections that in almost every case, if his man failed, it was because death had taken a hand.

Now he was on Tarani to follow up a man he had selected; and not knowing which of his many selections had been sent to this particular island, he approached his work with an open mind, but felt slightly curious as to whether the man had realized the beauty and charm of the amazing Barbara.

The thought troubled him, for he remembered every man he had picked for his chief; and, although as yet ignorant which one was here, he remembered that every one of them was of a type not at all likely to overlook anything in the way of feminine attractions.

"He'll have to stick to his knitting and leave the girl alone," he muttered drowsily, just before sleep at length came to him. "None of those chaps is fit to touch such an angel's hand."

And the angel was hovering above him as he dreamed. His finely molded features were set in a smile that transformed him from a cold official into a warm, pulsing human being. And Barbara, too, smiled as she slept; but her angel was a hero with merry gray eyes, his aureole a mop of flaming red hair.

And so both smiled the night through, all unaware of what the fates had cooking for them in the caldron at that moment.

CHAPTER XXIII.

BARBARA'S KNIGHT.

TRADER Goff permitted nothing to swerve him from the even course of his daily life, not even the advent of a man of Lynn's stamp. Lynn had nothing in common with any other man who had at any time within Goff's experience been cast up on the little silver beach; he was quite obviously a gentleman, one of that capable class of unobtrusive men of action from which Goff himself most certainly had sprung, whatever his present standing or the reason for it. For this reason the trader did not suggest, as he had done even in Gurney's case, that he make himself a residence for the duration of his stay, but placed his house at his guest's disposal.

"The place is yours, Lynn," he said,

"If you require anything you don't see, ask Barbara for it. I am obliged to accommodate you, since you bring such credentials, and do so gladly; but you'll pardon me if I go about my business as usual, I hope, and leave you in my girl's hands. A fellow mustn't let chance visitors break up his routine, y'know."

That was all. There was no curiosity regarding Lynn's business, no surmise as to the duration of his visit; Goff left the house without further parley and walked off along the beach, leaving his guest standing in the veranda gazing after him with a subtle twinkle shining in the recesses of a pair of keen, inscrutable eyes. There was nobody to say it to, so Lynn merely thought it, but the most striking subject of thought was what on earth the trader's business could be to demand such devoted application.

But the morning was sparkling and full of the wine of sea and breeze, bringing to the calm Briton abounding vigor and ambition. Far along the shore he saw another habitation, but as he had watched the place since taking his early morning swim, and had seen no sign of human being in the near vicinity of the hut, he had learned nothing of his neighbor, for Goff volunteered nothing, and no inquiry had been made. From the hut Lynn searched the sea and the reefs in quest of Barbara, feeling eager to improve the acquaintance of the amazing little beauty. She had prepared his breakfast, but he had eaten with her father alone, and he felt that she was either smitten with shyness or was playing coquette with him.

The longer he sought, the more intense his desire became to discover exactly how this girl measured up. For, be it understood, Lynn was first and last a gentleman in the strictest sense of the word; and while something burned in his breast which warned him that the ice of his nature was likely to melt under the glow of this girl's presence, he was not the man to plunge into ardent relations which might bring pain to the girl afterward, when he found that she could never measure up to the standard of his class.

So he waited impatiently, hoping to see

her, and willing to lay aside his more vital business for a day or so if only he could spend those days in a sweeter education. He looked, of course, for the flash of white draperies; he caught sight, instead, of a distant brown sail, which drew steadily nearer on the fresh breeze, and in which he soon detected a single occupant whose dress or skin, he was not sure which at the distance, matched the sail in tint.

He believed the lone sailor was a native, and strolled off along the shore to pass time until Barbara chose to appear. When he returned to the house the canoe was in the small surf, and when the brown-clad figure leaped ashore and ran the craft up clear of the water he was halted with something of a shock to recognize the girl he sought, and astonishment seized him when he realized that if she had presented a picture of beauty before, she filled the scene now, in her wild, untrammelled loveliness, like a vision of Eve.

Cold, indifferent, unemotional Lynn had grown to be in his official life; his face had been trained until, whenever he chose, it was a mask to his true feelings; but when Barbara saw him, and ran to greet him, red-gold hair flying, eyes sparkling star-like, bare brown arms and ankles gleaming in the sunlight, her ragged garment boldly outlining shy charms that could not be hidden for all their innocent shyness, the man's throat went dry, and the healthy tan of his face turned a paler hue.

"Lynn, you ass, pull yourself together!" he warned himself, angry to realize his loss of balance. He forced himself to put on an expression of outward calmness, and replied to Barbara's greeting: "What an astonishing young lady you are, Miss Barbara! Just when a fellow expects to see you as he saw you before, you turn up smiling like a sprite of the sea, more charming than ever."

"Do you like me like this?" she laughed, meeting his eyes frankly. "This is my every-day dress. I do everything in it."

"I think it is the perfection of dresses. I am glad you only put on your holiday dress for visitors. This is ever so much better."

"Oh, I didn't put on my good clothes for you, Mr. Lynn!" she replied with staggering candor. "You will scarcely ever see me dressed different to this, unless—unless *Lancelot* comes!"

For a moment Lynn stared down at her animated face, uncertain whether to laugh with her or to ask questions. She amazed him in many ways, and not the least by her outspoken assurance of his subordinate position as an inducement to feminine adornment.

But a keen sense of humor underlay his outward indifference, and he thought he saw in the girl's glib mention of *Lancelot* the not very common but entirely plausible spoken dream of a young girl living a lonely life, hoping that one day *Prince Charming* would arrive. He decided to laugh, and she joined him in a peal of merriment that placed them on a sound footing of fellowship.

"Let us hope that *Lancelot* is delayed, then," he smiled. "While waiting for him, though, won't you show me your island? Your father has resigned me to your care, and I believe I admire him better for it."

"*Lancelot* will not be long delayed," she said slowly, and her eyes wandered over the mountain, her piquant face shaded into anxiety for a moment. But she swiftly shook off the mood and turned to scrutinize her companion. "I will gladly take you walking," she smiled; "but do you expect to keep up with me in those clothes?"

"Why, yes, I think I can."

"You will look a fright in an hour. Dear man, you see my dress? I am ready to climb crags, swim surf, run through the jungle, or slide down a cliff. All these things you will have to do if you follow where I lead. You had better let me give you some of father's old things. All you need is a pair of old trousers and a shirt—unless your feet are tender; then you need shoes. Wait a minute."

She brought out a heap of garments which certainly had long since earned the description of old, and thrust them into his hands. Lynn's face showed no intense joy; in fact, the very touch of such nondescript things almost made him shiver; but he would have gone clad as a native rather

than miss anything to be had by pleasing Barbara, and he went into his part of the sleeping veranda to dress. Such clothes required little time to adjust; he rejoined the girl, wearing, with other things, an apologetic grimace; but her dancing eyes and parted lips thrilled him and amply repaid him.

"Oh, you look just like—you look really truly able to keep up with me now!" she cried, and clapped her hands delightedly and danced around him.

"Glad I suit your majesty," he smiled. "Nothing else can matter. Shall we take some lunch?"

"It doesn't seem necessary. I am first going along to the castle, to open the windows for my lord. We can have lunch there."

He stared at her blankly, doubting if, after all, there might not be something lacking in Barbara's mental equipment. But she met his stare merrily; there was nothing of dark import in her eager face, no light of aberration in her glorious eyes; she set off along the shore, chattering on, dancing over the dazzling sand like a sunbeam; and in spite of doubts, Lynn found it easy to adjust himself to her mood. He entered into the spirit of her chatter, and played what he supposed was simply her childish game of make-believe.

"And is my lord from home?" he asked. "Has *Lancelot* gone off to the wars, and left my lady to care for his castles? Is that the castle at the end of the beach?"

"Yes, that is *Lancelot's* castle. He has gone to the mountain to find the old witch who sits up there. He must not return and find his house neglected, so I must admit the sea breezes to keep it sweet and clean."

There were moments as they walked side by side when Lynn was assailed with recurring doubts that would not down. He was willing to enter into the play of make-believe, but somehow he felt that the girl was altogether too serious in her fun—that she really believed in her *Lancelot*, his castle, and the old witch of the mountain; and such a state of affairs was unthinkable. He resolved to speak to Goff about it, and urge him to take her away on a trip before she became obsessed with her fairy-fancies.

For the time being, he was willing to play on and to make the most of his opportunities.

They reached Gurney's hut, and found it as he had left it, wide open; but the floor was covered with sand, and rustling crabs had usurped the domain. Barbara seized a shovel and drove the intruders out, then fell industriously to work putting things in place which were never out of place; and while she performed her labor of duty, as Lynn interpreted it, her face glowed with ardor, and the touches her fingers gave to rough furnishings had the tenderness of love in them.

Her merriment had softened to a smile of joy in her work, and the man felt as if he were witnessing a rite almost too sacred to be spied on. He wandered around idly, waiting until the girl had completed her task, and as he allowed his eyes to rove about the rough shack he caught sight of an object which seemed slightly out of place in such surroundings.

It was a book, a stoutly bound volume, stained with sea water, and hung up to nails by means of a stick thrust through the back binding. He took it down and looked it over. It was "The Round Table," rescued from the sea by Goff and taken care of by *Lancelot* himself.

"By Jove, this is a queer community;" muttered Lynn. "Fancy finding on one potty little island a creature like Barbara and a poor devil of a beach-comber who reads Arthur's 'Knights'! Phew! No wonder she calls him *Lancelot*!"

He flicked over the pages, smiling at the pictures, perhaps recalling the day when he derived keen pleasure in such things. His smile broke into a low whistle at the page whereon was portrayed the *Perfect Knight*—*Sir Lancelot*—for the knight was shown snatching a distressed damsel from the clutches of an army of low-browed churls, and beneath the damsel's disheveled figure was scrawled in a very fine, young-ladyish hand: "Barbara."

Softly he replaced the book on its nails, and felt that he had uncovered most of the mystery.

If only the hut—*Lancelot's* castle—had been vacant, he could have established once for all that Barbara's knight and his castle, and the old witch, too, were simply creatures of a childish imagination.

But the place was not vacant, beyond the fact that the owner was temporarily absent, and further consideration was stopped by the girl herself. His hands had scarcely left the replaced book when a little cry burst out beside him, Barbara's flying figure flashed past, and she seized the volume, hugging it to her breast in ecstasy.

"Oh, he found it! He found it and preserved it for me when I flung it into the sea in anger!" she murmured. Suddenly aware that Lynn was regarding her strangely, she flashed a defiant look at him and cried:

"Oh, you don't understand! You cannot understand! Don't look at me in that way! Leave me, leave me! I hate you for that smile!"

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.



THE FLIGHT

BY SAM S. STINSON

FAIR as a radiant goddess was the maid,
 As rich as Cræsus he;
 And so they planned to make an even trade,
 Nor knew that riches flee.
 He married her, her beauty to enfold,
 But beauty fades away.
 She married him, enamored of his gold—
 In the same boat are they!

The Courtship of the Blue-Bell

by



Charley Wood

IT was a comparatively warm morning for early spring and the cook, like the birds and the worms, was making the most of it. He was seated on the edge of the wharf where lay moored his temporary home, the schooner, Benjamin Hay, when I came upon him. His rotund proportions occupied most of the space between two spiles while he swung his feet back and forth over the muddy water of the bay, and between puffs on a disreputable corn-cob, whistled a tune that was obviously original.

He managed to make room when he saw me, however, so I sat down and smoked and swung my feet likewise.

He spoke with a quaint twist to his words. I had remarked it once, and to my chagrin, for he had somewhat insultedly replied that it was only because he had spent so many years on British ships; but that he had been born right here in these United States and was for the Stars and Stripes forever, and maybe I could show him better Yankees than his Connecticut parents!

He launched into the following story apropos of nothing as far as I could see. I had hardly more than got my pipe started well when he began.

Cap'n Hosiah Briggs, he's the man I been thinking on. No, you never heerd of him, he was skippering afore your time in Square Haven. He was running mostly coastwise

in schooners, up and down and up and down, never his own owner, and all the time wanting a ship of his own and swearing at the orders of his owners behind their backs.

I ain't sure if he knowed his own mind.

Women? It weren't women that was the matter of him. He was a bach, forty abouts, set and free in his ways, and if he had any affection for women it was as portable as a deck-bucket. I would say he was a woman-hater if I didn't know there ain't any such, at least, I never seen one and I've seen the world from every angle, including catty-cornered in the Pacific to upside-down in Chiny.

He weren't wanting of no home, or no wife, or no children. All he wanted was good grub to eat and good licker to drink and a ship of his own without no female to interrupt.

It weren't licker that was the matter of him, neither, although he did like his little swig orful well and always carried a few cases along to sea. That was how he lived year in and year out, free as a sea-gull, independent as a pirate, and changing of his ship at the end of every cruise account of disagreements with his owners.

But, there come a time when he went about ship and steered off on another course. Old Sam Judson was the cause of it. Sam was an old shipmate of his whom he had

sailed along with afore the mast. He was living out of his days at Snug Harbor. The skipper had just finished a cruise and they was talking over things across a pair of grogs in Stapleton.

The skipper had let go the remark that he was sick of life with the owners holding a belaying pin over his head all the time. Sam thinks a minute and up and says:

"Mebbe I ought to tell you and mebbe I hadn't," he says, "but I know where is the best schooner on this coast lying idle on her hawsers for want of a good skipper, and she's owned by a pretty girl."

"Where?" the skipper wants to know.

"Square Haven," says Sam, "it's the Bluebell what belonged to old Skipper Bill Banks. He left her, keel and tops'l, to his daughter, Em'ly, when he died. Now, if you only had as much sense with women as you have with ships and was more 'and-some-like, there'd be your chance."

The skipper looks at him hard and orders two more grogs.

"My looks and your opinion ain't mates," he says. "But how does it come there ain't nobody married her with a beautiful ship, and why does it lie idle?"

"Because," says Sam, "she ain't never met the right man, she's that particular, she is. And she don't want no sailorman for a husband. She wants a man what will settle down and live home where he belongs and not be running off to sea. So, there lies the hooker, month in and month out and gathering moss and rotting."

"How old is this girl?" axes the skipper.

"Thirty-five or thereabout," Sam answers.

"A girl thirty-five year old," says the skipper. "According to that I'm a boy of forty and you're a youth of sixty-five. But, I haven't got no objection to the age."

"O' course not," says Sam, "she's just the age for to make you a good wife."

"I'm not wanting of no wife now or never," snorts the skipper. "I get enough bossing from owners. But," he says, "I'm going to show you how good my looks are and if I can manage women as well as ships by getting that schooner without marrying her."

Then he gets up and walks back and

forth across the grog-shop, rattling of the pay in his pocket and thinking hard. He kept it up for so long that Sam got tired of waiting for another grog and went home riled. He was one of them what figgers out the value of his conversation in drinks and he figgered Cap'n Briggs had cheated him bad.

That was why, prob'ly, he left the skipper to find out one important fact that he hadn't mentioned during the conversation.

Two days after that, if you had been right where you are now, you would have saw Cap'n Briggs. He stands right on that spot back of us, his gear in a pile behint him, and looking at the Bluebell. She lay right off there where you see them gulls fighting over that loaf of bread. She was moored fore and aft, sails stowed, and she'd been there without moving an inch beyont the slack of her cables for over a year.

The paint on her weren't even soiled, except for the little rust streaks running down from the scuppers and lanyards. She was a thing of beauty to behold. She looked snug and tight enough to be able to slant off to sea the very next day. The skipper actually got to feeling ashamed of the responsibility of standing there letting such a beauty lie idle.

So he stows his gear aboard the best hotel in Square Haven for to make an impression and cruises out in his Sunday-shore suit for to find Miss Em'ly Banks.

Old Sam weren't such a bad picker after all. The skipper told himself that when he had passed up and down in front of Miss Banks's cottage a dozen times and seen her standing on the verandy the twelfth. She weren't skinny and scrawny with a peaked bow and a perpetual grouch like he had been expecting of. She had one of them pleasant faces, no gray hair or wrinkles, and was buxom of figger.

"So far, so good," says the skipper to himself as he stands there and looks her over out of the corner of his eye, "and it makes it a lot pleasanter to find she's not 'omely. But I'll have to steer blighted careful because this house is moored plump between two hills and if I got moored there for life I'd smother for want of breeze."

But seeing the lady had caught him

standing there a looking at her he knowed there had to be something done quick, so he walks through the gate.

"I'm looking for Miss Em'ly Banks," says he.

"I'm Miss Banks," she answers. She follers it up with a lamping of the skipper's lines that didn't make him feel comfortable.

"My name is Cap'n Hosity Briggs," says he. He don't get no further because the lady interrupts.

"And you came to see me because I'm the owner of the Bluebell," she says, the surprise of it all but knocking the skipper backward. "You think she's the most beautiful ship you ever seen, you think it's a shame for to let her lie idle on her hawse, and you're surprised for to find that the owner of her is so young and 'andsome."

It took the skipper a minute for to get his breath and then he slams his Sunday cap angrily on the ground.

"Wait till I gets a chance for to lay a hand on Sam Judson," chokes he, hot as a galley-stove, "I'll jam his tops'ls into his keel for him. The sneaky rat!"

"Who's Sam Judson?" she axes.

"Don't you know?" he says.

"Never heard of him," she says.

"Then how did you know what I come here for?" he inquires.

"Because," she says, "you're about the dozenth sailorman what's come here since my father left me the Bluebell, and they all say the same things. I know it all by heart now."

Prob'ly if there had been a scupper there on the verandy for to crawl into, the skipper would have done it. For a long time he tried to figger out something for to say, but seeing the lady had said all he had intended to say for him, he just give over and started to leave without saying anything at all. He went down the walk toward the gate, and while he went she run her eye over him from top to keel.

He had his hand on the gate when he got another surprise.

"Mebbe you'd like a cup of tea afore you go," she says.

The skipper comes back like a man in a dream, steps careful over a door-mat what's on the top step and says "Home, Sweet

Home" on it and sinks into a chair on the verandy awaiting for the tea. While she was gone he wondered if all them other sailormen had been axed to tea, and hoped there weren't no arsenic or nothing in it.

Afore he was through he stowed away four cups of it! And he set right there on the verandy with the people going by in the street and staring of their lamps out at him while he done it.

That was the beginning of the courtship.

"I'm up ag'in' a terrible hard course," says he to himself after he had left, "because I won't never be able to fool this one, and a spoke of helm either way is liable to stow me away forever between them two hills."

He went back to the hotel and set in his room thinking it over, and smoking of his pipe till three o'clock in the morning.

It took him all of a month to lay out a course. He spent most of his time thinking it out in his room at the hotel, and laying it as careful as he would have figgered out a course around the world in uncharted waters.

He weren't backward about making promises, so far as that went. He could have taken a chart out of his sea-chest and put his finger on more than one port where there was females of more than one shade who might still be waiting for him to fulfil promises. He wouldn't have bet no money that any of 'em was still waiting, though, no more nor you nor me would. Anyhow, they didn't own idle Bluebells.

During this month he was a reg'lar caller at the cottage. The conversations between 'em was mostly battles of brains, because she was always trying to steer it away from the Bluebell and he didn't want for to talk about nothing else. There was more than once that she told him she would be more happy if the hooker was sunk.

Then, one Sunday afternoon when it was too rainy for to set on the verandy, he took a long chance. He was sitting in a horse-hair chair in the parlor, with pictures of old people hanging around him on the walls and she a playing of the organ in the corner. The homelike things in that room always got on his nerves.

He got up all of a sudden and goes over to the organ and takes a holt of her hand. He had saw a show the night afore and his imitation of the leading man weren't bad considering there was no rehearsals.

"You never knowed I read palms, did you?" he says.

"No," she says, "read mine."

Now I ain't sure if the skipper had ever read a palm in his life afore. All I know is that he wrinkled his forehead over her hand and took on the look of a professor of palmistry while he studies the lines.

"You're going for to be married," was the first thing he says.

"When?" she wants to know.

"In about four or five year," says he, and looks up in time for to catch a look of disappointment on her face.

"There ain't no man going to be a court-ing of me four or five year," she says sharp like.

"But suppose," says he, still studying of the lines, "suppose the man ain't got money enough for to do it in less, like the man what shows in your hand here?"

"Where does he show?" she axes, looking hard at the palm he's holding.

"Right there," he says, pointing to a little line. "There's the man what wants to marry you. And then ups and downs what you see in it there, that means he is a sailorman, and one of the best masters of sail what ever walked a ship's deck. And he's a man what would make a fortune, but for one thing."

"What is the one thing?" she axes.

"He ain't got a ship of his own," he says. "He's an independent man who has got to have plenty of freedom and be his own boss or he can't be happy. But you're going to be cruel hard on him."

"Why?" she says.

"That line what forks off there," answers he, pointing to one, "that shows where his heart longs for to be out a roaming of the seas, and that other branch shows where you want him to settle down in a house what's smothered in between two hills, where he can't see, or even smell, the ocean."

"But how do I know what he would be up to when he was off to sea?" she says.

"He wouldn't be up to nothing," he says, "because that big line what you see running down there, that shows that he don't care a rope yarn about nobody but you and never will up to the day he is hauled aboard Davy's locker."

Miss Banks looked at him for a long time, and so piercing, that he took to fidget-ing in his chair.

"What would you advise me to do about it?" she axes.

"There's only one thing you can do," he answers, his voice kind of trembling, "you can become engaged to him and let him charter the Bluebell from you for about a year, say, all aboveboard and right. And mebbe by that time he would have enough money stowed for to marry without having his heart broke by living between two hills."

"But I have enough money for both," she says.

"But you are forgetting he's an inde-pendent man what don't want to live off no-body," says he.

She kept quiet for a long time again as if she was thinking it over, and the skipper got up and walked around the room studying the pictures on the wall and the figgers in the carpet.

"I guess," she says, after a while, "if I was sure he was all you say and wasn't playing of no games I'd give him a chance and let him try it."

He winked at himself in a long looking-glass there on the wall and swung around.

"That skipper I was speaking of," says he, taking a long breath, "that was me."

"I knew it all the time," she says; "and I wish that ship was sunk."

Well, them charter papers was made out the next day in front of a lawyer and all regular and legal. When the last signature was on 'em the skipper looked acrost the table and noticed Miss Banks was eying him kind of funny, but he was so glad for to have the Bluebell for a whole year that he didn't pay no attention to it at the time.

The very next day he turned to get the hooker ready. He got a crew of swabs aboard and had the time of his life a trim-ming up of a ship for sea without having no owners to worry of him. At the end of a week he had a walloping big cargo

of sandstone aboard and everything ready for to sail the next day for New York.

There weren't but one hard job left ahead of him, and that was to bid Miss Banks good-by and do it in such a way that she wouldn't suspect he was glad to go.

He set in the cabin and took a few swigs out of his little store of drinkables what he always had aboard while he thought, comfortable like, what would be the best things to say to her. The mate, new shipped the day afore, set across the table and helped him so far as the drinkables was concerned.

"I got to go ashore and say good-by to my girl to-night," the skipper says. "That's a job I hate, a saying of good-by to women."

"You hadn't better drink no more then," says the mate, looking greedy at what was left in the bottle.

"I'll drink all I wants on my own ship," answers the skipper. "What do I care whether she likes it or not?"

It was just about this moment that a sailor sticks his head into the companion-hatch and sings out:

"There's a lawyer up here for to see you, cap'n."

"Send the lubber down," says the skipper. "I don't get up for no lawyers."

So, down the companion come a little man with big, black-rimmed spectacles, a reddish nose, and a hard hat. He weren't no young man. He crawled down the ladder a holding on with both hands, lubber style, and at the bottom he stands and stares at the bottle of spirits what sets there square in front of him.

"I come to see if you had any licker aboard, cap'n," says he.

"Sure," says the skipper, pointing to the bottle. "Take a glass and have a swig. I don't see what you come all the way out here for to get a drink for, though."

The lawyer didn't answer a word, but filled a glass right up to the brim and swallowed her off without wiggling an eyebrow.

"Yes, sir, that is licker all right," says he. "Have you any more aboard?"

"Ain't that good enough for you?" shouts back the skipper. "That's five year old and ninety proof."

"I'm asking the question from a legal standpoint, I am," answers the lawyer. "You see, there was a clause in Cap'n Banks's will about this ship that Miss Banks didn't tell you because she was afraid your feelings might be hurt. A queer man, Cap'n Banks was, in some ways."

"For one thing, he was dead set ag'in' licker. Now, there's a clause in his will what says there ain't never to be any malt, distilled, or fermented spirits aboard the Bluebell at any time."

Cap'n Briggs jumped to his feet, his face turning as purple as the water in the Gulf Stream, and out of his mouth shoots a stream of langwidge that almost blows the lawyer up the ladder. I'll tell you some on it.

"Why weren't I told about this afore I signed that charter for a year?" he thunders. "I'm a free-born American citizen and I got a right to drink when I'm thirsty. I've got five neat cases of good licker aboard me and my cargoe is all stowed! What do you expect me for to do?"

"You'll have to get rid of it and make the best of it, because it's got to be off here before the Bluebell goes to sea," says the lawyer, using a soothing tone. "Give them cases of licker to me and I'll throw 'em away for you."

"I'll give 'em to you over your top, you shrivel-hulled hypecrite!" answers the skipper. "If they have to be threw overboard I'll do it myself and be sure you don't get none of it."

"I'm sorry," says the lawyer, "but I'll have to see it all destroyed before I leave the ship."

Turning from purple to white the skipper went in the pantry and come out with a small case in his arms. He went to the companion, and the lawyer being in his way, he bangs him ag'in' the bulkhead and goes out the door. A minute after you could have heerd a groan and a splash.

Four trips the skipper made, and each time his face got more white and tragic.

"That was the last one," says he, coming down after dropping over the fourth one. He took a holt of the lawyer's collar and hustled him up the companion. Up on deck he grabbed the first swab he seen.

"Here, you," he says, "jump into a boat and pull this cripple-brained freak ashore. And if you can capsize the boat on the way to the wharf I'll give you a month's pay free!"

Then the skipper went back to the poop, where there weren't nobody, and uses terrible langwidge ag'in' the world.

"Here am I," he says, "a making of love to a woman for a whole month for to get a ship, and now I got to go dry a year! Liberty! What kind of a country is it that brags about liberty and allows a dirty deal like this? What, I axes you, did them soldiers back in 1776 fight for if it weren't so we could have our swigs when we wants?"

One at a time the crew drops whatever they were doing and turned pale while they listened. Cap'n Briggs hadn't never had no bad reputation, in fact, he was an easy-going man, as skippers go, but they hadn't never saw him crossed. You see, this happening had changed his whole nature.

"There's a terrible hard cruise ahead on us," says the cook, a sticking of his head out from the galley and speaking to an A. B. "We had better start a packing of our gear afore it's too late."

"I don't want to be caught where I can't get ashore with no man like that," replied the A. B.

The skipper started in on the mate. He come in the cabin and found him setting there drinking hard of the bottle on the table.

"I'm sorry," says the mate, "account of the heart-breaking luck you had."

"Who axed you for sympathy? You're sorry because you got to go dry," fires back the skipper.

"What's the matter of you?" axed the mate, starting to get mad. "Why don't you take your hard luck like a man and make the best on it?"

"Shut off that gas," shouts the skipper, holding of a menacing attitude, "or I jams you through a port."

By that time, unbeknownst, the whole edge of the companion was lined with the faces of the crew, pale and listening.

"Say," says the mate, "I ain't standing for to be talked to like that by no skipper

in port. You go easy with your lip or I'm packing of my gear and gone!"

"Go!" yells the skipper. "Go! A rattle-head like you ain't necessary to the sailing of this ship."

"I ain't wanting for to stay on a ship as dry as a ham-bone," says the mate.

He up and hauls out his sea-chest. The skipper grabbed onto what gear of his he could lay hold on and slammed 'em into the chest so hard there must have been nicks in the bottom. He weren't gentle about helping him over the side of the ship, neither.

That was the beginning of the worst week Cap'n Briggs ever put in. He was like a bear what had roamed free all his life and all at once had a ring put into his nose. It weren't that he wanted that licker so bad, neither, but he couldn't bear for to have it took away from him.

The next one to foul him was the cook. It was right after the mate had gone down that he come down the ladder trembling so hard that the vi'tuals in his hands looked like jelly.

The skipper set there a glaring while he snuk around unobtrusive like, setting of the table.

"What's the matter of you, you kettle head?" the skipper growls. "Have you got the ague or something?"

The cook, he looks up all nervous for to answer while he shoves the bottle to one side to make room for the dishes at the same time, and the next thing the poor man knowed he had shoved it clean off the table and the last swing on the Bluebell was a wasting on the deck!

He didn't wait for to hear nothing or feel nothing, but shot up the companion, and following close behint come all the supper he had brung down as fast as the skipper could heave it. Ten minutes after away goes the cook, pulling hard for the shore, and never to return again.

But the worst thing the skipper done that night was when he made the A. B.'s go to bed without no supper. There weren't no cook, you see. And there's them poor devils afraid to tell him and a peeking at him and dodging behint things when they seen him coming till he couldn't stand it no longer.

"What are you sneaking around like hyenas for?" he yells at 'em. "Go into the fo'c's'le and go to bed where you belong."

"We ain't had no supper, begging of your pardon, sir," says one, respectful. "And it's too early for to turn in."

"Go to bed when I tell you and don't heave none of your guff!" roars the skipper. He grabbed a holt of a piece of eight-inch hawse what he had been saving for to make a fender. "In there with you," he yells, "afore I slicks down your hair with this!"

In they goes, pell-mell, and each trying for to beat the other, and before you could wink your eye they was in their bunks swearing hard under their breaths and resolving their time was short on the Bluebell.

Some time after that the skipper says to himself: "I can't drink on my own ship," says he, "so I'll go ashore and drink like a common sailor."

And he done it.

He hadn't hardly stepped his foot on the wharf afore them sailors was up and away. Some didn't even wait long enough for to take all their gear. That's why the Bluebell didn't sail the next day. Them A. B.'s had their revenge, they did.

Around and around they went, a telling this one and a telling that one, and the story getting bigger all the time like a snowball rolling down-hill. They told every sailorman in port what a terrible man was Cap'n Briggs, and how a man would be better off for to stick his head in a noose than to go to sea on the Bluebell. News like that don't take long for to travel among sailors.

The skipper won't never forget the week that followed. He just couldn't get a crew. Once or twice he had one all signed and ready for to sail next day and went ashore for to get one last lick, and in the morning there wouldn't be a man aboard agin. For a whole week he tried with luck going worse and worse ag'in' him because he got worse tempered from the worry.

At the end of the week he couldn't get even one man aboard and he was sick and disgusted. He took to setting in the cabin a thinking. He would do that for hours

at a time while he tried to plan some way out of his trouble. You see, there was the Bluebell lying full of sandstone and if he couldn't get a crew for to take her out of Square Haven she'd be there till her charter run out.

More and more his mind went back to them peaceful days afore he got the Bluebell, and that peaceful house between them two hills. Then one evening he dressed up in his Sunday gear and went. Miss Banks was home and you would have thought she had been expecting of him by the way she acted.

"Em'ly," says he, a handing her some papers, "there's that charter. I'm done with the Bluebell and I hopes I never see another ship as long as I live."

"What, then, are you intending to do?" she says.

"Well," he says, "I'd rather settle down comfortable ashore, where there won't be no more ship troubles, even if it is between two hills."

She takes the charter and begin, slow like, to tear it into little pieces.

"So far as that goes," she says, a blushing, "we can move up on top of a hill, can't we?"

"I hadn't never thought of that!" says the skipper.

Right here the cook paused and the wrinkles around his eyes became more pronounced as he chuckled to himself. He was filling his pipe and suddenly he drew the bowl from the pouch and pointed across the harbor with the stem. I followed the imaginary line to where three sunken masts reared their grizzled, moss-covered trucks just above the water.

"See them?" he asked. "That's the Bluebell. Not many knows it, but Cap'n Briggs sunk her himself. What for? So he wouldn't never be tempted to go to sea agin. He said he hadn't never known what real life was till he got married.

"Listen! Hear them reports like the firing off of a double-action revolver? That's him. He's got one o' them automobiles what they calls flivvers now, too. There ain't a happier man in Square Haven to-day, there ain't."

The Owl Taxi

By Hulbert Footner

Author of "The Substitute Millionaire," "Chase of the Linda Belle," "The Fugitive Sleuth," etc.

CHAPTER XX.

EXIT SEÑOR SAUNDERS.

BEFORE they got home Amy began to awaken from her unnatural sleep. Greg gave her over to the care of Bessie, who had him carry the little figure up to her room, where, by methods known to herself, Bessie completed the restoration.

Greg learned that during his absence Pa Simmons had sent in a message that De Socotra had returned to his apartment about ten o'clock in company with a young Spanish-American whose description suggested Henry Saunders. A little before midnight De Socotra had come out again, leaving the young man within, and Pa Simmons had followed him to the house on East Seventeenth Street; where presumably he was still.

No word had come from Estuban. De Silva still lay in his deep sleep.

As soon as Amy had recovered she asked for Greg. He found her sitting up in bed, pale, great-eyed, and smiling. Bessie, it appeared, was not without a secret, feminine fondness for pretty caps and negligees. Producing such articles from a hidden store, she had dressed Amy up like a French doll. After a few moments the good-hearted Bessie made believe to discover an errand down-stairs, and left them alone.

But they had nothing to say to each other that any one might not have heard. There was no constraint; they gave each other their eyes freely, but they instinctively hung back from the deep waters of speech. They had been through too much

to-night; Nature demanded a let-down. Their eyes had reached an understanding, their tongues wagged irresponsibly.

By and by they heard the disturbance incidental to a new arrival in the kitchen below. Amy, recognizing the timbre of the voice, looked at Greg and said:

"Henry."

Ginger McAfee came running up-stairs. Though invited to enter, an excessive delicacy constrained him to deliver his message from the other side of the door.

"It's the young Spanish gent wants to see miss. Him that come to the yard yesterday morning. Bull's watching him till she says what to do with him."

Amy looked at Greg again.

Said he: "Might as well get it over with."

She nodded. "Let him come up," she called to Ginger.

Señor Henry rushed into the room and, oblivious to the presence of Greg, fell on his knees beside Amy's bed and reached for her hand.

"Amelie! Amelie!" he cried. A flood of Spanish followed.

Gone was the high-bred disdain. His yellow face worked with the uncontrollable emotion of a weak nature.

For some obscure reason Amy blushed and glanced uneasily at Greg. He, no less uncomfortable, looked away.

"Get up," she said curtly to the other. "Speak English."

Señor Henry obeyed neither command.

"I shall not answer you unless you speak English."

He made the attempt, but it was not easy

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for him to express his overmastering emotion in the unfamiliar tongue. The stammering effect of it all was:

"Come away! This is no place for you!"

"This is where my friends live!" said Amy coldly.

It was lost on him. "Come away! I have a cab down-stairs!"

"Where to?" asked Amy dryly.

"Back to Señora de Socotra."

"And Señor Francisco? No, thank you."

"Let me take you to a hotel, then."

"In this? I have no other clothes."

Señor Henry's feelings were too much for him. He relapsed into Spanish.

Amy clapped her hands over her ears. "Speak English!" she commanded.

The dark-skinned youth, guessing that the English was for Greg's benefit, shot a glance of purest hatred across the bed. To Amy he said:

"Tell the *señora* the truth, and she will leave Francisco."

"And die of a broken heart," said Amy. "I'd rather kill Francisco."

"But you cannot remain here among these people."

"Remember, you are speaking of my friends," Amy warned him. "Answer me a question. How did you know you'd find me here?"

"I guessed it."

"That's not enough. How did you guess it?"

"Well, Francisco asked me to spend the night in his apartment, so that the *señora* would not be left alone. He had to be out late. Bianca telephoned from the sanatorium that you had been carried off. What was I to do? I didn't know where Francisco was. I dared not tell the *señora* what had happened. Bianca said it was"—he jerked his head across the bed—"so I came down here."

"You knew then that they had put me in a private madhouse," said Amy.

He shrugged.

"Perhaps you thought I was mad?"

"I did not. I told Francisco it was an outrage. Nothing I could say would move him. What was I to do?"

"What steps did you take to get me out?"

"Francisco swore to me that it was only for the night. As soon as he could arrange to get a private car, he said, he would send us all home together."

"Why did Francisco put me in that place?"

Señor Henry shrugged again. "Surely you know that. He had learned that you were working against him in political matters. I warned you, you know."

"You mean *criminal* matters," Amy amended.

Greg spoke for the first time. "Ask him how Señor Francisco learned of your activities."

Señor Henry's shoulders and eyebrows were agitated together. "How should I know?"

"Did *you* tell him?" Amy asked directly.

He sprang up. "I did not tell him! I swear it! You insult me by asking such a question!"

Amy turned to Greg. "What do you know?"

Greg answered coolly: "He told him, right enough."

"It's a lie!" cried Señor Henry, turning a little yellower than his wont. "I might have known who put that idea into your head. Would you take the word of this—this cabman, against mine!"

Greg laughed.

"When could he have told him?" Amy asked Greg.

"This afternoon when Señor Francisco started from the apartment for the train he met Señor Saunders at the door. Señor Saunders entered the cab with him, and they started down-town together. He told him then. That is why Señor Francisco came rushing back in the state that you saw him."

The Spanish-American youth fell back. Rage and fright made his weak face hideous. A cold sweat had sprung out on his forehead; his teeth were bared.

"It's a lie—a lie!" he repeated. "I never saw Francisco until afterward. How do you know so much about my movements?"

"I drove the cab," said Greg simply.

Señor Henry stared at him speechlessly.

Amy very quietly started to pull a handsome ring from her finger. It was tight; it did not come easily. Both men watched the action with a fascinated gaze. She finally held out the ring toward Señor Henry. He refused it with a passionate gesture. She let it drop on the floor.

"Go!" she said.

He burst out in desperate appeals, reproaches, excuses, all in Spanish.

Amy turned wearily away.

Greg stood up. "You've had your answer," he said harshly. "Go, before you're helped out."

Señor Henry stopped short, stared from one to another, biting his lip, then turned and rushed from the room as violently as he had entered. They heard the front door slam behind him.

Amy covered her face with her hands.

"I am so ashamed!" she murmured. "To think that I could have thought—even for a moment—*that!*"

"Forget the manikin," said Greg calmly.

"He means nothing in your life."

Greg heard Estuban's voice in the kitchen, and hastened down-stairs. Their eyes brightened at the sight of each other like old friends. Estuban quickly explained that he had been carried as far as Philadelphia by the express on which he had expected to find De Socotra, and had been obliged to wait there several hours for a returning train.

"What has happened here?" he asked.

"Quite a bit," said Greg dryly. "We've got both the girl and the book out of De Socotra's hands. That is to say, we got a book."

"The little black book!" cried Estuban, his black eyes gleaming. "Let me see it!"

Greg handed it over, watching for Estuban's verdict with more anxiety than he cared to show.

Estuban hastily turned the pages. What Greg read in his face confirmed his worst fears—amazement, incredulity, anger.

"This is not it!" he cried. "He has fooled you! This is an impudent substitute, manufactured out of whole cloth!"

"I was half prepared for that," said Greg gloomily.

Estuban went on: "This is what De Socotra meant to carry to the President. Look! Testimonials of respect to his excellency; addresses of felicitation from public bodies of every class in Managua—the Santiago Chamber of Commerce, the Planters' Association, and the Rubber-Gatherers' Union! The last is a masterpiece; listen:

"The Rubber-Gatherers' Union of Managua, happy in their situation of a fertile soil under a liberal government, desire to express to His Excellency the President of the United States—

"*Et cetera, et cetera.* My God! What sublime impudence!"

"Then our work is still to do," said Greg grimly.

"Do you know where De Socotra is at this moment?" asked Estuban, with a dangerous glitter in his eyes.

"At a house on East Seventeenth Street, the headquarters of his gang. He got that book there earlier in the day."

"It was made there under his direction, no doubt, and the original is presumably there."

"If they have not destroyed it."

"They would scarcely do that unless they thought it was in danger of falling into our hands. Think of the handle it will give them against those who dare oppose them in Managua. The unfortunate ones who made those affidavits will be marked men hereafter."

"Greg looked around the kitchen at the men who were awaiting the outcome of this talk, and looked back at Estuban. The corners of his mouth turned up with grim humor.

"Let's go and get it," he said suddenly.

Estuban's hand shot out to meet Greg's.

"My idea, too," he said with satisfaction.

"We have four good men here," Greg went on, "and a fifth is watching the house now. With the exception of De Socotra himself, that gang is not formidable. Their morale is poor."

"What do you propose?" asked Estuban.

"The simplest plan possible—to get into the house by force or by trickery, and hold them up. Are you armed?"

Estuban nodded.

"They got a gun from me on our last meeting. I'll see what's in our outfit here."

Greg and Estuban were talking low-voiced in a corner of the kitchen, while the others waited. All thought of sleep had been given up for this night. Even Bessie, infected by the general excitement, had yielded to their solicitations in so far as to prepare a small-hour supper. The clock had just struck three.

"Boys," said Greg, "are you game to turn another trick before daylight?"

"Try us," said Bull, grinning.

"Me and Blossom was done out of the best fun before," said Ginger.

Greg briefly explained what had to be done. It appeared that their appetites were only whetted for danger. They jumped at the chance. Even Hickey, encouraged by the size of the attacking party, perhaps, did not bewail his fate this time. It transpired that both Blossom and Bull possessed revolvers. Greg borrowed Blossom's, and let Bull keep his—unloaded.

"You won't mind if I empty out the shells?" he said. "Estuban and I feel that we ought to take the responsibility of any shooting that may be necessary."

Bessie, who had taken everything in, disappeared into the store, and returned with a small object which she offered Greg. Said she:

"If you're going to break into the house—mind, I didn't say I held by any such foolishness, but if you're going to do it, anyway—better take my glass-cutter. It may come in handy."

"Bessie, you've got a better head than any of us!" cried Greg; "or maybe you're more experienced in housebreaking."

"Go along with you! Mind you bring it back safe. I can't sell window-glass without something to cut it."

When they were ready to start, Greg ran up-stairs to bid good-by to Amy. He told her what they designed to do.

It was at the hour of the night when human vitality is at its ebb. The plucky lip trembled.

"Must you?" she faltered. "On top of everything to-night?"

"It must be at once, while he is off his guard. He does not yet know of your escape."

"If I could only go, too! But to wait here in suspense! How can I endure it?"

"Oh, this is a simple job!"

"Simple! You don't know Francisco."

"I must go. Send me with a smile."

She smiled. "I want you to promise me something—you mustn't be angry."

He looked his question.

Her eyes searched his deep. "I want you to promise me you will not kill Francisco. I could not have that. After all, he has cared for me for nine years, and he is the husband of the one I love."

There was more implied in this than was spoken.

Greg understood. "I promise you," he said gravely—"unless it is a question of defending myself."

"Do not think that I mean to let him go free," she said; "he shall be punished, terribly punished; but it must be in the way that I set."

CHAPTER XXI.

UP-STAIRS AND DOWN.

LEAVING all cabs at home this time, they proceeded in couples by different streets to a rendezvous at the corner of Stuyvesant Square. Greg and Estuban walked up Fifth Avenue, then west to the meeting-place, thus passing the house that was their objective.

Their examination of it revealed these salient facts—there was no light in any window; the basement windows were protected by iron bars, the basement door by an iron gate, while above, before the front door, heavy oak storm-doors were closed. In short, an wholly unpromising prospect.

"We need an ax to get into this," said Estuban dejectedly.

"We'll have to try the rear," said Greg.

The question was how to get around to the back. The whole block presented an unbroken brick front from First Avenue to the square.

At the square they joined the other men and Pa Simmons, who was there with his cab. The latter reported that De Socotra had not left the house.

"Damn glad you come," said he. "I'm at the end of my wits, how to keep watching that house without the police force getting wise to me cab. I watches from this corner for a while, then runs around the block and takes a stand down by First. Then I come back again. But there's a cop down there's got his eye on me already. I don't know where to go now."

"You can be our mobile scout," said Greg. "Keep moving. Drive through this block every minute. We'll signal you if we need you."

Pa Simmons drove off.

At the corner where they stood there was a modern apartment-house. A space of three feet separated the back wall of this building from the side wall of the first dwelling. This crack offered the only discoverable opening into the interior of the block. As the house they were seeking to enter was the sixth from the corner, it meant that they must climb six back fences to reach it.

"Bull, how are you on climbing fences?" asked Greg.

"O. K., if somebody will hold me overcoat."

"Hand it to one of the fellows. Estuban, Bull, and I will go over the fences and break in the back way. You other fellows hide yourselves up and down the block here, but choose places where you can watch that house. If anybody comes out, you are to jump on him and frisk him for the little black book, see? If it isn't on him, let him go. If we get in the rear all right, and want your help, one of us will come to the front door and saw his arm up and down so, like a semaphore."

There was a flight of steps down to the rear basement door of the apartment-house. An eight-foot fence separated the narrow yard here from the yard of the first dwelling. Greg and Estuban boosted Bull up on top; Bull from the top and Greg at the bottom hoisted Estuban up; then the two already up reached Greg a hand. Once up, they found the way was easier than

they had expected. There was a longitudinal fence separating the yards of all the houses on Seventeenth Street from those on Sixteenth. This fence was topped by a three-inch plank, along which Greg and Estuban were able to walk upright. Bull, less sure-footed, straddled it and hunched himself along. At one of the back yards a cautious householder had set his fence with great spikes against cats or marauders. Here they had to drop down and go around. The sky was overcast and it was very dark. Few lights showed in the back windows.

They reached the sixth yard at last and silently dropped to earth. The back of the house facing them at first glance showed no gleam of light, but upon looking closer they saw that the principal room on the second floor was lighted. In two of the three windows on this floor cracks of light showed around the edges of the opaque blinds that had been pulled down. Two windows and a door gave on the yard. The windows were barred, so they could be left open in hot weather, but the door had no outer protection, and glass panes had been let in the upper panels.

"Here's where the glass-cutter comes in handy," murmured Greg. "Good old Bes-sie!"

They wrapped a handkerchief around the tool to deaden the sound as far as possible. Nearest to the lock on the door Greg traced a square big enough to admit his hand. There was nothing to do but let the piece fall inside.

"If the sound of it brings them, we'll already be in," said Greg grimly.

He struck the outlined square a light blow with his fist, and it tinkled to the floor within. Thrusting his arm through the hole, he drew the bolt and turned the key.

They stole in. Greg gave his pocket-light a swift flash around. They were in a kitchen, a disused kitchen; the range was gray with dust, the shelves empty.

"Wait here a minute till we see if they were alarmed by the sound," whispered Greg. "Keep on this side away from the windows."

They waited, holding their breaths to listen. Not a sound was to be heard

through the dark house except the rats scurrying behind the plaster.

Satisfied at length that the broken glass had passed unnoticed, they proceeded to investigate their surroundings. Four doors faced them; two gave on cupboards, the third on a short passage ending in the front basement room, while the fourth opened on the stair hall.

The other room on this floor was as empty as the kitchen. Though so far there was no sign of human usage, they were struck by the warmth of the house.

"They don't stint themselves in coal," whispered Greg. "Let's drop our overcoats."

A door under the stairs gave on steps leading to the cellar. A gaslight had been left burning down here. They saw the furnace that supplied the heat; but there was no person in the cellar.

Greg left Bull on guard on the basement floor. "If anybody gets past us up-stairs, don't let him get by you without frisking him for the book. If they come too fast for you, call for help."

Greg and Estuban stole up to the main floor. Two long parlors, front and rear, opened off the hall. They were dusty and empty like the rooms below. At the head of the next flight of stairs a crack of light showed under a door and a murmur of voices came down to them.

Greg whispered to Estuban:

"Creep up-stairs and listen. It may be valuable to us. I'll call the other men in."

With infinite caution Greg unchained and unlocked the two sets of doors and stepped out on the stoop. The block was empty. But there were eyes out. For when Greg gave the prearranged signal, three figures appeared from the shadows opposite and noiselessly hastened to him. He drew them inside the house and shut the doors.

Hickey was sent to help Bull, because there were two ways out from the basement to be watched; Blossom was left at the front door; Greg and Ginger stole on up and joined Estuban at the turn of the stairs. Putting his lips to Greg's ear, Estuban breathed:

"We're just in time. They're breaking up here. There are not more than four men with De Socotra in there. The rest have already scattered. He's giving these their final instructions now."

Greg whispered back: "Is the door locked?"

"I don't think so. There's no key in the other side. Now that you're here to back me up, I'll try the handle."

"Wait a minute. Front and rear bedrooms in these houses usually communicate. Ginger, go in the front room and stand guard. Take my flash."

Estuban yielded first place to Greg. Greg tried the door. It gave. Slamming it open, the two entered the room with their guns before them.

"Hands up, gentlemen!" said Greg.

There were four men; three seated in various attitudes about a table near the window, and the fourth, De Socotra, arrested in the act of pacing back and forth. The table was littered with papers. Several valises stood about the floor. The three sitting men—Abanez and Alfieri were two of them—flung up their hands without a sound, as if impelled by an electrical current.

Not so De Socotra. His nerves were under iron control. He actually laughed.

With his eyes fixed on Greg's eyes, he coolly withdrew a cigarette-case from his waistcoat-pocket, took a cigarette, tapped it finically on the lid, and stuck it between his grinning lips. Returning the cigarette-case, from another pocket he produced a match, struck it on his shoe, lighted the cigarette, and flicked the match away.

"Ah, our good friend, Mr. Parr, again!" he said mockingly. "Really, Mr. Parr, you ought to be in motion-pictures. Or perhaps you are. To what do I owe the pleasure of this call?"

If he expected to rattle Greg, he mistook his man. Greg saw a telltale bulge over the man's right breast, and that was all he wanted.

Matching the other man's tone, he said: "You're a remarkable man, Señor de Socotra. I didn't want to lose touch with you. To-night I have brought an old acquaintance of yours with me."

De Socotra, for the first time, looked at Estuban, and his eyes changed. The smile became a trifle strained, but the voice was as cool as ever.

"Ah, Estuban! How did you get out of jail?"

Estuban was incapable of this grim jesting. It was his first sight of the man responsible for the murder of his best friend, and his eyes burned.

He answered De Socotra in Spanish.

Whatever it was he said, it bit through the elder man's veneer of scorn. De Socotra snarled at him.

"Put up your hands!" said Greg. "I shall not tell you again."

De Socotra obeyed. But his expression altered. He looked beyond and between Greg and Estuban, and suddenly cried:

"Seize them both, Milio!"

In spite of themselves, they looked behind them. Even as he turned, Greg was half sensible that it was a trick, but the subconscious impulse was irresistible. There was no one there, of course. They turned back.

De Socotra was in the act of springing toward an open door in the corner. Like a flash Estuban's pistol sought him. Greg knocked his hand up, and the bullet went through the ceiling. De Socotra disappeared. The other three men, green with terror, never moved.

"Keep them covered!" Greg shouted. "I'll get him."

He ran out through the hall and into the front room, crying: "Hold him, Ginger!"

But he and Ginger only collided with each other in the empty room.

"He didn't come this way," gasped Ginger.

At the same moment back in the hall a door banged open. They ran out. An open closet door between the two rooms showed the way he had escaped. There was no sight or sound of him. There were two other rooms on the floor—a bath-room, presumably, and a hall-room—but he had not had time enough to get a door open and closed again, nor could he have gone down-stairs; for there was no sound from Blossom at the foot.

At the instant Greg made up his mind

that he had gone up; a small, bright beam of light flashed athwart the upper flight and threw a circle on the side wall. From above a voice said mockingly:

"Yes, I'm up here, Mr. Parr. Come on up. When you cross that light I'll give you something to bring with you."

The voice did not come from the spot whence the light issued. Evidently he had laid his light on the floor and retreated from it. For an instant Greg hesitated. Then it came to him what to do. Extending his body on the steps, pressing close to the rail where one on the upper landing could not see him, he snaked his way up a step at a time until he was within striking distance of the light. Taking careful aim, he fired. The light went out.

At the same moment he let his body relax and slid back down the stairs. But no answering shot came, as he expected. Nor was there any sound of running feet above. De Socotra as usual was bluffing. While the light lay on the floor he had stolen away. Listening intently, Greg heard some little sounds from the fourth and top story of the house. Snatching his light out of Ginger's hands, he sprang up the stairs. Ginger followed at his heels.

In the hall on the top floor stood a ladder leading to a scuttle in the roof. They heard De Socotra upon it working desperately to raise the scuttle. But they were too quick for him. As they mounted the last flight he jumped down and ran into the back room. There all sounds ceased.

Greg paused at the head of the stairs. It was a ticklish job to follow an armed man into a dark room. He tried to figure out what De Socotra would expect him to do, so he could do the opposite. He had left the door open behind him; was it to tempt Greg in? Greg determined to try to take him in the rear.

Leaving Ginger crouching at the turn of the stairs, he stole along the hall and ever so carefully opened the door of the front room. In case his man were inside, he flashed his light in to draw his fire; but there was no sound.

He went in, holding his light off to one side of his body. The room was empty.

Absolute silence pressed on the house so full of men.

There were two doors in the back wall of this room. Greg cautiously opened the first. This floor was planned differently from the second floor. He found himself in an extra middle room with a skylight through which showed the low-hanging clouds faintly rosy with the reflection of the city lights.

Returning, he tried the other door and found himself in a long closet or passage leading to the rear. He dared not flash his light here for fear of giving warning of his coming. The passage was as black as Erebus. The heaviness of the air convinced him that it was closed at the other end. He crept on all fours, feeling with his hand before him, half-expecting to lay it on a human figure; half-expecting momentarily to be met with a blinding flash and a bullet.

He was stopped at last by a door which must lead into the room into which De Socotra had fled. He listened with his ear to the crack, but could hear no sound from the other side. If this door were locked all his trouble would go for nothing. He found a match and inserted it carefully in the keyhole. It passed freely through. The chances were it was not locked.

If the man were still in the room there was no possibility of getting this door open without giving him warning; so Greg took no care, but suddenly flung it wide. He stood back and let his light shine through. Still it drew no shot.

Yet De Socotra was in there. Greg heard him run for the hall door. Greg sprang after him, but De Socotra got the door closed before he could prevent, and Greg heard the key turn in the lock. He heard Ginger tackle the man as he ran around through the passage to the front room.

Little Ginger was no match for this antagonist. De Socotra must have shaken him off with ease, for ere Greg could reach the front-room door, that, too, was slammed and locked. The middle-room door was already locked and the key on the other side. Greg heard De Socotra vault over the stair rail and run on down.

Ginger shouted a warning through the house to Blossom, and waited to liberate Greg. This took him a little while, because De Socotra had tossed away the keys at random. Greg shouted to Ginger to open the middle door, but in his excitement Ginger did not get the sense of it. He struck innumerable matches until he found the key to the back room.

Meanwhile De Socotra had leaped down two flights of stairs unhindered, for Estuban dared not leave the three men he was covering. On the third flight De Socotra saw Blossom waiting for him at the foot and went over the rail. He dropped in the middle of the hall and ran into one of the parlors. Here, as Blossom chased him in and out the different doors, he began to shout for help in tones of mock fear.

These cries were too much for Bull and Hickey on the floor below. Locking the doors at which they respectively stood guard, they sprang up to the parlor floor. This was evidently what De Socotra wanted. He led them all a chase through the dark rooms. They collided with each other, and wasted their strength in vain struggles, thinking they had the fugitive. When he saw the way clear, De Socotra ran on down the basement stairs.

By this time Greg and Ginger reached the first floor. They heard De Socotra running wildly back and forth in the basement below. Bull and Hickey had had the foresight to pocket the keys of the two doors and he could not get out. All the windows in the basement were barred. As Greg leaped down the basement stairs, with the other men tumbling after, he heard the cellar door bang open. There was no way out of the cellar except by the coal-hole.

"We've got him now!" he cried.

He was well assured that if De Socotra had had a gun he would have used it before this, and he followed unhesitatingly. At the head of the next stair he heard the furnace door clang, and his heart sunk like a stone. The gaslight in the cellar was still burning brightly. De Socotra stood by the furnace stroking his mustache, panting a little, but smiling still. His hands were empty.

Disregarding him for the moment, Greg flung open the furnace door. On the bed of cherry-red coals the little black book was already furiously blazing. A hand thrust in to rescue it would have been shriveled to the bone. There was no suitable tool handy. Greg had the inexpressible mortification of seeing it fall apart and dissolve in the flames. An involuntary groan broke from him. De Socotra laughed.

Greg flung around furiously, his gun up. "Damn you! I ought to shoot you like a dog, you murderer!" he cried.

"But you won't," said De Socotra coolly.

It was true Greg's pistol arm was rendered impotent, but not as De Socotra thought because he was intimidated. He turned away gritting his teeth.

The other men were crowding into the narrow cellar, staring open-mouthed at De Socotra, and waiting for a signal from Greg how to act. After them came Estuban, who had by this time succeeded in searching and disarming the three men, and had locked them in their room on the second floor.

"Where is the book?" cried Estuban.

"Burned up," said Greg heavily.

Estuban was hampered by no promise to spare their adversary. His gun went up. Springing forward, Greg flung his arms about him. They struggled, while their men looked on, at a loss how to act. No one noticed that De Socotra had maneuvered his position until he now stood under the gas-light. His hand shot over his head, and they were plunged in blackness. Before he could be stopped De Socotra gained the stairs. Trying to follow him, they jammed helplessly together. He slammed the door at the top and locked it.

With their combined weight it was only a moment or two before they burst it out. But De Socotra was already half-way up through the house. They reached the top floor to find the scuttle open to the sky. There was no sign of him up and down the roofs.

Greg reluctantly called off the pursuit. "We'll only rouse the neighborhood. He has some way of retreat known to himself.

Let the last man through hook the scuttle so he can't come back this way."

They left the three Spanish-Americans to make their way out as best they could. If De Socotra failed to return to their aid, they could always throw up the windows and call on the neighbors. It would be up to them to explain how they came to be in such a plight.

It was a dejected little crowd that made its way back through the dark, cold streets to Bessie Bickle's. Estuban was furiously angry at being balked of his purpose.

"Why did you stop me?" he cried.

Greg was not quite frank in replying. "I couldn't help myself," he said. "Richly as he deserved it, I couldn't stand by and let you shoot down an unarmed man.

"We'll never get him now," muttered Estuban, and relapsed into a sullen silence.

Greg's own state of mind was not an enviable one. To be so nearly successful and then have his man flout him to his face, and get away laughing—it was too much! His heart burned in his breast. Promise or no promise, he knew there would be no peace in life for him until he had squared accounts with that smiling scoundrel.

As soon as they opened the kitchen door they saw from Bessie's pale face and shaken manner that something fresh had happened on this night of nights.

Thinking of Amy, Greg's breast went cold. What is it?" he demanded.

The answer relieved his worst fears. "He's gone," stammered Bessie. "The Spaniard up-stairs."

"Dead?" said Greg, astonished.

"Aye, he's dead all right. I went up just now to have a look at him. He's lying there," Bessie shuddered. "I left him till you come."

"And Amy?"

"She's all right. Asleep. She don't know."

"Send one of the boys for the doctor," said Greg. "I'll go up alone first."

The light in Greg's room was still burning. De Silva was lying on his back on the bed, his eyes open and staring. Small wonder Bessie had been frightened. One arm hung down over the edge of the bed,

the hand lying palm upward and open on the floor. A little bright object had rolled from the nerveless fingers. Greg picked it up; a hypodermic needle.

On the bureau its case lay open. Besides the bed for the needle it held space for a vial of some blackish fluid; no doubt a further supply of the poison that killed with a lightning stroke. Under the little shagreen case was a folded paper addressed in pencil to "Gregory Parr." Greg opened it with fingers that trembled a little and read:

I kept the needle. I ought to have used it first, but it takes nerve to jab yourself. It was easier to jump overboard. I can use it now. When we started for New York, the old man gave me a little book to carry. Important papers were bound in it. I never read them. They were made out in duplicate. He carried one set and gave me the other. I meant to give them to De Socotra, but I didn't want to after. I didn't know what to do with it. I hid myself in a cheap little hotel the day after, the Alpha House, West Broadway. I had room No. 19. I slit the mattress and hid the book in the stuffing. I suppose it's there yet, if you want it.

DE SILVA.

The reaction from discouragement to hope was sudden. Greg had to read the note twice before he realized what it meant. He resisted his first impulse to shout the joyful tidings down to Estuban. Better not raise his hopes until the prize was actually in hand. Greg scarcely gave another thought to what lay on the bed. This discovery dwarfed the importance of the poor wretch's end. Five o'clock of a winter's morning though it was, he could not rest a minute before going in search of the little book. He put the needle in the case and the case in his pocket, and determined to keep his own counsel for the time being. If the doctor was willing to issue a death certificate without full information, so much the better.

To those in the kitchen he merely said: "I have to go out for an hour. If the doctor says all right, send for the undertaker. Hickey, drive me over to West Broadway, will you?"

Within the time he had set Greg was back with shining eyes. In the kitchen the disconsolate crowd sat much as he had

left them. Ginger and Blossom slept with their heads on the table. Bull and Pa Simmons were talking in whispers by the window. Bessie moved heavily around on her interminable chores. Beyond the stove sat Estuban in an attitude of utter dejection, elbows on knees, and head between his hands. At the noise of Greg's entrance he lifted his lack-luster eyes. Seeing Greg's beaming smile a resentful scowl lined his brows.

"You seem well-pleased with yourself," he muttered.

Greg, without saying anything, held up the little black book before him. Estuban gasped and hung undecided for a moment. Then springing toward Greg he snatched it from his hands, and scanned the pages with burning eyes.

"This is it!" he cried. "Thank God! We have him now!"

CHAPTER XXII.

NEMESIS.

ON the afternoon of the day following these events, Amy and Greg alighted from the flivver at the door of the Stickney Arms. Their pale, composed faces masked a great inner excitement, for they knew that Francisco de Socotra was at home. It had been Amy's idea thus boldly to beard him in his lair. Ever since she had got up that morning the direction of affairs had been in her hands. Greg looked at the little creature with a new wonder and respect.

The hall-boy, Frank, received them with a broad grin not unmixed with slyness. The new clothes that Bessie had got Amy made her look like a bride, perhaps. Clearly Frank's explanation of this visit was that they were returning, married, for the parental blessing. Therefore he looked both disappointed and puzzled when they sent up their names: Miss Wilmot and Mr. Parr. Word was quickly returned that they were to be shown up.

A new maid opened the door to them, to whom they meant nothing. They were ushered into the handsome living-room of the apartment where Señor and Señora de

Socotra were both waiting. Amy was quickly received into the other woman's arms, who patted her and wept and babbled incoherently. De Socotra, whatever his feelings were, received them with a happy parental smile that was perfection. His welcome included Greg. Not by the slightest sign did he betray any consciousness of the events of the night before.

Greg thought grimly: "He feels that he can afford to smile since the body of his victim is reduced to ashes, and the damning evidence of the little black book destroyed, too. Wait a bit, old fellow!"

While Amy and Señora de Socotra murmured together, Señor Francisco made bland remarks on the weather, his wicked eye twinkling at Greg as if to invite him to enjoy the situation. He offered Greg one of the incomparable cigars. Greg reflecting that all this was for the benefit of the gentle, kindly little lady, took it.

"Last night I pointed a gun at him, and to-day he comes back with a cigar," he thought. "Life's a funny affair!"

Amy said to Greg deprecatingly: "I am lying to her, poor dear! I am telling her that I was so much better to-day that they allowed me to come out for a little while in your care."

"Admirable!" murmured De Socotra.

Señora de Socotra shyly nodded and smiled at Greg, and said something to Amy that was evidently intended to be repeated to him. There was a charming, childlike quality in the little lady that was wholly irresistible.

Amy said: "She asks your pardon that she cannot speak your language. She wishes me to thank you for taking such good care of me."

"She thinks you're one of the keepers," chuckled De Socotra.

Through Amy, Greg made his best compliments to Señora de Socotra.

Amy soon rose to go. Her adoptive mother clung to her piteously, and would not let her go until Amy promised to return the next day, "perhaps to stay." De Socotra accompanied them into the hall, expecting, no doubt, to learn there the real object of this call. Nor was he disappointed.

"Francisco," said Amy coldly, "it is necessary that Mr. Parr and I discuss with you what is to be done."

"Come into my room," said De Socotra.

"No, we cannot talk here while mama knows we are still in the house. We want you to come to us in Gibbon Street.

De Socotra elevated his fine eyebrows. "That *would* be thrusting my head into the lion's mouth!" he said humorously.

"Are you afraid?" taunted Amy.

"My dear, the bravest man has to exercise ordinary prudence or the days of his bravery would be few!"

"Mr. Parr saved your life twice last night."

"Another time he might not be so fortunate."

"Francisco, I pledge you my word that no harm will come to you while you are there, and that you will be allowed to go as freely as you come."

De Socotra looked at Greg.

"I add my word to Miss Wilmot's," said Greg stiffly. "Moreover, there is no objection to your bringing any friend or friends with you, as many as you like."

"But if I still feel obliged to decline this charming invitation," said De Socotra mockingly.

"You will not decline it," said Amy.

"Why will I not?"

"Because in that case I will be obliged to tell mama the whole truth about what has happened. I am taking all this trouble for the sake of sparing her. If you will not help me in that, then affairs must take their course, regardless of consequences."

"What affairs?" asked De Socotra with a great parade of innocence.

"What is the use of making pretences among us three. We know, and you know that we know."

"But no one else knows," was the smiling reply. "And there is no proof in existence."

"You don't know what proof we have. Come to Mrs. Bickle's house and we will lay our case before you. You can then decide whether or not you care to accept the conditions that we lay down."

De Socotra hesitated. Bravado and

simple curiosity struggled with the man's sense of prudence. Above all, he was a gamester.

"When do you want me to come?"

"It is four now. We will expect you between five and six."

"Very well, I'll be there."

Upon the stroke of half past five De Socotra drove up to Bessie Bickle's in a taxicab. He made the man wait. Amy and Greg met him at the front door. He came alone.

"You are a bold man, Francisco," said Amy.

Amy had changed to a black dress which set off the unrelieved pallor of her skin like alabaster. The little creature now had a consecrated air like a priestess that added inches to her stature. Greg, who was wretchedly ill at ease, regarded her with a kind of awe. She was the leader now. A strange hush brooded over the little house. The shutters of the store were up.

Amy led the way up-stairs. De Socotra, notwithstanding his pretended assurance, was impressed by the change in her dress and manner. All the way up he talked lightly to conceal his uneasiness.

"What an odd retreat you have chosen! I thought we should never get here. My chauffeur had never heard of Gibbon Street, nor any one else, for that matter. What shocking streets we came through. Picturesque, though, if one cares for that sort of thing."

No one paid the slightest attention to this babble. At the head of the stairs Amy opened the door of Bessie's bedroom and passed in. De Socotra was still talking as he followed her. Greg was behind him.

"Houston Street reminded me of Rome in Juvenal's day, with its—"

The sentence was caught up in a gasp. It was never completed. Bessie's room had been transformed into a little mortuary chapel. Everything in it had been removed, and the walls hung from ceiling to floor in grim black draperies. The effect was startling in the extreme; it had been designed to startle. In the center of the room, the sole object it contained, rested a

plain black coffin on a severely draped bier. Six tall candles stood about the head lighting the face of the corpse strangely. It was the face of De Silva; peaceful, waxen, and faintly yellow.

Greg, fascinated, watched De Socotra. Amy disdained to look at him. Her gaze was bent like Nemesis on the poor clay. De Silva's face showed a dignity it had never known in life. One saw the man he might have been. Stilled now was the wild spirit that had been touched too late by kindness.

De Socotra's bronzed face turned gray, and a network of tiny dark veins showed under his skin. One realized the man's age. He breathed like something hurt, but kept his back straight, and his gaze never faltered from the dead man's face.

"Where did you—where did you—" he began twice, but did not finish.

Amy, without speaking, pointed to a note pinned on De Silva's breast. De Socotra, seeing that he was expected to read it, came forward. His nostrils twitched, a pained look showed deep in his eyes; one guessed that it afflicted him with nausea to approach the body of his hired assassin, but his iron will was not yet broken. He stooped, and in the light of the candles began to read with a sneer. It was the note De Silva had left for Greg.

As he realized what it implied, De Socotra sharply straightened, and for an instant looked wildly around like a trapped creature. But he quickly controlled himself. He turned his back on the coffin.

"So this is your proof," he said, and God knows what effort it cost him to bring it out so nonchalantly; "but he's dead, too!"

"Follow me," said Amy.

She opened the door that communicated with Bessie's parlor. An overpowering breath of sweetness was wafted forth. She passed in. De Socotra followed to the door, walking steadily, but with a gait somewhat stiffer than his wont. At the door he put out a hand to steady himself. His eyes looked wildly around the next room, and he drew back a little as if his flesh refused to be subjected to a further horror.

This room, too, was a resting-place of the dead—but with a difference. Great, many-branched candlesticks stood around this rich bier, flooding the room with a pale gold light. Roses pink and white and red were everywhere; sheaves of roses heaped on the coffin and strewn on the pall.

Amy's expression was very different as she stood beside this bier. She was still a marble woman, but it was a marble head of grief. Her hands involuntarily went to her breast. She gazed down, oblivious alike to De Socotra and to Greg. Greg looked at her and experienced the meaning of adoration.

De Socotra's horror-stricken eyes were fixed on the ceiling. Anon they darted frantically from side to side like rats threatened by fire. In the end he had to look. His eyes were dragged in agony to the dead man's face. A groan was forced from the bottom of his breast. At that moment the debonair scoundrel's spirit broke. His head fell forward, his limp arms dropped to his sides.

He saw the face of Antonio Bareda beautiful in death. The lips seemed to be on the point of breaking into the old friendly smile; there was a slight lift to the eyebrows that suggested light and humor lurking behind the lowered lids. The wrinkles of age were all smoothed out. The happy warrior slept the long sleep.

"Come closer," said Amy remorselessly.

The broken man had no thought but to obey. He approached the coffin's foot on sinking knees. The change in his face was shocking. He saw that the dead man held clasped in his hands the little black book in which was bound up "the happiness of a whole people," but De Socotra regarded that indifferently now.

He whispered hoarsely: "It is enough. I understand you." Turning, he made his way toward the hall door like a man struggling against a crushing power; like a swimmer at the last gasp.

"Wait!" said Amy.

Reaching him, she held out the little shagreen case. "Something of yours that I wish to return to you," she said with dreadful meaning.

Greg shuddered. De Socotra dropped the case in his pocket.

At the foot of the stairs he paused again. Without looking at Amy he murmured: "Will you come back—and stay with mama?"

"If I do not find Bianca there."

"I shall send her away at once."

"Very well, I shall be there to-night."

When the door closed behind him Greg burst out: "You cannot go! It is too horrible!"

"It must be gone through with," she murmured.

Early next morning, Greg, who had paced his room the night through, received the expected summons. Francisco de Socotra had been found dead in his bed. Heart-failure, the doctor said. How should he have noticed the tiny needle-prick on the man's throat? The needle itself had been destroyed before he came.

Señora de Socotra was a piteous figure. Later in the day she insisted on seeing Greg to thank him for his kindness at so dreadful a moment in a strange land. Overwhelming as was her grief, there was no bitterness in it. She spoke of it as simply as a child. Amy, with the tears running down her cheeks, translated for Greg.

"If you could have known him as I knew him! So good a man, so kind and true! Like a knight of olden times; my knight! I could not live without him, did I not feel that he had left me a work to do. He has left a great fortune, they tell me. Every penny of it shall I devote to good works in his memory! If I cannot be happy I can at least find peace in building a worthy memorial to his dear name."

When they left her, Amy said: "You understand now why I acted as I did?"

"I understand," Greg said.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CONCLUSION.

THE news of the deaths respectively of Antonio Bareda and Francisco de Socotra reached Managuay simultaneously. Many surmises were given rise

to, but the truth never became known—or at least it was never published. The bodies of the two citizens arrived on the same ship, and their funerals were held on the same day.

Little inconvenience was thereby caused, for there were few in Managuay who desired to attend both ceremonies. One cortege was followed by the rich and the great whose sleek countenances bore the conventional expressions of grief; while behind the other followed on foot an endless procession of the weeping poor.

De Socotra's wife and adopted daughter brought his body home, and on the day following the funeral, Señora de Socotra, in memory of her husband, presented to the republic the magnificent estate of Casa Grande with its famous *Jardin des Plantes*, to be held in perpetuity for the benefit of the people. Señora de Socotra and Miss Wilmot (as the younger lady was thereafter to be known), then departed for Paris to arrange for the magnificent mausoleum that the widow designed to erect.

The simultaneous deaths of these two men left Managuay's political situation very unsettled. The government, deprived of its strong men who had ruled for so long from behind the curtain, scarcely knew where it stood; the people having lost their champion, were too apathetic to take advantage of the government's weakness. For a while things went on outwardly as before. Then it became known that the United States minister, a well-meaning, weak soul, who had been an involuntary tool in the hands of the exploiters of Managuay, had been recalled, and one Gregory Parr appointed in his place.

When in due course Mr. Parr arrived, the people were surprised by his youth. He brought with him as secretary a Managuan, Mario Estuban, and the poor people took heart. On the occasion of his first call on the President of Managuay, Mr. Parr displayed a knowledge of the internal affairs of the republic that appalled the functionary. Further, Mr. Parr made certain representations that resulted in the hasty resignation of the president and his entire government, and a new election was called.

During the interim influential gentlemen, both Managuan and American, called on the United States minister, and it was rumored that heated interviews took place. The minister remained polite and unyielding. At the same time currents that were set in motion in Washington to have him removed failed of their effect.

As election day drew near a United States cruiser made a visit of courtesy to the harbor of Managuay. The sailors were received with the wildest enthusiasm by the crowds. She remained until after the event. No armed force was landed; her mute presence in the harbor was sufficient. For the first time in years the Managuayans voted as they pleased. A truly popular and representative government was returned, which promptly got down to the work of correcting the abuses of the former régime. Curiously enough, business was not ruined as had been so freely prognosticated. Dividends continued to be paid while the workers sang at their work. Capitalists discovered in Managuay as elsewhere that oppression did not even pay.

Toward the end of the winter, Señora de Socotra and Miss Wilmot returned to Santiago de Managuay.

Amidst the misty verdure of the *Jardin des Plantes*, under the great moon of the tropics, sauntered a happy pair.

"When did you start loving me, Greg?"

"When you touched my arm outside the garage, and asked me if that was my car."

"But I was in boy's clothes then."

"My heart told me you were not a boy. When did you start loving me?"

"On the way home in the cab from Bessie's when we quarreled so violently. I cried all night."

"Oh-o! Then the way to reach your heart is by quarreling with you!"

"Oh, it wouldn't work now. I see through you too well!"

"I love to have you see through me! How sweet it is to have you laugh at me and love me still!"

"I like to have you love me, but I'm not sure that I like to be laughed at. Perhaps you can teach me to laugh at myself."

"I don't want you any different. It's such fun to tease you, red-head!"

"I'll bleach my hair!"

"You couldn't bleach your red-headed nature!"

"What became of the old flivver, Greg?"

"I brought it with me."

"Brought it with you?"

"Yes, and Hickey. I intended to surprise you. Hickey had a longing to travel. He is now driving Taxi No. 1 in Santiago, and learning Spanish in the mornings. When the old car will no longer run we'll build a little private museum for her in our back yard. When we get old we'll go look at it together and remind each other of the brisk days of our youth."

"We'll never grow old inside anyway."

"Amy, dear, one thing troubles me."

"What is that?"

"De Socotra's money."

"It was all left to mama."

"But I suppose it will come to you in time. How could we take it?"

"I have thought of that. We needn't take it if you will help me lie once more and for the last time."

"How?"

"I have been trying to persuade mama to buy herself a sufficient annuity and then devote all the rest to philanthropic works. She objects that she must make provision for me. But if we allow her to think that you have sufficient—"

"I see. I haven't a cent, you know, really, except the salary of a minor post in the diplomatic service. Aren't you afraid sometimes?"

"Never! My dearest dear! I know you will win a proper place in the world for you and me! It's fun to begin on nothing."

"Oh, I do love you!"

"I love you so!"

(The end.)

— U U U U

CONCERNING THE BRINGING UP OF MOTHERS

BY LYON MEARSON

THEY did not wear short skirts, my dear,
 When mother was a girl;
 And stockings—they were not so sheer
 When mother was a girl;
 We've had an earful of the way
 They dressed in that forgotten day,
 A modest set of maids were they,
 When mother was a girl.

They never saw a lady's back,
 When mother was a girl;
 A dress was fashioned like a sack,
 When mother was a girl;
 For maidens then were mostly prim,
 They never flashed an ankle trim
 (No lady had a nether limb)
 When mother was a girl.

Ah, well, the seasons pass, my dear,
 Like blossoms on life's bough,
 The clothes that seem so nifty here,
 They never would allow
 In former years, yet spare your tears,
 For mother wears 'em now.

Heart to Heart Talks



By the Editor



THE glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome" are scarcely more than tantalizing phrases or hazy images for most of us. Yet every lad who left a high school with a graduation certificate knows Athens and Rome were the outstanding citadels of classic culture and an ancient civilization. And Greece surpassed Rome as an original masterpiece surpasses a copy, however brilliant.

As long as men continue to revere beauty and esteem reason Hellenistic art and literature will remain the mountain-tops of human achievement. Colleges may dispense with languages, but life can never wholly transcend the classics or the classic spirit. Even in a good translation, Greek literature, however, must remain for most of us an unexplored country. To make the Greek playwrights or the Attic philosophers intelligible, much less palatable, considerable training and a certain scholarship are necessary.

In offering next week's new serial, we feel we have accomplished an original thing in fiction publication, and put ALL-STORY WEEKLY readers in possession of the magic wand that will lift the curtain that protects the treasure-trove of ancient Greece. This story more definitely approximates the Greek attitude toward life than any modern work of fiction we could name, and the author is a ripe scholar, whose work is shot through with Greek feeling and beauty.

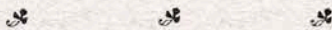
DAUGHTER OF LYSSA

BY B. J. R. STOLPER

will lift you out of the whirl and welter of the present and transport you to the magic simplicities of a world where machinery and conventional morality were as unknown as electricity and steam. Professor Stolper is more than a fascinating writer; he is a classic authority as well, and his story is more than a meretricious imitation of an ancient model or an historical caricature—it is a living embodiment of the native Greek spirit in all its tragic intensity, in all its passionate beauty.

In advance we must warn you this is not a modern romance, and conforms to none of the romantic gestures of the modern story. Always in the offing of the Grecian mind Fate loomed large, a portentous menace. The tragic note was dominant in Grecian drama. Stolper's story rings true to his Greek models.

We await with no little curiosity your comments on a piece of work which we think stands out because of its sheer beauty and pure tragedy. Mya and Poias will not disarm all criticism, but we much mistake our public if the discriminating reader and the seeker after "something new" do not both agree they have found it (after reading the first of the four instalments) in next week's ALL-STORY WEEKLY.



TO write of things as they are—to hold the mirror up to nature and reproduce in cold type what is there reflected—is one of the most difficult tasks in the profession of letters. Perhaps that is why there are so few really great realists. The roster of romanticists and idealists is much longer. But there is another branch of the craft that requires quite as much effort and a

very special type of genius. This is the school that, taking a theme beyond ordinary human knowledge, an—to the ordinary mind—impossible or at least improbable situation, makes it seem to the reader a vivid, vital reality. In other words, they make the incredible plausible. Such a story is our novelette for next week—

FIRES REKINDLED

BY JULIAN HAWTHORNE

Author of "Doris Dances," "Absolute Evil,"
"The Cosmic Courtship," etc.

It deals with the amazing experiences of a young American who, visiting London on some genealogical research, finds in a most commonplace and matter-of-fact lodging-house an astonishing adventure in— But it is a story that must be read in its entirety to get its full force, and any explanations here would only weaken it. One week from to-day you will get it.

THERE is a romance and fascination in the lives of men who do the real, hard, vital work of the world—railroaders, sailors, miners, construction men—the real toilers. And in few fields of human endeavor is there more drama—sometimes tragedy—than in mining, be it mining for coal or iron or gold or diamonds. In our next issue you will find a story by Octavus Roy Cohen, "THE BABOON'S SISTER," that has for its background a mining-camp in Alabama. The characters are three strong men—strong in different ways—and a girl, the sister of a miner. It has all the tenseness and gripping interest that we have learned to expect to find in a Octavus Roy Cohen story.

LISTEN. We wanna say right here that they is a story in next week's issue of this here, now, magazine that you wanna read. "PLAY PERSISTENCE" is its monniker. If it ain't funny an' everythin', nothin' ain't. It's *some* story, believe us, Camilla. We'll tell the world it is. What's the, now, author's name? You've guessed it, boys, we'll say you have—Samuel G. Camp.

"SMUDGED NAMES," by Maxwell Smith, in next week's magazine, is an intensely gripping story that will hold your attention from the first sentence to the last. Not a superfluous word mars the inevitable drama which the author, with singular insight and much understanding, stages for ALL-STORY WEEKLY readers. This story is bound to increase the prestige of an author who has already "made good" with his constantly growing public.

We take it you will give a warm welcome to the story, "HIS LORDSHIP ROLLS THE

BONES," in next week's magazine when we tell you that the author, Leonard Wise, was with the American army in France, and has but recently returned to this country. From internal evidence, we would be led to believe, a good many of the American E. F. have seen life as well as fighting.

SEQUEL TO "PALOS OF THE DOG STAR PACK"

TO THE EDITOR:

Well, I suppose my subscription has about expired, and I just can't afford to miss one number of the dear old ALL-STORY WEEKLY, so am sending one dollar for three months' subscription again, and I am going to start me an ALL-STORY WEEKLY reading-room. I have one year's subscription complete, and am going to save every copy to place in my ALL-STORY WEEKLY library, and then in a few years it will be a great pleasure to me to go in and take an easy chair and read the splendid stories again that I now so much enjoy. One old gentleman told me "he never got the real meaning of a book till he read it the second time."

"Misery Mansions" is one of the grandest stories I ever read. Yes, I, too, would like a sequel to "The Untamed," also "The Texan"; also one novelette I sure would like to see a sequel to, "The Girl in the Golden Atom," as I don't think the author treated us fair. Would like to see another story by Giesy and another *Tarzan* story. I am not very strong, and so spend a great deal of my time reading; but I enjoy the dear old ALL-STORY WEEKLY more than all other magazines combined. I loaned a great many of them two years ago, and lots of them I never received again; so I don't like to lend them, only to some true lover of books, one that appreciates the ALL-STORY WEEKLY as I do. I got the ALL-STORY WEEKLY fever (and a pretty bad case, I assure you) the first winter I spent in Florida, and it is now included among the household necessities, as something that cannot be done without. Oh, say! I also would like to see a sequel to "Palos of the Dog Star Pack." With the best wishes to the ALL-STORY WEEKLY and its readers, I remain,

MRS. LOU BAKER.

Cumberland Furnace, Tennessee.

NOTE: Mrs. Baker will be glad to learn that Dr. Giesy has recently completed a sequel to "Palos of the Dog Star Pack," which will be published early this summer.

LIKES "THE REBEL SOUL" AND SEQUEL

TO THE EDITOR:

Really there is little use to procrastinate longer when I know full well that eventually I will write. The ALL-STORY WEEKLY is the strongest little magazine I know, and I am an inveterate and promiscuous reader of magazines generally.

One week recently I was very much annoyed to find that every news-stand in Battle Creek had sold out of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, and I had to go clear to Kalamazoo to get one. I wanted very much to know what became of *Whistling Dan*, you see. Just now I am down deep in Austin Hall's "Into the Infinite." That man certainly has an enviable wealth of imagination. "The Rebel Soul" appealed to me very strongly—back in 1917, wasn't it? (June 30, 1917.) In fact I was so deeply impressed I tried for a while to become a rebel. Needless to say, I fizzled. But I am like *Roselle*; I refuse to listen to anything uncomplimentary about *George Wither-spoon*. I want to say I admire your faculty of selecting manuscripts that "carry a wallop," and that the ALL-STORY WEEKLY is the only magazine I can read from cover to cover without finding fault. Success to you, and may your "eagle eye" never dim while you retain the power of choice of stories.

J. P. ROBINSON.

Battle Creek, Michigan.

THINKS TEX AND WHISTLING DAN HAPPIER UNMARRIED

TO THE EDITOR:

Guess I've got a right to say a few words in praise of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, the greatest and best little magazine on the market. I have been a reader for over three years, and I can say that I like all your stories, for they are clean and don't run on the same lines as in some magazines. We, the ALL-STORY WEEKLY readers, are privileged characters—read a little of everything, believe me.

Now, about two stories I read lately, "The Texan" and "The Untamed." Some people, it seems, didn't like the way they ended; but say, why condemn the poor fellows, *Tex* and *Whistling Dan Barry*, to a married life? (Don't laugh, Mr. Editor. I am not married and never was, and you probably are.) *Tex* and *Whistling Dan* are too good to be tied down to a married life; so let the poor fellows alone to enjoy life a while. No doubt some heroes deserve to be married, but those two don't. I myself hate to see a good man go under, and *Tex* and *Dan* are good. Doesn't it get monotonous to know that when you start to read a story, the poor hero is going to get it in the end? That is why I like *Dumas*; he did not marry all his heroes in the end. So let the good work go on, and let some of these poor heroes enjoy life a little longer, I say.

Abdullah is one of your best writers; wish you wouldn't let any of his stories get away. "Master of the Hour" was one of the best stories I ever read. I am reading "Into the Infinite." It sure is great. Nothing more to say, only that I haven't missed a number of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for three years, and the only time I will, will be when I can read no more, for the ALL-STORY WEEKLY is the one and only for me.

Chicago, Illinois.

W. C. L.

"THE BEST AT ANY PRICE"

TO THE EDITOR:

"The Conquest of the Moon Pool" is the first story in any magazine which I immediately re-read upon completion. Mr. Merritt has so cleverly used scientific facts and theories of the formation of the earth and earth life in the explanation of phenomenal plants and beings and their environment in his "different" story that it seemed perfectly realistic and possible. The descriptions are wonderfully beautiful. The humor in the character of *Larry* brightens the story throughout. It is a perfectly "satisfactory" story—all things explained without pedantry, and ended consistently. I do not like to see the ALL-STORY WEEKLY quoted as "the best magazine of its price." It is the finest fiction magazine at any price. Its very reasonable price cannot be taken as an indication of its contents, but as an indication of its tremendous circulation and of the fact mentioned by S. S. McClure, that it is a magazine "which does not spend as much money on the cost of paper as it does in good judgment in selecting its contents."

"The Labyrinth" is especially good; its originality is refreshing; its humor exquisite. I very much liked "On the Spur of the Moment" and "The Blue Jay," as well as all of the *Roxy Malone* stories. "Who Wants a Green Bottle?" is unusually gripping. I like Herman Howard Matteson's stories. "Janie Frete, Intruder," is the best of the *Janie Frete* series. I thoroughly enjoyed "Allatambour" and "Pug-ly-gug-lo." I am now interested in reading "Children of Night" and "Misery Mansions." I liked "A Good Indian" and "The Grouch," but never read E. J. Rath's slap-stick comedies like "Too Many Crooks," *et cetera*.

MRS. FRED M. STAPLES.

Woodfords, Maine.

SEE ALL-STORY WEEKLY FOR AUGUST 2

TO THE EDITOR:

I come begging information. Where, oh, where has H. Bedford-Jones gone to? Please page him; see if he can't be found. Another "please"—not quite so frequent on those "different" stories. Like them? Why, surely I like them, but they tire me all out. Take, for instance, "The Conquest of the Moon Pool." Why, after reading a chapter of that I'd be as tired as if I'd done a day's work.

"Misery Mansions"—there's something that appeals to me—it was great! Ask E. K. Means if he can't get a little more (body, you might say) into his stories. They're good, no question of it; but outside of several amusing situations arising, there's nothing to them. I am keeping what I call a review on the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. In the first place, I think I can lay claim to as many back numbers of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY as any reader you have, lacking about twenty magazines, I think, since the first day of publication.

Now for my "review." I have a note-book in which I insert the name of a serial I have liked exceptionally well along with the number of parts and date of starting. In this way I have a splendid library of the *best* in fiction. When a person wishes to read a book, I just let them look over my review, pick what they want, go to the bookcase in which I have all my ALL-STORY WEEKLYS arranged in numerical order, and help themselves. Please forgive me for taking so much of your time. What I started to do was merely to thank you for the pleasant hours you have given me. But, darn it, when I get started talking ALL-STORY WEEKLY, I don't know when to quit. I would like to plead with the other readers for a sequel to "The Untamed." Wishing a long life to the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, BEN F. LOBNOW.
Long Beach, California.

"UP-STAIRS" A WHIRLWIND NOVELLETTE

TO THE EDITOR:

Just a few words of appreciation for one of the best magazines on the market, the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, and it certainly is *great*. I have been reading it from the first instalment of "The Texan," and that story was a peach, and can't be beat.

Am going to tell you how I happened to be a steady reader of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. A friend of mine gave me the last edition of "The Texan." I started in reading the book, but when I ran into "The Texan" story I stopped. I asked that friend what he meant by handing me the last part of such a good story, and, believe me, I never let up on him until he brought the rest of the story, which he did, and in due time, too. I took the books home, and settled myself for an enjoyable evening. I got it. I never went to bed till the wee small hours of the morning. Now, I am of the same opinion as the other readers—*Tex* is being badly treated, when all he has is a posse and the other fellow got the girl. Why, oh, why, can't we have a sequel?

"The Untamed" was great. Isn't Max Brand going to give us a sequel, or don't he know that the wild geese are back, and it's time *Dan* was coming back to *Kate*? Surely she deserves some happiness, and that can only mean *Dan*.

All the other good stories are altogether too numerous to mention, and there certainly are a great many that need praise. But one word for E. K. Means—he certainly is a gloom-chaser with his stories, and all I say is let him keep the good work up.

Am now deeply interested in "Into the Infinite," and so far it promises to be *some* story. I can't blame *Roselle* for loving *George*; could do so myself, even if he is a Rebel Soul.

"Up-Stairs" was some whirlwind of a novellette, and it surely was good. In fact, all the novelettes are beyond criticism.

Although I am not a subscriber, I have not missed a single copy of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY

since I started reading it. It isn't that I am just lucky, but I always manage to be first in line at our bookstore. Have often supplied others with copies they were unable to get, and I am sorry to say the books never came home; but never again will I be so accommodating, as I want to save the books.

Well, I guess I have had my say, but I could not resist writing and letting you know of the many pleasant hours I enjoyed, and still hope to enjoy more, with the old standby, the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. I remain an ever-booster,

801 Linwood Avenue,
Niagara Falls, New York.

B. T. P.

LITTLE HEART-BEATS

I have been reading the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for a long time, but never have written to you people before. I like a story in serial form that you don't know just who did it until you read all of the serial, and where it throws suspicion on more than one person, as in "The Crimson Alibi." I like the serial stories best. I read every story in your magazine, and wish the authors and the editor the best of success, and hope you will have more good stories. Must close, as I think I said enough.

F. H. H.

Omaha, Nebraska.

I am interested in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. I think it is just great; the best I have ever read. I like all the Western stories. In fact if I were to tell you the stories I like, I don't think I would ever stop. This is the first time I have written to you, so I wish good luck to the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. I have just read "The Untamed," and think it just fine. Hope we have some more like it. Hoping to have more good stories to please everybody,

MRS. B. THORPE.

Care of Westboro Ro.,
Ottawa, Canada.

You are certainly printing a lot of *Ar* stories at present. Being a Westerner, my favorites are stories of the great, open West. Will say that I haven't read a poor story in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY yet. Of course some of them are better than others, naturally. Would like to read another story of *Peter Gross* and the *Argus Pheasant*. The stories all the way through show that the author knows something of Borneo. Would also like a sequel to "The Texan." Well, I'll close, saying that the ALL-STORY WEEKLY is the best magazine printed, regardless of cost or authors, and I have read them all.

LESTER SKELBERGER.

Broadwater, Massachusetts.

I am a man of limited time, and seldom have the chance of indulging the pleasure I take in reading. Recently, though, on my vacation, I

happened to chance through the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, and came across the first instalment of "Safe and Sane." I started to read it, and could not quit indoors until I had finished it. I eagerly anticipated the concluding instalments, and was not disappointed. Mr. Robbins's philosophic humor and originality appeal to me strongly. There is a real pathos in the character of *Peter Pottingham*, the fat, grotesque old billionaire, with his tragic history. Suffice it to say that I believe Mr. Robbins to be a man of real literary merit, and one whose work seems head and shoulders above the average magazine writer. I hope to see more of his work, and will watch your magazine with that object in view.

STEPHEN L. SMALL.

10 Arlington Street,
Boston, Massachusetts.

I am a new reader, but I have spread the seeds of its propaganda. This is how your magazine readers grow. A boy told another boy about the ALL-STORY WEEKLY; this boy then told me. We began taking it when "The Conquest of the Moon Pool" began, and I think that A. Merritt should write a sequel to it. Another of my friends, seeing my interest in the magazine, bought a copy when "Pug-ly-gug-lo" started, and he has kept it up since. He, after a little persuasion, got one of his best friends to try it. He bought the April 12 issue, and all that afternoon nobody could drag him from it. I always read Heart to Heart Talks. Somebody had a letter published that said that the short stories were best. Well, he is wrong—very wrong! The serials are the main part of it, and I think most people think so. I think that this magazine is the best on earth, and I think all of its readers think so also.

Indianapolis, Indiana.

ROY JOHNSON.

I am forced to write you a letter although I am a reader of your magazine for only a short period, but have realized since that it is the best on the market, barring none, and I have been a steady reader of quite a number of them.

I have one kick to register, and that is it makes me keep the midnight oil burning, and it is late in the morning when I close your book.

Every story has a punch of its own, and it always hits the bull's-eye.

One thing I do want, and that is a sequel to "The Untamed." Get after Max Brand right hard, and I "reckon" he will come across.

I would also like you to send one of your authors to Akron, the Rubber City (sometimes known as the city of opportunities), to get in on the aero races which will come in the early part of May, to be given by the Akron Aero Club. I am sure one could get a good actual-place story with the races as the "object."

An ALL-STORY WEEKLY booster,

510 Brel Street,

EUGENE C. GARDNER.

Akron, Ohio.

Please find enclosed coin, for which please send me the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for the week of April 10. I was unable to get it at the time it came in, and I do so much enjoy reading the stories. They are so good I don't know which I like best, "The Untamed" and "Broadway Bab" sure were some worth reading. "Ready to Occupy" was simply great. I hope the authors of those stories will see their way clear to give us some more like them. Please give us some more of the good old Western stories. I like those, as there is always something doing, and you don't feel like going to sleep. As this is my first letter to the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, I hope it doesn't find the waste-basket. Wishing every success, I remain,

Watertown, Connecticut.

E. I. P.

No doubt you will be surprised to hear from one of your readers who lives in Saskatchewan, Canada, but I have just finished reading the story by Max Brand, "The Untamed." I think that that story was the best you ever published. Is Max Brand going to write a sequel to "The Untamed"? I truly hope he will. I would like to ask you a question, Mr. Editor. I didn't read the story, "The Rebel Soul," by Austin Hall. Can I get that story in book form? I read the ALL-STORY WEEKLY every week now, and I think it is the best magazine I ever had in my hand. Trusting to hear from you by return mail,

Strasbourg,

OTTO SPREDICKE.

Saskatchewan, Canada.

NOTE: "The Rebel Soul" has not been published in book form, but we can supply the number of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY containing it (June 30, 1917), for twenty cents.

I have been reading the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for several years, and just thought I would tell you how I enjoy reading most of the stories. I like the serials best. "The Texan" was sure great, but poor old *Tex* was sure left out bad. We would sure appreciate a sequel to "The Texan" and also "The Untamed." *Whistling Dan* is probably tired of chasing wild geese by now, so please bring him back in a sequel. "The Red Glory" that is starting in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY promises to be some story. I guess this is enough for this time. Will close with very best wishes for success. Don't forget *Tex* and *Whistling Dan*.

MRS. J. F. TILMAN.

Emmett, Idaho.

I have been reading the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for quite a while, and I thought I would write you and tell you what I think of some of your stories. My sister, Rubye Gallatyne, has written you two letters, and I thought I, too, would write. I wish you would give us another story by Johnston McCulley. He is certainly some writer. I don't see how any one could like E. K. Means's stories

so well. I don't like them at all. I read one of them and that was enough for me. "Broadway Bab" is about the best story I've ever read, and close behind comes "The Case of Madeline Patris." I liked "Twenty-Six Clues" and "The Untamed" just fine; but who is there that did not like "The Untamed"? "That Receding Brow" was fine, as all of Max Brand's stories are. "Claire" and "Ready to Occupy" were ripping, although I did not read all of them. I liked "Suspense." Well, I will take up no more of your time, for I know you are always busy. Wishing the ALL-STORY WEEKLY such prosperity in the future as they have had in the past,

Weatherford, Texas.

DURA GALLATYNE.

I have been a reader of your wonderful magazine for a long time, and I thought I would write and express my thoughts. The ALL-STORY WEEKLY is a fine magazine, and is thought a great deal of around these parts. My father, who is a great reader, says the ALL-STORY WEEKLY can't be beat. Your latest serials, "The Crimson Alibi," "The Untamed," and "The Wicked Streak," are the best I've read in a long time. My sister wishes to know what the "H. R. H." meant in "H. R. H. the Rider." [His Royal Highness.] Hoping to see this published, I'll close.

Yours truly,

ALL-STORY WEEKLY BOOSTER.

Livermore, California.

ALL-STORY WEEKLY READERS' EXCHANGE

NOTE—All details of sale or exchange must be arranged between the readers and not through this office, nor can we undertake to print letters referring to any other magazines than the Munsey publications. Letters to be printed in this department should contain complete address.

A NOTE for the ALL-STORY WEEKLY files regarding "An Offer from Mr. Holloway," in Heart to Heart Talks, March 8, 1919:

1. Have purchased six sets of the magazines I asked for at eighty cents each. 2. Have written letters to those whose copies I did not buy, and have returned the postage they spent in writing to me. 3. Have sent photos when requested. 4. If any subscriber writes to the office, claiming he did not hear from me, send me his letter, and I'll write and return his postage. A letter *might* go astray, and I do not want the magazine to suffer.

One reader purchased the copies in Florida, took them to Montana, afterward moved to Portland, Oregon, and now lives in Colorado—magazines with her all the time! Some adv. that!

WILLIAM HOLLOWAY.

I have the following magazines, which I wish to exchange or dispose of. Any one wishing them, write to me. Of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY I have the following: April 21, 1917; September 15, 1917; November 17, 1917; December 22, 1917; March 23, 1918; February 9, 1918; August 10, 17, 24, 1918; September 7, 1918, and October 5 and 19, 1918. *The Argosy*: January, 1914, and the December 1, 1917; March 9, 16, 23, 1918; June 29, 1918; and July 27, 1918. I want all the years' numbers, 1916 and 1917 of *The Argosy*. Who has them? Please write me.

Brookston, Texas.

MRS. O. H. HARRIS.

I see by the last ALL-STORY WEEKLY that you have an exchange department, and so I am sending list of some numbers I would like to get and some that I have to exchange. I would like to get October 26, 1918; September 8, 1917; September 15, 1917; June 23, 1917; July 14, 1917. I have these copies to exchange for the above numbers: March 3, 1917; May 9, 1914; November 11, 1916; September 9, 1916; July 11, 1914; February 5, 1916; August 7, 1915. The above are

ALL-STORIES, but I have some copies of *The Argosy*, such as May 4, 11, and 18, 1918. For each of the five copies that I want, I will give two copies for each of those I receive and pay postage both ways on all magazines; or if anybody happens to have what I want, and does not want those I have to exchange, I will pay twenty cents each for them and pay all postage.

Boone, Iowa.

MRS. W. C. DODD.

I have every consecutive number of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, with the exception of the second issue, since the magazine became a weekly. These copies are in first-class condition, and I would be willing to dispose of them for a reasonable price. I desire to sell at least twenty or twenty-five consecutive issues at a time.

Very truly yours, L. J. LANGENDERFER.

766 Orchard Street,
Toledo, Ohio.

I would pay any ALL-STORY WEEKLY reader any reasonable price for a January 11 copy of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. I couldn't get that copy, and so didn't get to finish the story, "The Untamed."

Please print this in Heart to Heart Talks so I can get that copy.

MRS. ORA CRABTREE.

Fouke, Arkansas.

I want to get one copy of each of March, 1912, and August, 1912, issues of *Munsey's Magazine*, for which I will pay twenty-five cents a copy. I have the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for March 7, 14, and 21, 1914, and all issues from September 15, 1917, to December 28, 1918. I will exchange any of above numbers of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for two issues of *Munsey's Magazine* as given above. If you have above copies of *Munsey's*, or want any of above ALL-STORY WEEKLYS, write first.

HENRY W. KINSINGER.

Minersville, Pennsylvania.

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Read this Big Story of New York's Mad Gaiety

Beau Revel

By Louis Joseph Vance

"LARRY—" Mrs. Lathom began, and her pensive inflection drew from Revel a quick, sidelong glance colored by a faintly apprehensive crinkling of eyebrows.

"*Je suis,*" he murmured, and waited watchfully. Divining the subtle tribute in this attitude, Mrs. Lathom smiled the smile of ironic introspection which is one sign of humored vanity—a smile that lingered as she pursued:

"Larry—how long have you been pestering me?"

"Pestering? Oh, making love!"

simply adore the way you play the game. A woman does like a man to rattle off a glib, unblushing lie instead of fumbling for the truth in a foggy memory. Any other woman, Larry, would let you get away with it, just to show appreciation of your unquity."

"Uniquity? Lovely word! Makes one feel caught red-handed in something agreeably abandoned."

"So you have been caught—fibbing. We met here, in the Crystal Room, ten months ago tonight. Seeing Angie Earle just now reminded



"YOU MAY YET WAKE UP SOME FINE MORNING TO FIND YOU'VE GOT A MADLY-IN-LOVE MARRIED WOMAN ON YOUR HANDS, AND THE DEVIL TO PAY"

"Well—tell me how long; have you any notion?"

Revel answered readily in his most matter-of-fact manner:

"Eleven months, two weeks, three days, and some odd hours."

"Dear old fraud!" Hints of latent laughter played over the exquisite texture of her voice like moonlight on running water. "Larry, I

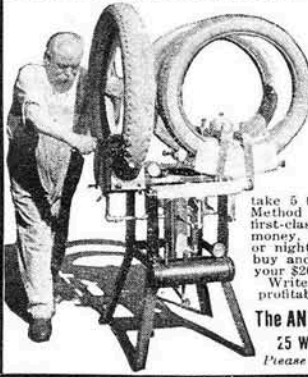
me. It was she who introduced us, the night her husband sailed for France."

"Ten months is a long time," Revel commented, not at all abashed. "How much longer do you think you can hold out, Alice?"

"That's what's troubling me. I've been so patient with you, wondering if you'd ever ring true. Well, you haven't yet, you know. If you had, just once—"

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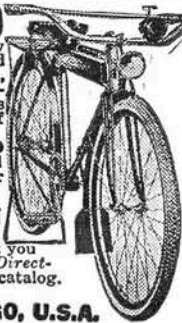
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that counts these days. The man who waits, gets lost in the shuffle. It is the resolute will to follow your hunch that lands you where the money is.

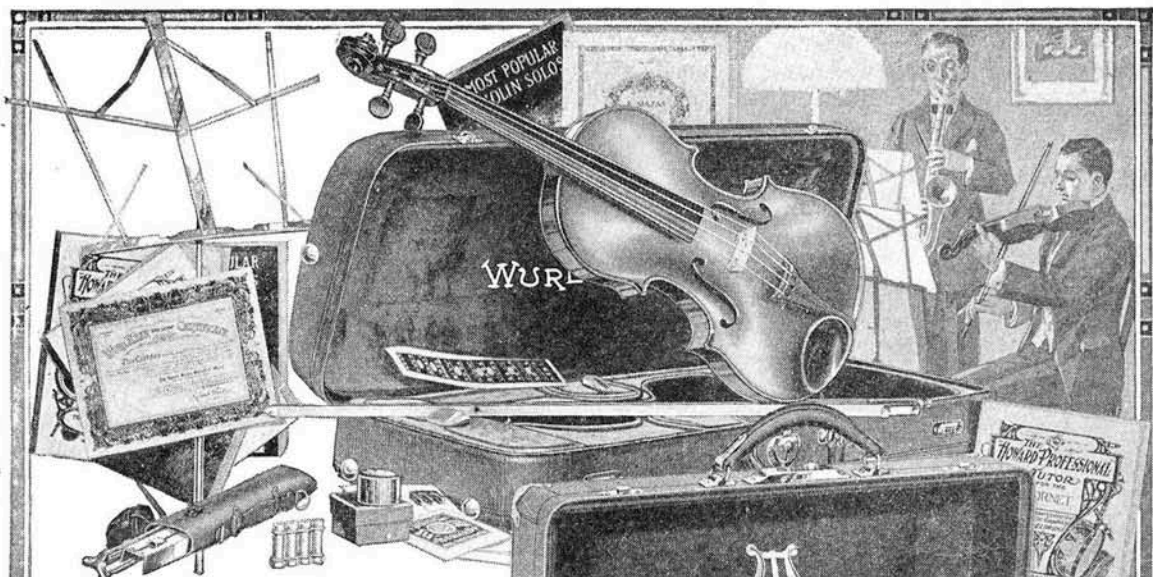
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The corn itself can be ended completely, and usually in two days.

The method is scientific. It consists of attaching a Blue-jay plaster, forgetting the corn, and letting things take their course. The results have been proved by experience.

They have been proved to so many people that corns are now comparatively uncommon.

Corn aches are needless.

Paring corns is folly.

Old-time harsh and mussy treatments have no place today.

You will know these facts, and quickly, if you'll try a Blue-jay on one corn. Do it tonight, and the whole corn question will settle itself forever.

B&B

Blue-jay

The Scientific Corn Ender

Stops Pain Instantly—
Ends Corns Completely
25 Cents—At Druggists

BAUER & BLACK, Chicago, New York, Toronto
Makers of Sterile Surgical Dressings and Allied Products