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ALL-STORY WEEKLY



Daughter of Lyssa

by B. J. R. Stolper

*A Tragedy of
Ancient Greece*

MORAN



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Tobacco Co.

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the national joy smoke

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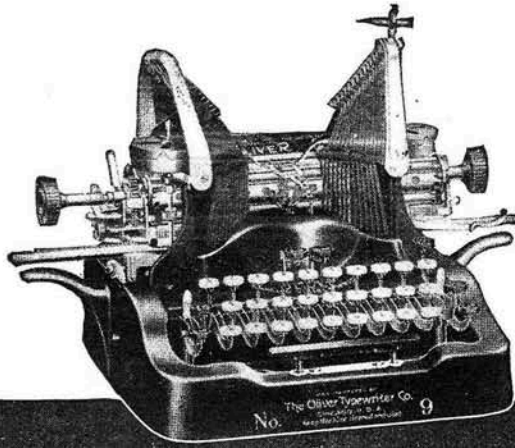
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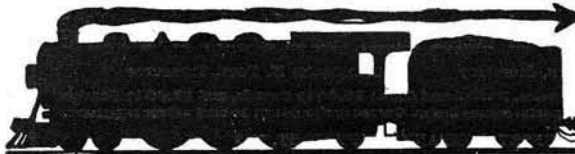
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Name

Street Address

City State

Occupation or Business

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOLUME XCVIII

NUMBER 3



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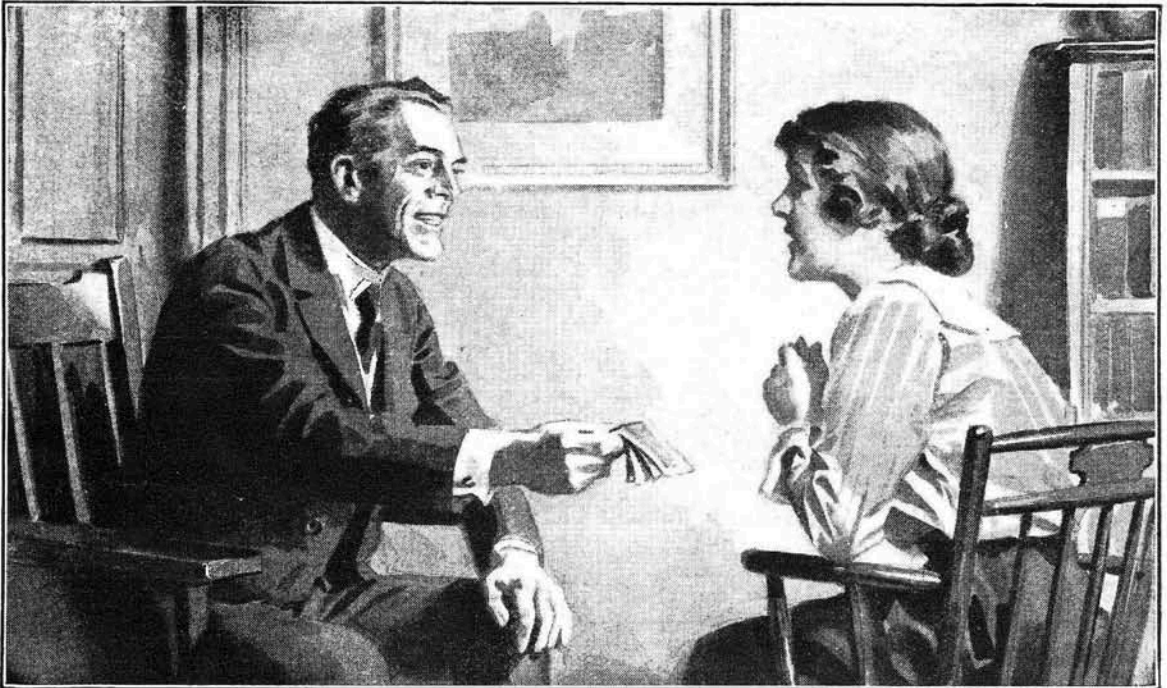
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Daughter of Lyssa by B. J. R. Stolper

THE unique distinction of this story is that it transcends the modern standards of romantic fiction. Here is a Greek cameo, dug from the ruins of ancient Greece by B. J. R. Stolper, resplendent with the perennial beauty of all things Grecian. Rarely does a story of such distinction find its way into a magazine of fiction. We are much concerned that you should taste the full flavor of this exquisite tale, for the author is saturated with the Grecian spirit, and his work faithfully reproduces the Greek view of life. The author is a veritable magician, who will lift you out of the turmoil of the twentieth century, and set you down in the classic environment of Hellas when men pursued the heroic and the beautiful as to-day they pursue money and power. This is not a modern picture set in a Greek frame, but a veritable Grecian tragedy. The literature of Greece, which still remains the richest in the world, was predominantly occupied with the tragedy of human fate. This story is essentially tragic, and you will be disappointed if you look for modern instances and the proverbially happy ending.

Modern literature is essentially romantic and far removed in its outlook on life from that of the Greek tragedians who were uncircumscribed by romantic ideals and Christian convictions. Tragedy is the topmost peak of human achievement or art's creation. If the austere beauty of Greek tragedy repels you, have nothing to do with "Daughter of Lyssa." But if you appreciate the Elgin marbles or an Athenian temple, if the story of Prometheus or Orestes, or of Antigone take hold of you as no mere modern romance can ever do, you are of the elect. You have a spiritual kinship with the Greeks, and you will find Stolper's story as beautiful as it is tragically true.

CHAPTER I.

MYA'S MOTHER.

MYA'S father was a silent lout, ferryman at the whirling flood. He did his task so darkly and moodily that he won a grim by-name. His own, Lycander, was quite forgotten. Charon, folk called him, and he answered to the dreadful syllables without comment.

"Hoi! Charon!"

Those waiting to cross would see his motionless form on the far bank, seated on a rough boulder, his naked, upraised knee gripped in his tightly clasped hands.

"Hoi! Charon!"

Then he would move, unclasp his hands, rise slowly, and walk, with head still bent, the four paces to the flat-boat. There he would stand listening, till the second hail. The concave shores sent back all sound many fold; and it was known that Charon

bent his ear with fierce pleasure to the echoes. Only when these ceased would he cast off the osier rope from the stake driven into the sand, clench and coil it with a kind of cold ferocity, and push out powerfully, wading, holding the boat incredibly against the stream. His hands were huge, disproportionately huge, even to his own great, muscular body. When the water foamed under his armpits, he would vault heavily into the ferry, seize the broad-bladed oars, and make across with dead, monotonous, inevitable strokes.

He was always on the far bank, no matter from which shore he was hailed. For his hut stood on a small, rocky patch in the middle of the rushing water, and his ferry was always moored before it. Save his own and Mya's, no human foot was ever set on the island. He had looked grimly to that once, and it had been enough, when young Cynthos's Phrygian cap was picked up at the far mouth of the stream, and, later, young Cynthos's broken body. Charon had truly no need, thereafter, for so much watchfulness. Yet, though he might have shed two-thirds of herculean sweat-labor by making fast as close of each passage, rowing only from bank to bank, he ever returned to his boulder after landing his freight.

Charon's island cropped out in a curt elbow of rock curving left toward the stream. The ferryman had strengthened the curve with great stones and tree-trunks. He had carried them down from the interior of his island, wedging them fast, and had completed a jetty in shape of a young moon, behind which the flat ferry rode safe at all seasons.

Otherwhere, the water ran swift and deep on all sides round about. Save in the sultry dog-days, there was no ford; and even in such time, only at the crossing, in full eye from the jetty. To swim was to whirl blinded to the gods; no man had tried it.

Above and beyond, twenty paces, against a grove of black cypresses, rose the hut in which Charon lived with white Mya, his daughter. To right and left of the low walls lay the goat-fold, the swine-pen, and the bits of farming earth where the two grew their small corn and set their grape stakes.

Charon had not always lived on the island. At first his hut had stood on the left main bank, as you look down to the sea. That had been for one year before these happenings, and for fifteen continuous years before that. His moving to the island came about abruptly, and in this wise.

When Mya was born—she was now sixteen—her mother had died in labor. Lycander—he had not been Charon then—had been a wordless man even before the black day and the blacker day. It is true old folk said they had seen him smile, once or twice, with wonderful sweetness, after he brought his wife home to the river-edge. But silence and dark mood had come back to him very quickly. He had gone to the light-haired hill dwellers for a wife, and had got him holy Aphrodite and unholy Clytemnestra in one, or so it was said.

Young Lyssa had been a wonder to stare on: the color of foam and sky and gold and rosy-fingered dawn in her slim body, wide eyes, fine hair and oval cheeks. She had been a shepherdess, and Lycander had met her on the hills. She was fifteen, a woman grown, yet with the face of a child, and a white body so sweet and fragile, as is not seen among lowland folk. When she raised her clear eyes to him as he bent over her, Lycander saw truth of all Olympus in their blue depths. His heart choked him with its sudden beating, and the blood flamed on his brown face and throat. He was dusty with striding; but she took in his splendid brawn in a glance all innocence, and smiled up at him, even fluttering the delicate petal, her white hand, to his great, corded, tawny arm.

"*Hou!*" murmured Lyssa with wonder. "Let me see your two eyes."

Lycander's heart looked out at her through both of them.

"But for those, stranger, I might have thought a Cyclops had met me. You are a giant. We do not see such men in these hills."

It was sundown. He had gone with her to her byre among the young trees, the two talking as they went. The sheep moved before them. She had no kin, she told him; she was alone in all the world, even owning nothing. He looked at her slender form in the dim light that fell so

dull everywhere, and yet blurred so softly and wonderfully on her shapely golden head. And he smiled and took her hand.

At dawn he helped her drive the sheep up to the old man who owned them. The latter stared at the huge stature of the stranger. A lean faced young man came out of the dwelling, and lolled against the door-post, watching with an ambiguous smile. His lips pouted full, even when his cheeks creased, revealing his white, regular teeth. But Lycander reached out his left hand to Lyssa, took a strong grip of the ashen staff in his right, and, turning, began to descend with her from the mountain.

When three months had passed Lycander's sullen brows had lightened unbelievably; he took to humming indistinct tunes, as he plied the heavy oar. When five months were by, one day he hurled his rough gold armet, an ancient thing and choice, into the shouting water: To the gods! They were without ruth when they saw to envy. When six months had come and gone, folk called him *Charon*, and he waited a second hail, to listen with fierce pleasure to the echoes.

He had rowed passage to the opposite bank and had returned alone, with wonderful speed. His heart was like a boy's. He had labored mightily against the current, all round the dangerous island, had landed sharp on his left bank far from the hut and stolen home noiseless. *Thai!* he would hear Lyssa's startled laughter.

He heard murmurs in the hut. A dry twig cracked under his foot. When he entered Lyssa was alone, singing lightly, and mending a tunic.

"Lyssa!"

"Lycander?"

"Who has been with you?"

"With me? No one, Lycander."

But his sharp ear had caught a rustling in the leaves back of the house. He had turned, leaping, through the doorway. There was a crashing in the low branches of the plane trees, a short struggle, and Lycander strode into the hut, crushing a slim figure in his arms. He moved the pale face to the light; there was pain in the eyes and the upwritten eyebrows; but the full, red lips

still pouted in a faint, ambiguous smile. It was the young man who had leaned against the door-post in the house of Lyssa's master. "Lyssa!"

A red haze had risen. Lycander's ears were full of noise like roaring water. Everything seemed misty red—the hut, Lyssa, the young man, his own two arms.

But Lyssa was speaking in her sweet, truthful tones. He knew them. There was no guile in her voice.

"It is my brother. He came this day from the mountain."

"You have no kin!"

"I was afraid. The old man was my father. This is my brother. I was afraid lest you demand the bridal gifts, as is the custom."

And her blue eyes were troubled only as a child's might be. Almost he believed her. But when he looked suddenly down on the narrow face at his breast, and beheld the black hair, black as his own, and the sleek, outthrust lips, a kind of rage came upon him. She had lied once. She was lying now.

"He is your lover! You were common to the hill! I will kill him!"

"He is my brother! He is my mother's son!"

But Lycander had turned with his burden and was walking swiftly toward the stream.

"My brother! my brother! my brother! Ah, gods! Lycander, I will say the truth!"

She rushed, stumbling, toward him, her naked arms outflung, her fingers working, distraught with horror. But Lycander had heaved the stranger terribly, high above his head, gripping and squeezing him in the vise of his great hands. The man screamed once, twice. The echoes awoke. Lycander had hurled him into the whirling race. His voice was smitten dumb as with a blade. In an instant he was gone.

But the echoes called on a while longer, and Lycander stood half-bent forward, listening, listening.

A month later Mya had been born, and Lyssa had died in labor. None but Lycander had been at the birth, which, indeed, had taken place in the small hours of morning. Lycander had not given forth his

wife's corpse to be burned, as was custom, but had hollowed a place for her in the earth under the plane-trees that had stood back of the hut.

This had given rise to dreadful rumors for a space, *anthropophagi* (cannibals), and what not. But when hardy folk had dared Lycander, calling him by name, he had glowered, pointing what he had done. *Hai*, it was a foreign thing, but not unhuman. With that the questioners had been silenced. One, whose wife had newly lost a child, had wished to bear tiny Mya to his home, to suckle; but Lycander had looked black. A she-goat stood tethered in the room; toward her he had jerked his head, presently driving the softened visitors before him out of the hut.

CHAPTER II.

THE VISION OF POIAS.

THUS fifteen years had run, and Lycander was *Charon*. He had reared Mya himself, feeding her goat's milk in the beginning, but weaning her soon, and very roughly. When she had begun to crawl, he kept her tied with a tough vine while he plied the ferry. When she had grown and understood a little, he so held the menace of the water to her terrified mind that she never tempted the calling brink. Indeed, she kept a horror of the flood the rest of her days.

A song some poet made when her strange tale had noised about Bœotia, said it was that had later drawn her so hotly to Poias, the marble-cutter; her horror and his disdain of the devouring river he had baffled twice for her sake. Perhaps so.

When Mya was small she feared men because they were like her father. When any appeared she fled and hid in the hut. Charon grew corn and grapes, enough for their needs. He kept goats for milk, cheese, and flesh, and for skins to make garments; and when Mya was bigger he sent her out to pasture them in the unpeopled wood behind their dwelling.

The ferryman had kept no count of days.

Since his eyes unceasingly sought the ground, he had no regard for time that shows in men's faces. To him Mya was hardly more than just come into the world—a dumb infant.

But late one afternoon, when he returned home, he heard a murmur of voices—a voice—within the hut. His heart stood still; there was a rushing in his ears; a red haze arose. At the same time, there came a crashing in the plane-trees that grew incredibly fainter and fainter, then ceased to silence.

His great hands opened and closed as he turned to pursue. But the years slipped from him, and he rushed headlong into the hut.

Mya sat on a stool, staring before her, humming.

His chest heaved. He gripped his daughter's shoulder cruelly; and she raised two clear blue eyes to his.

"Who has been with you?"

But he knew what the answer would be. She was a woman. How had he been so blind? Kill her? No. Kill him? He stared stupidly about and threw the hair from his eyes. No; this was his daughter; Mya, his daughter. He turned and went slowly to the door; he stood, half-bent forward, listening. Nothing spoke but the river. He raised his eyes—the island.

That same day he had borne hut and herd and goods to the rock on his flat ferry. But first he had lifted Mya and rowed her across, leaving her there, alone. She had screamed at the whirling water. It had been a savage joy to lift her in his arms and walk swiftly toward the stream. He had stood there, half-bent forward, listening. But he had set her in the boat and had rowed her across.

Charon's encounter with young Cynthos had been abrupt and violent. The lad was a vine-dresser, a lover and a dancer in the mysteries.* Charon had oared at his call to set him across. Midstream, a great splash had beckoned his attention, and, without breaking stroke, he had made for the island. The race had loosened some stone or other, and a tree-trunk had sprung, threatening

* A religious ceremony of a secret nature, to which only the initiated were admitted.

the jetty. Presently the ferryman had made fast to the stake, motioning his passenger to keep seat. When he had wrenched the tree in place, wedging all fast, and had turned to put off again, the ferry was empty. He looked upward, shading his eyes. The youth had mounted the steep rise, paused lithely, and was flashing his white teeth at slim Mya, who smiled at him through the grape-leaves.

Charon had sped like a terrible shadow. Two waiting on the left bank saw the whole. He had seized the shapely naked ankles, clenching and dragging down; had gathered and crushed the dust-stained form in his arms, walking swiftly to the jetty; there he stood, crouching; had heaved his monstrous hands, burden and all, high above his head. Young Cynthos's phrygian cap fluttered down and vanished. And a moment later young Cynthos himself curved, turning, far out in air, struck, and disappeared without a cry.

But Charon had remained listening. Presently he had got dully into the ferry and started for the left bank; but the two waiting had fled.

The tale now moves to Poias.

The heroic age had not then so receded as now; all things were possible; men still lived who had seen demigods in the flesh, hearing even their spoken accents. While Charon, at the river-edge, was still Lycander, one Poias, a marble-cutter's boy at the base of the mountain, dreamed and planned two things. Either would make him known the breadth of Bœotia. Both would put him into the mouths of the singers forever. So his name should outlast and outlive his body.

He dreamed as a boy dreams some night after hearing a breathless tale of men and quick fame—impetuously, pompously. But, unlike the great lost among slim, hot-eyed youths, divine boys who die into earthly men, he bent a stubborn will to plan, early musing on shifts to make his two dreams truths, when he should be grown to their accomplishment.

He would achieve the most perilous adventure in the world. He would possess the loveliest woman of his time.

In those days there stood on the left main bank, seven miles north of Charon's rock, a tall, round tower. It was old even in Poias's time, and he has been dust these fifty Olympiads. More than one spoiler of cities had tried to take it, by craft as by force, as its fame spread; but it had always won through, immovable and unassailable as Atlas.

It was called simply the tower. It stood in the open field, but cunningly and wonderfully guarded. All round, a deep, wide basin had been dug, flooded to the brim by turning the bed of an underground stream. A man's life, attacking, would be spilled twice over, even while he sped furiously, swimming or oaring, across the stretching water. The great building was made all of stone: huge, gray blocks such as now are not used; they cannot be lifted to set one above the other; Cyclops or Pelasgians must once have set hand to the work.

Within were vast dry bins for grain, stalls for cattle, endless racks for weapons. In a low-ceiled cell below earth level a fresh spring bubbled up through flags and back again down a runlet. Twice, when Athens sent armies into Bœotia, the whole village had retreated to the tower, holding out with such ease that siege had been raised.

The fabled rearing of the tower, too, overlaid with mystery, added to its lure and impregnability. It was not alone a stronghold and a treasury; it was also a fane, making defense desperate. For this much was known: In hidden times a god had fallen from heaven and turned to black stone in the village. Or else he had cast his image there for men to worship. It had come down by night, with noise, in a trail of fire. And when those who had hid came forth trembling in the morning to look—there was the stone in the image of a man.

The folk had set it in a grove of young oaks till the tower was ready for the god's better safekeeping. A belief sprang up that when the tower was taken the image would be defiled, the men of the village slain, and the women and children sold into slavery. Some say an oracle had uttered the words. Perhaps so.

But thereafter armed men from the village watched incessantly on the walls, as

who perform a rite, not only as soldiers, but as priests, taking eager turns at a duty which had become a solemn, vital honor. Reverence of the immortals, their own lives, as well as the freedom of their women and children, hung on unyielding defense of the tower.

It was this citadel that Poias dreamed to take. The tradition of its unconquerable strength was older than the oldest memory. No less than this was his adventure.

CHAPTER III.

THE WONDER OF THE WORLD.

THE woman Poias desired was Mya.

He had not, indeed, beheld her at once for his fame—knowing her face and form, her dwelling and parentage. That was impossible: she had not then been born into the world.

When he awoke that wonderful night, a lad of eight, on the floor of his father's hut, to find himself staring, with wildly beating heart, at the bright stars that twinkled down to him through the black-rifted beams, his thought was not of Mya, daughter of Lyssa. It was of glory through the tower and a woman. The two should bring him fame forever. He would take the tower, he, Poias. The most wonderful of women should call him husband. His fame would endure through Hellas and mid-Argos.

His achievement was firm in his mind: the tower, no other. But his dream of the maiden was hazy-golden and confused; a mere stubborn longing. His images were boyishly vague, tinged with fable and songs half understood; a nymph made mortal; the slim moon on the hill; a gift from Aphrodite like Helen's self.

For long he told nothing of his dreams, for he feared the rough marble-cutters would laugh, his rough father more loudly than any. But once he had made a song of his thoughts, fitting a rude tune to words he said over and over again, as children do. He lay under an olive-tree out of the sun, eyes half shut, chanting:

"I will take the tower," he sang. "I will take the tower! And have to wife the wonder of the world!"

He thought himself alone; but a shadow fell on his naked feet, and he sprang up on confusion. His mother stood before him. She had brought a jar to fill at the brook. She stood there with the tall, curved clay poised on her shoulder, gazing down at him strangely.

"The song," she murmured; "where did you learn it, son? Do the Bœotian children sing it? Is it a game?"

And when he kept dumb, while his eyes grew intent on a pebble, he fell to prodding with a brown toe.

"Do not be ashamed, Poias," she said gently.

At once his boy's heart began to beat violently, like that of an ephebus* on the threshold of the first mystery. He felt, though cloudily, that his mother knew and understood, perhaps. She swung the jar down midway, setting it then out of the heat. And presently drawing the boy down beside her under the oval shade of the olive, she looked long into his eyes, tilting his firm, young chin.

"It is no game," she said. "The Bœotian children do not sing this song.

"I have watched you, Poias. I am your mother. You will tell me everything.

"But first I will tell you a tale. We are Thebans; that you know; and by no means Bœotians. For the children shout it after you when they play, and the women call me *Theban* at the linen-pool; and the marble-cutters speak good words to your father only because his strength is great. But this you do not know; I had not thought to tell you so soon. Who are you? Of what house? By what name do you call yourself? Not Poias, son of Ctephar, the marble-cutter! And not Poias, the Theban, a light name, a by-word! And by no means Poias, the Bœotian!

"When I was a maiden in the fields about Thebes, there met me once a stranger, at dusk, in the furrows. How old are you Poias? That was even so many years ago

* A free-born youth in Attica, between eighteen and twenty years of age, who has just been entered on the list of his tribe.

He was tall and beautiful. He was clad in purple. He was like the gods who hold the open sky. I have never seen his like; nor did I behold him ever again, after I awoke in broad sun on my couch under a cypress. He was your father, Poias."

"My father!"

"Your father, though soon I had followed the flutes and tympani of the marriage procession with Ctephar, called by that name. Not altogether mean is your blood, for the stranger, if not an immortal, was at least of those who live after death—a hero—a demigod."

As when a runner in the pentathlon, untried, a novice, dreams of tempting glory in the sacred games, secretly he leaves his dwelling, lest his kin mock, *Meleager! Meleager!* after him in scorn; he steals by night through the gates of his town, some mean Attican village, treading at last, after journeys, the groves of Elis—swift-poised, sleek with oil, he crouches, how tense, among the eager, naked contestants—the signal falls, out he leaps, breathing a prayer to the gods, dimly longing for success yet daring no form for his thoughts; on he runs forever; his feet grow numb, his thighs, his shoulders; he sobs and hisses for pain of labored breathing; confused on his ears beats a distant roar of voices; he tastes salt blood in his mouth and all grows black; anon he rouses to shouts and pæans; lo! he is victor; glad arms uphold him before the great statue chryselphantine*—he feels on his hot temples the smooth sprig of olive; he has won; the marvel has happened; he will hold and spread glory forever. So the lad Poias, hearing and believing a god had begot him, grew exalted beyond his years in heart and purpose. He was not as others. He would live in the mouths of singers for all time.

But his mother was speaking again:

"I have watched you, Poias, hoping. Good seed is known by the fruit."

Her voice sank so low, she seemed brooding aloud; but the boy heard and understood.

"If you were as other women's sons, bred to small desires, mean tasks, common

things—eheu! alas! Then your mother had once been smirched forever," she whispered; "stained, cheapened, made vile. Then the stranger, your father—then your mother—a mockery to smirk at, sprawling, where immodest fellows meet to inflame themselves with wine!

"I have watched you from your birth, hoping. At last, one night I heard you cry out before you awoke—or did you wake?—of towers and wonder-women; and my heart was proud. Dreams come from Zeus. You are not born to be forgotten, Poias. What you will, you can. There is ichor flowing in your veins.

"But now tell me this: The tower of which you sing, I know; it is a great deed; you will achieve it, be resolved, though how and when lies with the gods and you. But who," she smiled, "is your wonder of the world?"

Confidently Poias's eyes smiled back at her.

"When I am grown," he said, "I will know. But it will not be one from among these huts; they are childish, and play with dolls; they have no fame. When I am grown and bear weapons I will know. And then, wherever or whoever she be, I will go and take her."

CHAPTER IV.

THE LITHIAN GAMES.

IN far off Athens, it was said, men were building white houses, pillared temples, great open theaters hewn in the solid hill. The village children played a game of architects with flints, mud, and bits of wood and reed. But Poias's father, Ctephar, took him one day with the marble-cutters to the true marvels of Athens herself. Once every week the slow oxen were guided with their rough carts to the quarries at the base of the mountain, the white blocks were loaded in, and the long, creaking train plodded off into the southeast. It was a journey of many days. The men took with them food and water, musical instruments, and weapons as for a campaign.

* Overlaid with gold and ivory.

Long afterward, when he was grown, Poias recalled the delight of that first adventure into the unknown: the wary progress, the lowing oxen, the gruff friendliness of the cutters. He remembered the pleasure of striding out strongly at Ctephar's side near the ox-cart, shuffling up little spurts of warm dust with his naked feet in the road.

The touch of marble, even when he had become a man grown and feared, always softened him somewhat; perhaps because of the thrill, on that young, strange journey, when he clambered up to perch on the cool block of white stone, high above the broad, swaying backs of the swing-paced animals.

Indeed, his vague plannings for fame were later shaped, perhaps, by the vivid episodes of that first sally into the freedom of the open: the hardy independence; the fresh, unfamiliar wooded spaces; the lolling by the wayside in the soft shade, when the oxen were unyoked and the men prepared and ate the noonday meal. At night the bright firelight leaped up in the road, the men lay around it, singing and telling marvelous tales: How the disguised son of Ægeus slew the Stretcher on his own dreadful bed; how Alcides did his twelve labors; how, by craft, Ilios was stormed and spoiled after ten years.

Ctephar told wild stories of Theban sphinxes: they crouched behind highways in his country, and leaped upon travelers; their strength, however vast, was fruitless; only cunning and swift thinking availed. Women, too, were discussed—with many quips and coarse turns that Poias did not understand, but also with stirring fables that set his heart beating faster.

Behind, in the shadows, sounded the muffled stamping and munching of the oxen. Flutes and rough, stringed instruments were brought out and tuned. The wine skins passed around, and he, too, was given a share of the sour-sweet liquor as one who had equal right. The flat, round bread-cakes, the oil, the goats' cheese, the honey, the thick porridge, the roasted swine-flesh, had a savor beyond that at home in the village.

But of all impressions none grooved so

deep in Poias's mind as the day of entry into Athens. They had come to the end of their journey; over a stretching plain; and down into the valley of the Cephissos. Suddenly a lofty, isolated mass of rock, the Acropolis, towered before them. Soon they were in the wide streets of the city.

White houses ranged on either hand, more dazzling than any marble in the quarries. Men walked leisurely about on the flagged pavements and the narrow footways. They seemed different from any Poias had ever known; of a majesty and fineness that made his heart flutter. They wore garments such as he had never seen: purple, saffron, and many-colored.

"Could one of these," thought Poias, "be the Stranger—my great father?"

Little prickling points seemed to rise at the short hairs on the nape of his neck. The blood hummed in his ears.

But no. These were men.

At upper stories in the white dwellings, behind tall, smooth columns, wonderful women showed dimly at the windows. Some were spinning flax or weaving. Others sat motionless, in a peculiar attitude, looking silently down into the street. There were many of those. Each rested her dimpled elbow on the stone sill, the slim fingers of the right hand clasping the rounded forearm of the left. A silver ring gleamed brightly on one of two upraised fingers.

The marble-cutters spoke together in undertones whenever they passed one of those, laughing hoarsely, and blinking and nodding their shaggy heads significantly.

"Outward! All outward!"

One of the men, a black-browed, lustful fellow, patted the great block of marble on his cart and chuckled:

"When this is delivered over—"

"*Psyche to take!*"

"Outward— all turned outward! Not one ring-point toward the palm!"

"What is wrong with the Athenians?"

"They are busy building!"

And the men laughed again, loudly.

"*Psyche to take! Psyche taken!*"

It was some rude jest; but what, Poias could not then comprehend. His young mind was mazed with his dreams, which drifted in on him now in broad day. Here

were wonders. Which of these fabled dwellings would send forth one to his desire when he was grown?

A sharp nudge broke in on his thoughts. He stumbled forward, and only saved himself from a fall by a quick, catlike turn. Near him stood a pert town lad of little more than his own age, laughing at the young rustic who seemed lost in longing before the worst known house in Athens. Poias flushed a dark red and clenched his fists. But Ctephar's ox-cart had been moving forward steadily, and was now a good distance away. Slowly he turned and walked after it.

In the years that followed, Poias plodded out on many such slow journeys with the marble-train. He shot up, and unfolded rapidly to a strength and swiftness of body that amazed the thick-musced Bœotians. Very soon Ctephar set him to quarrying; and, as his skill increased, there were few and fewer of the men who could keep pace with him in breaking free the huge masses, prying and cutting the blocks. Presently there were none.

He overtopped the tallest in stature. The grip of his hands, the numbing pressure of his arms when he seized and crushed an opponent to him, wrestling in the village trials, became a rumor of spreading wonder. The marble-cutters were the strongest about, because of their life and the manner of their labor; and of them Ctephar was the foremost and most feared. But soon even he shook his head with a wry smile when Poias stepped forward silently to a challenge. He was proud of the youth, albeit puzzled sometimes, he could not say why. Nevertheless, he had felt Poias's great strength on two occasions, and had no stomach for more.

One day there had been games in the village. The Lithian games, folk called them, after the manner of those of the isthmus of Nemea, in Argolis, or even of Olympia, in Elis; but these were local. All work had been put aside. Men and youths strove together in honor of the stone god in the tower, whose feast it was.

Only the strict guard of the citadel remained at duty, and of them the fortunate

watchers on high post clustered on the walls. There were foot-races, casting, shooting with the bow, boxing, and wrestling in the open field about the broad, stretching water of the tower. There was no contest in singing; the village had only one poet, and even he had failed them. He was hoarse as a crow with a throat cold. In those days there was no writing in Bœotia—the poet had guarded his new effort too jealously—and so there had been no way to give over the hard practised ode.

Poias had disregarded the shorter races, though he was swift-footed enough. He had won in those when a mere stripling. But his heavy discus hummed through the air, striking farther than any of the lighter ones; his quoits fell true; he sped his spears straight to the mark. Only the boxing he omitted, fearing to kill his opponent or break his jaw-bone. Then his mother had oiled the supple muscles of his body, and he trotted out with the crowd of naked runners over the long course.

Ten times they circled the great track, three miles each time. Toward the end the sobbing runners were strung out in a straggling line the whole length of the way. Here and there one had collapsed, with blood pouring out of his nostrils. Many limped, or walked slowly with quivering hand pressed to their sides. Only four came in steadily the whole distance, and of these the first was Poias. His deep chest rose and fell quickly, but his eyes were clear; and he smiled at his mother as she threw the robe about his glistening shoulders as he stepped forward to receive the wreath.

Presently the wrestlers came forth, thick-set, brawny men.

"Son—"

Poias raised his head with difficulty. He was lying stretched full length on the warm grass, his eyes sheltered from the glare by his mother.

"Your father is no foot-runner." Ctephar stood looking down on him good-naturedly. "But he planted fairish sinew when he begot you. Sit up and give heed. I will try a new fall. So watch with care and a whole mind."

"He needs little teaching," grinned a quarryman.

His great, hairy breast showed like a vaulted cask through his goatskin. But Poias had once wrapped long arms around him with such power that his ribs had cracked. He had been hurled like a lump to the earth.

"With his strength, new falls are foolish!"

Ctephar grew angry. He had a short temper.

"It is true the marble-cutters cannot stand up to him. He throws them on their shoulders, every one. What of that? I do no less! I have left you in peace, boy. For me to strive with you would have been unnatural. But remember—and you, Poias—your father is still to come!"

Poias's mother had risen, and Poias also. They stood drawn back a little; and in his mother's eyes the young man beheld the same strange look she had given him that day, long ago, when she had gazed down on him under the olive, the tall, curved clay poised on her shoulder. He felt suddenly a surge of will so firm it seemed as if some one other than he were standing in his tired flesh: some one fresh, unwearied, thrillingly strong. The childish words of his song came back to him: *I will take the tower! I will take the tower!*

"My father is still to come," he repeated gravely. He looked down into Ctephar's drawn brows.

"Will you try the new fall with me?"

From every side the folk had crowded around. There were many words of condemnation, especially for Poias's mother; but she said no word. Poias, too, was silent. Was such thing ever heard? A father and a son! It was wrong on any day, in any place; but above all at the sacred Lithian games, and before the tower, the heaven-flung image.

"*Thebans—Thebans!*"

There was a murmur of many tongues. The words went from mouth to mouth.

"Let the savages wrestle!"

"We were wrong to let them take part in our games, who are not of our blood," said an old man. "But the youth was a great athlete. Now let them do as they have in mind. Doubtless it is custom among the Thebans."

"Come, you!" cried Ctephar violently.

He forgot he was the boy's father (for so he thought). He forgot Poias's stirring feats; the pride he had felt in him, *his* son, excellent in trial after trial; the great weariness that must lie, listless, on the boy after the heart-breaking race. Rage, a blind lust to seize, to teach the whelp a lesson, laid hold on him like a black madness. He crouched somewhat, bending his body and crooking his knotted arms and tense fingers. Like some mountain bear he looked, as his shaggy head sank down between his wide, hunched shoulders and his little eyes peered fiercely from under their thick, pent brows. His anger had risen to white heat against Poias; against this strange woman, his wife; and, above all, against himself.

Together, they had brought the fame of their city into disrepute. It would be spread forever in the village, and perhaps beyond it, that Thebans knew no obedience nor reverence between fathers and children; that they were raw folk, uncouth, without laws or fear of the immortals.

But Poias had leaped forward, had dashed aside the seeking hands and taken Ctephar about the middle. A gasp went up from the spectators as the Theban's lips contorted to a groan of agony. His feet left the ground. He was lifted at once to the height of Poias's shoulders. His face grew purple, his eyes rolled whitely from side to side. He was laid on the earth like a child. The back of his head brushed the grass-tops, his neck jerked forward—and both his shoulder-blades had flatly touched. Poias held him motionless with one powerful hand crushing down on his chest.

CHAPTER V.

THE STRENGTH OF TEN.

IN the Lithian games Ctephar had felt the boy's full strength for the first time.

What happened after, on that day—how Poias had risen, had tossed back the long, black hair that hung about his young forehead, and stepped out in the exaltation of the moment to the edge of the tower water—Ctephar heard later from others. It had made him vain of his son when broken ribs

had healed, and rage and unreasoning jealousy ebbed, though he was puzzled as any Bœotian by the mystery. But in that hour he lay half conscious and indifferent to all save the dull anguish in his body.

Poias had taken his mother by the hand. And standing there at the brink of the vast basin, he had fixed dilated eyes on the tower beyond it, and sung these words:

“Tower! Tower!

And you, O god, within the tower!

“Mother! Mother!

And you, O woman, that will be my mother, the mother of mine!

“No small words were spoken by Ctephar the Theban, the marble-cutter, when he said my father was still to come!

“I am not of your blood, Bœotians, but I think your thoughts. I am not your kin, O women and children of the village, but my heart is soft to you for the days to come.

“Let the tower be strong!
Let the god in the tower be strong!”

It was a good ode; so thought those who heard it. The hoarse poet could have done no better, though his would have been longer. For an outlander, the sympathy and understanding had been true-measured and just. The sentiment had been devout. It showed a love of Bœotia. *Let the tower be strong! Let the god in the tower be strong!* After all, the two—father and son—had striven only in honor according to their uncouth custom. The fault, if there were any, lay in Ctephar, whose rudeness was known; young Poias, however, had been bred up almost in the ways hereabout.

Only one thing was clouded and ill-expressed. What had the youth meant by the words concerning his mother? “That *will be my mother—the mother of mine.*” *Will be—how that?* She had given birth to him up there in the cypress hut hard by the quarry; and a strangely long labor it had been. However, the words were poetry, which not seldom were little more than good sounds.

But the mother of Poias paled and flushed, and her eyes shone.

A month or six weeks later, when Ctephar’s fractures had knit soundly, and

he was laboring his full day’s stint in the quarry, he had felt Poias’s strength for the second time. But that had been the last. To another who had twice laid hand on him in violence, the Theban would have seized his knife. Openly, perhaps; secretly, if that were the only way.

Yet this second time, too, after his fury had disappeared, he had nursed no festering ill-will. Rather he had felt wonder; a kind of bewildered respect for this extraordinary son, like one who has set a silly fowl’s egg to hatch and brooded out an eagle. Also, there was a rough sense of justice somewhere deep in the marble-cutter’s hot heart that made him see right in the boy’s actions.

Poias had shown no anger that day at the games when he had gripped his father and put him to the ground. But a terrible passion had mastered him on the second occasion, almost leaving a dead man under his hands. He had come home to the noon-day meal together with Ctephar. The latter had been moody and sullen all the forenoon, flaming out into violence over small things. It had seemed to him that the marble-cutters were goading him; that a hidden gibe, of which he was the butt, were being slipped about from mouth to mouth.

The men worked in groups at the cutting. Because he had been silent, his group had been silent. But all the others had laughed together in pauses of labor, and it had seemed to Ctephar that they were appraising *him* with the rough side of their tongues. At that time the trial at wrestling still rankled. He had sprung up and rushed over to one such group, and, of course, a sudden silence had fallen. There were no two Poiases in the quarry. Ctephar’s strength was known; now he seemed insanely angry for some reason. So the marble-cutters had been afraid, and had kept still. But the Theban had cuffed one of them, the man had drawn a knife, and Ctephar had at once clutched and broken his arm at the wrist.

Now he paced restlessly to and fro in the narrow hut. The meal delayed. His wife came in his path as she moved about setting forth the food. Ctephar had never laid the weight of his finger on her ungen-

tly. But that day he seemed beside himself. As she brushed against his arm, he flung her aside with such force that she fell full length against the timbered wall opposite. The earthen bowl she held crashed to the ground. The hot liquid spread, scalding, over her face and body, while a thin stream of blood, made by a pointed shard, trickled slowly from a wound in her temple.

She quivered and lay motionless.

Ctephar had stood frozen, with wide, horror-stricken eyes. But Poias had moved with the swiftness of a leopard across the narrow space; had hurled the fierce mass of his body at the Theban, overborne him to the ground, and fastened his fingers in his throat. The young man's face was gray and hard set like flint. A great vein swelled up between his eyebrows. His nostrils expanded, quivering, like those of a maddened stallion. There was death in his intent stare. A moment, and Ctephar's life would have gone. But a faint voice called from the other side of the hut:

"Poias! Poias! *No!*"

And his fingers had relaxed.

Ctephar, however, had carried the swollen, angry marks on his throat, under his thick beard, for days; it was long before they faded out entirely.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PULSE OF POIAS.

THUS thirteen years had run since Poias had awakened, that wonderful night, a lad of eight, on the floor of his father's hut, to find himself staring, with wildly beating heart, at the bright stars that twinkled down to him through the black, rifted beams.

But now his thoughts had begun to reach out to Mya, daughter of Lyssa. Even as rumor had become busied with far-echoing versions of his own strength, swiftness, sureness of eye; his great craft at divine improvisation, the heroic proportions of his body—so reports had crossed to his ear, over shorter distance, of the dark ferryman's wonderful daughter.

Poias spoke little, but he listened much. Soon he had heard from the marble-cutters,

and from other talk, here and there, the whole tale of the whirling flood: of Lyssa and the grim death of the unknown who had visited her; of Lycander, called *Charon*, his monstrous hands and intent, unholy lust for echoes.

Two men, perhaps more, had met cruel doom at the hands of the sullen ferryman. They had come between him and the women of his house.

One, a hill-dweller, folk said, had been found caught in the jagged rocks at the far mouth of the stream, where the fury of the water had hurled and wedged him in. His body was so squeezed and crushed, with purple-blue finger bruises below the armpits, that he must have been dead when he struck the race. The other had been a man of the village, a light of love. He had disappeared some days after the first corpse had been found; eyes had never beheld him since. Undoubtedly Charon had made away with him, also; but none had dared to ask.

Charon was forty years old, bitter, touched darkly by the scourge of those who may not be named. He was in the prime of an incredible bodily force.

A strange thing, women; who can believe in their faithfulness? Who could blame them, unfaithful? Yet who could lie calm under his own betrayal? Helen of Troy, they say, was led from Lacedæmon and her husband's bed by Aphrodite herself. None the less, Menelaus made furious war. Zeus fought in it. Aphrodite averted her head from her own, after a time. Clear-eyed Athene condoned and counseled the avengers.

Charon had killed a man with his hands as a thief and violator. Yet he himself had gone into the mountain out of his country and taken Lyssa without plain words beforehand. What cause, then, had he later to blaze into anger, killing, and killing? Lyssa had gone with him at once. Was he a god to set the treasure of love suddenly in her heart—to plant faithfulness full-grown? There had been many young men in the mountain, and she was a shepherdess.

And yet she had cried out that the stranger was her brother—that he was her mother's son! She had wept, and told the same

tale over and over again as she lay on the floor of her hut, such times as Charon plied his ferry, and pitying women stole through the covert to help and comfort her. It might be she had *not* been unfaithful. Charon himself, brooding after she died, had seemed unresolved in mind. What were his dark thoughts, as he sat half the day on his boulder, motionless, his naked, upraised knee gripped in his tightly clasped hands? His lips were always compressed, his eyes staring toward the earth. Nor did he speak alone to himself. When one is idle and silent in broad day, he thinks. What were Charon's thoughts? Always he seemed waiting for some word, some event that must surely come.

But when a hail for the ferry sounded from the far bank, he would rise, walk the four paces to the flat-boat, and stand there, half bent forward, listening with fierce pleasure—to the echoes.

And now Mya was fifteen, a woman grown, though her father did not know it. To him she was hardly more than just come into the world. A dumb infant. Since his eyes unceasingly sought the ground, he had no regard for time that shows in men's faces. Yet the girl, though she had a child's face, possessed a white body so sweet and fragile as is not seen among lowland folk. When she raised her two clear eyes, there seemed truth of all Olympus in their blue depths. Those who had seen her mother, Lyssa, when she had first come home to the river-edge, said Mya was Lyssa—Lyssa—a wonder to stare on: the color of foam and sky and gold and rosy-fingered dawn in her slim body, wide eyes, fine hair, and oval cheeks.

It was thus Poias heard of her.

He had long since learned the riddle of the *hetærae*, the courtezans who sat so still at upper windows looking forth into Athenian streets, a silver ring-point gleaming brightly on one of two upraised fingers. He had entered, submitted, and gone away, never to return. Youth recoils always to extremes.

But Poias, when the first sickening revulsion had slowly faded, had silently taken counsel with himself and put the matter from his mind. For fame all acts were pos-

sible. For love, also, as witness what was sung of the gods. But neither fame nor love could be bought. His thoughts had not taken that form, perhaps; but they had had that meaning.

Now he mused on Mya, daughter of Lyssa, wondering whether she were the woman of his dream. She was very beautiful, it was said: beyond lyrics in loveliness. Young men had seen her from spying places in the unpeopled wood behind her father's dwelling. She had pastured goats. So shy she seemed and graceful in her shaggy tunic, a hamadryad might have borne her to that dumb brute, her father. Her hair was the color of glittering gold, only finer than spun thread. Whiter and more shapely than that of the young nymph carved in marble in the temple at Athens was Mya's naked arm. The sun had never browned it. Her little feet were two pale drifts like those left on green tree-roots when the snow is melting. The knee—an oval lozenge—a cameo. Her eyes were deep blue, full of kindness. There were lights in them. Her young breasts had budded.

But the youths had remained hidden, hardly breathing. She had not known they were there. Cruel death floated about Mya's innocence, her marvelous body, like a diaphanous veil seen and unseen—invisible to eyes and beating heart—all too visible to shuddering reason. Charon—his monstrous hands—the foaming, whirling flood!

The world was a wide shield, and many rumors drifted in of the beauty of women in far places. But none so set vague desire flaming as those told of Mya, moving with her flock in the unpeopled wood behind the dark ferryman's dwelling. The grim menace of death lent a lure, perhaps, to the girl's fabulous loveliness. Peril tinges all goals with glamour—much as a setting brings out richness in a jewel.

So Poias mused often on the daughter of Lyssa, rousing suddenly at times to wonder how lost he had been. A full half-hour at whiles he would stand, his arms drawn back, the long bar arrested in mid air in the motion of thrusting into a rock crevice. Was she the woman of his dreams?

Poias had never before glanced sidewise

at a maiden, except indifferently. These were the village girls. He knew them; they had no fame.

The silent women, too, that sat in the windows in the great town—there were many of those, one like the other: a wretched price bought them all.

But the daughter of Lyssa— His imagination took slow fire warming him. He fell to staring at full forms, swinging hips, clustered hair—Psappa, Oë, Melitta—as they passed by the quarry, bringing food to their husbands or their fathers; as they stepped rhythmically down to the washing-pool, a basket of linen balanced on sleek head. Wherein did *she* differ from one of those?

A little pulse began to beat quickly in his blood, that was always so calm. Yet his keen mind, too, grew busied with a thousand thoughts, shifts, revolving this and that, gathering, all but full-shaped, to a plan. There had long lain dormant some such vague speculation, as there must:

The tower! It stood seven miles north of Charon's hut.

Mya—

If there came but occasion. The ferryman, her father, was Bœotian of Bœotians: own blood kin to those in the village.

Suddenly the words of his childish song leaped to his mind, as indeed until his death they always shook him when he desired some one thing greatly: *I will take the tower! I will take the tower!*

He would go down to the whirling flood to see this wonder of the world.

Since that old day under the olive, Poias had told all things to his mother, not excepting the unlovely matter of the courtezans. He talked over with her his dreams and plans. They walked out often together in the cool of the evening, musing on shifts to make his two dreams truths, now that he was grown to their accomplishment.

In return, his mother told him much of her early life as a maiden in the fields about Thebes. She spoke of Ctephar, and his persistent wooing: he had been the strongest of the young men thereabout, a sort of leader; she had not been unmoved by him.

But she, too, had had her dreams. Her friends had mocked her and called her strange, even then. Songs, odes, lyrics, dithyrambi, they said, had turned her wits: she was looking to a god, no less! But one evening, in the furrows, the stranger had suddenly appeared.

Soon she had followed the flutes and tympani of the marriage procession with Ctephar. Her parents had praised her. Her companions had pretended joy, smiling covertly when they thought she did not see. But she, too, had smiled, knowing that soon she would carry a demigod under her heart.

Ctephar had ever been gentle with her. But to others he was given to bursts of violence from the first. On one such occasion he had slain a man with his knife; a magistrate of the city. She had known nothing of the matter, lying deathly sick with nausea, stretched on the couch in their hut. But Ctephar had suddenly entered, thrown bread, cheese, and the wine skin on a linen tunic he spread hastily on the earth, flung the bundle over his shoulder, and had seized her roughly by the hand. Together they had fled along hidden byways. She had dragged, half fainting, through underbrush, over rocks, and between trees; but he had told her nothing till they were far advanced into the Bœotian plain. Then he had said abruptly he had killed a man, a magistrate of Thebes, and that they could never go back to their home.

Poias had been born months later, in the cypress hut hard by the quarry. None the less, he had come to world before his time. The labor had been an agony of suffering, so long, so protracted. Her body had seemed cruelly given over to those who may not be named; but her spirit had laughed through anguish. Gods are not men. Even if she died—but she knew she would not die: surely not till she had seen her son brought into the world.

These things and others that are not spoken of between mother and son, she told to Poias, together with wonderful sayings of gods and heroes. Many of those Poias had heard before, from the marble-cutters. They had been told and sung on the slow journeys with the ox-train on

the way to Athens, when the oxen were unyoked, and the men prepared and ate the evening meal. Behind, in the shadows, had sounded the muffled stamping and munching of the animals. The bright fire-light had leaped up in the road, the men lay around it, singing and telling marvelous tales. Women, too, had been discussed, with many quips and coarse turns that Poias had not then understood; but also with stirring fables that had set his young heart beating faster.

His own mother had been a nymph, folk said—Clymene. But no matter.

On the lips of the tall, slender woman walking beside him, there in the cool of the evening, those old tales took on a deeper significance. Poias felt always a sudden surge of will so firm, it seemed as if some one other than he were standing in his flesh: some one eternally unwearied, thrillingly strong.

None the less, when he resolved to go down to the river-edge, he said nothing of it to his mother.

Why?

He who can answer that truly, can say also where the conies nest; why the whelps forsake their lioness in her lair; and where the young men go out alone when dusk comes over the fields.

CHAPTER VII.

WILD GEESE.

THOUGH the Bœotians spoke of Poias as bred almost in their ways, he had certain traits they could not fathom. He was indifferent to girls and women. He marveled constantly at the tower, though born—as the phrase goes—within spear-cast of it. He wandered at whiles, head bent, now here, now there, over the fields that circled the sparkling water, a prone hazel-fork thrust rigid before him. He vanished sometimes from hut, quarry, and village, staying for days; none saw him leave nor return; neither was it known where he went.

Poias never turned to the maidens, even to the comeliest, to follow her sidewise with his glance. Not one but would have let

him carry her across her mother's threshold. The most prudent might have yielded herself, together with every marriage-rite young girls await with delicious vanity—the palms, the torches, the garlands, the marriage-robe, the flutes, and singers of the procession. He was beautiful as an immortal. Yet he never walked at dusk save with his mother.

As one not of their blood, Poias had never set foot within the tower. That was forbidden by ancient custom. Outcasts and strangers, from immemorial time, might not enter the fane. They were profanation. Some say the forgotten builders had made the custom through craft, handing it down, a defense, to forestall betrayal from within, though Bœotians hated to hear that said. Perhaps so. But though the strength and skill of Poias were boasted of wherever those of the village met foreigners, the young man was not permitted across the stretching water. Nor did he demand it.

And yet he was seen constantly about the tower, on this side and that; at the two low-arched water-gates, front and rear; at the blind, sheer uplift, monotonous, slippery with greenish moss. It seemed he soon must know every gray block of it.

He moved about it in broad day, when the sun was most deadly. The watchers cried down to him, laughing, from the walls:

“Poias! Do you dream to take the tower, that you eye it so intently?”

“Oë, or Melitta of the big eyes—or even that cross-eyed one at the linen pool—turn your glances there! *They* would reward your patience!”

The hoarse poet pronounced that the young man was sunk in contemplation of an epic; that the curtness of his first ode had mortified him, and he was amassing wider detail: more sharp, more minute. It seemed possible to many, for a poet should know the manner of his kind. But the greater number shook their heads. The history of the tower was known to every child; and what could Poias learn from stones?

One day the young man had spoken to Iäso, whose home was within the citadel, asking a curious question; and yet—not beyond comprehension. Men seek to know such records. Certainly prize-men.

Iäsos was the finest athlete thereabout, after Poias. As was custom, he had been made peculiar guard of the fane, dwelling constantly within the walls, what time he conquered all comers in the Lithian games. It was a solemn, vital honor. Reverence of the immortals, the lives of those in the village, as well as the freedom of their women and children, hung on unyielding defense of the tower. Therefore excellence in warlike qualities was gloriously rewarded. The unbeaten victor interposed his firm flesh, his watchfulness and cool purpose, for the god himself.

Iäsos had been second of the four to come in steadily, all the way over the long course, in the heart-breaking race. Poias had been the first. Others had collapsed with blood pouring out of their nostrils. Many had limped, or walked slowly with quivering hand pressed to their sides. Only two other young men, Ctesion and Phidon, had achieved the whole distance in good time.

Iäsos was second at the discus, the quoits, the spear cast, the leaping and boxing. He was too heavy for the shorter races. He, also, was a marble-cutter; and none could cope with him at wrestling, save Ctephar and Poias. But those were outlanders. Had they been Bœotians, Poias would have *lived* in the tower. There would then have been but half a purpose to this tale—and none at all to the youth's two dreams of fame.

One day Poias had fallen in with Iäsos as the latter strode back earnestly to his duty, and the two had talked together. There was pleasant friendship between them because of athletics. Also Iäsos felt that Poias, and not he, truly merited the bronze watcher's-seat in the fane, though the Bœotian was proud of the honor.

On two occasions only might the god's companion set foot outside the round walls—once every year at the games, when he went out to defend his place; and once every thirty days, when he laid a trophy on the old altar in the grove. It was there the ancient folk had at first set the god when he fell from heaven, with noise, by night, in a trail of fire. The grove lay a distance from the village; all vast oaks,

dark, with spreading arms massive as a man's body. There was dim twilight under them always, however brightly the sun blazed. But when the altar had been newly set there, the oaks had been young and thin-leaved. Then the tower had been raised, for the god's better safe-keeping.

No athlete could be chosen the god's companion unless he achieved twelve, at least, of the twenty-four wreaths contested at the games. Once every thirty days he laid a single trophy—or more, according to the number he had won—on the altar. When all were piled, his name had vanished, mounting up in fire with the wreaths, which were burned as a sacrifice. Then came the Lithian games; and either he, or some other, cheu! Alas! placed the first trophy again on the altar.

"Iäsos," Poias had begun, after keeping pace silently for a time, "I have been thinking about the games. They are very old, and we do the same things every year. We leap, run, box, and wrestle. We try with the bow, cast spears, the discus, quoits, and heavy stones. I suppose these things must be. We do them; and when we are dead, doubtless others will do them, too.

"Yes, and we sing—"

He smiled.

"Now I have a desire for a new sort of trial; or at least, a change in the old. Boxing and wrestling we cannot change. Leaping, too, would not be feasible, though I should like to learn how far a man may leap from a height, yet not suffer injury. He might practise constantly, increasing the distance as we do in broad-leaping. But he would need a soft place at first to land. Water. Now the tower would be an excellent start: at a great height, too, to harden one to dizziness. But of course, the basin is sacred—"

"Sacred!" repeated Iäsos wistfully. "It may not be entered at all, nor crossed in a boat, save by those who come to watch, or go, being relieved, or by Bœotians when the village is threatened. But it would be interesting to try."

"No," said Poias. "But there were other matters, too. We cast and shoot; sometimes at a moving target, even a living one; but more often over motionless ground,

at a motionless goal. Even the goats and mad heifers they set capering and charging for us in the games leave me indifferent. I am tired of them. What training could those give us in war? For I will make war somewhere before I am old. There is always fighting in the world."

"A charging goat, or a heifer, sharp-horned, is good training. One must loose swiftly and accurately!"

Poias shook his head.

"A beast, even the wildest, is not a man. A beast puts its head down and rushes blindly. If one is cool, he steps to one side and lets drive. But when a man is the target, unless he is a fool, the method must be different, I think. A beast, no matter how crafty, has no cold plan: it cannot know what *you* might plot. Its rage is blind. Above all, it has no weapon to speed over distance faster than its own body can rush."

"What man will stand as your target?" said Iäsos simply.

"Another matter: when we shoot or cast, even toward a motionless goal, the *course* of our cast is motionless also. Do not laugh, Iäsos. The earth is fixed; and quickly as we aim and throw every stone, every grass-blade and clod in range of our eyes, has guided our effort. But how would it be, what quick judgments would we have to make if earth itself leaped, danced, and scattered, glittering million-pointed along the whole course of our cast?

"It cannot be? It is that I would ask you to try—for *I* cannot—together with certain other tests."

"*You* cannot?"

"It concerns the waters of the tower, but no profanation. It would be hostile for me, a Theban"—Poias smiled, showing his white teeth—"to hurl a missile toward the tower. But how fatally could *you* hit across the sparkling, sun-broken water, aiming from the tower? I am curious to learn. You are always close on my casts, every one. There is no edict or custom against that trial.

"And now these other things—"

Presently idle folk saw them: Iäsos on the wall, known by his style of shooting and

the rapidity with which he snatched up his arrows; and young Poias on the brink of the great basin. Plainly, a trial was toward, for the two men behaved unlike. The god's companion held a war bow, and let fly, drawing the taut sinew to his ear. Meanwhile Poias stood empty-handed in the field, intent, staring toward the tower. Even as Iäsos drew, the Theban leaped, crouched, sprang backward or forward, or stood motionless, his clenched right hand uplifted menacingly, as though aiming a throwing-spear. Arrows fell all about him; nor were those headless.

After a time, however, Iäsos laid aside the bow and took up a sling. It was a narrow thong, weighted heavily at one end with spiked bronze. Men used it in war, with deadly effect. Iäsos swung it about his head, slowly at first, then in ever swifter, wider circles; and suddenly launched it straight toward Poias. But here was a strange thing: a long, thin thread shot out like a tail after the missile, and a short length at the end cut a quick wake in the water at the edge of the basin, whipping on, immediately, into the grass of the field. The head missed Poias by a good deal.

This Iäsos did several times, coming ever nearer to his mark. Once he grazed Poias's shoulder.

Afterward the young Theban gathered up the slings, coiling them. But the ends he cut off with his knife, some longer, some shorter.

The other guard in the citadel were much taken with the test, and later practised it often among themselves. Great skill grew up among them in sending the missile as in dodging it. For while the man in the field, who was the target, could see the dark bronze coming—the slinger could follow the trail of thread with his eye over the sparkling, sun-broken water, and correct his errors of aiming.

The hazel fork no man could understand. But Poias's mother had related to him long before how, when a maiden in the fields about Thebes, she had seen one trace the course of hidden water with such a wand: hazel, willow, or some other slim sapling. When the wand dipped down, water drew it, now one fork, now the other.

Poias vanished sometimes from hut, quarry, and village, staying for days. None saw him leave nor return; neither was it known where he went. He would disappear when lights quenched everywhere for sleep, suddenly coming back, after long absence, in the small hours of morning. His mother may have known, for he debated all things with her when they walked together, usually in the cool of the evening. But a great curiosity was waked in others by his vacant place at meals, in the stone-pit, and the trodden path about the tower water.

The girls tossed their heads; the young men laughed knowingly. *Poias! Poias!*

There were those more steeped in experience, older folk, who said he was a fool: what did he want with venom? Far things seem fair: foreign women more desirable. But they were bad, and treacherous, those. What had that lovely mountain girl made of Lycander? Unproved? Unproved? But not disproved! Poias would do better to make eyes nearer home, though even Bœotian girls, bred in the village— However, he was half a foreigner himself. Wild geese fly off mysteriously to others of their kind.

But his father, Ctephar, spied on him one night when the young man thought him asleep. He stole into the darkness, following secretly, not far behind, on his son's footfalls. The way led down by the grove, across a short plain and up into the wooded mountain. Poias had stopped abruptly once and whirled round on his heel, giving his father a hearty fright. Luckily, a shadow had concealed him; also he wore the blue tunic. At last Poias had whistled softly, a man's head had appeared above a boulder, and presently the man himself. Ctephar's eyes had bulged, for he recognized the face. A savage scar ran crookedly from right temple to nostril, hewing short the nose: it showed ugly and livid under the young moonlight that flooded down.

Ænop! He who had been driven into the mountain with stones and spears. He had bred horses, and men said of him—

He and Poias spoke together briefly. Poias's grave face had never seemed so joyous. Then the two had gone on up, leaving Ctephar staring with horror after them.

Not girls nor women, but wilder and worse excitements lay beyond that steep rise. Outcasts, atheists, broken men of all sorts without house or kin, lodged yonder in the rocks, still deeper back, where they had their caves and dens. At times they came down for cattle, or waylaid on the highways, or did worse things.

So Ctephar had gone back, more rapidly than he had come. He hid his discovery, for he was ashamed and afraid. He grew moody and sullen, waking often at night, to look toward Poias's couch. But some nights later, when he raised his restless head, Poias lay there asleep, his face untroubled, one arm thrown back over his head, as had been his habit from a child.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE GIRL AMONG THE GOATS.

A SLENDER, silver crescent rode in the mild sky as Poias slipped forth silently late after sundown from the cypress hut. His father lay stone-quiet, seeming to sleep. His mother stirred softly and called after him. Each had his own thoughts as the young man stepped into the shadow of the doorway, glanced quickly to left and right, and made across the moonlit space. And each was partly right. So were the youths and bridling maidens of the village had they but known it.

Poias meant to go down to the whirling flood, to see Mya, daughter of Lyssa.

But first he moved steadily along the familiar way to Ænop and the men, up on the mountain. The horse-breeder met him at the accustomed place, for Poias always set when he left, the time when he would come again; or failing that, the next.

The lawless men in the rocks were fair prey: every hand against them; and they kept good watch against surprise. One had to be taken to them, with proper warning from a distance. Otherwise—a quick and violent death.

But Poias had known some of them from a child. Ænop was his friend, admiring his strength. When the crooked scar had been made—it was not a scar then, but a pulsing, bloody cleft—Poias had found him,

half dead, huddled among the thick pines. The lad had thrown away the berries he was gathering, had stolen off with earthen pipkin, and fetched cold water, to bathe his face. Afterward they had grown friends. Poias had told him, boylike, of his dreams, and Ænop had taken him up to the rocks, to the outcasts and broken men.

"When you are ready to take the tower," he had cried, "here are men to your hand. *Only show us how!*"

And the men had laughed.

Now Poias stood among them, in high humor, discussing many things. He had found the very width of the stretching water—if that were of importance—and would soon know the hidden source that fed it, perhaps. If that were cut off—And yet he had another plan in mind that might make that needless, lending still greater glory to the conquest. He would return in three nights; or, failing that, in two more. Let Ænop wait for him on the *upper* rocks, toward the ridge road. Then he would tell them everything.

The men lusted for revenge and treasure. Poias's desire was for fame alone. But their paths met at the tower, and he cared nothing for the means, so that only the end were achieved.

He spent the night near a little, crackling fire that leaped up brightly before the cave where the sheep and cattle were penned. The cave was honeycombed with passages leading all ways, deep into the mountain, and up into open air. The shadows danced with the flames. The men lay around eating, drinking wine, and telling tales. Behind sounded the muffled stamping and munching of the oxen: they lowed. The air was crisp and racy with pine. The open spaces, far down below, through the trees, toward the moonlight-flooded valleys, seemed vast, without limit.

Morning was well advanced when he threw off his cloak and rose from sleep. The men had gone, save a few; but there was bread, porridge, and wine for him, by the cooling embers. He ate, climbed higher up the mountain toward the rough road that lay parallel to the whirling flood, then went on steadily till midday. At noon he stopped to eat his bread and cheese; drinking water,

later, from a small brook. Late in the afternoon he lay in the plane trees growing back of the hut of Lycander, called *Charon*.

A little wind blew softly, rustling all the leaves about him, and over his head, though he could not hear them. Beyond the hut and the river spoke the water. It ran swiftly: seeming motionless midway, rushing forward along the near bank, by dark reed and hummock. Far off it flew up at whiles in quick spray against a steep, rocky patch crowned with cypresses, falling back in a sparkle of silver.

A low object showed blackly to the eye, half-way across, moving to the distant bank beyond the island. Ever it grew taller and shorter, taller and shorter, with slow rhythm, heaving very slightly sidewise, left, between whiles. Little dazzling gleams flashed regularly at longer intervals out from each side.

Charon—plying his ferry.

Presently it would be sundown. The pale curve of the young moon, like the ghost of a child's bow—a little, lonely, floating cloud-sickle—hung in the quiet sky that flushed faintly.

It was summer. Breaths of languorous scent rose from the plane trees, from the flowers, the mosses and herbs of the thicket.

Not thus had Poias dreamed his second longing would be stilled to his heart's desire. As he stood waiting behind a tree-trunk, one hand pressed lightly on the cool bark, he felt an unknown softness come over him. A little pulse-beat muffled at the hollow of his throat. His lids drooped: he gazed vaguely through blurring lashes.

He had thought to storm a town: swiftly mounting the burning walls in face of raining arrows, spears, hot fire! To take the wonder of the world at the summit, to hold her against fierce attack, to feel his tense, naked arm, circling her yielding body, silk-drenched with the cool smoothness of her hair.

Would she meet his dream? What were her ways—the curve of her lips, her blue eyes, her turn of head, the budding of her young breasts.

Forgotten were tower; long craft of planning; his tall mother and the tales she told when they walked together, in the cool of

the evening; the stranger, his great father, drifted from his mind, lost as under deep water. His heart beat, and his palms grew moist. The long, black hair fell over his hot forehead, and he tossed it back.

Then came Mya.

She moved among her goats, toward the hut, from the unpeopled wood behind her father's dwelling. A little bell tinkled in the flock. She was slender and full of grace. Her arms were rounded and white; very delicate; the sun had not browned them. The shaggy, goat-skin tunic rose, folding over her left shoulder: one young breast showed. Her little feet were two pale drifts like those left on green tree-roots when the snow is melting.

She penned her charges, milking them. The thin, limpid jet shot foaming into the earthen vessels. Her slim hands caressed the rough coats of the patient beasts before she gently thrust them each away, calling out to the next:

"*Cissaetha! Aymone! Eris! Œta! Phryxa!*"

Then she rose. The light, wooden yoke swayed a little as she moved toward the hut. She steadied the vessel with outspread, fluttering fingers.

"Mya—"

Poias stepped from among the trees.

As when a fawn treads daintily in the still glade, setting slender, delicate legs one before the other, she thinks herself alone; she is content; unafraid, demure, she goes her quiet way, turning here and there, trotting confidently to crop the tender grass; anon the fine head rises; large, liquid eyes look with trust into the forest till the budding, velvet hornlets lower; curving, the dappled neck droops; she is safe; fragrant herbs call, tempting, with their scent—suddenly a jealous wind rushes by her ear; it pricks up, pointed; an arrow has hissed by, life-close; its cruel tooth has bitten into a tree-trunk; its forked feather quivers; she must leap aside and away, terror winging her headlong flight—so the daughter of Lyssa, hearing a strange voice, a man's, not her father, calling her name, turned hurriedly to escape.

Yet she held the two swinging vessels safe, spilling not a drop.

"Mya," said Poias. "Mya. Do not be afraid. See, I will go away, though I have come a long journey, on foot, to see you with my two eyes. You are beautiful. You are more lovely than they said."

The young man's voice was husky. His head trembled a little as he whispered, though his gaze was deep and straight.

Mya looked at him sidewise.

"Who said? Who are you? I do not know you. Go away, or I will call. I will cry aloud to my father, who is on the river."

"You are beautiful," repeated Poias, "but I will go. I had not dreamed it would be like this. You are so slender; yet you have taken my strength away."

He turned slowly, moving toward the thicket. His brown, muscular back was straight, where it showed at the tunic; the white linen arched slightly away from left shoulder to right hip: a ripple of power undulated beneath his smooth skin as he raised his hand, passing his fingers back over his hair. But long, black locks drooped again over his forehead as he dropped his hopeless arm. He walked with hanging head.

The sultry air weighed. The muffled roar of the river echoed in his ears, dulling him.

"What is your name?"

Mya was laughing softly.

"Your name? You are a foolish man. I see you will not harm me. But go, if you wish."

Poias stood, rooted.

"I have never spoken to a man. When any appeared, I ran and hid in the hut. I will run now. What is your name?"

"Poias."

"It has a sweet sound. *Poias*. It is different from my father's, whom men call Charon, though his name is Lycander. But you are different from my father. You have a smooth face, and you tell me things I like to hear—not about goats and food and the dreadful, rushing river."

She shuddered.

"Your voice is pleasant, and you smiled when you spoke my name. You have white teeth.

"Are you dumb—*Poias*, though you spoke to me just now? Why does your hand tremble? You are taller than my father,

though he is very tall. But he is stronger. His hands are big. You look like the young men I have seen hiding in the woods where I pasture my goats. They thought I did not see them, and they nodded together, making great eyes as I combed the burrs from Phryxa's coat with my fingers. One day there were two, and one day many, behind the broad oak and the clump of five trees."

She smiled again.

A dull ache throbbed suddenly in Poias's breast, leaped, and disappeared. It shocked just below the breast-bone, then in the hollow of his throat. His heart raced, beating, beating. A hot wave rushed up to the roots of his hair, spreading warmly over his whole body. His palms grew moist.

"Where do you live?" asked Mya. "But let us walk from here. It is hot. I will laugh, if you stand there like a tree. Am I so ugly that you stare at me with great eyes?"

Her supple fingers moved to her hair, coiling and twisting the heavy gold. She tucked a strand into the sleek knot over her white neck.

"You—you—"

Poias stammered.

"You are not ugly. Let no man say it. I am not always—my tongue— Mya! I could put you in a song—your sweet eyes, your white body, the treasure of your hair—that men would sing of you evenings through Hellas and mid-Argos!"

"I have never been put in a song," said Mya curiously. "But let us go into the hut, where it is cool. You shall put me in a song. My father will see us when he turns the ferry. The goats are penned, and I must set the milk in the shallow vessels to skim the light fat. I must make cheese, and set the evening meal."

She led the way, and he followed after her dimly, gazing through blurred lashes. Her form was like a sapling. The yoke pressed softly on her shoulder, dimpling the skin. The swinging vessels balanced, swaying, like tall grain when summer wind has drifted by—like two maidens in a slow dance.

The hut was cool and half dark, with low, raftered roof. The walls were round

logs of cedar, peeled bare of bark, wrinkled and grooved in grain their whole amber length. They gave forth a faint fragrance. Behind the open doorway through which Mya and Poias had stepped, crossing the threshold, the plane trees rustled all their leaves, moving their trunks a little. Bright cracks of light, shaping a thin, upright oblong frame, showed in the wall opposite—two long, slim sun-streaks shot like golden wires across the hard earth floor—the door that led to the river-edge.

Mya knelt like a dryad, easing the glazed vessels to the ground. Then she slipped from under the wooden yoke, rose lightly, and stretched her white arms upward, clasping her hands behind her shapely head. Her lithe body dilated.

"Sing me your song," she said, "Poias."

The young man had leaned against a door-post. Now he started forward, with swift, impetuous steps. The girl's lashes dropped, fringing her eyes. Her bosom rose and fell quickly.

But Poias had stopped—trembling.

"Mya!" he cried. "You must—"

He leaped forward and crushed her in his arms, pressing her passionately to him. His hot breath beat back to his nostrils as he kissed her shoulder, her cheek, her yielding lips, the tender velvet of her throat under her chin. Her two arms slipped down over his neck, tightening. He had not dreamed they could be so strong, so frail they had seemed. Suddenly she moved convulsively. Her head drooped and hung to one side, like a broken blossom. And his clasp relaxed. A great terror came over him for the first time, like ice above his eyes, at his heart. He knew the strength of his body. He had been a savage, a madman. He had killed her.

"Mya!"

She opened two swimming blue eyes, smiling faintly up into his vivid face that bent over her.

"Poias—you are stronger than my father."

"I have hurt you! I am a brute beast! Let me see your side—"

He stripped away the goatskin tunic with a gentle hand. Everywhere the flesh was ivory. But a red, angry welt glowed broad-

ly about her waist, and up—diagonally, across her left shoulder.

“I have hurt you!”

“You are strong, Poias. But you hurt me less than my father, when he found me by the river brink—when I was small.”

She rested in his arms, drawing her tunic back in place with slow fingers.

“Mya, you must come with me. I love you. I was a fool out there by the plane trees, when I saw you for the first time. I love you. You must come with me to my mother. She will take you in. You will live in our hut by the marble-quarry. I will

build you a dwelling with my hands. I am not always so cruel!”

His words followed one on the other, a low, impetuous flood, confusedly stemmed, at times, only by his quick breathing.

But the girl had stirred. He felt her warm body stiffen. She moved her head swiftly, intent, listening toward the river.

“My father!” she cried. “He will kill you!”

Poias’s great arm closed again about her. His lips compressed, his face set, his nostrils began to quiver.

Charon!

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 Baboon's Sister

by
Octavus Roy Cohen



“O-o-o-oh!

The monkey married the baboon's sister;
Kissed so hard he raised a blister—”

THE red-grimed men on the commissary steps stared curiously toward the slender youth who marched blithely up the steep grade and whose clear tenor rang up defiantly against the sweltering heat of Alabama August.

As he came closer, he seemed little more than a boy. His skin was pink and clear as that of a baby, his eyes wide open, blue and guileless, his step light, his manner that of a man at peace with the world and determined to remain so.

He actually seemed to enjoy the final steep pull to the commissary. The sun, glaring down from a cloudless sky and

begetting little heat-waves, which danced mercilessly above the dusty red of the road, seemed to hold no terrors for him.

As for the men in the hot, breezeless shade of the veranda, they gazed in wonder. They were nearly prostrated, and the mercury in the thermometer tube gave them just cause. It registered an even hundred. Even the leaves on the few trees which served to relieve in some small measure the starkness of the landscape, drooped in utter dejection.

The young man paused before the commissary. His voice soared clearly:

“Kissed so hard he raised a blister—”

And then, with a sweep of the broad felt hat from his curly head, he made obeisance

to the crowd on the gallery: "Howdy, fellows! Beautiful, sunshiny day, isn't it?"

Somebody laughed and the stranger joined him. There was an infectious quality in his chuckle which brought smiles to the lips of all save one giant man who sat humped against the wall, sucking a soft drink through a straw. The youth introduced himself.

"My name is Dane," he said easily, "Jimmy Dane—at your service, and if some one will tell me where I can get a nice yellow drink like the one in that man's bottle, yonder"—he pointed toward the big, lantern-jawed man crouched against the wall—"I'll be forever his debtor."

Five minutes later, he emerged from the interior of the commissary with the coveted beverage in his hand. He seated himself on the steps, shoulders against an upright and grinned genially at the crowd.

"Beautiful camp—this Red Ore—isn't it?"

His sarcasm brought an approving grin from the wondering men, for Red Ore, although one of the most productive iron camps in the northern Alabama district, could lay small claim to beauty.

A red, rocky hill rose sheer behind the commissary; a hill almost barren of vegetation and split by a work railroad, a branch of one of the mineral lines which radiate from Birmingham. The commissary itself was a gaunt, unimposing structure, which had been painted red against the day when it should be dyed that color by the ore-dust which covered the entire camp.

Next to the commissary was the one pleasant spot in the camp: the company offices. The building was low and rambling and constructed like a huge bungalow. About it was a lawn framed by a carefully trimmed hedge, and within it worked the engineering and clerical forces.

Beyond the offices one could see three skeletons rising in silhouette against the burnished sky; the three tipples which marked the entrances to the trio of slopes up and down which the skips rattled day and night.

From the commissary steps the road fell

sharply away for several hundred yards. It was intersected at regular intervals, by rough, ungraded streets. On that road and on those streets were the tiny, whitewashed cottages of the miners. Even the newly painted home of the superintendent was far from an artistic triumph. There was little which was physically attractive about Red Ore.

The stranger who had introduced himself as Jimmy Dane sipped his drink with a relish. He nodded toward the three tipples, the first of which showed no signs of life. "Holiday?" he queried easily.

One of the miners, on whose face tiny streams of perspiration had made white valleys in the encrusted red grim, shook his head.

"Not quite," he said. "Accident in No. 1 mine."

"Anybody hurt?"

"No—and it's a miracle there wasn't."

"Pay good?"

"Fine."

"Short handed?"

"Always."

"Need drill men?"

"Yes— Say, sonny, you ain't makin' out to be an ore miner, are ye?"

Dane nodded. "Sort of—maybe."

"Drilled before?"

"A little."

"Mucked any?"

"I know something about it?"

"Well, I'll be ding-busted. How old are ye?"

"Younger than my daddy, and not quite as young as that little boy yonder."

The deep, booming voice of the big man against the wall, broke in gruffly: "He ain't old enough to be anything but a fool!"

Dane turned until his baby-blue eyes rested fully on those of the big man.

"How'd you guess that?" he inquired cheerfully.

"Any fool could see it."

"And you caught on right away!" Dane chuckled, the miners roared with laughter and the big man rose to his feet and towered menacingly over the newcomer.

"You didn't happen to mean nothin' personal by that, did ye?"

Dane smiled. "Me? Personal? My goodness, no! I never get personal with grown men. It isn't respectful."

The big fellow stared hostilely. And then, because there was nothing else for him to do, he turned away, swearing under his breath. Jimmy Dane apparently took no notice of the episode, but the others, who had watched with abiding curiosity, shook their heads apprehensively. The big man was the camp bully, and no man relishes being made the butt of humor—least of all a man of the bully type.

Meanwhile, Jimmy Dane chatted in a wholesome, friendly manner with the men on the veranda—talked with them as if they had been lifelong friends. Within ten minutes he was one of the crowd. And then, in the middle of a sentence, he broke off and sang a few bars of the inevitable song:

"The monkey married the baboon's sister;
Kissed so hard he raised a blister.

"Oh! Boys! Do you raise 'em that way in Red Ore?"

The object of his remark was a young girl, scarcely more than eighteen years of age, in a voile dress—cool and fresh and beautiful as a morning flower. She rounded into the main road from one of the intersecting streets, nodded genially to the men on the veranda, and entered the commissary. Jimmy Dane stared admiringly and then slapped his knee with approval.

"Does she live in Red Ore?" he inquired.

"She does," answered one of the men.

"Then," asserted Jimmy positively, "Red Ore is where I camp. I apologize for everything I ever thought about the place—which is considerable apology, at that. If you've got princesses here—"

A heavy hand fell on Jimmy's shoulder. Muscular fingers tightened until they dug cruelly into the flesh and the youth was jerked to his feet and whirled around to stare into the eyes of the big man with whom he had just had the verbal run-in.

"Whatja mean by that?" growled the big man ominously.

A glint of steel flashed momentarily in Jimmy Dane's eyes, but his cheery manner did not leave him for an instant.

"Just what I said," he retorted. "I like the scenery in Red Ore and I'm going to stay here."

"If you mean that gal—"

"My dear, big man—I thought I made that very plain. If they raise 'em as beautiful as that here, I think I'll stick around a while and see what I draw."

The big man's idle hand clamped on Jimmy's other shoulder. The mottled face, with jaw outthrust, shoved itself into Dane's. "Apologize!" he ordered.

Jimmy nodded. "Sure—sure, I'll apologize. I don't know what I'm apologizing for—but I'm one of the best little ol' apologizers you ever saw in your life. I apologize humbly. I beg your pardon a million times. I salute you. I love you dearly. Is that enough?"

The big man flung him away and strode into the store. But the men on the veranda were not laughing. Solicitude showed in their eyes.

"Better be moughty careful, sonny," counseled one. "You stepped plumb on his toes that time."

"You don't say? That nice, big, cheerful cuss who's just been manhandling me?"

"The same."

"Didn't I apologize enough?"

"Too much," came the prompt answer. "Y' see, that there gal happens to be his sister!"

"Good night!" Jimmy Dane sank to the floor with affected grief, and gave forth a lugubrious wail:

"O-o-o-oh!
The monkey married the baboon's sister;
Kissed so hard he raised a blister.

"Isn't that just my luck?" he wound up. "Just about?"

"He's a bad un," proffered the other.

"What's his name?"

"Jerry Delaney."

"And his sister's first name?"

"Eunice."

"How did it happen that they're fruit of the same tree?"

"They're not—quite. She's his half-sister."

"I see—I see." Jimmy rose to his feet. "Those the offices next door?"

"Yes."

"Superintendent there?"

"He went down in the mine after the accident. Don't know whether he's got back yet."

Jimmy nodded and strolled away, whistling gaily. The men on the commissary steps gazed after him. The lips of each wore a smile.

"Some feller, that kid." "Yeh! an' in bad with Delaney, more's the pity!" "Jerry 'll squash him one of these days—just like that." "Cheerful kid, ain't he?" "Looks like a youngster." "Or a girl, eh?" "He ain't scared much, though. It took nerve to laugh at Jerry right to his face thataway. It kind of took the big feller down."

The door of the commissary swung back and Delaney and his sister emerged. The man glared about belligerently, and flung a general question at the crowd: "Where's that smarty feller?"

"Gone to see Mr. Jerrold."

"He'd better not try—"

The lilting lyric tale of the matrimonial affairs of the monkey and the baboon's sister came to them from the door of the superintendent's office and Jimmy Dane danced toward them. Apparently oblivious to the presence of Delaney and the girl, he leaped onto the veranda and bowed low to the men.

"Welcome me, brothers," he said. "I'm one of the crowd. Drill helper to start with."

The girl was staring curiously at the effervescent young man. Here was a type new to her. He was as different from the stolid, phlegmatic mining men as night is different from day. Jimmy swung on the crowd.

"When ladies and gentlemen are present," he hazarded, "it ought to be customary to introduce 'em."

"Meet Jimmy Dane, Miss Eunice—" began one of the men when Jerry growled a surly interruption.

"She'll not be meeting this monk. And as for you, young feller"—turning to Jimmy—"the first time I see you hanging around my sister—"

Jimmy paid no more attention than if

he had not spoken. His eyes held those of the girl steadily and he spoke directly to her.

"Remember, Miss Eunice, we've been introduced, so the next time I pass you I'll speak and it won't be polite to cut me."

In spite of herself, the girl laughed, and her laughter fanned the sullen flame of ill-temper in her brother to a white heat. "'Nough of this!" he roared. Then, to Jimmy: "You get th' hell out o' this camp! I'll give you one hour."

"All favors thankfully received—usually, Delaney. But you can have your hour."

"You're not going?"

"Not for a while. I like this place."

"If you don't *vamose*, quick, I'll—I'll squash you."

"No!" Jimmy, grinning, shook his head. "I don't fight."

"Skeered, eh?"

"It ain't that," dimpled the young fellow. "I found out that it's bad for my complexion—and it gets my hair all mussed up."

"Dam' coward!"

"Sure—sure! Have it your own way. If I was to deny it, it 'd be the same as calling you a liar—and that would make me just as impolite as you are."

Eunice placed her hand on her brother's arm. She was flushed and ill at ease and patently ashamed. "Let's go home, Jerry."

They started down the slope together, and scarcely had they gone a dozen steps when Jimmy's clear voice called after them.

"Miss Eunice."

Involuntarily she turned.

"Remember," said Jimmy, "we've been formally introduced!"

And despite her obvious fear of her brother, the girl flashed him a smile. "I'll not forget," she said.

II.

JIMMY DANE won straight into the hearts of the men. For two weeks he mixed with them and was one with them. They found him a different sort; always cheery and good-natured, always ready to help, always ready to loan a few dollars

when money was needed; a close-lipped confidant and a sound adviser.

Tommy Davis had it that Jimmy looked eighteen and had the wisdom of eighty. And what surprised all of them was that from the outset, Jimmy Dane proved himself one of the most skilful drill-men in Red Ore.

He seemed tireless and his muscles appeared to be made of chilled steel. He was always ahead with his own work and ever ready to help others. He even did part of the work of a mucker for two days, when one of his drift-crew was sick.

And above all, he paid positive and direct court to Eunice Delaney.

He did not visit the Delaney house; to have done so would have been to invite a clash with Jerry Delaney, whose rancor against the young chap seemed to grow with each meeting, and who seemed to have made a hatred of Jimmy Dane his watchword. Time and time again, he attempted to force Jimmy into an unequal physical combat, but every time the young drill-helper turned him aside with light jest and merry quip. The men stood back and smiled with silent amusement, although there were many who had grown to like the young newcomer, and who feared for him when the inevitable clash should come.

Nor was Jerry Delaney the only man in Red Ore who looked with unfavorable eyes upon the growing affection between Eunice and Jimmy Dane. There was one other to whom the situation did not appeal.

That man was Harris Jerrold, superintendent of the Red Ore mines.

Harris Jerrold was a big man; physically, the size of Jerry Delaney, although built more along the lines of the smaller Jimmy Dane. He was the trained athlete in every inch of his broad-shouldered, deep-chested six feet. Moreover, he was an unusually handsome man; with a shock of sandy hair brushed straight back from a high forehead, with steel-gray eyes looking out levelly from under light lashes. He was straight as a sapling and undoubtedly a competent man.

His friendship with Eunice Delaney dated back nearly six months, to the day when she had come home from a two-year

course at the University of Alabama. Being egotistical by nature he had fancied to dazzle her with the grandeur of friendship with the superintendent of the mammoth camp. But if she had been dazzled she had not shown it.

However, she welcomed him warmly. He was an infinite relief after the slow-tongued stupidity of the uneducated men with whom she was forced to associate through her status as sister of, and housekeeper to, a miner. But she instinctively distrusted Harris Jerrold and her guard was up against him. She knew him for more or less of a social butterfly and she realized that he was not the kind of man to offer his hand in marriage to the sister of a miner. And so—while she welcomed his company, she discouraged any attempt at intimacy.

Jimmy Dane looked with pronounced disfavor upon the friendship between the superintendent and the girl. He did not like it. He knew Harris Jerrold's type. And being Jimmy Dane, he did what no other man would have done on such short acquaintance—in his habitual light way he questioned the girl about Harris Jerrold.

"Like him, don't you, Eunice?" He had called her "Eunice" from the first, without asking her permission.

"Yes," she answered honestly. "He's a relief."

"From these dunderheads?"

"Yes."

"I admire his taste," said the boy, "but the admiration doesn't extend beyond that. Is he serious?"

"Does that interest you—much?" It was very dark along the road where they were walking and he did not see the flush which stained her cheeks.

He waved his hand airily. "Not much. Like to understand my fellow creatures."

His eternal lightness of manner irritated her. The flush of cheek was succeeded by a pallor. "I like Mr. Jerrold more than any man I know."

"Present company excepted?"

"No—not even that."

He bowed low. "Lady, I thank thee for thy honesty. I fancied I was irresistible."

"I know it!" she flamed.

"Seeing that I am not, I wish you luck

with him whose charms exceed mine. But, fair lady, I bid thee be careful."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Think it over," he said easily. "You may get the right answer some day. And now, let's talk about something pleasant—like that brother of yours, for instance."

"What about him?"

"For a man who does very little work," said Jimmy Dane frankly, "he has more money than any miner I have ever seen."

She bit her lip. "Well?"

"Did he inherit it?"

"I don't see—"

"That it's any of my business? It isn't. That's why I enjoy inquiring."

"Since it is none of your business," came her tart answer, "I'll say nothing about it."

"Fine—fine!" He threw back his head, and his clear tenor ascended heavenward:

"O-o-o-oh!

The monkey married the baboon's sister;
Kissed so hard he raised a blister—"

Suddenly the song broke off. He clasped tense fingers about her arm and pointed up the hill, toward the tippie before mine No. 2: "I say—look at that."

"That," was a fire which crept up the timbers of the giant tippie and in a very short time roared into the clear night air. There was a general exodus from the houses, and up the street could be seen an eddying of the miners and their families toward the scene of the blaze. An extemporaneous fire-company was working in the glare of the fire. Toward the scene of the excitement, Jimmy Dane and the girl ran; she keeping pace with him by a display of agility which surprised and delighted him.

As they rounded the power-house and came within view of the blazing tippie they saw that it was doomed, and that with its destruction work on No. 2 slope would be held up for perhaps a month, while a new tippie was being constructed. The fire-fighters were bending their energies to saving the cable-house to the rear of the tippie. All were working under the direction of Superintendent Jerrold.

Jimmy Dane helped but little with the fire-fighting. Instead, he separated himself from Eunice Delaney and worked around

to a position near the foot of the burning tippie. Searching the ground, he bent over, then straightened and made his way to Jerrold. That individual—who had developed an antipathy to the young man because of Jimmy's friendship with Eunice—glared at him.

"Well, what do you want?"

"Wanted to show you this," answered Jimmy, extending a handful of small sticks. Jerrold glanced at them.

"What about it?"

"They forgot to light it. I found it at the foot of one of the support timbers."

"Who forgot to light what? What are you talking about?"

"Just this, Mr. Jerrold," said Jimmy quietly. "This pile of tinder was carefully placed at the base of a supporting pillar. It was saturated with kerosene. The entire base of the tippie was soaked with oil; the fire couldn't have spread as it did had that not been the case—"

"It means," he finished, "that this fire is incendiary. It is the result of premeditated vandalism—just as all the other 'accidents' which have occurred in the last few weeks, have been caused by somebody who is seeking to injure the Red Ore mines. What do you say to it?"

Jerrold snorted: "You're a damned fool!" he snapped. "Get back and help put that fire out!"

III.

ANOTHER "accident," three days later, left Red Ore with a majority of its population unemployed. No. 3 mine was working to capacity, but the destruction of the tippie at No. 2 and the new accident in No. 1 cut down the mine's output by two-thirds.

The company was growing impatient, but the superintendent did not seem flustered. With quiet efficiency he directed the repairs. At that, the task was tedious and the day-and-night efforts of the engineering force did not satisfy the men who were paid by the day or by the ton and were therefore forced into idleness.

Labor agents appeared in Red Ore and a general migration to other camps commenced. The Red Ore Mining Company

found that it would be faced by a serious labor shortage as soon as its Nos. 1 and 2 slopes should reopen. It was a virtual certainty that only one of them could be manned.

The general offices in New York were howling. The company was paying enormous penalties for failure to deliver according to ironclad contracts. A field representative came on from New York, and reported back to the general offices that all progress possible was being made. Red Ore had apparently been the victim of circumstance.

What the field officials did not know—but the fact was patent to the sober-faced directors who gathered about a polished mahogany table in the thirty-first floor of a big New York office building—was that the company was facing insolvency.

For two months the Red Ore camp had been paralyzed by a series of supposed accidents, following close on the heels of one another. The fire at No. 2 had been the crowning catastrophe. And when No. 1 slope was eventually opened again it was found that only enough labor remained in Red Ore to work it. Work on the rebuilding of the tippie at No. 2 went on slowly. There was little need for haste. The miners had gone.

After the opening of No. 1 slope, Superintendent Harris Jerrold left for Birmingham one morning on the Mineral accommodation. On the same train was Jimmy Dane, who had not been working for several days. The following night Jimmy returned, and one day later the superintendent again reached the camp, the chief engineer having been in charge during his absence.

Jimmy spent two hours with Eunice that evening. He was breezy as ever, laughing, joking, chatting—refusing to take things seriously and misreading—or not reading at all—the light of invitation in her eyes.

The girl had been considerably worried lately. Superintendent Jerrold had been rather obtrusive with his attentions, and she had exhausted her fund of tact. She instinctively disliked the man. But, womanlike, when Jimmy asked her the question direct, she refused to admit the fact. She

evaded a straight answer and left the really earnest, but apparently disinterested, young man totally in the dark as to the condition of her real feelings toward the handsome young mine superintendent.

When they parted that evening Jimmy struck down the hill toward the shack where he had a room. The girl watched him until he was lost in the shadow of a clump of bushes. Then she sighed and turned back into the house. She wondered about the young man. She marveled at his eternal light-heartedness, his refusal to take anything seriously, his perpetual laughing at the serious things of life. And she liked Jimmy; liked him more than she dared admit even to herself.

He was so different from the other two men who played major rôles in her restricted existence—her half-brother, big, brutish, bullying, heavy of muscle and hard of fist, grim, unimaginative, rather repulsive to her, if the truth be known; and Harris Jerrold, a polished man of education, self-opinionated and overbearing but a competent worker and a man who had fostered a friendship with her brother that he might more easily foist his attentions upon her.

Yes—Jimmy was different from them, yet she found it in her heart to wish that he had more of their soberer qualities. His was the irresponsibility of youth. She could not believe that he knew of her love for him.

Had she watched Jimmy after he disappeared in the shadows she would have found food for puzzling thought. For Jimmy did not go straight to his cabin. Instead, he turned down the street on which the superintendent lived, and hid himself behind a boulder. There he waited—motionless as the big rock itself—for an hour. At the end of that time his patience was rewarded.

A big man strode along the road; a man whose huge, angular bulk identified him as Jerry Delaney. He did not see Jimmy, crouched behind the boulder, nor did he see that light-hearted young man as he followed across the main road and pussy-footed along his trail toward the mouth of No. 3 mine.

Occasionally Delaney paused to glance apprehensively about. The moon was new and shed but little light. Apparently satis-

fied that he was unobserved, he skirted the hill into which No. 3 slopes burrowed, and struck down into the valley on the other side. A hundred yards behind him, Jimmy Dane followed stealthily.

For a half-mile Jerry walked, then struck into a clump of bushes. Jimmy clenched his fist. He understood now. Jerry had reached a surface opening from No. 3 mine, which led to the water-pumps. The young man no longer doubted what he had before only suspected—namely, that Jerry Delaney was the man who had been responsible for the series of accidents which had placed the Red Ore Mining Company on the verge of bankruptcy. Nor could Jimmy Dane forget for a single instant that this man was the half-brother and sole surviving relative of the girl who in the last few weeks had come to mean so much to him.

He followed Delaney into the stygian darkness of the passage. The big man worked swiftly. In ten minutes the pumping apparatus was out of commission. It was a certainty that by the following morning No. 3 slope's lower levels would be unworkable.

Delaney crawled to the entrance, and there, standing quietly, whistling his eternal "The monkey married the baboon's sister," was Jimmy Dane. The big man started with surprise and then strode forward angrily.

"Whatcha doin' here, Dane?"

"Whistling."

"I don't mean that. Was you spyin' on me?"

"Why should I spy on you?"

"I'm askin' of you—you ain't askin' of me."

"Oh! I thought it was fifty-fifty."

"Say, young feller—I've a good mind to take this chance and knock the everlasting hide offen you."

"No?"

"And for half a cent—"

"No you wouldn't, Delaney."

"I'd like to know why?"

"I'll tell you why. Unless you had a gun and a pair of knucks you couldn't lay a fist on me in an hour. I'm considerable of a boxer. It may interest you to know that I held the amateur welter-weight cham-

pionship of the United States for four years. And if you did lay your hands on me I'd be likely to hurt you and hurt you badly. If you have any doubts—just start in."

Delaney stared into the unflickering eyes of the young man. Dane was laughing, his lips were creasing into a broad, good-natured, mocking smile. And then Dane spoke:

"I see that you realize that I'm telling the truth. That's good. It 'll save you a lot of trouble and a good licking. And now, for the other reason—why, you'd be almighty foolish to whip me, even if you could—and that is because you can't afford to get me sore at you. Because if you did, I'd land you in jail, very quickly."

Delaney cringed. "Wha — whadaya mean?"

"I'm a great little meaner to-night, Jerry my lad. I mean that I've just watched you cripple this water-pump apparatus, and I happen to know that you're the man who set fire to the tippie on No. 2."

"That's a lie!"

"Them's harsh words, Adolphus. Besides, it isn't a lie. I know that you've been at the bottom of every accident which has occurred here in two months. Now, I'm no fool. I know you're not running these risks for the love of the thing. And I need money. Count me in on the divvy and I'll keep my mouth shut."

"You mean you'll come in with me?"

"Sure. I'm not asking any embarrassing questions, mind you. But I need money—plenty of it. And you've evidently got the secret of landing it. Am I with you or do I squeal to the superintendent about you being the man who is at the bottom of all this dirty-work?"

"You—you're in on it—of course. But, say—I didn't think you were that kind."

"No?" Jimmy Dane threw back his head and laughed joyously: "That innocent look of mine, helps me to get away with a lot of things, Jerry!"

IV.

THAT night marked the beginning of an intimacy between Jimmy Dane and Jerry Delaney which developed into a *Franken-*

stein for the younger man. For with the intimacy between the two men Eunice Delaney snubbed Jimmy Dane completely.

And Jimmy did not know that the reason was because Eunice knew that her brother was the vandal who had virtually wrecked Red Ore, and that now she knew that Jimmy and her worthless brother had formed an alliance for evil.

And although he went his way in his customary lightsome, singing manner, there was the suggestion of worry on his boyish forehead. As for the girl, she did a thing which proclaimed aloud her sheer femininity: she assiduously invited the attentions of the superintendent. Jimmy saw them together many afternoons and many nights. He did not trust the superintendent. But now the girl would have nothing to do with him, and he was deprived even of the satisfaction of warning her.

His alliance with Jerry Delaney was a successful one. He furnished the brains which Jerry lacked, the sly cunning necessary to their work. They crippled machines in the shops, they placed a blast which caused a rockfall in an important drift and held up work on that level for days. They even robbed the crusher of two important bolts and for five days it remained helpless, until new ones could be wrought.

More men were leaving Red Ore daily. Work was too uncertain. The gossip had gone that the camp was hoodooed. After the successful completion of each dirty job Jerry handed Jimmy his share of the money, and both men seemed satisfied. And Superintendent Jerrold went his way quietly and calmly, unflustered in the face of the series of crippling accidents and apparently happy in the smiles of Eunice Delaney.

And then one night Jerry came to Jimmy Dane with a plan to put important No. 1 slope out of commission for a week or more. They were to file the steel cable on the skip-hoist when they were quite sure that no men would be endangered. It was a certainty that the car, pelting wild from the surface at top speed, would leap the track, tear off rods of trackage and perhaps cause a cave-in. Jimmy hesitated for a moment and then agreed.

Their job was completed that night, near

midnight. It worked according to schedule. No one was hurt, but the tracking was ruined, the cable useless until expert repair work could be done, and No. 19 drift closed tight for several days.

Superintendent Jerrold was summoned and visited the scene of the accident immediately. He swore a bit and examined the cable. The following morning he wired news of the latest misfortune to company headquarters and got busy on repairs. No one seemed to suspect either Jimmy Dane or big Delaney.

Two nights later four strangers arrived in camp in a touring car. They proceeded straight to the superintendent's office and interviewed that gentleman privately. A half-hour later, Jerrold left camp in their company. And at eight o'clock that night the front door of the Delaney cabin opened and Jimmy Dane entered. Eunice's lips curled. She rose and would have left the room, but Jimmy restrained her.

"Just a minute, Eunice," he said, "I have something to say to you."

"Nothing that I care to hear."

Jimmy laughed. "Yes it is. I promise—Stay—please."

She stayed.

Jimmy turned on Jerry Delaney. He was smiling broadly: the same care-free Jimmy Dane whom the men in camp—and the girl standing straight on the other side of the room—had learned to love. Dane addressed the girl's brother.

"I thought it might interest you to know," he observed quietly, "that Superintendent Jerrold has just been arrested!"

He saw the girl's bosom rise with a sudden intake of breath. Jerry rose slowly to his feet, his face ghastly with sudden fear.

"Arrested?" he faltered.

"Yes."

"Wh-what for?"

"Trying to wreck the mine."

"But—but— Say, we've got to beat it, Jimmy."

Jimmy smiled. "No."

"But if they've got him—"

"You've got to beat it, Delaney."

"You're in it! Deep as I am."

"A little deeper in fact. You see, I swore out the warrant for Jerrold's arrest!"

"You—you swore out— What are you talkin' about?"

"I'm talking about this, Delaney. You've been a fool—a sucker. I came down here from company headquarters. I'm a mining engineer. I'm a stockholder in the company.

"When those accidents started we knew that there was something radically wrong. The company was facing ruin. They sent me down here incognito to investigate.

"I got away with it. And it didn't take me long to suspect that it was you. You had too much money and did too little work. But I didn't want you; you're small fry. You were just the tool, and I knew it. I wanted the man behind you. I knew that whoever it was, he was in authority, and that his idea was to keep his hands clean in case anything went wrong.

"It struck me as peculiar that Jerrold should be so lukewarm in his investigation. He didn't even try to hold the laborers here. He almost encouraged them to leave. Then when that tippie burned, I took pains to prove to him that the fire was incendiary. And he never said a word about it. That proved that he was in on the know.

"I got the goods on you, that night at the water-pump. You accepted me as an ally, where a cleverer crook would have been suspicious of me. After that it was a cinch to find out that the money was coming from Jerrold.

"But then I was puzzled about where Jerrold got the money from and why he wanted to wreck the mining company for which he was working. I followed him one day and was not very much surprised to see that he went to the city and direct to the offices of a rival mining company, which has been trying to buy Red Ore mines.

"It was a cinch that Jerrold was employed by this company. Easier still when I managed to get a look at their records and discovered that he is already a stockholder. Their idea was to force us to sell at rock bottom and allow them to grab a corking good piece of mining property, at a fraction of its values.

"It was a pretty clever scheme. But they carried a good thing too far. And the climax came the night we cut the skip

loose. I knew that Jerrold saw that filed cable and I knew that being an engineer he could not fail to realize that it had been deliberately cut. That was when I swore out the warrant and got the deputies out here to arrest him.

"You've been the goat, Delaney. But I'm running this thing my way. I might mention that I'm the new superintendent of Red Ore. You're been criminal, but we have nothing to gain by putting you in jail. Jerrold will do time enough for the pair of you. You've been the dupe, the fool—nothing more.

"You've got forty-eight hours to make your getaway. That's all I've got to say!"

Jerry Delaney apparently had even less to remark. Within an hour he had left Red Ore, his eyes wide with fear. The last any one in the camp saw of him was when he drove down the road in a hired rig.

For a long time after he had gone the girl stood motionless in the corner. Jimmy, humming softly to himself, gazed at her and compelled her eyes to his. Finally he spoke:

"Well?"

"I—I'm glad you were merciful," she said. "He is my half-brother."

"He has been more foolish than criminal," answered the young man. "But at that, he might have spared a thought for you."

"He never did that in his life," she said bitterly.

"Now, you're alone in the world," said Jimmy softly. Then he smiled. "I've an idea— You've sort of specialized on superintendents—how would it strike you to marry the new one?"

"Marry—" The girl's hands flew to her bosom and her eyes opened wide.

"Me!"

"I—I—guess you need—a sobering influence," she said tremulously. And then she made the discovery that the muscles of his arms were strong as steel.

Jimmy Dane did not leave the girl's cabin until near midnight. And as he trudged down the steeply sloping road she heard his clear tenor floating over the red-grimed camp:

"O-o-o-oh!

The monkey married the baboon's sister—"

His Word of Honor

by Edgar Franklin

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

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

HENRY BAIRD was unhappy because he had to stay in New York to complete the sale of a copper property that would bring him eight hundred thousand dollars while his rival, Alan Moss, went to the Rockridge colony, in Massachusetts, to visit the country home of Mabel Darrow. When he returned to his apartment he was made still more unhappy, for he found Anderson, his attorney, and Whitmore Terral, his cousin and chum, waiting for him, and from them learned that a man named Blackton claimed the copper property, and that the sale would be held up until his claim could be disproved in court. But it was when Larkin, his tailor, called and demanded immediate payment of a bill of three hundred and fifty dollars that his cup of wo ran over, and he decided that New York would have to get along without him while he took a trip to the country—which meant Rockridge and Mabel. Telling Terral that he would keep in touch with him from either Rockridge or New Bingham, a near-by town, he started in his ancient motor-car, his entire fortune of one hundred dollars in his pocket.

But misfortune dogged his wheels, and most of the hundred was spent for repairs and replacements before he reached New Bingham. There he was inveigled into a lawn fête for the benefit of the church, and his few remaining dollars taken from him by charming girls selling chances. Then a great idea came to him, and he arranged with Mr. Singer, in charge of the fête, to raffle his automobile, selling two hundred two-dollar chances, Henry to receive three hundred dollars of the proceeds. But no sooner had he received this money than Terral appeared, having followed him from New York, and told him that the tailor would sue at once if Henry did not pay him that day. Terral had borrowed eighty dollars, and Henry had to give him the remainder, leaving him with twenty dollars with which he resolved to spend at least one night in Rockridge. After Terral had left, Henry noticed a crowd about the automobile. It was afire, and in a few minutes was destroyed. "Too bad!" said Mr. Singer. "We'll have to return the four hundred dollars."

CHAPTER IX.

FOR VALUE RECEIVED.

THE jab of a knife between his ribs, perhaps, might have caused Henry Baird to start more violently; surely no other, less energetic, means could have duplicated the effect of Mr. Singer's words. The stunned feeling had all vanished now in the fraction of a twinkling; Henry's breath was taken in with a queer little whistling hiss; his eyes, with a squint of positive terror, darted at Mr. Singer's profile and darted away again, to settle fixedly on the blazing ruin in the center of the empty space.

His six or seven gallons of gasoline seemed to have distributed themselves wonderfully; even now the fire was beginning to burn out. Stray, blazing pieces dropped here and there from the side of the car and under the bottom; the running-board collapsed, strewing his few tools over the grass. The excitement was dying, and some of the small boys were edging nearer the scene of the catastrophe.

"And I congratulated myself so much on that unexpected hundred dollars!" Mr. Singer sighed. "However, these things will happen, I suppose."

He felt in his pocket and produced the marked envelope; he ripped it and extract-

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for June 14.

ed the bills, to turn to Henry with a smile of bland sorrow.

"Here is our share, Mr. Baird. Give me yours and I'll have the girls locate the various tickets and refund."

"I—I—" Henry stammered

Oh, we shall have to refund!" Mr. Singer said hastily. "You—er—understand that, of course?"

"I understand it fast enough," Henry said more steadily; "but one of us can't refund. I'm the one!"

"Pardon me?" said Mr. Singer, and his eyes opened.

"That three hundred dollars is no longer here. I sent it back to the city by the young man who left here ten minutes ago."

"Young man?" Mr. Singer echoed. "I saw no young man."

"Well, plenty of other people saw him; I'm not lying to you," Henry said warmly. "He followed me to get some money that was needed in—in my business, and that was the only money I had, and I gave him that."

"Then let us overtake this young man at once, and—"

"He can't be overtaken; he's on the train long before this."

Mr. Singer's gaze was almost painfully steady.

"Are you telling me that you—er—cannot produce another three hundred dollars for the people who bought these tickets in perfect good faith?"

"I'm telling you just that!" Henry said bitterly.

Mr. Singer cleared his throat with a decided little sound.

"It seems to me, sir, that you have created a very unusual and very unfortunate situation here."

"It seems just like that to me!" Henry agreed.

"One, sir, which is very easily open to unpleasant construction; and one for which the remedy will have to be found in very short order!" Mr. Singer added, still more energetically.

"Do you mean to say—"

"Just a moment, Mr. Baird. I do not necessarily 'mean to say' anything at all. It may be merely gossip, but one of the

boys who arrived a few minutes back hinted that you were trying to sell this very car for one hundred and fifty dollars an hour ago."

Henry winced.

"So that at the very happiest, it would seem that you have used our fair to your own advantage; and now that affairs have taken this unfortunate turn, I would suggest, for your own welfare, that you set the matter right as soon as possible!"

And he turned to one of the several elderly gentlemen who had gathered from different points—one whose short, gray whiskers and keen, gray eyes marked him as a man of acumen and authority.

"Oh, you're listening, Judge Grayson?" Mr. Singer smiled.

The judge nodded shortly.

"I aim to hear most of what's going on around here!" he stated with some significance, and stared straight at Henry!

There was threat in that tone. Henry glanced at its owner, and then, for a time, gazed at the smoking, crackling heap that had been his car; and one might almost have expected that panic would have seized upon him, and that, taking one or two of them with him, that he would have dashed to the nearest telegraph-office, and set the wires smoking in an effort to catch the train that bore Whitmore Terral, and have that gentleman return to New Bingham.

No panic came, however, or any sign of panic. That part of Henry's brain which could feel an emotion so trivial as terror was temporarily benumbed, but the ability to reason with ghastly clearness remained. The only money in the world which could keep the knowledge of his poverty from Tilbury and Tilbury was on its way to New York—which settled that. What was of vastly more importance, his trip to Rock-ridge had reached its definite end. Alan Moss had the field to himself and— It was a slightly selfish way of considering the immediate situation, was it not?

This bright thought came to Henry at the end of one minute, causing him to scowl suddenly and blackly. Two hundred well-meaning people had paid two dollars apiece for a chance at his car; now there was no car left, but the wholly simple and very unpleasant fact persisted that Henry Baird

had taken and used money for which he could make no return!

Nor had anything like this ever happened before in all Henry's career. As a little boy, and ever since—even if the stress of recent circumstances had caused him to dally a little longer than usual in the paying of his personal bills—Henry's word had been his bond, and that bond was as good as gold!

A quick, hot flush came to Henry's cheek and an angry light to his eye. He took to gnawing his lips, and the flush deepened. This was no time at all to begin breaking lifelong principles; for that matter, he *couldn't* begin breaking them, now or any other time!

"Well?" Mr. Singer inquired icily.

"Just what do you want me to do?" Henry demanded.

"Hand back the money you took in. What else?" the judge rapped out.

"I haven't it!"

"You'll have to materialize it mighty quick, young feller!" the judge said.

"And I cannot raise it," Henry's undertone went on, swiftly and desperately. "I'm not going to recite my troubles to you gentlemen, but the solid fact is that all I have left on earth is—myself!"

"Um!" muttered the judge.

"So I'm going to sell myself!" cried Henry Baird.

"*Hey?*" said Mr. Singer.

"Yes, I'm going to sell myself into slavery to the holder of that winning ticket!" Henry laughed savagely.

There was an utterly astounded pause, as well there might have been. Mr. Singer first regained breath, and did it with an outraged hiss and lips compressed.

"I will venture to say," he announced, "that *that* is the most superbly idiotic, most utterly unmoral proposition that has been uttered in this town since the day of its foundation by Elijah Bingham!"

"And I will add—" the judge began.

"Wait a minute before you add it!" Henry snapped. "There is nothing idiotic and nothing unmoral about it. I'm not offering to hand over my body and soul for the term of my natural life. I'm—well, let's see. Somebody has paid two dollars

for that winning ticket. I'll go to work for them for, say, two weeks in any capacity under the sun that isn't likely to land me in jail.

"And there are no reservations on that either! I can keep books or milk cows or drive a car or repair one! I can paint a house or develop a roll of films or feed the chickens or pick fruit or read to the sick! By thunder, I can put down a concrete floor, too, and I know how to nail on shingles, and can cut hay and look after horses!"

He was fiercely in earnest. It goes a long way in the world. Judge Grayson grinned suddenly, although he had expected to do nothing of the kind.

"He'd have to be pretty poor stuff not to be worth a dollar a week," he mused.

"But even—even so," Mr. Singer stammered.

"Oh, there is nothing in it, of course," the judge assured him. "You couldn't write a contract like that that would bind him. Slavery went out of date quite some time back."

"Well, honor didn't, did it?" Henry cried. "Or the habit of keeping one's promise to the letter? That sort of thing is pretty well understood hereabouts?"

"I guess they didn't and it is, as it were," the judge said almost soothingly, "but—"

"Give me a piece of paper!" said Henry Baird, and snatched out his fountain pen, while the judge, who was growing really interested, found his capacious note-book and extended it. "They had the drawing before the fire, I believe? What was the number of the winning ticket?"

"They—they did. Yes, of course," said Mr. Singer, who was a great organizer, but no man at all in an emergency. "The number. Now, let me see. What was the number?" He shuffled agitatedly through a collection of scraps crumpled in his palm. "Ah, yes; that was it—one hundred and thirty-seven."

"One-thirty-seven!" Henry muttered, and sat down with a heedless thud upon the camp-stool just outside the candy kitchen.

The group around them had grown. The news, as news always does in similar gather-

ings, was traveling with rather more than the speed of a wireless wave. Girls were giggling and men were craning their necks as the remarkable Henry wrote. He remained unconscious of them all.

"'Because I am unable to deliver the automobile called for by ticket one hundred and thirty-seven, or to make other adequate return, I hereby agree to work for the holder of said ticket in any non-criminal capacity to the limit of my mental and physical ability, for a period of two weeks from the date hereof, unless previously released by holder of said ticket for causes not at present foreseen!'" the judge read over Henry's shoulder, and added, "Phew!"

Somebody cheered.

"'I further agree to follow without question any or all orders given me by the holder of said ticket,'" the judge read on, "'and to the completion of this contract in every detail, herein written or otherwise implied, I hereby pledge my solemn word of honor. Signed: Henry Baird!'"

"Can that be made any more sweeping?" Henry asked shortly.

"I dunno how," conceded the judge.

"Is there anything bindin' about it, though?" a harsh voice demanded from Henry's other side.

The judge rubbed his short beard and smiled meditatively.

"I never struck anything just like this in my thirty-three years' practise of the law," he stated. "All the same, seeing as he's unable to come across with the cash, I'll say to the holder of that ticket, that if this young chap doesn't live up to his agreement, come to me and we'll see if something harsh can't be done to him!"

Henry smiled bitterly.

"That of course," he said. "Well, who owns me?"

The crowd, ever growing, was surging quite excitedly now. Here and there the mystic figures, "one hundred and thirty-seven," were being spoken with rising inflection. Oh—and now somebody was pushing forward energetically; and the judge opened his eyes and turned away suddenly with a strange, suppressed, squealing little laugh!

"Well, if you was trying to put anything over on New Bingham, you've got all that was coming your way, young feller!" he muttered. "The way she's waving it, she's got the ticket!"

"Who has?"

"Miss Levison, son! She's been trying to catch a man for a matter of forty year now."

Henry turned with a gasp. She was there, at any rate. Yes, camel's hair shawl and weird, bucolic bonnet and ghastly little patches of rouge, she was there! Painfully spare, bewigged in a fashion that permitted baby-curls to stray upon her forehead, Henry's employer for the next two weeks glanced at him once, and cast down her eyes and said faintly:

"I—I have it, Mr. Singer!"

"*You!*" breathed the organizer; and Henry Baird knew, at least, that the man owned a heart.

"This is one-thirty-seven on my ticket."

CHAPTER X.

TICKET NO. 137.

A COLD chill ran through Henry Baird. It was all right, of course; he had made his agreement without a suspicion of the winner's identity; but when one's journey has started toward a Mabel Darrow and ended with a lady— Why was Mr. Singer smiling so strangely and relievedly, as he examined the ticket and shook his head?

"I'm sorry," he was explaining. "I'm such a wretched writer. Yes, it does look like a three, but it is meant for a five, Miss Levison. That's one-fifty-seven, you see."

The crowd seemed to absorb the lady. Mr. Singer hurried back, blinking. The judge continued his chuckle; and again the crowd was moving with the approach of one who held aloft a ticket. Henry peered and sighed his relief. This was the right one, of course, and it was a man—not the sort of man he would have chosen for an employer, perhaps, but a hard-featured, sturdy, farmer person.

"I got it, Singer!" he announced.

"Ah!" sighed the organizer.

"Is this right what they're saying? This man's going to put in two weeks' work free?" He looked Henry over with care, and smiled grimly. "Good and husky, by cricky! Used to working on a farm?"

"I'll get used to it in mighty short order," Henry said cheerfully.

"You said something that time, young feller!" muttered the employer. "We're old-fashioned folks out my way, y' know—up at five and at it fifteen minutes later."

"That satisfies me," said the victim.

"Ready to start?"

"Well, you'll have to turn in your ticket first, of course," smiled Mr. Singer, and stretched out his hand for it.

The farming person poked it at him, and for a moment his attitude suggested that he was about to throw a halter over Henry's head and lead him away. Henry smiled faint resignation. If those knotted hands meant anything, there was a busy two weeks ahead of him; a man with a neck like that and an Adam's apple which resembled a jack-knife inadvertently swallowed and stuck half-way down would extract the last ounce of energy from his slave!

"Oh, *this* isn't one-thirty-seven!" Mr. Singer cried brightly.

"Why ain't it?" the winner demanded in amazement.

"Why—why, this that you've mistaken for a one isn't a one at all!" the other apologized. "It's just a scratch where my pencil slipped and went through. You see, the paper was so very soft, and I—I wrote the tickets hurriedly on one of the enameled tables in the ice-cream place. They slipped around a good deal, you know, and—er—yes, I'm dreadfully sorry, but this is ticket thirty-seven—just plain *thirty-seven*!"

The farmer looked him up and down and cast a lingering glance at Henry.

"Well, are you sure about it *now*?" he asked unpleasantly.

"Yes! I remember that ticket slipping quite distinctly."

With a grunt the farmer person turned his back. Mr. Singer dabbed his forehead with a wonderfully white handkerchief and smiled deprecatingly at Henry.

"People are so unreasonable in a case like this," he reflected.

"Yes; I'm beginning to feel a little bit unreasonable myself," said Henry Baird. "This thing of being handed around from one to the other gets on one's nerves. There is a one-thirty-seven ticket, isn't there?"

"Of course."

"Well, let's find out who has it, and have the thing settled," Henry urged irritably. "If I'm sold to the meat market or the orphan asylum or the barber shop, I want to know it and have done with it. I'm—"

Here he subsided suddenly, largely because the lovely, slender girl with the mass of chestnut hair was waiting a chance to speak to Mr. Singer. She had been looking straight at Henry; now she dropped her eyes suddenly and blushed faintly. The judge started and covertly poked Henry Baird's ribs.

"She's got! I saw it!" he breathed.

Being human, Henry found himself smiling pleasantly and expectantly, and with no effort whatsoever.

"That's little Adeline Danvers; worth about four hundred thousand dollars in her own right, too, since her papa died, couple o' years ago," the judge hissed on. "Ain't a feller in *this* town wouldn't trade his immortal soul for the privilege o' being sold to *her*, you betcha!"

The girl was looking straight at Henry and laughing uncertainly.

"Were the girls joking or—or is it so, about—about this gentleman?" she asked.

"It's all so!" the judge chuckled.

"Well, I have ticket one-thirty-seven!"

"Here's your slave for two weeks, then!" the good judge laughed outright. "Miss Danvers, this is Mr. Baird—the first human being ever sold in New Bingham!"

"He isn't really—"

"He's willing to do anything," Henry smiled, very glibly and cheerily, "so that he can work out two weeks for the holder of that ticket. That's all there is to it, you know."

"Well, you'll find plenty to keep you busy out there," the judge explained. "Miss Danvers has got a big place just beyond town."

"Yes, but we—we're not short of help just now. That is, not—not the kind that

Mr. Baird could furnish, I mean—not farm work, I'm trying to say. We have plenty of men, and—”

“I'll make myself useful,” Henry grinned. “Do you want to start now?”

“Do I really have to—to take you?”

“I think so!”

“Of course you could sell your ticket to somebody else,” Mr. Singer put in helpfully.

“Only please don't!” Henry cried from the bottom of his heart. “If you could see what I've just escaped—”

He faced her imploringly. She looked squarely at Henry, too; and somehow Henry knew that they were going to get on famously together. Not that there was the slightest sentimental touch in the notion either; but this was a real girl! Her eyes twinkled deeply at Henry Baird; the funny little dimple on her left cheek grew more pronounced.

“I did see,” she said. “You—can drive a car, of course?”

“That's how I landed here,” Henry said sadly.

“Then I—yes, I think I'll let you drive me home, and we'll see what aunt has to say about the arrangement. We're alone out there, you know; just aunt and I and the servants.”

Henry bowed.

“Show me the car!” he breathed.

“It's parked down there by the north fence. Do I—thank you for him, Mr. Singer? Or just what is the etiquette of a thing like this?”

“Well, all that I shall require, my dear young lady, is the ticket itself,” the organizer beamed.

“Oh, yes, of course. Here it is. Are you ready, Mr. Baird?”

“I'll have to run down there for my little trunk,” Henry smiled.

“All right,” his employer laughed, and turned to walk away.

And Henry followed almost joyfully. Almost—not actually, of course. He had started for Rockridge, and the sole desire of his life was to get to Rockridge. But after two narrow escapes, the prospect of a little breathing spell with a girl like this, and an aunt who was doubtless as charm-

ing, was pure balm. He looked upon her mass of hair, which was finer than any silk; he looked upon the back of her round neck, which was very near perfection.

“Oh!” cried Mr. Singer behind them. “Just one moment, please!”

They turned.

“I—I'm sorry, of course; but *this* isn't one thirty-seven either!” he said.

“What?” rasped Henry Baird, as he bounded to his side. “Of course it's one thirty-seven. One—three—seven! What's the matter with that?”

“Nothing, except that—that that last one isn't a seven!” Mr. Singer submitted rather weakly. “It's a five, Mr. Baird!”

“It's nothing of the kind!” Henry corrected hotly. “That's a seven!”

“No, it's a five!” the organizer insisted. “Really, it *is* a five! That wiggly line there, which you mistake for a straight line, is the curved lower part of a five. You see, I rushed through that second hundred, and the paper slid about so much that— Why, you look at it, Judge Grayson! You'll see that it is a five!”

The judge scowled over the slip.

“Knowing your writing, I should take it for a five—yes,” he said heavily. “Your strength always kind of gives out on those down curves, anyway. Such as it is, it's one of his fives, fast enough, Mr. Baird.”

“I decline to admit anything of the kind!” Henry snapped with much finality. “That is a seven and nothing else! Why, if you're going to call that palsied jiggle a five, there's no end to this thing! Any ticket in the lot may have won me! And he wrote another set of 'em for the drawing, didn't he? Likely enough, one thirty-seven never even won me in the first place, and—”

“Now, there, there, there!” said Mr. Singer, who was, after all, master of the situation. “The set from which we drew was written by Miss Pindar, and she is the principal of our high school, and one of the finest writers I've ever seen. Your number is one thirty-seven, and this isn't one thirty-seven! I'm very sorry, Miss Danvers, but this is *not* one thirty-seven.”

“So I imagined from what you've been saying,” the girl said quietly.

After which, because she was a little person of some quality and because, whatever his exterior, she knew nothing at all about Henry Baird, Miss Danvers favored Henry with a cool, perfunctory little smile and walked away—and what had promised to be an interesting incident had closed with a sickening thud, and Henry Baird, so to speak, was once more upon the open market.

"Say! That's the last time that's going to happen!" he snarled at Mr. Singer. "I'm doing all I can to make good on a hard proposition, but I'm not going to stand around all day and have your hen-scratches make a confounded clown of me every three minutes!"

"Why—why—well, now, you look here, sir! You look right here!" Mr. Singer sputtered and shook his finger under Henry's very nose. "You—"

"He's right!" the judge said shortly, as he laid a restraining hand on the arm of the organizer. "You send the girls out, Singer, and have 'em round up the man who *has* got that one thirty-seven ticket."

"And when you want me I'll be within a hundred yards of this spot," Henry barked in conclusion, and turned his own back and strode away.

He was very near the boiling-point. Teeth gritting, he headed for one of the big maples beyond the zone of activity; and such was his expression that, while many gaped after Henry, none followed him.

There was a seat running around the lower part of that tree—just the sort of seat upon which one might settle for a struggle back to that resignation which should be the part of a slave. It was going to be a struggle, too, after that last blow and—

"Hey, there! Wait a minute! Wait just a minute!" the judge called, trotting after him.

"What?"

"We've found him! He just turned up, Mr. Baird. Here is the man you're going to work for."

Henry stopped with an ungracious grunt.

"He was away off at the far end of the grounds and only just now heard what was up," the judge explained further. "No,

there's no doubt about this ticket; I looked at it myself and then gave him your pledge. It's his, all right, and you won't be so badly off with a feller like him. Here he comes."

So Henry turned, without much interest. And Henry started slightly, for there was something tremendously familiar about that well-dressed figure with the jaunty cloth hat pulled down over his eyes. Yes, and he knew the aggressive check of that suit, too. Plain horror parted Henry's lips. He could not—he *would* not—believe.

But within a bare two seconds full belief was Henry's, nevertheless. The oncomer looked up very sharply from the remarkable pledge he had been reading as he walked. As if a stone wall had risen in his path, he stopped short. His rather unpleasant and arrogant and heavily browed dark eyes opened wide and he stared incredulously.

And Henry was face to face with his old friend and enemy, Mr. Joseph Plant, than whom he detested more cordially few people on earth!

CHAPTER XI.

BOUND OUT.

IT must have been—yes, it *had* been—almost a year since their last meeting.

The scene flashed upon Henry much as scenes flash upon the mind of a drowning man. Unconsciously he shut his teeth and straightened up, rather resembling a courageous gentleman upon whom the firing-squad has already trained its muzzles. That last meeting had been a silly affair, striking him as humorous at the time; but in the last five seconds all humor had faded from the memory—for Henry rather fancied that he knew Joe Plant.

Henry, on that memorable occasion, had been engaged to Miss Evelyn Bond for a matter of three weeks. It is to be presumed that Miss Bond had told her fiancé the details of her flitting, cyclonic affair with Henry Baird—from which, happily enough, both had made a quick, scarless recovery. It is certain, at any rate, that Mr. Plant suspected all, and that, had he been three inches taller and a matter of forty pounds

heavier, and an athletic person to boot, he might have tried thrashing Henry for the mere satisfaction such a course would have afforded his rather mean and self-centered, and possibly even somewhat stupid, nature.

Being merely himself, Joseph had looked up that day from the corner of a deserted club writing-room, where he had apparently been thinking dark and jealous thoughts, to find that Henry Baird had wandered in; and for no reason, save that it suited his unlovely mood, he had risen impulsively and spoken freely to Henry, to the general effect that hereafter all spaces occupied by Miss Bond or by himself would constitute a barred zone for Henry Baird.

The speech itself and its unexpectedness had dumfounded Henry for a moment, and when it had reached a lame end with the dwindling of Joe's temper he had thought of no more fitting answer than to snap his fingers at Joe Plant in majestic, unsmiling silence.

Nor had this simple move been without its swift and splendid results, for Joe had colored to an apoplectic tint, had trembled with rage suppressed, and, quite melodramatically, had muttered something about repaying Henry for that snap sooner or later; after which Henry had snapped the fingers loudly, just once more, and then had turned and slowly walked away.

Oh, yes, it had been downright comical at the time. Henry recalled chuckling over it several times that evening. He did not chuckle now; he merely looked at Joseph Plant and waited—and after a tense fifteen seconds or so hope darted up in Henry.

It was remotely possible, of course, that matrimony had smoothed out some of the rough spots in Joseph's nature and that he was contemplating nothing hideous. Indeed, now that the first shock was over, it seemed to Henry that Joe looked quite like an ordinary human being this late afternoon. He was still staring at the self-offered slave, but there was a faint grin about his mouth.

"Hello, Henry!" he said mildly.

"How do you do, Joe?" Henry responded thickly.

"Know one another, hey?" the judge cried.

"Oh, yes, we've known one another for a good many years," said Mr. Plant. "Is this—er—is this all fact, Henry?"

"It is," Henry said stiffly.

"You're pledging yourself for two weeks to the holder of this ticket?"

"The details are all written into that little document you hold in your hand."

"Yes, but they're so darned amazing and unusual, Henry, that it takes time to grasp them," mused Joseph as he studied it again.

"And to the completion of this contract in every detail, herein written or otherwise implied, I hereby pledge my solemn word of honor." That's decidedly broad!"

"It is."

"And distinctly binding."

"Absolutely so."

Joseph laughed shortly—there was something almost friendly in that laugh, too—and tucked the paper into his pocket. He glanced at the interested throng and at Judge Grayson.

"All right, Mr.—whatever your name is. Thank you for turning him over to me, and all that. It isn't necessary for us to perform for the crowd here, I take it? Let's get out of this mob, Henry."

He laid a hand on Henry's arm and headed away, and a faint little sigh fluttered inaudibly from Henry's lips. He hardly dared permit himself expect it, but the suspicion would not down that Joe was about to heap coals of fire on his head. Since he could not very well use a Henry Baird, he would release him! Even now Henry and his twenty dollars might make Rockridge that evening.

"Well, this," said Joseph, "is indeed a funny stunt!"

"I got myself into it. There was no other way of getting out of it."

"Hen, were you really unable to make good when your car burned? You're—er—broke—so far as ready cash is concerned?"

"Yes."

"Well, well, well!" muttered Mr. Plant, and kept on moving toward the far end of the ground, where cars upon cars were parked.

"How on earth did you come here?" Henry asked. "You're not staying in New Bingham?"

"Eh?" Joseph roused from a brief fit of abstraction. "No; of course not. I just ran in for some stuff, and I came in here for the fun of the thing an hour ago. I—"

His voice drifted off again as they walked. They were down by the cars now; in fact, they were beside Joseph Plant's own heavy and handsome vehicle—and still Joseph had not revealed his supply of flaming coals. Frowning meditatively, he arranged several parcels in the rear of the car; he paused again, staring at them; and then he turned upon Henry a perfectly impersonal gaze.

"Well, it's a queer arrangement—this thing of buying a slave in these days—but I can use you, Henry," said he.

"Ah?" Henry said quite sharply.

"Around the place, you know. Help's hard to get up this way, and I've been working overtime myself," Mr. Plant added in the most utterly matter-of-fact way, and took no whistling.

He had simply accepted the thing as it stood. Henry, after that first start, shut his lips and sighed again—differently this time.

Joseph stepped into his car and sat down on the right-hand side.

"Somebody said that your trunk was down there, Hen?" he yawned.

"Yes."

"Better drive down there first and put it aboard, if you will. Then we'll start for home."

He lighted a cigarette, without the formality of offering one to Henry Baird. He leaned back comfortably and frowned at his reflection in the wind-shield, while Henry started the car and steered it down to the spot where still reposed his shiny little trunk.

Small boys clustered around to help him as he lifted it to the iron rack at the rear of Joseph's car and tightened the straps. Then possibly the most remarkable stranger New Bingham had ever known wheeled about, rolled through the gate and into the street, with a resigned:

"Which way, Joe?"

"Go up to the end of the street here and take the dirt road to the left, Hen,"

said Mr. Plant. "It's as good as State Road and shorter."

He crossed his legs and took to humming, while Henry piloted the car to the end of the street and then up the pretty country road to the left. Apparently he did not choose to converse with his prize just then, and Henry was as well satisfied, being himself rather deep in thought.

What was ahead of him? A sojourn at the house Plant had taken for the summer, somewhere over Tolver way, near the New York State line, of course—and a rather ridiculous sojourn, too. Still, the sort of place that Plant would naturally take would be far removed from congenial people, and Plant himself attracted no wide circle of friends. Privacy at least would be Henry's and freedom from a lot of gaping idiots; there was a lot to be thankful for in that!

He essayed a sidelong glance at Mr. Plant. Never, it seemed to Henry, had civilization produced a more utterly stupid, self-centered profile than that one! Another man, gifted with imagination, would have been quick with the various possibilities of the situation. Plant was not, simply because it was not in him to be. Henry grunted and gave her more gas.

"I say, Henry!" Plant said.

"Yep?" Henry muttered toward his owner.

"This—this slave notion. It's rather queer—it sounds odd as the very devil. People aren't likely to understand."

"I'm not going to advertise it, believe me!" Henry said grimly.

"No. Naturally not. I'm not keen to be known as a slave-winner, glad as I am to have you just now," Plant went on quite earnestly. "Suppose we drop that into the silences, as it were. People from New Bingham don't come over our way twice a year; there isn't one chance in a dozen of anybody carrying the news of the fair."

"Well?"

"We'll say—you'll say—that you're working for me, and go no farther with explanations. It's quite true, anyway. You'll simply not mention the truth, under any circumstances."

"I'm willing," Henry said, with a dry smile.

"That's a pledge, then," Mr. Plant concluded.

"That's a pledge," Henry agreed carelessly.

"Shake on it!" said Joseph Plant.

"That's not necessary when I make a pledge," Henry grinned as he shook.

"I know that, Henry," his owner smiled and nodded.

Then he fell silent again, and the beautiful car hummed on, while Henry shook his head once or twice and reflected further upon the queer things that can happen to a man who has been selected by queer things as good ground for their happening.

Still—what of it all? Joe Plant was actually rather decent. He was far more decent than Henry ever would have dared hope, could he have foreseen this weird situation. He had some sense of shame, too, which was encouraging; he shrank from giving publicity to the fact that he was using bound-out labor, as it were, at a dollar a week. Henry grinned again, and:

"Joe!"

"Yes?" Mr. Plant said, and although it may have been pure fancy, there seemed to be a new note in that single word—a haughty note, a note of asperity or of something or other which had not been there before.

"What am I going to do in the way of work? Turn butler?"

"Butler? No, of course not."

"I'd make a crackerjack butler, Joe."

"I have Stark, father's old butler," Mr. Plant said shortly.

"Ah, yes?" Henry pursued rather airily. "Nevertheless, Joe, I feel that—"

"Hold on!" Joseph said so sharply that Henry stared. "I've been thinking, you know, and I'm afraid that we shall have to reach a little better understanding. This thing isn't a joke."

"No, Joe," sighed Henry.

"A considerably better understanding," his owner corrected. "Whatever our relation or social station or anything else may have been hitherto, you're working for me now."

"Yes, Joe."

"Not 'Joe,' please. Just make that 'Mr. Plant' hereafter."

"Eh?"

"I said Mr. Plant," Joseph repeated coldly. "It sounds rather better, Baird."

Nor was he jesting. He looked Henry straight in the eye, and Henry nodded.

"All right; let it go at that," he said stiffly.

"I think 'All right, *sir*,' is nearer to it," said Mr. Plant. "Don't misunderstand me, Baird. I'm not trying to take any undue advantage of you. I've simply been revising my ideas to fit the present situation, and I think I see things quite clearly now."

"Joe—"

"I think you've bound yourself to obey orders without question?" Mr. Plant said very sharply indeed.

"Yes."

"Then I order you to address me either as Mr. Plant or sir—if you can't be made to understand by any gentler means! Now, as to the work you're to do. You were asking me about that a moment ago. You will be the hired man, Baird."

Henry drew a deep breath.

"Just—just what does the hired man do around your place?"

"The hired man on my place does what he is told to do, whatever that may be," Plant said crisply. "Looks after this car—drives—cleans up generally—takes care of the ashes and all that sort of thing—cuts grass—trims hedges—does odd carpentering jobs. You're something of a mechanic, I believe, Baird?"

"Something," Henry agreed grimly. "Do you have much trouble in keeping a hired man—sir?"

"I shall have no trouble at all in keeping this one, Baird," Mr. Plant said with some serenity. "One's word of honor is one's word of honor, whether one happens to be President or merely a hired man."

"It is," said Henry.

"Yes, I know it is, Baird," said Mr. Plant even more serenely, and selected another cigarette.

Followed another space of silence while the car bowled merrily along the pretty, lonely back road, and Henry pondered afresh. He had apparently been wrong, after all. Joe Plant had no idea of neglect-

ing the situation's possibilities; he had already begun the process of taking it out of Henry, as it were. Or—had he? Were not these later details, perhaps, merely so many manifestations of the person's innate meanness? Henry was rather inclined to think so just then.

Gloomily he studied the narrow road ahead, and wondered when and where they were to turn off. He was none too familiar with routes in just this region, but in the nature of things they would have to head west pretty shortly if they meant to strike the Tolver neighborhood.

Ah, yes, and there was the crossroads now! Pleasantly smooth and wide after this rather rutty stretch, there was the State Road; and Henry, with a toot of his horn, slowed down and swung slowly toward the left.

"Hey! Stop! Where on earth do you think you're going?" Mr. Plant cried testily.

The car stopped with a jerk, its front wheels on the State Road.

Henry stared at his owner.

"Home, I suppose," he said, with no undue humility. "Where *are* we going?"

"To the Nook, of course."

"What nook?"

Mr. Plant gazed at Henry with that patient forbearance one must now and then feel for a really stupid employee.

"My Uncle Edward's country place—the Nook—the house he never uses—the Nook," he explained.

"I got the nook part of it before," Henry snapped. "Where the dickens is this particular nook?"

"At Rockridge, of course," said Mr. Plant.

"Where?" gasped his slave.

"At Rockridge, Massachusetts, eight or nine miles ahead. Rockridge! Good Lord, Baird, don't gape at me in that imbecile fashion! You've heard of Rockridge, at least?"

"Yes, I—I believe I have heard of it," Henry confessed hoarsely.

"Well, my place is on the west hill, as they call it. There's the big white house, seven or eight hundred feet back from the road—the Philip Darrow place—and—"

"Yes?" Henry said. "Yes?"

"Well, the Nook is the next house, of course," Mr. Plant snapped. "Turn to the right, Baird. Go on!"

CHAPTER XII.

TO THE GOAL.

ONE unfortunate thing about humanity's eternal pursuit of happiness is the frequency with which the craved objective, coming into sight, diminishes in value. As a case in point, Henry Baird had been straining every nerve to get to Rockridge and Mabel Darrow; hardly more than an hour ago he had been gloating over the rather dubious, somewhat absurd, prospect of living up the last penny of his twenty dollars in sight of Mabel. That had been Henry's idea of happiness.

Yet now he was making straight for Rockridge, with the certainty of staying next door to Mabel—not for a few hours, but for two weeks at least, and that without a penny of expense—and, so oddly is human nature constituted, Henry was not happy at all.

Never anxious to pose as a heroic figure, perhaps, and certainly not ashamed to be caught at work, there was nevertheless something about the idea of Mabel discovering him as the Plant hired man that sent a blazing flush to Henry's face—and then a pallor, as cold chills ran through him—and then another flush. He wondered feverishly if Plant knew just what kind of torture he was inflicting; he stole another glance at him, and found some small comfort: Plant did not. That unpleasant countenance, with its too thick lips and its shoe-brush mustache and its stubby, pugnacious nose, was not one to conceal the sort of ghoulish triumph Plant must have felt, had he suspected the truth.

But he did not suspect the truth, of course. That was one thing Henry had overlooked. Thanks to the tremendous reticence that had come upon him in this connection, only one soul in the world knew of his passion for Mabel Darrow—himself.

Nevertheless, gloom thickened around Henry. Very likely they did a good deal

of visiting, back and forth; at the most, it could be no more than a matter of a day or two before Mabel learned of his presence. After that, it seemed to Henry, he would have to keep an eagle eye open, that he might disappear before she actually saw him.

He groaned faintly as he gazed steadily at the State Road ahead. He caught Mr. Plant smiling enigmatically and turned suddenly, with an expectant grin of his own, actually with some idea of asking point-blank if it wasn't all a joke of Joseph's. And Mr. Plant ceased smiling and frowned at him with:

"Keep your eyes on the road, will you, Baird? I'm not anxious to be smashed or ditched."

"All right."

"And another thing, Baird, if I read that smile of yours correctly just now," Mr. Plant said earnestly and rather uncannily. "I'm afraid that you don't understand even now that we're not—well, friends on the same level, if I must put it that way. We've been acquainted for a good many years, of course, and we've moved in much the same circles, but that's all done with now—yes, because of your unfortunate circumstances, if, again, I must put it that way. I'm not trying to play with you, Baird, in any sense; but you're simply the hired man now." He stared steadily at Henry. "You take my meaning, I'm sure?"

"I take it!" Henry said grimly.

"Drive on, Baird," Mr. Plant ordered complacently. "Speed up a bit, too, you might. It's getting late."

So Henry speeded up a bit, and not more cheerfully. He had had his answer; it was no merry trick of Joseph Plant's. It was just plain, cold fact: Henry had been accepted as the hired man. Not that it would have mattered a particle, you understand, had Plant been, say, the scrawny farmer person who at one time seemed to have won Henry; for such a master Henry would have worked and grinned cheerfully, even from five in the morning to ten at night, accepting his fate and not bothering even to feel resigned.

But that *this* creature, this Joe Plant, with the soul of a rat and—well, there was

no use fuming over it. Henry speeded up some more in the hope of scaring Joseph, and failed completely.

The beautiful country grew more beautiful in the young twilight. Comfortable little mountains piled up ahead, and the grades were getting steeper, denoting their approach to Rockridge, as Henry recalled from a former trip when Rockridge had been nothing but the name of a place.

Here was the little country store and post-office at the crossroads, and the garage and the drug-store and ice-cream parlor, which, with the dozen houses scattered around them, constituted the business section of Rockridge proper. The exclusive colony was spread widely over the hills beyond; when one passed this next curve, it seemed to Henry, one found the country club and the links far off to the right. Yes, one did, because they were there. One also met handsome cars occasionally, driven by liveried chauffeurs and occupied by well-dressed people, and in passing these Henry shrank down beneath his hat until he could just see the road beyond the edge of its brim.

And now they were climbing again in the wilder section with the trees growing thicker, and only the gateway to a drive here and there to indicate dwellings. And—*yes!* That huge white place on the hill far ahead, with velvety meadows stretching away in this direction—that must be Mabel's home! That—

"I said, '*In here,*' Baird!" Plant seemed to be shouting quite excitedly, although Henry had not heard before.

"What?" barked the hired man.

"In *there*, now," Joseph said disgustedly. "You'll have to back up; it's too narrow here for a turn. Yes, right up that drive, naturally. Can't you see the Nook on the posts?"

"I see it now!" Henry muttered as he obeyed.

Lips compressed, breathing quite heavily, he headed up the rustic way. Some time soon, he fancied, Joseph would use just that tone—and then be forced to send hurriedly for a doctor. But for the moment, come to think of it, his scowl was admitting altogether too much suffering.

Henry smiled suddenly and with a ghastly calm. In another minute he bade fair to come face to face with Evelyn Plant, who had loved him for full forty-eight hours once upon a time; and while he no longer entertained a tenderness for the lady, it was beyond thought that she could be allowed to see the mental stress put upon Henry Baird by the creature she had married. Henry smiled even more wonderfully, as he contemplated the Nook.

It was a pretty house, if one had to admit it! Big and rambling and comfortable, it had been built by some one who leaned to rough logs and rustic effects. Soft lights shone here and there from the windows; Henry caught the faint sound of the piano, sending forth the tinkling, wandering sort of music that Evelyn affected. Henry sighed, too. It would have been a nice kind of place to visit, here next door to Mabel Darrow!

"Stop at the door," Joseph ordered crisply.

Henry stopped at the door and stepped down.

"Would you like me to assist you out—sir?" he asked grimly.

"What? No," said Mr. Plant. "You might get out those packages, Baird."

His expression was curiously tense and eager just now, as if much suppressed emotion surged about in the Plant interior. He stared at the doorway expectantly, and although the piano continued to tinkle, the door did open, and there hurried forth the person whom Henry identified as the butler.

He was not an attractive butler, by any means. Although probably in the earlier sixties, he gave one the first impression of having passed the century mark. He was small and spare and slightly stooped. A patch of long, thin gray hair was plastered down carefully over a cranium otherwise bald. But it was the face itself that caught and held Henry's attention for a little. Lean to a degree, hooked of nose, with a pair of sharp, gray eyes that peered suspiciously at one as the head bent forward, it was not so much the countenance of a man as that of an elderly, particularly wary hawk.

Now, though, he was smiling—if that

pained, reluctant expression was meant for a smile. Now he was hurrying to Henry and saying: "Good evening, Mr. Joe, sir."

"Good evening, Stark," Joseph said.

Stark opened the rear door of the car hurriedly and fussily.

"The east guest-chamber, of course, sir?" he mumbled toward Joseph. "I'll get the trunk out and up there, sir, and—"

"Leave the trunk just as it is. Baird will take it out."

"I beg pardon, sir?" said the butler, and peered at Henry again.

"This isn't a guest, Stark," Plant said smoothly. "This is my new hired man, Baird. Taking Jones's place, of course. He'll attend to his trunk himself; he will have the room over the garage."

Still Stark peered at Henry. Then he cupped a hand around his ear and came closer to Mr. Plant.

"Excuse me, Mr. Joe," he said. "I'm getting a bit hard of hearing, I'm afraid. What did you say about this gentleman?"

"He's the new man of all work on the place—the hired man. I just brought him from New Bingham."

And still Stark peered at Henry Baird, but his expression was changing rapidly. The smile had faded out altogether; the corners of his mouth pointed straight down, as before; the gimlet eyes narrowed and focused, presumably on Henry's soul. Then a start ran through the aged butler, and he looked at Mr. Plant.

"I beg pardon, Mr. Joe," he said flatly, "but this is no hired man!"

"He is, though," Plant laughed. "Take in those packages, Stark, and say to Mrs. Plant that I'll be in for dinner directly."

"I will in a moment, sir," Stark said firmly, "but you'll have to excuse me, Mr. Joe, for telling you this is no hired man. I've seen and handled help all my life, and this ain't one of 'em, sir. You'd best send him off again, sir."

"I'll keep him for a week or two," Joseph said comfortably, and smiled kindly tolerance at his butler.

"You'll regret it if you do, sir, if I might make so bold as to say so," Stark said stubbornly. "You'll pardon me, Mr. Joe, for speaking freely, but I was buttlng for your

father a matter of eight or ten years before you were born, and I'm older than you are.

"I don't doubt for an instant that this person tells a plausible story; you were always an innocent boy, Mr. Joe, and easy imposed on with a hard-luck story, your heart being so soft and tender. But there's fine-looking people like this one that just makes a business of getting into houses for purposes of their own. The silver, Mr. Joe—or worse. You understand, sir?"

Joseph shaded a yawn and glanced at the house—the piano had ceased tinkling.

"This chap's honest enough, I fancy," he said carelessly.

The aged mouth tightened to a thin, curved line.

"I'll say no more, Mr. Joe," the butler stated. "You'll learn for yourself, sir. You were always like that."

He gathered up the packages and shuffled into the house, pausing only an instant for a final look at Henry and a final shake of his head.

Joseph smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

"You didn't make much of an impression on Stark," he observed.

"Is it part of our contract that I'm to make him fall in love with me?"

"Possibly not, but I wouldn't antagonize him, nevertheless. You'll be more or less closely associated for a while, you know. You'll—er—eat together, I believe."

"Hey?" escaped Henry.

"I'm not quite certain about that, but I believe Stark permits the man of all work to take his meals with the cook and the two maids. My last chauffeur, when I was able to get one, was *persona grata* out there. Oh, yes, you'll probably qualify."

Henry swallowed the thing in his throat.

"Where's my room?" he asked briefly.

"Right over the garage, Baird. You'll have no trouble finding it when you put up the car. You—ah, Evelyn!"

He hurried forward in the gathering dusk to her who had been Evelyn Bond for most of her life and Evelyn Plant these last four or five months. He kissed her, and Evelyn slipped an arm about his neck and hugged her husband, while Henry drummed out a

little tune on the front mud-guard and waited for whatever was coming.

She was as pretty as ever in her little evening gown, if one fancied that kind of dark, rather languishing prettiness. She held a fixed conviction, of course, that no male could look at her without becoming infatuated; and she was a rather daring and romantic soul, in her own way, and—ah! She had sighted Henry.

Forward she came suddenly, with both hands outstretched and her eyes sparkling their amazement and pleasure.

"Why, *Henry Baird!*" cried Mrs. Plant. "And you never said a word about bringing him, Joe, or—"

"Pst!" Joseph said sharply. "Just a moment, Evelyn! It isn't necessary to shake hands with him."

"It—what, Joe?" Evelyn cried, stayed by sheer astonishment.

"I said that it isn't really necessary to shake hands with Baird, my dear. In fact, I'd rather you wouldn't, I think. One doesn't do that sort of thing."

"But of course one does!" Mrs. Plant laughed in some bewilderment, and started toward Henry again.

"But of course one *doesn't!*" her husband corrected, and caught her. "You don't understand, of course, Evelyn. Baird is not my guest. He's working for me."

Evelyn stared from one of them to the other. "He's doing *what?*"

"Working here for me, as my hired man," Plant pursued slowly and distinctly.

"No, it isn't a joke, by any means. I found him in New Bingham, rather—er—strapped for funds. Eh, Baird?"

"Rather!" Henry agreed grimly.

"And—er—looking for work, in a way. Eh, Baird?"

"In a way," Henry assented.

"So we struck a little bargain, and, not having any particular choice in the matter, anyway, I fancy, Baird decided to come on here and be our man of all work. And that is really all there is to it. The room over the garage, Baird. Shall we go in, my dear?"

Evelyn's full, astounded lips were parted.

"He's not going to live over the garage, Joe?"

"Our last man found it very comfortable, I believe."

"But—but Henry Baird! No, I don't understand it, and I don't care what's happened to him, it's perfectly ridiculous. Why, we have the east chamber and the one on the other corner of the house, Joe, and—"

"And those are kept for our guests, Evelyn. In the morning, Baird, you will wash the car. Get at it as early as possible, for Mrs. Plant may wish to ride. Be sure to finish with that polish in the red can, too, by the way. It's something the chauffeur chap I had recommended very highly."

He gazed steadily, stonily at Henry.

"Joe!" said his wife. "I'll not permit—"

"My dear," said Joseph, "you will permit *me* to handle the male servants of the place, *if you please!* Of course, it may strike you as a bit unusual to find a person like Baird—or like Baird used to be—in—er—a menial capacity, although that didn't occur to me when I engaged him. The simple fact is that every man, sooner or later, finds his true level according to his merits—and Baird has found his in working for me. So, if *I* may settle the details as to his quarters and duties—"

He faced her steadily, with affection, of course, but also with obviously tried patience and a good deal of plain authority. It appeared that he was waiting for a graceful, submissive bending of the wifely will, which it seemed to Henry was rather a foolish thing to expect from a lady of Evelyn's temper and spirit.

"Well, I don't understand it at all!" she said curtly. "If this is a practical joke, I think you're both very stupid indeed—and if it isn't I think *you're* cruel and very absurd, Joe!"

And thereupon she turned and stepped into the house, closing the door after her. Joseph Plant did not follow immediately. Instead, he sauntered to Henry Baird in the gloaming, and, with a deal of cool effrontery, looked him up and down and yawned. Henry smiled sourly.

"See here!" he said with some force. "I'm willing to pose as the simple hired man before the general public, but you

mean to explain the truth of the thing to Evelyn, don't you?"

"Why should I?" asked Plant languidly.

"What? Because we have known each other for a great many years, of course. I have no objection to working, Joe; that's what I started out to do. I have a lot of objection, however, to letting you deliberately make an idiot of me!"

Mr. Plant gazed blandly, densely at him.

"I fail to see how that view bears on the case," he murmured.

"Does that you mean you're going to let her think that I was reduced to a point where I—where I just went to work for you gladly?"

"I have no idea of explaining, if that's what you're saying."

"Then I'll do it myself," said Henry.

"Oh! Will you, really?" smiled Joseph. "I had some idea that you were pledged hard and fast to silence as to the actual facts? It seemed to me, Baird, that you had given me your word to call yourself the hired man here and let it go at that?"

He gazed on, while Henry's color rose and Henry's breathing quickened; Henry's clenched fists rested upon his hips, and he glared at Joseph Plant.

"Say, was I—was I just tricked into that promise?" he demanded. "Have you got more intelligence, after all, than I gave you credit for?"

"No end more, Baird," said Mr. Plant. "No end more."

And then suddenly his teeth bared in a smile that was almost hideous. His mean eyes contracted; even the corners of his nose crinkled in the excess of satisfaction that was Joseph Plant's just then.

"You'll snap your fingers in my face, eh?" he snarled triumphantly at Henry Baird. "You'll snap your fingers in *my* face, will you?"

CHAPTER XIII.

AT THE NOOK.

THERE is no good purpose to be served by dwelling at length on the harrowing details of Henry's first evening at Rockridge. Some of them were agonizing,

some of them were pitiful, if not actually shameful.

As to that matter of his hunger, for one thing. Henry was healthy from top to toe; meal-time may not have been an event for him, but it was inevitably a definite and necessary pause. Hence, after two solid hours in the sufficiently comfortable room over the garage, sitting on the edge of the bed with hands clasped and the lonely incandescent dangling overhead, Henry found that his mind had shelved automatically all other considerations and was handling the food problem alone.

He had but to close his eyes to see tables glittering with silver and glass and steaming viands and a roast turkey, and—although he had sworn by a variety of unrecognized gods never to taste food in Joseph Plant's accursed servants' dining-room, and that not an hour back.

Still, he could not well live through two weeks without food. Perhaps, indeed, it was Plant's low purpose to play upon his pride and watch him starve slowly to death. Henry rose suddenly and, really making no noise at all, trod to the rear of the house. The piano was tinkling again at the front.

His entrance seemed to startle the aged butler, who was alone in the kitchen. Silently he heard Henry's barked request for food; silently he produced food and spread it, nicely enough, on the kitchen-table. Then, without comment, Stark settled grimly in a chair across the kitchen, folded his arms, and watched Henry with hawk eyes while he ate—now grudgingly conceding to himself the quality of the stuff, now hurrying for a space, with nervous eyes upon the farther door, lest Evelyn herself appear.

Still, when it was over, when without a comment of his own he had risen and marched straight back to his little room over the garage, he did feel rather saner. He sat down again upon the bed, to think; and again he began to travel the same old circle round which he had whirled for the other two hours.

Either he himself or Whitmore Terral had been perfectly accurate: either his personal streak of hard luck was still with him or it was all due to his genius for the

wrong thing. Although, what wrong thing had he done this time? Could he have recalled Whitmore and the money? No, because that would have meant the certainty of Larkin's promised explosion and the exposure of his poverty to Tilbury & Tilbury.

Should he have folded his arms and defied them, back there at New Bingham, once his car had burned and he found himself unable to refund? Not that, decidedly. For one thing, the defi would have ended in the local jail, and small blame to the outraged citizens who did the ghastly thing; for another, a stand of that kind would have reduced Henry Baird to the level of the common, cheap swindler—there was no escaping that, even if he hadn't kindled his own car!

No, if he had done one wrong thing, it was in the wording of his really remarkable pledge of servitude. At the moment much emotion had possessed Henry Baird, of course; his one desire had been to bind himself so visibly, so thoroughly, that even the rather skeptical judge could take no exception. And while he had certainly accomplished that, a cooler and more prolonged consideration of the matter would have ended in a less sweeping, although no less binding, pledge.

Still, that was all ancient history now, was it not? The pledge itself reposed in Plant's pocket, and, more unfortunately, in Plant's ugly head. Henry sighed after another long period of vain meditation, and turned out his light, to walk to the far window and gaze up-hill. Far away, up there, was a single illuminated window—Mabel's own, perhaps. He gazed on and sighed more heavily. He turned away with a sigh of blank wonder, even now, at the manner in which he had reached Rock-ridge.

Scowling, he crossed the room and gazed at Plant's infernal Nook. The lights were all out there; the piano had ceased tinkling a long while ago. The trees were stirring softly and drowsily in the night wind; Henry yawned. There was the faintest, sleepest little twittering up there in one of them, too; Henry, listening, yawned again tremendously.

After the city din, the quiet of the country always lulled him like a drug. So Henry, shuffling back to his bed, wound his watch in the darkness and laid it on the shiny little trunk.

Joseph had not ordered him roused at dawn, anyway, he concluded as he blinked at the beams above his head.

The sun was rather high for a hired man's awakening. He swung to his feet and stretched. He whistled as he made for the crude little bath-room and started the icy water in the tin tub; he peered at the Nook through the curtains and laughed aloud. Sleep had done wonders for Henry!

Last night this queer adventure had been a serious affair; it was nothing of the kind this morning. Not that he pulsed with joyful anticipation as he looked forward to the next two weeks, to be sure, but he was going through with them with a laugh, all the same.

If it was Joseph Plant's intention to make him suffer, Joseph was doomed to disappointment. Henry was powerful to a degree, and there were few odd jobs about a place like this likely to weary him to any extent, while the outdoor exercise was bound to benefit him; and if it was humiliation that Joseph sought to inflict, his chances of success were even smaller, for humiliation is a mere state of mind, and one, in this case, which Henry calmly declined to entertain.

Hence he whistled still as he strolled into the bright morning. He whistled into Stark's very face as that aged and close-lipped individual piloted him into a pantry off the kitchen, where his breakfast was laid upon a little table. Henry ceased whistling and smiled rather thankfully.

"I don't eat with the other toilers, eh?" he mused.

"You don't," Stark said pleasantly. "It ain't me or the cook. We're old enough to take your measure and make no mistake in you, however you wheedled yourself in here. But you'll do no charming of the two young girls and getting information out of them, or the like of that. You know I'll have an eye on here while you're in here?"

"I'm perfectly willing to take your word for it," Henry said mildly.

"Don't snoop, then; and when you've finished, go out the way you came," the butler concluded.

Joseph Plant was loitering outside when Henry emerged. One sharp glance he directed upon the victim; then Joseph's countenance grew stony and unimpassioned as any statue's.

"Better get into your working-clothes at once, Baird," he suggested.

"Yes, sir. What are they and where are they?" Henry beamed.

"They're overalls, of course, and you'll find them hanging in the garage at the back. Wash the car first. Then I want that tiled pavement in front of the veranda thoroughly cleaned up; take the mop and the pail from the garage."

"Yes, sir," clicked happily from Henry. "And then what shall I do, sir?"

Involuntarily, Mr. Plant squinted again at him for an instant.

"I'll tell you that when you've finished the tiles. You seem quite contented this morning, Baird."

"Oh, yes, sir. I'm always happy and contented when I've plenty to do, sir. I think that's the way with most people, sir, don't you? Leave 'em idle, and they get into mischief, I always say. Give 'em plenty of hard work, and they're bound to be happy."

This time his smile at Joseph was almost a leer; and Joseph flushed just a shade and himself sneered smilingly.

"Well, you'll just bubble over with joy before I'm done with you, Baird, because I'll hand you all the hard work on the place. And one thing more, Baird!"

"Yes, sir?" said Henry, and touched his forehead respectfully.

"This isn't play!"

"Indeed it is not, sir. Hard work is never play, sir."

He inclined his head very gravely; and Joseph, since he was only Joseph after all, flushed another shade.

"I mean to say that whatever—er—whatever silly pose you choose to affect this morning, you'll remember that you are what you are, Baird, and that you're bound here by your word of honor," Joseph rapped out.

"Indeed, I wouldn't be likely to forget anything as important as that, sir!"

"You're bound here to do absolutely and unquestioningly what I tell you. And you'll stay here, too. D'ye understand? You'll stay right on this property and not budge one foot over the line without my personal permission, Baird. *My personal permission!* Get that?"

"Your personal permission, sir? Yes, sir, I have that," Henry agreed solemnly. "Was there anything else, sir?"

"Yes. Wash that damned car!" Mr. Plant cried, and turned on his heel.

CHAPTER XIV.

HONEST TOIL.

QUITE happily, then, did Henry chuckle as he donned his overalls, rolled his sleeves high, turned in his collar, and connected the hose. In a small way he seemed to retain a little advantage over Joseph; doubtless, in the course of another day or two, he would discover other ways of stimulating that somewhat soggy and egotistical brain to anger. For the present, however, he preferred to wash the car and ponder upon Mabel.

The sense of her nearness had grown tremendously this morning. She was over there—right over there! Henry, his task finished, leaned on the shining car and gazed longingly through the thick trees. Be his personal muddle what it might, but for that definite prohibition of Joseph's as to leaving his property Henry was inclined to think that he might have cleaned up and covertly slipped away across the fields for half an hour, even if only for one glimpse of her at a distance.

It would never have done, though. Mabel might possibly understand, but her father—No, it never would have done in any case, with that beastly pledge upon him to say that he was working for Plant and go no further with his explanations.

Rather abruptly Henry's recent happiness seemed to expire. Anger came in its place and a flush considerably darker than Plant's own. He spoke freely and spitefully and quite awfully of Mr. Plant to

the empty garage; and then, since that sort of thing was absolutely futile, he located pail and mop and started for the house.

Evelyn was alone on the veranda; the book dropped to her lap and she dimpled quite bewitchingly at the sight of him.

"Good morning, Henry," said Evelyn.

"Good morning, ma'am," Henry said grimly. "Will these be the tiles that require washing?"

Evelyn Plant threw back her head and laughed charmingly and with real amusement.

"Henry, you're so ridiculous!" she cried.

"Yes, ma'am," Henry said obediently, and dipped his mop. "Is there any special way you'd like these tiles washed, ma'am?"

"No, there isn't. I don't want them washed at all. Stop it and talk to me."

Henry shook his head.

"I'm sorry, ma'am. I have orders from the master to wash them," he said.

He swished down the length of them—and turned and swished back, pausing to survey the result for a moment. Evelyn had ceased smiling now and lively curiosity was in her splendid dark eyes.

"It's a bet, of course?" she said.

"Me doing this, ma'am?"

"Yes. And don't talk like that, Henry. You sound—why, you sound like a real hired man!"

"Yes, ma'am; that's what I am," sighed the victim. "No, ma'am, it isn't a bet."

"Honestly?"

"I never lie, ma'am."

He essayed another swish of the mop, this time to find Evelyn leaning farther forward and watching intently. The curiosity was turning to plain wonder, and there was vague, startled suspicion in her gaze.

"Henry Baird, *what are you doing here?*" she asked softly. "Tell me!"

She glanced toward the house in the oddest fashion. She sat up suddenly, too, for the door was opening and, slowly and impressively, Mr. Plant himself was emerging. He carried a magazine and an unlighted cigarette; he paused at the edge of the veranda and considered Henry's work critically and superciliously—and Henry understood. This, unquestionably, was the

first of several big scenes Mr. Plant had planned for the consummation of his great revenge!

Yes, that was just what was afoot. Henry grinned rather contemptuously, endeavored to flick a little water on Joseph Plant, and watched him seat himself in the other wicker armchair.

"You're doing well enough, Baird," he said kindly as he lighted his cigarette. "What were you asking Baird, Evelyn?"

"How he comes to be here, in this way. You tell me!"

Mr. Plant smiled nastily and sent a thin cloud of smoke toward the roof.

"Oh, I don't know that it need be discussed again! Still, there is no secret about it, of course. Baird is merely working here for me."

"Yes, but—*why?*"

"Why do most people work, my dear?" said Mr. Plant, and raised his brows. "He found himself practically penniless and forced to do something for a living; I happened to be the first to avail myself of his valuable services. That's really all, Evelyn. You might be a little more careful along the edges, Baird."

And now, incredulous still, Evelyn gazed again at Henry and again at Joseph, suddenly to cry: "Is it really—*so?*"

"Painful, of course, everything considered, but it's really so," Mr. Plant murmured as he picked up his magazine.

"It's true that Henry is doing this because—because something has happened to him, and he has no—no money left?"

"Ho! None at all!" Joseph sneered absently over his magazine.

"Henry, is—is he fooling?" Evelyn demanded.

"Ho! Even ho, ho! I should say he wasn't!" Henry sighed. "No, ma'am, that is!"

Evelyn's eyes flashed.

"And instead of inviting him here, to rest and get over—whatever it is that has happened to him—instead of lending him what money he needs, when you have plenty of your own, Joe, you let Henry Baird come here and work as your hired man?"

"Yes," Joseph conceded, his whole attention on the page. "Why not?"

"I'd be ashamed to sit there and admit it!" Mrs. Plant said hotly.

Joseph smiled unpleasantly at the magazine.

"I'm not, though," he said meditatively. "In fact, I think it's rather decent of me, Evelyn. Tough, in a way, to be sure—but most of us gravitate to the job for which we're best fitted. And stay there, too, once we've found it. Appearances may fool some of us for a little while, but just how much they matter in the long run—"

"Beg pardon, sir?" said Henry. "You're addressing me, sir?"

"What?" rasped Joseph Plant.

"The lady stepped inside a moment back, sir."

Henry's winner cast a startled glance toward the door. Henry smiled down at his tiles.

"Beg pardon, sir, but you have a masterful way with the women, haven't you, sir?" he said. "You shows 'em their silly ways, like, and gives 'em a good practical view of the case! That's the thing, as I always say, sir. Treat 'em firm and—"

"Say, that 'll do you, Baird!" Mr. Plant shouted with altogether undue heat. "You are not here to make comments!"

"Why, I'm sure, sir—" Henry began mildly.

"You're here to work, and, by gad, I'll make you work!" Joseph continued. "Have you got that pavement washed? All right. Take back the pail and the mop and then go out to the ice-house and cut the day's supply. I'll see that you do it!"

He bounced to his feet and slapped the magazine to his chair quite viciously. Viciously, too, did he follow upon Henry's very heels as he journeyed, humming irritatingly, to the garage and then to the ice-house. Viciously he smiled as Henry's powerful arms swung out a cake; and he ordered Henry to put it aside and go on digging until he reached the piece that Mr. Plant desired to use that day, down at the bottom of some four or five tons of large cakes.

So that Henry, ever humming, tugged and pulled and shifted ice and shoveled sawdust and ground cork until the beads rolled from his forehead. And pulled and

tugged further! And eventually, it must be admitted, his humming died out and his mocking smile faded away.

It was not the work itself, of course; it was the idea of Joe Plant standing there and snapping his ridiculous orders. Henry paused briefly as he extracted the last cake and considered ending the whole affair by wringing Mr. Plant's neck. Joseph happened to be glancing over his own outrageous pledge just then, so that Henry groaned internally and dragged the young floe to the kitchen.

At some remote antebellum time the woodpile had toppled over. Mr. Plant, considering it with an easy smile when Henry returned, decided that it must be repiled this morning. Coolly and with no abuse he insisted on a little more speed, too, and suggested that Henry possibly was not strong enough for his job, after all, causing Henry to pause again and then drag the harder at the logs.

The sun was high when he had finished. In the nature of things Plant would have to pause for luncheon pretty soon; but it seemed that he had no idea of permitting Henry to pause just then.

"That's a fair enough job, Baird," he said evenly. "You'll trim the north hedge next."

"Where is it?" Henry asked grimly.

"Go right through the trees beyond the garage. Pick up the shears on your way. I shall be down shortly to see how you're getting on."

He pointed and waited for Henry to go, and Henry went. His smile had left permanently by this time. He had fancied himself strong enough to carry off the whole affair with a laugh, but he was beginning to doubt his strength. Plant's business connections, apparently, needed none of his attention:

he would be here day and night to hound Henry Baird.

Nor was he working out vengeance for any mere finger-snapping alone, as Henry realized more and more fully. The mean little thing that passed for a soul in Joseph Plant was urging him on to repay Henry for ever having found favor in Evelyn's eyes; it was his happy purpose to drag Henry in the dirt before her, back and forth and back and forth.

Henry paused at the hedge and laughed wildly. His teeth were grinding like millstones; his hands were twitching. He bit off the laugh and glared at the hedge as if yearning to tear it up by the roots. Was he capable of going through with two weeks of it? He gripped himself and stared at the soft ground.

Apparently he was, since he had no choice in the matter. If a mere legal contract had existed between himself and Joseph, he would have stepped across the hedge then and there and started for freedom. Henry, however, had forged for himself bonds less palpable than air and rather stronger than steel.

And yet—it was all so infernally absurd. Not more absurd than the pledge he himself had given to the holder of ticket No. 137, of course, but— Henry listened. It was evident that Joseph meant to watch his every waking moment, for steps were approaching. They were coming from the other side of the hedge, though, he noted now—soft, quick steps accompanied by a blithely whistled tune.

Their owner was passing the two or three larger bushes just below Henry; and then their owner was by them and had stopped short; and Henry found himself face to face with the jaunty, immaculate, self-confident Mr. Alan Moss!

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 Classiest Love Farce of the Season!

ONE HONEST TEAR

BY ROBERT SHANNON

IN NEXT WEEK'S ALL-STORY

Play Persistence

by

Samuel G. Camp



LISTEN. My advice to any young guy just startin' out in the well-known world is to play persistence—to win! They is nothin' like stayin' with it—whatever it is. Never say die! Get me? Genius is one per cent brains, or somethin', and ninety-nine per cent hard work—though who wants to be a genius? Say nothin' and saw wood. Keep everlastin'ly at it! They is no such word as—but you get the idea. All that sorta stuff.

Old stuff? To be sure! But I'll say they is somethin' in it!

For instance—well, look at me! To begin where most stories leave off, no doubt outa respect to the reader's feelin's, I marries into the profession. You know what I mean. They is only one regular honest-to-goodness profession; and which is the theatrical.

I'll admit that the time she marries me the world is apparently in no great danger of bein' set on fire by the wife's abilities as a actress; but she has everythin'—includin' the old ambish—and no doubt, in time, she would of went far; in fact, just about then she was considerin' seein' Australia first with a number three company.

But, however that may be, doubtless the missus ruins a great career when she marries me. She admits it herself. And so do I. In fact, here, at last, is one thing upon which I and the missus agrees perfectly;

except—well, *whose?* But that, of course, is a mere detail.

At any rate, as soon as I and the wife settles down and begins livin' happily, or thereabouts, ever, or occasionally, afterwards, the missus begins it. Well, at that, I guess it was only natural. Once this here stage stuff gets into the blood, it's all off. The victim never recovers.

However, in the wife's case, it is interestin' to note, as the guy says, that the disease breaks out in a brand-new form. I wouldn't say, but the chances is they wasn't nothin' like it ever previously known to science.

In a word, the wife, instead of makin' up her mind to return to the, now, foot-lights, with my consent, of course—or without it—instead of anythin' like that, the missus breaks it gently to me where she wishes I would break into the great theatrical game myself! Can y' beat it? And not only that, but she adds that she won't never rest satisfied until I have done that same little thing.

And maybe you know what havin' your wife not never rest satisfied is like.

Well, of course, I says she must be crazy; and who does she think I am? It's a laugh! But the wife says I don't get her. She knows perfectly well that I haven't got the brains nor the intelligence, nor the looks nor nothin' to be a success

as a actor—she agrees with me perfectly! What she means is, she wants me to bust into the dramatic world as a, now, producer; or, say, a manager—that's it—the manager of a regular first-class theater playin' nothin' but the very highest class productions!

Oh, boy! Is that all? I asks her. She says it is; and what's more I needn't act like she had asked me to perform the impossible, because any guy, even with no more ability than I, but with any kind of ambition and, now, persistence, could put it over. And she will certainly never rest satisfied until I do.

Well, in a word, I falls for it—for two reasons. In the first place, "never" is a good long time; and besides, though I don't admit it to the wife, I am perfectly willin' to be the manager of a first-class theater playin' nothin' but the very highest class productions, as the missus says. I'll say I am! In fact, I have been willin' for some time.

Listen! It's a curious thing, but—d'ye know?—when the missus pulls that manager stuff she hits on my one ambition! And if I do say it myself, I don't know of nobody which is more qualified to be the manager of a regular first-class theater than yours as ever.

Of course, I haven't never worked at it, so to speak; but I'll tell the world fair if I had saved every dollar which I have blowed at the ticket offices, I would now own a little theater of my own. On the level, they is nothin' about the, now, show business, and which may be learned from the front, as the sayin' is, which I don't know. And as for the rest—well, I'll admit freely that I don't know no more about it than Belasco. Not a thing!

Still, though I am certainly strong for this manager thing, somehow it hadn't never occurred to me to do anythin' about it till—well, until the missus says she won't never rest satisfied till I've put it over. About then I gets right down to brass tacks and starts in to look the situation over.

And—well, the upshot of it is, at the end of six months or so, it begins to look like in lookin' the situation over I had overlooked the situation. Anyways, I'll

say I am still without a situation as the manager of a regular first-class theater playin' nothin' but the very highest class productions.

In fact, it would seem that every theater in the world already has a manager, and every one of these managers is givin' all sorts of satisfaction, and so, of course, nobody need apply. So it surely looks like I am up against one tough proposition, and a fine, large chance of becomin' manager of a regular first-class theater playin' nothin' but the very highest class productions!

In the mean time, of course, I reports to the missus from time to time; and she continues to never rest satisfied right along. In fact, I'll say I never seen nobody rest more unsatisfied for the same length of time. She is surely good at it! And she also continues to remark that if I had any kind of ambition and, now, persistence, it would certainly seem as if I could land somethin' somewhere. But, of course, if I am satisfied with the kind o' work I am doin' now, why, very well. But she tells the world—and so forth and *et cetera*.

It's a great life!

Well, things is only slightly worse than I have described them when one mornin' the missus beats me to the paper; and, after givin' the day's bargains the once-over, and passin' up the war news at a glance, she turns to the dramatic news, and—

"Jim! Listen!" she fires at me. "They's gonna be a new theater in town!"

"What d'ye know about that?" I says. "Where?"

"Corner of Main and Russell," she says. "And they're startin' construction to-day!"

"I know the place," I says. "I wonder is it gonna be a regular first-class theater, playin' nothin' but the very highest class productions? Who's puttin' it up?"

"It doesn't say," she says. "It says the owner's name has not been, now, divulged."

"Whatever that is," I says. "So they're keepin' it dark, eh? Well, believe me, I'm gonna look into this little thing! It's the chance of a lifetime! The only theater in the world without a manager!

Of course, it ain't built yet, but opportunity waits for no—"

"Here's your hat!" says the missus.

I grabs the hat and takes it on the lam for the corner of Main and Russell. A construction company has put up its sign on the premises, and they is a bunch of wops with a Irish boss startin' to break ground. I asks the boss does he knew where the money's comin' from, and he says sure, from the construction company.

I notes the address and beats it for there. Arrivin' there I cross-examine a officer of the company, and he says I can search him who is the owner and proprietor of this here new theater—the deal is bein' handled by a firm of lawyers.

I gets these law-shark's address and makes it in nothin'. And in about one and a half minutes they gives me the gate includin' no information of any kind.

Can y' beat it? The chance of my young life to get right in on the ground floor of this here brand-new theatrical project and grab off that manager's job, and not a thing stirrin'! I'll say it would certainly worse than baffle you!

But, anyways, leavin' the law joint by request, as you might almost say, I steers for my own place of business; in the mean time wonderin' what will I tell the missus, because now, if ever, she certainly has somethin' to rest good and unsatisfied about, and pullin' a lot of other deep stuff, all of which gets me nowheres. Pretty soon I seen a mob gathered in front of a newspaper buildin', and so I figure where they is some big news from the front, and they have put out a bulletin, and so I crosses the street to see what's doin'.

Well, they is such a crowd that nobody except the front rows can read the news, and the rest of the bunch, like always, is all tryin' to push through to where they can see somethin'; and so—well, I seen where they wasn't no use of tryin' to find out what it's all about, and besides, it will all be in the paper later on, and so I am on the point of leavin' when somethin' starts.

It seems somebody has been pushed and, now, resented it out loud; and, one word leadin' to another, a ring forms itself around the, now, principals, and the war is

on! I changes my mind about leavin', and immediately goes to the front. It looks like they is somethin' gonna come off that is right in my line of business.

And somethin' did. At that, I would of missed it if I had been one second later in arrivin' at the ringside, because this here brawl is surely one of the shortest on record. In fact, it consists of one blow, which is delivered by a little guy that is clearly a, now, legitimate lightweight, and received by a human box-car, a guy that could give the well-known heavy-weight champion fifty pounds and shade him by a hundred, and which immediately kisses the pavement and lays there dead to the universe!

"Oh, boy!" exclaims a innocent bystander. "Considerable punch!"

"Nine, ten, and—Battlin' Jack-the-Giant-Killer wins by the well-known K. O. route!" I announces.

And whilst the winner stands there nursin' his mitt and surveyin' his deadly work with a air of, now, surprise, I advances, and layin' a hand upon his shoulder, I says:

"Just a moment, please! I would have a word with you. Let's—"

"What's this?" he bristles. "A pinch?"

"Be calm, Camilla," I hastens to assure him. "It is nothin' of the sort! It's business!"

"What—say!" he says, lookin' at his victim which is now beginnin' to exhibit signs of slowly returnin' health. "What's the matter with that guy?"

"What's—you hit him!" I informs him.

"Yeh," he admits. "But is that all?"

"All!" I exclaim. "All! Believe me, kid, it was enough! And I'll tell the world fair, boy, if you got a few more of them dreamland things left in your system, and if you'll listen to me, you're gonna be not only rich, but famous!"

Because—well, of course, y' understand a guy has gotta live, and so, whilst awaitin' the opportunity to crash into the old dramatic league as manager of a regular first-class theater, and so on, I am still doin' business in a slightly different line of the managin' game—of so-called box-fighters, to be exact. And this, now, twenty-two

caliber guy with the punch like one of them French seventy-fives—well, it surely looks to me like right here is my chance to pick a winner!

“Rich and famous!” he parrots. “Lead on!”

So then I leads the way to a place from which, now, everythin’ over two and one-half per cent had then been extracted, and we proceeds to business. If necessary, I would rapidly describe this guy as a very well educated bird which, after doin’ time in a number of different business establishments, for several years, at the end of which he only owes for three weeks’ board and lodgin’, has recently discovered the, now, fallacy of riches—when they belongs to somebody else.

In other words, in this guy’s opinion, money ain’t everythin’ in life—they is one per cent of somethin’ else, whatever it is. Outside of that they ain’t nothin’ much to say except that in or outa the movies, and barrin’ a fresh-laid one-thousand-dollar bill which is in a class by itself—a guy showed me one one day—he is one of the handsomest things on earth. Until a few moments ago he has never in his life struck a good square blow for democracy, and consequently has been unaware of the hidden power within him, as the sayin’ is. And his name is Clarence Howard Carlton—oh, boy!

“We’ll can the Clarence stuff,” I says. “‘Battlin’ Jack’ for yours!”

At any rate, we get together easy enough; and that very day he starts in learnin’ the manly art of assault and batt’ry. They is a few things which he will have to learn before we goes out after the championship; but he will pick them up easy enough—provided he fails to hit the teacher first.

Well, I wises up the missus about the new theater; how the owner is a mystery and everythin’, and just like I had knowed she would from the first, she takes the air from a standin’ start, zooms rapidly upward to within’ a coupla inches of the record for altitude, and holds it for six months.

Y’ understand, we have now reached one of them places where considerable time is

supposed to elapse, as they say on the screen. Durin’ this time the missus continues to remain unsatisfied, or far worse, with a great deal of success. No, on the level, home was never like this!

Work on the new theater buildin’ continues accordin’ to union rules and regulations; but though I tells the missus cheer-o, and I am doin’ everythin’ possible, and showin’ all kinds of persistence and everythin’ in tryin’ to solve the Great Dramatic Mystery, or Who Holds the Ownership?—though I offers to prove to the missus where I have already took part in precisely four fights, in three of which I was trimmed, and all on account of gettin’ too nose about this here new theater project—in spite of everythin’ the missus sticks to it that if I only had a little ambition about me I would go to work and get the necessary facts, *and land that job!*

Happy days!

And all this, y’ understand, is nothin’ but the truth. For one reason or another, probably for advertisin’ purposes, the person or persons which is back of this new theater is keepin’ themselves dark. And you can take it from one in a position to know, they are good at it!

Still, every cloud has its silver linin’, as the weather guy says; and the one bright spot at this time is the way in which, now, Clarence Howard Carlton, the human Greek god, *alias* Battlin’ Jack, starts in to bust up the boxin’ league—and does it! Three weeks after Battlin’ Jack signs on the dotted line, durin’ which time, as a result of tryin’ to teach him the well-known art of boxin’, four guys has went to the hospital, three of them havin’ some kindo’ trouble with their jaw, and the other one sufferin’ with convulsions, I starts him in one of them regular Queensbury things.

Another guy also starts in this same brawl, but defaults in twenty seconds on account of unconsciousness. Four more affairs havin’ ended in a exactly similar manner, though the time varies slightly, Battlin’ Jack crashes into the first division, where he continues to mop up. In a word, it is conceded on all sides that Clarence Howard Carlton, *alias* Battlin’ Jack, is the fightin’ discovery of the age—and if any-

body should ask you what's my middle name, you can tell 'em it's Columbus!

So, all in all, it would look like I should worry. They is a lot of worse jobs than managin' the lightweight champion of everywhere; and, unless somethin' happens, Battlin' Jack will surely cop that old championship. And as for that, I don't know of anythin' that's liable to happen, unless—

Well, I'll admit frankly that I would of felt a lot safer if every time the mail guy drops round Clarence had drawn a couple dozen less of them little pink things all smelled up with talcum powder and other, now, exotic scents, and which is known on the, now, Columbia circuit and elsewhere as mash notes.

D'you get me? I'm layin' the world at large sixty to one that sooner or later this bird's fatal beauty is gonna make trouble—serious trouble—for somebody. And I guess I know who. In fact, I *know* I know who!

And—well, I win! And I'll say, too, that I didn't make no error when I picks the guy which is headed for trouble! But when it comes, I'll tell the world fair I am a lot worse than troubled. I am dumfounded!

He springs it on me one mornin' shortly after I and the missus has had another fairly hot session on the subject of, now, persistence. To tell the truth, I'm hangin' on the ropes when I leaves the missus; and when Clarence hands me this I takes the count. I'll say it's the limit!

Well, he wasn't in no condition to listen to reason, anyways; and so maybe it was just as well that I didn't try to put up no argument. I simply leaves him go his way, after wishin' him joy. And then I staggers to a couch and collapses.

But after a little I begin to come out of it and get back some of the old fightin' spirit; shortly I'm tellin' the world fair I'll never leave him get away with it without a battle; and then I am discovered sittin' on the edge of the couch, with my head in my hands, pullin' some of the deepest stuff on record.

Well, after a while I gets it. Maybe if I hadn't been takin' in so many movies

lately in order to save the missus's life, because if I had stayed home she would of talked herself to death—maybe if it wasn't for seein' all them photo-plays I might of doped out somethin' original.

As it was—not a chance! At that, though they isn't nothin' new or startlin' about the plan I finally hits on; I'll say it's a winner!

So then I immediately looks up Clarence and, after gettin' what information I need, under the, now, guise of askin' him to reconsider, I starts on a still hunt for a scout by the name of Lefty Lewis. If Lefty is outa jail I know where I had ought to find him, about this time of day, in one of three places, each of which is a, now, public menace.

Well, I finds Lefty in the second one of them places—him and three of his pals—and I wanna say right here and now that this gang is no friends of mine!—and 'comin' to the point at once, I inquires of Lefty if him and his little pals has anythin' particular on for this very evenin'.

Well, Lefty says that him and his little playmates was just considerin' makin' a friendly call on a old and feeble woman which lives all alone by herself, and which is known to have a bunch of dough hid in the mattress, though, of course, that is neither here nor there. The point is—

“This here aged and feeble dame needs somebody to cheer her up,” I says. “I get you. And as for that dough bein' neither here nor there, believe me, if it's there it will soon be here.”

However, Lefty says, if I am wise to somethin', why, maybe—

“Listen,” I says. “You know this bird, Battlin' Jack, that I've been pointin' for the championship. Well, listen, Lefty! I go to work and get this guy all signed up and everythin' with Kayo Smith, and which as you well know is runner-up to the champion—and so here is where we wins our chance at the champ—d'ye get it?—and what d'ye know? It ain't two hours ago he springs it on me. He's gonna get married!”

“All these here pugs is crazy,” says Lefty. “It's gettin' hit around the bean so much. But what of it?”

"What of it!" I howls. "Nothin', only he notifies me once and for all where he's through with the fightin' game! Just like that! Get me? The dame won't stand for it!"

"T'ell you say!" says Lefty. "What d'ye know about that? Well, I'll say it's tough; but, believe me, Jim, old kid, that settles it! These here dames—who is she?"

"She's in the chorus of the 'Oh, Jane!' company, which is playin' the Majestic," I says.

"One of them stage dames, huh?" says Lefty.

"Yeh," I says. "But now listen! Here's the dope. To-night Clarence—Battlin' Jack is givin' one of them farewell suppers to a bunch of his pals at the, now, Greenfield Inn. You know the place. It's maybe a dozen miles or so outside the city."

"I stopped there once—till the dog barked," says Lefty.

"And listen!" I says. "The weddin' is set for day after to-morrow; a coupla days later the Oh, Jane! outfit hits the pike for Chicago and points West; and this here dame is gonna stick till the company goes on the road—after which she and the Battler starts on their honeymoon.

"But look! Suppose anythin' was to happen to, now, sorta prevent— Say! Suppose the Battler was to kinda, now, mysteriously disappear—and stay so till it's time for the Oh, Jane! push to leave town: ain't it reasonable to suppose that this here dame trails right along with the bunch?"

"Sure she does," says Lefty. "She's a broken-hearted woman, but she stays with the job."

"You said it," I says.

So then I spills the, now, scenario—which I admit frankly is lifted bodily from the fifth episode of that great serial success "The Murderers of Manhattan," or somethin'—to Lefty. And Lefty says unless he is all wrong it will work. I then inquires as to what Lefty considers a reasonable price for this here little job. He names it.

Oh, boy!

"Listen!" I says. "You got me wrong.

I ain't hirin' you to exterminate the Kaiser! Just a simple little job of kid—"

"Where d'ye get that stuff?" Lefty butts in. "Ain't us fellas gotta live? Well, the price of, now, kidnarin' has went up like everythin' else!"

But anyways, we gets together at last; and after warnin' Lefty where this here is a strictly strong-arm job, and that, like it says in Sullivan County, no shootin' is allowed, I makes a appointment for the evenin', and goes away from there.

Now about six miles outa the city, on the road to the, now, Greenfield Inn, they is a place where a side road crosses the main turnpike. And that night—which like I have figured on is moonlight—a long, low, black motor-car, like in all these here thrillers, might of been observed standin' in the byroad just off the main highway.

The occupants, a low-life sinister appearin' crew, countin' me and Lefty, and the showfer, and Lefty's three little pals, is six in number. One of them, which occupies the front seat with the showfer, has a black handkerchief tied around the lower part of his face. I'll leave you guess which one. Anyways, I'll say it makes smokin' difficult. The others wears their face naked; they are used to this sorta thing, and they should worry.

"Now listen," I says to the showfer. "Let's get this thing straight. When the car shows up—"

"Listen," butts in Lefty. "Are you sure you can tell the right car? Believe me, we don't wanna have to hold up more than eight or nine cars before gettin' the right one—it would get monotonous; and besides, somethin' might happen. Somebody might object."

"Ain't I already told you a dozen times?" I retorts. "From where we're sittin' here I could tell that car a mile off! And the Battler tells me in so many words that he's gonna drive out to the inn to-night with a particular friend of his that owns the car—and they won't be nobody else along. And this guy drives a white Japalac eight—d'ye get it? A Japalac eight, tourin' model, painted white. Why, say! In this here moonlight that white car will show up like a battle-ship!"

"All right," says Lefty. "It's up to you! But get this! You can't expect me and my pals to work for nothin'; and if any mistakes is made, all additional hold-ups comes extra!"

Can y' beat it?

But anyways, I then goes on to tell the showfer that when I gives him the office he is to drive out onto the turnpike and stop the car so as to block the road—like as if our car was stalled. Then he is to get out and start lookin' at the engine or somethin'; and—in the mean time the Japalac eight, containin' the Battler and friend, will of came up and stopped near by, and then it is up to Lefty and his gang to get busy. "Leave it to me!" says Lefty.

"And," I concludes, "after we have grabbed off the Battler and is on our way back to the city, don't nobody address me by name nor any other ways. With this here camouflage over my face, and my coat collar turned up, and everythin', he won't never recognize me. But if he ever does—good night! It's all off! And, believe me, boys, that bird can *hit!*"

"And no shootin' allowed," moans Lefty.

Well, that about completes the plans for the evenin's entertainment; except that Lefty is wise to a place where, he says, the Battler can be kept comfortable, as well as dark, till this here lady of the, now, ensemble, has departed for the great metropolis of the West. By that time the Battler will of come to his senses; and so really I am doin' him a great favor, and in time he will thank me for it. These stage dames—but—well, of course, the missus—

But, anyways, we haven't sat there more than a coupla weeks, like it seems, when I hear a motor off in the distance; pretty soon we seen the glare of the headlights before the car rounds a turn; then the lights themselves; and then—

"Let's go!" I says.

We moves out on to the turnpike, and—well, I must of misjudged the distance or the speed of that Japalac eight, or somethin', because, anyways, they piles into us! I left the car by way of the wind-shield, takin' it with me for reference, and after 'planin' gracefully through some twenty or

thirty feet of ordinary atmosphere, somethin' goes wrong with the, now, fuselage, or somethin', and I crashes heavily on my face in a ditch which is floored with the hardest rocks in the world, and lined with barbed wire—the kind with extra long barbs like was used in the war.

Unfortunately, on account of landin' on my head, I fails to lose consciousness. I would certainly of preferred it, because it surely feels like three of my legs is broke, or else one of them in three places—I ain't sure which.

Anyways, after a while I manages to stand up and, now, peer over the edge of the ditch. Oh, boy! The first thing I seen was a *yella* Japalac eight! D'ye get it? And the next thing I lays eyes on is the three biggest guys in the world puttin' the finishin' touches on Lefty and the bunch!

And I might just as well admit right here as well as anywheres else that I made a bad mistake when I picked that *yella* car for a white one—though, of course, the moonlight was to blame for that. But I made a worse mistake when I fails to inquire—as to just who the Battler was to entertain that night at the Greenfield Inn.

As a matter of fact the Battler had invited every well-known fighter in the universe. And listen! That *yella* car carries the three leaders in the heavy-weight division! And outa all the cars in the world, I chooses that one to pick on! Can y' beat it?

Anyways, one glance or two and I realize right away where this is a bum night for the grand old sport of kidnapin'. The wind, or maybe the moon—anyways, *somethin'* is wrong! Somehow I feels it right in my bones—which I seem to have more of than usual, and all of them advertisin' the fact that they are present—that I ain't gonna have no luck. And I fades.

I makes two miles on one leg. Then a livery car bound for the city comes along, and I tells the guy which hospital I wanna go to, and he drops me there. The doc looks me over and says I got a coupla bad sprains, but nothin' serious. A coupla days' attention and I'll be all right. Nothin' serious!

Noth—but let it go. Anyways, I concludes the day's activities by phonin' the missus where I am, and I have been in a, now, slight motor accident, but nothin' serious. And if she wishes to view the remains to come round in the mornin'; just now what the victim needs most is—rest.

But listen. Next mornin' Clarence, *alias* Battlin' Jack, beats the missus to it. He says he phoned the house, and the missus directs him here. And after inquirin' about my health and prosperity, and so forth, he says:

"Listen, Jim! Maybe I've got some news for you. Now, what d'ye know about this? The, now, lady I'm engaged to, y' know—well' she's been puttin' somethin' over on me. Y' know, I thought all the while that her stage name was her real one, and that she's workin' because she needs the money, and everythin', just like all the rest of us. But instead of that, she's only workin' for the experience; because some day she's gonna be a great actress, and—listen, Jim! Her father—"

"What's this?" I says. "A movie? But go on. What about the old man?"

"He lives right here in this man's town," says Clarence. "And he has lately made a coupla more fortunes in stocks; and—listen, Jim!"

"I am," I says.

"He's the guy that's back of the new theater!" Clarence fires at me.

I'm outa bed in one jump and yellin' for my clothes.

"Take it easy!" says the Battler. "They ain't nothin' to get excited about! It's all settled. Get me? Don't I owe you somethin' for leavin' you flat like this? And listen! Ain't I heard you beefin' this last six months about landin' that manager's job?"

"I'll say I have! And—well, I and the old gentleman hits it off first rate right off the bat; and—get me, Jim? You get the job!"

"Oh, boy!" I says. "And I come near—but wait, kid, can you guarantee that this is gonna be a regular first-class theater, playin' nothin' but the very highest class productions?"

"Certainly," says Clarence.

"Very well, then," I says. "I accept."

Shortly after Clarence leaves, bearin' my best wishes and congratulations, and here's luck to him and his blushin' bride, and everythin' else I can think of—shortly afterward the missus blows in.

Well, I springs the glad news; and after the fireworks and everythin' is over—

"Jim," says the missus, "didn't I say right along that if you only had a little ambition and, now, persistence, you could put it over?"

"You surely did," I says. "You surely did—right along!"

But if she only knew!



IN JUNE

BY VIOLA BROTHERS SHORE

I COULD not say
 If your eyes were gray—
 I never knew your name—
 Nor where you went
 When the night was spent
 Nor whence it was you came.
 But once when the moon
 Was full, in June,
 She called my youth into flower—
 And something in you
 Called to me, too—
 And I loved you for an hour.

Fires Rekindled

by Julian Hawthorne

JULIAN HAWTHORNE'S genius strikes from a somewhat different angle than that of his illustrious father, Nathanael; but those who have read his "The Cosmic Courtship" (ALL-STORY WEEKLY, November 24 to December 15, 1917), or that amazing "different" story, "Absolute Evil" (April 13, 1918), must acknowledge that it is none the less genius of a high order. In the present story the author, in our opinion, has surpassed himself in the subtle delicacy of his conception and the vivid charm of his style. It is not a story for the stolid realist, but to those who are "seeking, that they may find," it will be a delight.

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

IN the spring of 1918 I succeeded (with some difficulty) in securing passage to London on a private errand of my own. Not that the war of the nations against Germany had not deeply and painfully stirred me: I had offered myself for service, but owing to some obscure affection of the nerves, not outwardly noticeable, I had been rejected. So far as I, personally, was concerned, I was resigned, for it was the spiritual aspects of the struggle that had chiefly engaged me, and I was never much of a fighter.

During more than a year past I had been collecting materials for a biography of a certain great-granduncle of mine—Captain Lionel Heathcote—who had been distinguished, a century before, as a soldier and diplomatist. But I had found the data covering one period of his career to be scant, or missing: yet this very period—about a twelvemonth—seemed to be of special importance, for, whereas, up till then, he had been singularly successful in his undertakings, and stood at the threshold of a brilliant diplomatic future, he then suddenly abandoned his prospects and sank into obscurity. None of the letters and other documents which I had assembled explained the mystery.

It now occurred to me that the Library of the British Museum might contain something bearing upon the subject. Captain Heathcote, at the date in question, was about thirty-five years of age: he had been sent to London by President Monroe to assist our Minister at the Court of St. James (Mr. Richard Rush) in unraveling a dispute between Great Britain and this country over the execution of an alleged British spy, Ambrister, during the Seminole War: the captain having been personally present at the execution, which had been ordered by General Andrew Jackson. His mission had been signally successful: not only did he place Mr. Rush under great obligations to him, but he won the personal liking of the British Premier, Lord Canning. He was

a handsome, dashing young soldier, with a romantic and adventurous life behind him, and was now evincing intellectual endowments of a high order; the best society of London opened its doors to him; he was accredited with having averted the peril of another war between the mother country and our own; there was almost no distinction to which he might not aspire.

What could have induced a youth so fortunate, gifted and ambitious to put aside the cup that was held brimming to his lips?

It was in the hope of solving this enigma that I embarked on my journey to London—the first that I had undertaken beyond the boundaries of my native land. My only sister, Joan, had some years before married a British officer, Major Philip Dalrymple, was residing in London, and would guide my first footsteps there.

It may be proper to mention that I am now approaching forty years of age, have always been of a studious turn, and, after leaving the university, took a post-graduate course in mental science and religious philosophy; but this left my mind unsettled, and I took up history and biography, in the hope of arriving at a spiritual interpretation of events and of the actors in them. I published a few monographs, which were kindly received but not widely read. Finally, the figure of my problematic ancestor appealed to me as a promising theme, and I had become singularly interested in it.

The following narrative consists substantially of the diary, or journal, which I kept during my London sojourn. That sojourn resulted in unexpected and strange developments, concerning the significance of which I shall leave the reader to form his own conclusions.

The reader is now qualified to proceed.

JOHN HEATHCOTE.

CHAPTER I.

E. A. A.

AFTER ten days of uneasy experiences on the Atlantic, I resume this journal. This is written at my new lodgings, 22 Lower Seymour Street, London.

Joan met me at the Charing Cross Station on my arrival. What a handsome woman! I hadn't seen her since her marriage. Were I ever to marry (which is absurd!) it would be with one of her type—brunette, dignified, sensitive, gentle. We had been all our lives affectionate chums, and the ominous posture of affairs in France seemed to unite us more than ever.

We met this morning by appointment to seek lodgings for me, and this apartment is the first one we examined. The house is a small and old one of darkened brick, in a respectable, but not fashionable, quarter of the city. The owner is a widow, respectable and antique—Mrs. Blodgett. The house, she told us, had been in possession of her family for more than one hundred years, and the upper floor had always been let to lodgers. "Genteel folks always, and some of 'em famous," she observed. A long

row of black-bound books on a shelf in her sitting-room turned out to be family archives—in fact, account-books which she and her predecessors had kept of business dealings with their lodgers! How odd and un-American!

The old lady excused herself from going up-stairs with us to the vacant apartment: "I'm a good bit heavier than what I was forty years ago, and goin' up-stairs catches me in the back!" Rosy, rotund and wrinkled she is, in white cap and apron and black dress—sacred to the memory of a spouse who died "back in the eighties!" So Joan and I went up the dark little carpeted staircase and entered the room by a door on the left of the landing.

As I crossed the threshold, and almost before casting my eyes over the room, I had a singular sensation, on which I am disposed to dwell a little.

"But I know this place perfectly well!" I exclaimed to myself, but audibly.

"Considering this is your first visit to London," remarked Joan, smiling, "you lose no time in feeling at home!"

I smiled, too. "Nevertheless, our place at home isn't more familiar."

"That 'been-here-before feeling'!" she rejoined. "Isn't there some psychological or physiological explanation of it?"

Without replying I sat down in a big, old easy chair covered with worn and patched black leather, springless, but still comfortable.

"I've sat in this chair times out of mind," I said; and I was about to add—"with a beautiful woman in my lap!" but checked myself. What had come over me?

In the partition opposite the front windows there were two doors; between them a dark oak bookcase, reaching to the ceiling, the shelves filled with dusty old volumes. The wall-paper was dull-green, faded by time to quite a fashionable shade. In the corner of the room to the right, next the door on that side, hung in a tarnished frame an ancient lithographed portrait, too dim for its subject to be discernible at my distance. At the other end of the room, near the other door, stood a massive table, covered with a thick cloth of a yellowish color.

"Joan," said I, "let us try an experiment. Begin with that portrait over there: unless I mistake, it's of the Prince Regent, afterward George IV, and down in the left-hand corner his signature is written, with something added—'My respectful admiration,' I think!"

With an amused laugh my sister stepped over to the corner. Her first careless look at the portrait became close and interested.

"I declare, John, you're right!" she said at last, turning round to me in perplexity. "It is the prince, and his signature, too: the sentence is so faded I can't quite make it out! But what does this mean?"

"I don't know! The wall-paper is different, though it used to be green, too, but with some sort of arabesque pattern in yellow on it. But now take a look at those books. I can name two of them, at least—'Keats's Endymion' and 'Moore's Irish Melodies.'"

She stared at me, with a wrinkle between her brows, and then slowly approached the bookcase. "The titles on the backs of most of them are almost illegible," she murmured. "Oh, here!" she muttered after a moment, taking out one of the volumes and

opening it at the title-page. "This is witchcraft!" she added, meeting my eyes in dismay.

"Is it the 'Endymion'?"

"No, but it's 'Moore's Melodies'! John, you came here this morning, before I met you!"

"I certainly did not! You know yourself I hadn't finished dressing when you arrived." I got up and came to the bookcase. "And here's the other book," I said, pulling it out and showing it to her. "Now listen while I describe what's behind those doors!"

"I wouldn't dare open them!" she said. "You frighten me!"

"I feel a little terrified myself," I replied, "but there's a very agreeable vibration here, for all that! I don't believe in reincarnation, and the theory about nonsimultaneous action of the two lobes of the brain is a rather desperate guess. But," I continued, pointing to the door beside the portrait, "the kitchen is in there, with the sink on the right, where I've often helped the girl wash up the dishes"—I opened the door and we looked in and confirmed my assertion—"but this is the door of the bedroom, with which I am better acquainted." I laid a hand on the door-knob.

"Don't, John!" entreated Joan. "If you do, I'm going to *pray* that you'll be disappointed!"

"It's too late! Here's what we shall see: On the left there'll be a window, and beside it a dressing-table built into the wall—quite an unusual construction. Right in front of us there will be a large alcove, half as big as the rest of the room, with another window at the end of it. It looks out into the area, where a young lime-tree is growing. In the alcove is the bed, an old-fashioned four-poster with curtains. Shall I tell you any more?"

"Open the door!" said Joan recklessly.

I did so. The fixed dressing-table had been newly upholstered with blue and white dimity, and the curtains had been removed from the bed—there was no other variation from my description. I walked over to the window in the alcove.

"There's the lime-tree," I observed, "only it's ever so much bigger than I re-

member it. It's taller than the house now; it used to be hardly as high as this window-sill."

As I stood looking down into the area I was visited by another perception—or reminiscence.

"This window, you notice," I said to my sister, "is fitted with folding-shutters, solid panels, in the style of three generations ago. There are three panels. I am going to show you, in the center panel, some initials cut into the wood. I cut them myself, one autumn morning, with the sun falling in over my shoulder, as it does now. There are five letters—three above and two just below. The top ones are E. A. A.; the under ones, J. H. Are you ready?"

"I don't believe it!" Joan exclaimed.

I pulled open the shutter. There, precisely, were the initials!

"Let us get out of this house at once!" said Joan, catching me by the arm and trying to draw me away.

"By no means. Here I stay as long as I'm in London. I've never liked any rooms so well. As you say, I'm at home here! Oh, here, at last, is a discrepancy!"

I had been scrutinizing the letters, and I now pointed to the two last.

"That seems to be an L instead of a J," I said. "The tail is on the right instead of on the left."

"There, you see!" cried my sister triumphantly, "that disproves the whole thing!"

"Wait a moment—I can explain it," I returned after a moment's thought. "Don't you remember, when we were little, father and mother used to call me 'Lionel'? But I wasn't christened till I was eight or nine years old, and then they decided to name me after our grandfather, John. Why, you used to call me Lionel half the time!"

Joan admitted this reluctantly. "But what of that?" she added. "You were not here when you were eight or nine years old, or any other time, and there are plenty of people whose initials are L. H. Besides, who is E. A. A.?"

"I've been trying to think. It seems just on the tip of my tongue, but it won't come off. But I know she was a woman—she is, maybe!—for when was all this?"

* "The letters have been there for ages. They've been painted over scores of times; and that tree must be at least a hundred years old. My dear, it's nothing but a string of coincidences—lucky guesses! Don't let us think any more about it! It gives me a most uncomfortable feeling. Please don't stay here—I sha'n't have a moment's peace!"

But I said that a string of guesses or coincidences was no just cause for uneasiness. "I feel a peculiarly agreeable influence here: I've made up my mind to lease the apartment for a year, and in order to settle the matter, I shall pay Mrs. Blodgett in advance! Now I'll go back to the hotel and have my things sent over here. I can't thank you enough for guiding me here! Remember, you've invited me to dine with you to-morrow. From what I'm told, a dinner isn't too easy to get in London nowadays!"

Joan sighed. "Nor breakfast nor lunch, either! I know you'll starve to death, or be carried off by evil spirits! You must arrange with Mrs. Blodgett to give you your meals here; you have a kitchen, at any rate! Let's go down and talk to her!"

Mrs. Blodgett readily agreed to ration me, observing that her maid-of-all-work, Kittie, was "a cook born and bred"; so that, at any rate, the radical simplicity of my habitual diet would present no difficulties. In the back of my mind, while we talked, was an undefined notion that I had been before served, in that house, by another skilful cook; but her name had not been Kittie, nor had she anything of Kittie's amiable and blowzy aspect. Possibly this may have prompted my interjecting an inquiry, made, however, in a tone becomingly playful, as to whether the house, like other good old English houses I had heard of, enjoyed the reputation of being haunted?

Good Mrs. Blodgett seemed a little indignant.

"Never nothin' of that sort, sir!" she asseverated. "Me nor my forebears has never had no such complaints, but always expresses 'emselves perfectly satisfied!"

"I'm sure I shall be satisfied," I assured her conciliatingly; "and if the ghost were a nice one I shouldn't complain."

The negotiations thus happily concluded, Joan and I parted, she going to her cottage in St. John's Wood and I to wind up my affairs at my hotel. I was more impatient to get established in my lodgings than I allowed my sister to think. Now that I am here, I am conscious of a secret, inexplicable delight!

It had pleased me to know that, so far as my landlady's word could be trusted, I had the monopoly of whatever "haunting" could be predicated of the house. I should have felt jealous of any participant in the occult sensations I had experienced. The influence, vibration, or whatever it may be termed, which had met me in the rooms, and had been so singularly accredited by the fulfilment of my various little surmises—especially in the really remarkable case of the initials—had been poignantly inviting and, so to say, caressing! It was personal, sweetly familiar, and, above all, distinctly sexual or feminine!

It is upon me now more powerfully than ever!

I can compare the sensation only with that of a lover who should visit the apartment of his beloved mistress. Everything speaks of her: traces of her touch, her presence, are on all sides. She seems to be moving about in the bedroom, preparing herself to go with me to some little festival. I can almost hear her humming snatches of a lightsome song. At this moment I can almost believe she is standing at my shoulder! And yet I am alone, the door is locked, and I am perfectly aware that all this is—

I was going to write "nonsense," but I won't do it! It is simply something that is entirely unprecedented in my experience, and that I don't understand.

Some years ago I was induced by an open mind, or by curiosity, to investigate occult phenomena, and to find out whether I were "suggestible" in that direction. Hypnotism, clairvoyance, telepathy, spiritualism, Buddhism, psychometry, and other cults—I explored them all, and with a willingness to be convinced rather than the contrary. But my results were negative; nothing seized me; I felt no assurance of an authentic revelation. Phenomena for which

I couldn't account did take place, but they aroused no emotion deeper than curiosity, and not much even of that. Some obscure physiological—perhaps pathological—force seemed to be at the base of them all, and the minds of the faithful didn't strike me as of an elevated order. The further I delved the less of spirit did I seem to find. At last I fell away, feeling that I was wasting time.

Another thing bearing on the present situation is the fact that I have never known or been attracted by women, with the exception, of course, of my mother and sister. This doesn't mean that I am insensible to woman—the *ewig weibliche*—in the abstract. I'm a man, and don't consider myself a sexual freak! But my health was delicate in my youth, and my habits secluded and studious. My father died when I was a child, and my mother, Joan, and I lived in a place somewhat removed from ordinary social access. I loved, and love, beauty, feminine or other, but as a spectator. I can feel the allurements of woman in poetry and art, but I was never subject to any personal attraction to individual women. And, at my present age, I never expected to be!

Therefore, upon the whole, I should hold myself to be a person as little likely as any one else in the world to be subject to occult influences, or to a personal sexual passion. I am not of that habit or constitution.

And yet, here I am, alone in London, my face flushed and my breathing disturbed by something intensely feminine and personal, which, nevertheless, has no apparent actual existence! Of the verity of the emotion aroused in me there is certainly no question, but for any rational or conceivable grounds for it, I speculate in vain!

No doubt an alienist would call me insane; but I know better!

When I went into her bedroom—our bedroom!—there was an effluence there, a fragrance, not of flowers or of commercial scents, but of *her*—that gave my nerves a delicious shock of anticipation and joy. It was exquisitely individual; and when I struck a match to light the bedroom candle (these ancient conveniences survive in Mrs. Blodgett's establishment), I was near be-

lieving that its light would show her face on the pillow of the bed! It showed the pillow only, but the persuasion of her presence remained.

That persuasion, or conviction, wanes or increases, but upon the whole I think it becomes stronger. It is not, however—so far, at any rate—accompanied by any idea of what she looks like; my imagination—or memory—fails to define her features or form. I feel only that she is utterly lovable, and that I love her; and I can't help believing that I shall know and realize more and more of her as time goes on.

Is this a memory of something that has been, or a premonition of something to come? Or is it independent of past and future? Or is it a hallucination?

It is not a hallucination. Hallucinations deceive the physical senses; but what she communicates to me penetrates to a depth in me far beyond the sphere of sense.

I wish I knew her name! "E. A. A." must be her initials, but what do they stand for? "Exquisite Adorable Angel," perhaps!

It's late—time I was asleep. By the way, I had a message from Joan this afternoon saying that poor Philip's horse had been shot under him, and that he was in a base hospital with a broken leg. She was to cross over to France and go to him to-night, and didn't know when she might be back, so our dinner to-morrow is off. I am grieved for her and for him, but I confess I am relieved on my own account. Fond as I am of my sister, I wish to keep this experience all to myself!

I shall sleep in E. A. A.'s bed to-night!

CHAPTER II.

ECHOES FROM THE PAST.

SEVERAL days—probably a week—since I last wrote here. I am taking small heed of the flight of time. I don't have to. And sometimes, as with hashish eaters, moments and days—or ages!—appear inextricably confounded. The soul has measures of its own.

The weather is fine and soft; my landlady tells me it is often so in London in the

season—that is, during the summer session of parliament. I had a line from Joan that Philip is getting on, but saying nothing of coming back here. It looks as if the crisis of the war was at hand. I may see something of it even in London, though hitherto there has been nothing more than a rather ineffectual attempt to bomb folks in the streets from German Zeppelins. Perhaps the war is but the material analogue of a mighty spiritual change in the world. The glass through which we have seen darkly during so many centuries may be about to dissolve, leaving us face to face with the reality of things!

I've been arranging my work on the biography. I found the librarian, or curator, of the British Museum Library to be a very pleasant gentleman, miraculously conversant with the millions of volumes under his charge, and kind enough to take an interest even in my little investigation. He opines that the old files of the London *Times* and *Morning Post* are likely to afford my best browsing-ground, together with pamphlets, play-bills, and other fugitive scraps thrown off by the world as it revolves; and he can, if necessary, gain me access to state archives of the period.

There are also collections of personal correspondence between persons of more or less importance during the first part of the last century. Working upon material so ample, there is good hope that I shall happen upon something germane to my purpose; my ancestor can hardly have passed through his year in London without leaving some foot-prints on the sands of the time, thickly trodden though they were. His figure and fate engage me more than ever. I have a gratuitous notion that in learning to fathom him, I shall be gaining a better understanding of myself!

It's a mere notion, and not a plausible one. So far as outwardly appears, Captain Heathcote's character, temperament, and life were almost the categorical opposite of my own. But sympathies sometimes run perversely. Just because I can't be and do what he did and was, I take my revenge upon nature by entering imaginatively into his being and doing. Or it may be something a little less obvious than that. It

may be that I am not so much innately incapable of such a career as his, as I am lacking in the circumstances that surrounded him, and in the opportunity that he met and availed of.

I have lived in peaceful times, and have been a near invalid, withdrawn amid books and meditations, with a shrinking from contacts with actualities—especially from aggressive contacts. But vivid narratives of action, peril, and adventure always attract me, and the adventures related of my ancestor very particularly. I seem to feel myself in his saddle as he rides on his headlong escapades; I'm at the tiller of his boat in the storm; I plot in his brain the escape from the Spanish stockade; I fight his duel and kill his man! Anon, I convince the wise and cautious President that Jackson was in the right as to the spy, and I take ship, confidently, for England, pledging myself to conquer the prejudices of the British premier.

Now I plunge, rejoicing, into the splendid tide of London society, its dinners, its balls, its receptions, its great ladies and famous beauties. And all the while I am sitting motionless and mute at my desk, a hermit, a dim-eyed student, an old bachelor!

No doubt heredity is a truth, and personal traits skip a generation or two and crop out afresh, to be repressed or stimulated by conditions, education, customs, accidents. In some remote and double-locked chamber of my subconscious being may abide the germ of qualities that flamed into splendid results in Captain Heathcote. I might have been he. In a sense, I may *be* he! But then ought I not to be able to solve his mystery, even without the help of the British Museum? I fear my relations with him are not quite intimate enough for that! I am an admirer, but not a psychometrist. I can't identify myself with him so closely as to divine his doings out of whole cloth, so to say. Or, if I could, I couldn't summon effrontery enough to pass it off as sober history.

Though, for my own private edification, I might stretch a point!

A romantic, impulsive, audacious young scapegrace he must have been! He was but fifteen when, rebelling against the strait-

ness of existence on the New England homestead, he shipped before the mast on a Salem vessel, bound for the East Indies round the Horn. Stray hints of him came back from Ceylon, Hong-Kong, Sumatra, and the Philippines; by and by he turned up at Panama. He crossed the Isthmus, and in the course of a year or two made his way up through Mexico to Texas, then a Spanish possession. In Mexico City he fought two duels—was wounded in one and killed his man in the other.

About 1812 he was in New Orleans, and there is some basis for the belief that he commanded a privateer in the war with England. There is no doubt that he was in the battle of New Orleans, and by that time was on cordial terms with Jackson—although Jackson was much the elder, the two were kindred spirits. In New Orleans he met the girl whom he married (after a whirlwind courtship, I fancy!) Her given-name was Dolores; her family Spanish. He was now about thirty years old.

Their matrimonial experience was probably far from being tame and uneventful. He must have been a hard man to manage; and she hardly qualified to exercise judicious management. He seems to have been well supplied with money, and treated her generously from that point of view; but their temperaments clashed; they quarreled and made up; he never brought her to New England, but at the time of the Seminole War they were residing in Baltimore, and it was there that she gave birth to a child, which died in infancy while Captain Heathcote was helping Jackson singe the King of Spain's beard in Florida, and tread on the mighty toes of Great Britain. Dolores does not appear afterward in the story. I incline to think she rejoined her family in New Orleans.

And then comes that interval of mystery! And I, exactly a century later, am in London as he was, walk the streets and view the scenes that he knew, and am doing my best to get in touch with him! Outwardly alien from him as the poles, I feel a bond between us that unites us closer than twin-brotherhood! It sounds absurd, and may be pure illusion, but I record my belief for what it's worth.

Something happened to him, right in this neighborhood, that changed him vitally and lastingly. The more I mull over it, the more am I disposed to suspect that some love-adventure was at the bottom of it!

London social morality, under the sway and example of the Regent, was not puritanical. In that society he must have met renowned beauties, and they might be disposed to make a pet of the gallant young American. What more likely than that he lost his heart to one of them? In that case, anything might happen! If the lady of his choice proved less than adamant—and the chances are she would!—discovery and exposure may well have followed.

The English won't stand for an open *esclandre*—if lovers stay under the rose they are not meddled with; but if they emerge they must pay the costs. If the intrigue had not gone too far—if it was stopped, say, on the brink of an elopement—the lady would probably be removed out of harm's way. Had it come to a duel, news of it could hardly have failed to leak out, and the riddle I am puzzling over would have been answered long since. As it is, I grope in thick darkness!

Meanwhile I find the old London newspapers—especially the advertisements—rather fascinating. Here is the life and atmosphere of the time, as if I were back in the era of the "First Gentleman of Europe." In the *Morning Post*, every day, there is a paragraph under the title, "Court Circular." It briefly records the doings of royalty—at least the visible and trivial ones. "The Prince Regent, accompanied by ladies and gentlemen of his *entourage*, walked yesterday on the slopes of Windsor Palace." Where does he walk to-day, and in what company?

Under the heading, "Parliament," we are told that Lord Canning, replying to an interrogatory from the front opposition bench, declared that the posture of the Florida incident had undergone no alteration. This must refer to the Seminole War, and preceded the arrival in London of my ancestor. But the "Personal Notices" are more interesting—they give rein to the imagination. "Lady Rowena Grey, of Ormiston, lost her fan on the way home from the

performance at the Drury Lane Theater." "The Publisher begs to announce a poem—'Endymion'—written by Mr. John Keats." "On the Banks of the Thames, near Twickenham, a small, well-appointed Villa is to lease on reasonable Terms." "A Private Gentleman will lend all or Part of Five Hundred Pounds on proper Security." "The Concert at which A. was to appear has been postponed till Tuesday P.M. 5 o'clock." "Ayub, the Moorish Sorcerer, gives Advice daily from Nine Morning to Six Evening, or by Private Appointment." "A Letter awaits A. at the usual Place. L." And so on illimitably.

As I pore over these scraps I hear the early nineteenth century existence humming as busily as to-day, preoccupied with itself. I see women in high-waisted frocks, through the diaphanous skirts of which their garter-buckles sparkle; gentlemen in colored coats and trousers strapped under their boots, and funny truncated-cone hats perched on their abundant hair; coaches trundling on heavy wheels and swinging on huge springs, with coachmen and footmen bewigged and powdered.

Is that George Bryan, better known as Beau Brummel, pacing down the Row with a long cane and a lorgnette? No, it must be some imitator—the great Beau was forced into exile at Calais a year or more ago. But here comes a splendid cavalcade, with H. R. H. the Prince Regent at its head, uniformed and plumed, and bowing to the pretty lady in the coach—a compliment little apt to improve her reputation! And yonder, jogging easily along on his black barb, with his heroic nose and his enigmatic smile—here is the great duke himself! The crowd makes way for him and does him reverence; they will never cease to honor the conqueror of Bonaparte!

How little do we think of all these fine folks now—almost as little as they thought of us; yet in their own eyes they were as real and important as we are in ours—they, who now are nothing, as we in our turn shall soon be nothing! But as I read these old newspapers, which they in their day read, I hear their stir and feel their reality!

There was one paragraph in the *Morning Post* which I was impelled to copy out in

full. I can give no reasonable excuse for doing it. It's ten thousand to one that it possesses no significance for me. "Asgard" has a Scandinavian look, and I get no Scandinavian vibration from the "E. A. A." on my window-shutter, nor from the lovely, undefined presence that seems to pervade my apartment. But I have associated that presence with an idea of singing. I don't hear her sing, but I feel she is a singer. I can't, somehow, imagine her as anything else! And her last name must begin with A. (I wonder whether it's her married name. I have an impression that it is! Here's the paragraph:

At Buckingham Palace, on Tuesday afternoon last, Mrs. Asgard, the distinguished soprano, had the honor to sing before H. R. H. the Prince Regent and a small company of his friends. H. R. H. afterward declared himself pleased with her performance. Mrs. Asgard afterward drank tea with H. R. H. and his guests.

That's all! But when I shut my eyes I can almost see a slender, upright figure, with a laughing sparkle in her eyes, standing up before the group of lords and ladies, and singing—singing! I believe she wore a black silk frock trimmed with blue, and her neck and arms were wonderfully white, and she had auburn hair! Oh, how she sang!

CHAPTER III.

THE WRITING IN THE BOOK.

THE developments that I am trying to trace are so peculiar that I find difficulty in keeping these memoranda up to date; but I mustn't let them escape!

I had dropped in on my landlady the other day to discuss the price of milk, and as we chatted my eyes happened to fall on that row of black-bound books on her shelf which, as she had told me, contained her accounts and those of her predecessors, with lodgers going back for upward of a century.

If the Mrs. Asgard mentioned in the newspaper paragraph should happen to be the E. A. A. whose initials I had found on the window-shutter (a large "if," to be sure!), then she had lodged here, and her name would appear in one of those books.

Mrs. Blodgett readily agreed to my request to be allowed to take some of the volumes to my room for examination. "Indeed you're most welcome, Mr. 'Eathcote; but in course prices of things in old times wasn't like what they've come to be these days!"

I didn't explain that the object of my curiosity was not comparative prices. In all, there were about thirty of the series, mostly small 8vos. The series began in 1815, and I carried to my room the first half-dozen of them.

The newspaper paragraph about Mrs. Asgard had been dated in the spring of 1818. Not without a tension of the nerves did I open the volume corresponding to that epoch! I prepared myself for disappointment: the odds against success were incalculable!

The thumbed and soiled pages of the entries for that year were written in an angular hand, precise and painstaking, but unbiased as to spelling. The top lines were inscribed with the name of the landlord, Caleb Blodgett, in account with the lodger for the time being. I turned leaf after leaf slowly.

On the page dated March 1, 1818, I came upon the following:

Caleb Blodgett in acct. with Mrs. E. A. Asgard.

My heart gave a jump, and I dropped back in my chair, breathing as if I had run up a hill. I sat up again and read the words over and over again. There was no mistake! Mrs. Asgard and E. A. A. were one and the same person, and she had lived in these rooms! It was Mrs. Asgard, the distinguished soprano singer, who had sung at Buckingham Palace and been honored by royalty; it was she whose influence had met me on the threshold of the apartment and had been with me ever since! It was she who had lain in that bed, sat in this chair, leaned on this table; it was here that she had received her lover!

There could be no mistake: the name of Asgard was too unusual, even without the preceding initials and the date. It was tantalizing not to know what those two initials stood for; but doubtless they would be elucidated in due time. After having been

brought so far along this wonderful path, I had faith that I should arrive at the end. I could well-nigh believe she was whispering counsel in my ear, and putting in my hand the clue that should lead me through the maze!

But I presently subdued myself to a more deliberate survey of the situation.

Mrs. Asgard, even assuming her to have achieved eminence before she was thirty, and to have fulfilled her allotted span of three-score-and-ten, must have died at least a quarter of a century before I was born!

Hitherto, so powerful upon me had been her influence, I had been blind to this flagrant fact: it had seemed to me that she must still live, and might at any moment walk into the room! Even the Buckingham Palace record hadn't opened my eyes to a realization that this was a physical impossibility.

But her name in the old account-book brought me to my sober senses. A gulf a hundred years wide stretched between us. The recognition of it awed me; and yet, as I mused upon it, I found a sort of consolation, too.

For her influence—the perception that it aroused in me—had always been that of a young woman in the bloom of her career—such a woman, with bright auburn hair and sparkling dark eyes, as my fancy had conjured up standing in the presence of royalty. The century that intervened, while denying all hope of confirming this vision in the flesh, yet assured me that her freshness and beauty were beyond the reach of time; that she was an immortal reality, secure and unchangeable. She had actually existed in this world, and she could never die; she was a spirit, and for the sake of the spirit I was willing to forego the flesh, since it is the spirit that true-lovers love, and the flesh only as it is the spirit's transient vehicle! She was with me now, and we loved each other!

But here another reflection cast its shadow over me. Apparently Mrs. Asgard had been a married woman. Who and what had been her husband? He couldn't be L. H.; and the intervention of L. H. presented still another problem.

* I remembered, however, that in the early part of the nineteenth century the title of Mrs. was often borne by unmarried women, especially on the stage—and, for that matter, Asgard might have been merely a stage name. But if (as I was disposed to believe) there was a husband, he could hardly have been with her in London—his presence there would not have been compatible with that of L. H. She and her husband must then have separated, she retaining, for professional purposes, her married name. That she was a widow did not seem probable, for in that case why shouldn't L. H. have married her? True, he also might have been already married; but at this point I dismissed the speculation, perceiving that it was the identity of L. H. that really concerned me.

It concerned me because the hand that cut those initials on the shutter must have been the hand of her lover, and of her accepted lover, too; and that was a hundred years ago! The reason I had failed to consider this before was my first impulsive and irrational persuasion that L. H. and I were one. I could no longer hold to this; and what, therefore, was my standing with E. A. A.? What rights in her could I claim? How could I supplant him? And how could her spirit, which had loved him while she was still in the body, now adapt itself to mine?

I could see no escape from this dilemma; but neither, on the other hand, could I feel troubled by it. For there are certainties of the soul that disdain proof and confer the gift of belief. They convict as pusillanimous the pleas of reason, and they disclose interior truths. They are the more convincing, because beyond our fathoming.

In my life nothing else had been to me so real as was my passion for E. A. A. I could not question its verity, and inasmuch as the inmost essential of love is reciprocity, I could as little question hers for me. How to reconcile this with the apparent fact that L. H. had forestalled me, I knew not, nor was it necessary. What I knew I knew!

I felt, nevertheless, that knowledge of him would increase my knowledge of her, and must constitute the next step toward

solving the enigma. The good fortune I had thus far met with encouraged me to hope for more. L. H.—who was he?

My first unthinking notion that the letters stood for Lionel Heathcote—some inexplicable prototype of myself—must now be pronounced untenable. The man had been a contemporary of hers, and probably not greatly her senior. It was likely, too, that he had been a personage of some importance to be admitted to her acquaintance. Possibly, since she was a singer, he may have been a musician or composer; but, running over the names of such as might have fitted the conditions, I realized that the field was too extensive for guesswork. But I might consult my omniscient friend the librarian at the museum.

This suggestion directed my thoughts to the books on yonder book-shelf; by some inadvertence I had never examined the "Endymion" and the "Melodies," my divination of which had so startled Joan. That divination indicated that there should be some direct connection between the lovers and them!

I got up and drew out the volumes and brought them to my table. They were first editions, and might be worth a good price in the market. I opened the "Endymion."

A thing of beauty is a joy forever!

There stood the deathless line in old-fashioned, unpretentious type, making its virgin appearance in the world, innocent of fame, ready to go forth on its mission of delight to all lovers of beauty! Few eyes had seen it then, which now is known to myriads: the poem of love and of lovers, thought I to myself, vague, wayward, faulty, exquisite, strange, a mirror wherein the enamored may behold their ideal rather than its reality, or if the reality, then as haloed and softened by the ideal. Beauty dawns through it like summer moonbeams through pearly mists; love glows amidst it like the blush of roses on the moist brows of a bacchante.

The voice of youth, innocent, sensuous, and musical, echoes about it; soul and flesh are interwoven in its mesh, each glorifying the other. A book, indeed, fit for the reading of the lover and his beloved, sitting

cheek to cheek, breathing its aroma, tasting its sweetness, even as Paolo and Francesca in the dim Florentine chamber! Lifting their eyes intermittently from the page to one another, they know how true it is that a thing of beauty is a joy forever—a truth hidden from others revealed to them!

The poem chances to be a favorite of my own solitary youth, rhyming with youthful dreams never to be fulfilled; it wrought an impression upon me for which its actual contents could not perhaps wholly account; and even now, writing of it in this London room, I have a dreamy sensation of being something more or other than my usual self, and perceive that such a vein of apostrophe is not normally mine. May it not have been in this very chair that she and he were seated when they first opened the book and cut the leaves!

As I passed from page to page, seeking remembered passages, it was like entering the guarded temple of two lovers and treading on consecrated ground. Here they had met in their secrecies; here were depicted scenes, and thoughts uttered, which made them flush as at the thought that some spirit of the air had found its way into their privacy. But the mysteries of all lovers are open to one who loves.

That opening verse of the poem had been underscored with a delicate pencil line; and as I went on I discovered that most of what I called my passages had been similarly marked. These markings were, however, of two kinds, easily distinguishable each from the other; some had been made with the delicate touch that told of a feminine hand; others with, as it were, a masculine emphasis and impetuosity. The latter designated verses in which the amorous nature of the young poet had achieved most effective expression; the former drew attention chiefly to magical cadencies and spiritual subtleties. Together they seemed to draw aside a veil, permitting a living and intimate insight into the form and quality of these two characters. The poem blended the two into one.

As I was lingering over the latter part of the second book a belated impulse caused me to turn to the flyleaf. There, if anywhere, should be confirmation of what I

had been seeking! There it was, written in a bold, somewhat unformed hand, that I read:

I inscribe this Booke of Love
to the Heart of my Soule
from her Lionel.

"This book of love"—almost the phrase I had used just now—and signed with the name by which I had been called in my childhood!

I was profoundly stirred. Oh, if the writer had but added his other name and hers! But my advance through the obscurity must be gradual: already it was carrying me beyond my rational depth and seemingly toward the fulfilment of a mystical prophecy of the spirit!

That ardent, irregular handwriting! What was this incredible message which, apart from its external purport, it seemed to have for me?

After a while I closed the book and took my pen and a sheet of paper. Without attempting a facsimile of the original, but in my own customary hand I wrote the same words in their order, and then reopened the volume and compared the two.

To an indiscriminating glance they were quite unlike. The original was larger than my copy, and lacked its trained evenness: it had been done by one unversed in niceties of penmanship, who wielded the pen with something of the freedom of a broadsword. But students of chirography are aware that careful analysis may reveal unsuspected likenesses between two apparently dissimilar scripts. They observe the manner in which letters are formed, the manner in which they are joined to one another, the spacing of the words, the slope of the lines, and such like unconscious details. The handwriting of a boy of twelve will look different from that of the same person grown to manhood; and yet an expert may be able to identify them. The inner nature, the temperament, cannot be wholly disguised, and it is this which betrays the secret.

I had received no special training in this curious science, but a professional writer acquires habits of close observation. And as I examined Lionel's writing and my own, I detected surprising affiliations. Had I

lived his life, even the external resemblance might have been greater. I think, in a preceding page of this journal, I have drawn some such comparison as this between myself and my great-granduncle—and, to be sure, his name was Lionel! But how can I venture into the lawless region of surmise which such a thought suggests! Sanity warns against it.

And yet what could be more opposed to recognized laws of being than are some of the experiences that I have already met with in this house? I cannot disown these. The supersensuous impressions which I received on my first entrance here were verified by physical proof, so far as they were related to material facts; and my perceptions—I might almost say, my visions—of an adorable personality hovering about me, are too deeply rooted in me to be ignored. On their own plane they are consistent, and they bring with them the memory, or the consciousness, of innumerable logical accessories—words, backgrounds, attendant figures, small incidents—of almost overwhelming verisimilitude and *naturalness*—for I know not how to avoid that word.

There is a maid-servant in that kitchen—I don't mean Mrs. Blodgett's actual Kittie, but a dark-haired, clever young woman who cooks delicate little meals, brushes her mistress's hair (that glistening, floating auburn web!), helps her as tire-woman, and accompanies her on her little professional excursions—whom I know well and could instantly recognize out of a thousand, though I know she doesn't exist to bodily sight or touch! Haven't I "tipped" her with innumerable half-crowns, and even with a guinea upon occasion! She is the sole trusted confidant of our secret!

What am I saying! Why shouldn't I write down what my thought dictates? I believe I, or something in me that craves to do it, could begin here and write a complete narrative of adventures which befell me—or something in me—when George was regent in England! I have only to yield to the—to this urgency within that strives to seize and direct my pen, and the thing would be accomplished!

No, the time is not yet come! I am too much bewildered and too agitated to risk

such an experiment—such a surrender! If there be in me a something, a force, an entity, distinct from, however closely allied with, my normal self, which desires to control me, to possess me, to use me for ends of its own, I am determined to resist it until, at least, I can gain some further understanding of its nature and of its relation to me.

I have already fallen too much under the dominion of these fancies. I will try the effect of rigorous application to the research for which I came hither. The dusk of the long English summer day has fallen, and I will go out and walk amid the crowds of London streets, and try to free myself from this enchanted mood.

CHAPTER IV.

“A SMALL VILLA NEAR TWICKENHAM.”

I LIVE too much alone, and my mind feeds upon itself. It might have been wholesomer to plunge into the present life of London, enter into the thoughts and feelings of the people, keep my ears alert for the alarm of Zeppelin attacks, read the daily accounts in the newspapers of vicissitudes at the front, accept opportunities to attend sessions of Parliament, make myself a sympathetic and informed part of this greatest crisis of known history. I might have lived thus, had Joan remained with me—and I have more than once considered seeking out her and my brother-in-law in France, and seeing actual passages of the terrible struggle. But I've done nothing of all this.

It may be want of resolution to obey what any common sensible person would call the dictates of common sense. But it may be that I am governed by the injunctions of a sense that is not common, or at least is not commonly heeded. In animals, it is called instinct; in man, intuition. In either case, it is a spiritual leading. The simple structure of the animal mind disables them from rejecting this leading; but men's minds have become so sophisticated by inferences, deductions, doubts, by all the subtle jugglery of cause and effect, that they mistrust the hints and guidance of the spirit,

and laboriously reason their way through life as tropical explorers chop their path through the jungle with a machete. They are confirmed in this procedure by the Pucklike suggestions of all manner of anomalous impulses, often of physiological origin, or the fruit of idle and selfish propensity. Having been misled or betrayed by these, they shake their heads at the fine call of the inner voice; they can no longer discriminate between the authentic and the bogus!

Common sense tempts me, at times; but intuition holds me still. I will see this adventure through to the end. And though I am still groping in the mists of perplexity and conjecture, the results which I have attained warrant me in persevering.

For a time, indeed, after my last writing here, I turned my back on Mrs. Blodgett's rooms and the British Museum alike, and went exploring in London neighborhoods. One sunny morning I took a taxi out to Richmond on the Thames, dismissed it there, and proceeded on foot. The principal street of the town conveys a pleasant antique impression, and some of the ivy-grown mansions and precincts had a familiar aspect, which disappeared, however, upon a more categorical examination. Consciousness has a sort of penumbra, made up, I suppose, of anticipation, or of remembered information, which, if left undisturbed in its harmless function, plays pretty tricks of this kind.

I lingered on the hog-backed bridge, and could fancy that I had leaned on that gray stone parapet before, and enjoyed the soft mirror which the river held beneath the dense, overhanging foliage of the winding margin toward the north. On the other side of the bridge I saw the oak-covered acclivity of Richmond Hill come down to the water on the left and on the right, green lawns of private villas, bordered by the foot-path. There is a quality in cultivated country loveliness which, given similar elements, renders one scene reminiscent of what one has seen before. Nature, in her infinite variety, pretends to repeat herself.

I passed on to the Twickenham side, walking slowly and enjoyingly, as if with a beloved hand in mine. It might be about

a mile to the ancient church, with its graveyard, that stands as the outpost of the village, at the turn of the road.

Before reaching this, however, I paused before the gate of a villa, itself invisible behind its environing trees and shrubbery. When had I been accustomed to enter this gateway and pace up that curving drive to the villa's door?

The gate stood open, and I went in. In a moment or two the villa was revealed, built of gray stone, with pointed gables and projecting lower windows; on the right was outspread a down of silken turf, a couple of acres in extent, protected from the road by a hedge and a row of trees. When, and with what companion, had I known this place?

I advanced toward the house, which seemed to be unoccupied; but at this juncture an elderly man, with a stoop in his gait, came round the corner of the building—a gardener, apparently, and eyed me narrowly, suspecting me perhaps of being a German spy! "Is the house to let?" I asked him, by way of accounting for my intrusion. But before he could answer me, I found myself, to my own surprise, continuing: "I used to live here, a good many years ago," I said, "and if you have the keys, I should like to look over the place again!"

My sober appearance and matter-of-fact speech relieved his misgivings, perhaps; he mumbled something, to which I paid no attention, and, producing a bunch of keys, led me round to a side door, and I entered. But I halted in the passageway. "The house has been altered!" I exclaimed. "There used to be a partition here. There was no doorway here in my time. The staircase seems different. Who has been living here?"

My annoyance must have been perceptible in my tone. The effect of the changes was as if a clumsy hand had been introducing "improvements" into a picture by an old master. The walls had been repainted. Whatever was still recognizable had a forlorn appearance—a mellow past shamed by the invasion of a smart present. I appreciated more than ever the conservatism of the Blodgett dynasty!

The man mumbled explanations. The present owner had come into possession just before the war. He had made the improvements for the better accommodation of the bride he had been bringing home; before they could establish themselves, he had been called to the colors, and was killed in the first battle of the Marne. The widow had gone back to her own family, and the house had stood vacant ever since.

"Has the second floor been altered, too?" I asked.

"Yes, sir—all over, more or less!"

"I won't go any further," I said. "I'd like to take a look at the garden, though."

"You'll find the grounds pretty near as they always was, sir," remarked the man, as we came out again.

"This lawn is said to be one of the eldest in England—it goes back to Henry VIII's time," I said, pausing on the brink of the broad silken carpet, on which the sunshine lay lovingly, and the shadows of the trees seemed to melt into it. "There was a sundial over yonder that had stood for five hundred years!"

"There's no finer lawn in England!" returned the man; you'll find no deeper turf anywhere." He picked up a stake and a mallet that were leaning against the house, and, with half a dozen blows, drove the stake three feet into the green surface. He drew it out again, and showed me that the pointed end had not yet reached through to the soil. The turf closed over the wound like water. It was all a dense mat of finely interwoven roots, the result of the constant mowing of centuries.

"Yes, I remember we put up a marquee tent out there, and the pegs left no trace when we pulled them up," I said. "Let's have a look at the sun-dial."

"It's a bit crumbling, sir, but it'll hold out maybe a century yet," observed the man, as he followed me across the grass, which sank, elastic, beneath our tread.

The sense of companionship, which I had lost inside the house, had now returned. She and I had occupied the place during one summer only, and much of our time had been spent in this verdurous and flowery enclosure. She dressed in white frocks; the sun sparkled on her hair. We had plucked

flowers of antique fashion in the garden adjoining; that faithful, dark-haired waiting-woman of hers had spread out rugs to protect us from the damp, and here had we lain, luxurious, when the dial marked noon, and the blue shadow of the great lime-tree had crept silently toward us over the fairy grass-blades.

Leaning back against the shaft of the dial, she had looked upon me with her brilliant, laughing eyes, and had sung and sung—ballads, love ditties, frolicsome arias—oh, never was nightingale to be compared with that marvelous voice! Perfect love, perfectly enshrined! And here I stood once more! Surely, would I but turn my head a trifle, I should see her at my shoulder, lovely, loving, fresh and radiant as ever!

The man had wandered off. I could see him stooping about in the garden at the left, cutting roses, white tulips and purple chrysanthemums from their stalks. I put my arms round the ancient dial, and rested my head upon it. I had not looked forward to this; I had thought that our house in lower Seymour Street was our only trysting-place. But it all came flowing fragrantly back into my memory now! Was it, in truth, a hundred years ago—"on the banks of the Thames, near Twickenham, a small, well-appointed villa"? Yes, I remembered it all! Was that a nightingale singing among the lime-trees?

The man came back after a while with the flowers; a friendliness had grown up between us; he seemed to have understanding. I ruffled his composure a little with the present of a sovereign. The flowers from her garden stand on my table as I write.

CHAPTER V.

THE ENCHANTED NIGHTINGALE.

THE librarian, when I next visited him, handed me a small book with greened edges, bound in brown leather, somewhat defaced by time.

"I won't be positive, but this may be of service to you," he said. "Very few copies are known. The volume contains four numbers of a magazine which was issued about 1818. It follows ostensibly the plan of

Addison's *Spectator*, but it was really a rather bitter political compilation, directed against the prince regent and his party. It was suppressed soon after the appearance of the fourth number. The articles are mostly in the form of fables or fairy tales—a crude symbolism, thinly disguising personal references. The real name of the editor is not known: William Godwin has been suggested, but the evidence is far from convincing. There is a satirical skit, in sonnet form, which has been ascribed to Lord Byron, with small visible justification, except that it's very savage. But such speculations won't interest you; for the rest, you will judge for yourself."

This excellent gentleman always spoke as if he were reading from a book. He now handed me the volume and departed to encourage other students.

I took the book to a desk and opened it without any lively anticipations.

"The Divinator, by Thoth, Jr.," was the announcement on the title-page. I glanced over several articles until I came to one in the form of a story, called "The Enchanted Nightingale, the substance of which I took down.

A daughter of the King of Mesopotamia, Princess Ai-Leen by name, on a visit to Egypt, sang so marvelously that she was summoned before the Pharaoh, who, enchanted by her melodies, offered her the position of favorite in the royal palace. She, however, declined his offer, declaring that freedom was more to be desired than riches or titles. The Pharaoh, unaccustomed to rebuffs, meditated how he might be avenged. But because the princess had become greatly loved by the people, and he being a prudent monarch, he did not deem it wise to seize her openly, and therefore bided his time, hoping to ensnare her by guile.

Meanwhile there arrived in his dominions, from the princess's own country, a gallant young nobleman, already renowned for warlike exploits, and accredited with letters from the Mesopotamian monarch to the Pharaoh. His crest bore the device of a lion, and his title among his own people was El-Leon, or, as we should say, Sir Lionel.

The occasion of the knight's advent into Egypt was the crucifixion, at the hands of a

Mesopotamian general, of one Am-B'ristah, a citizen of Egypt, and a subject of the Pharaoh, who had thereupon threatened war against Mesopotamia. But Sir Lionel laid proofs before the Pharaoh, showing that this Am-B'ristah was a spy and outlaw, and that his execution was justified according to the law of nations. The Pharaoh, whose army, at this time, was exhausted by long conflicts with the Ethiopians, was secretly glad of a pretext to avoid sending an expedition against Mesopotamia; he therefore accepted the explanations of Sir Lionel and even received him into special favor.

Now it chanced that the young knight, wandering upon a time on the terrace of a certain pavilion on the banks of Nile, heard a sound of singing, passing sweet, so that even the nightingales paused to listen. Concealing himself behind a palm-tree, he presently beheld an exceeding fair princess, with golden hair, and clad in the robes of Mesopotamia, who sang to the moon, with a music that ravished the hearer's very heart! When the song was done, the knight came forward and knelt before her, avowing himself her countryman, and the slave of her beauty, and asking her wherefore she dwelt in this remote spot, instead of delighting the court of the Pharaoh with her divine gift? In reply she related to him the story of the wrath of the monarch of Egypt against her, because she had disdained his offers, and how she remained thus secluded lest he do her some violence.

Upon hearing this the knight laid at her feet his homage and fealty, and swore to protect her against all enemies; he told her, moreover, that he had studied the art of magic and would, if she were willing, transform her into a nightingale, and thus safeguard her against whomsoever went about to bring evil upon her, and withal he right heartily besought her to grant him her love as guerdon. Then the princess, whose eyes had been already filled with the knight's manly beauty, and her heart won by his devotion, yielded him her favor, and the twain exchanged vows of everlasting love, kneeling before the altar of Ashtoreth.

Then, bidding her close her eyes, Sir Lionel wove a spell upon the Princess Ai-Leen, and lo! she was transformed into the

form of a nightingale, in whom none save the knight might recognize the Princess Ai-Leen, albeit she sang more sweetly than ever. And he took her to a secret bower that had been made, where he daily visited her in secret, and they loved each the other, and were exceeding happy.

But now the great goddess Isis of the Egyptians, from whom no secrets are hid, was wroth with the lovers, because they had taken their vows on the altar of Ashtoreth instead of on her own; and she compassed their destruction. And first she appeared before Ai-Leen in the guise of an humble emissary of the people, and told her that all danger was passed, because the Pharaoh had forgotten his passion, and had altogether ceased from anger toward her. "Fear not, therefore, O highly gifted one," she said, "to cast aside thy disguise and go forth, and behold! the people await thy coming in the great temple that is built upon the street of the high priest, even Dru-Ri, there to acclaim thee and do thee honor!" So spake Isis; and the Princess Ai-Leen gave ear to her words.

Then did Isis pass straightway into Mesopotamia, to a great magician there, named Asg-Ard, who, before her flight into Egypt, had held Ai-Leen in bondage; but she had escaped from the tower in which he held her prisoner and had fled into Egypt. And Isis said to him, "Know, O Asg-Ard, that thy princess abideth in Egypt with her paramour, the Knight El-Leon, and also singeth before the people in the Temple Dru-Ri. If, therefore, thou wouldst redeem her, gird thyself and depart straightway into Egypt, even to the Pharaoh, for he is covertly at enmity with the princess, because she scorned him; and he shall aid thee to be revenged upon her. By means of a spell cast upon her by El-Leon, she hath been disguised under the form of a nightingale, but on a certain night she will cast aside her disguise and appear in the temple before the people; and there, in her tiring-room, after the singing, thou mayst come upon her by surprise, and do further as seems good to thee."

Having thus spoken, the Goddess Isis vanished behind her veil, and the magician girded himself and went down into Egypt.

Now, all came to pass according to the word of Isis. For Ai-Leen, trusting in the false emissary, and Sir Lionel agreeing thereto, prepared for her appearance before the people in the temple; but the magician gained audience of the Pharaoh, and, prostrating himself before him, unfolded the word of the goddess. Then Pharaoh mused a space and answered, "The boon is granted thee, but hear the condition. If thou in any manner betrayest my privacy in this matter, I will disown and denounce thee, and deliver thee up to the people; for they have taken the princess to their hearts, inasmuch that even I, the Pharaoh, dare not have my will of her. But if thou observest this condition and attainest to lay hands upon her, and the matter be brought before me for judgment, I will hold thee blameless, declaring to the people that she was thy slave beforetime, and that thou hast but done what was just with thine own. And against Sir Lionel likewise will I protect thee, saying that he is a robber, coming hither from a far country to spy out our land of Egypt, and doing what was unlawful to her to whom I had shown favor. For he, too, hath the art of magic, and if he discovereth thy purpose will doubtless strive to overcome thee."

Then answered the magician, "Thy counsel, O Pharaoh, is written on my heart, and I will in all ways be obedient thereto." So Pharaoh and the magician contrived together how their plot against the Princess Ai-Leen might succeed.

Now Ai-Leen, knowing naught of these things, and believing that the Pharaoh had ceased from anger toward her, put on fitting raiment and went to the temple on the day appointed, where was assembled a great multitude to listen to her singing. So she sang before them, and the multitude praised and extolled her, saying, "There is none in the land of Egypt fit to untie the strings of her sandal." And they rejoiced exceedingly among themselves.

After all was done, and the multitude gone their ways, Ai-Leen went to her tiring-room to disrobe herself. The room was in the top of a high tower, the stairway to which was well guarded. Howbeit, the magician, by his arts, had prevailed to come

thither before the princess, and even then lay in wait for her. And when Ai-Leen entered, he sprang upon her, and pinioned her, and would have borne her back to imprisonment. But she struggled strongly against him and sent forth her voice in a piercing call to her lover to come and succor her. And behold! he, her lover, Sir Lionel, was even then ascending the stair, to convey her with him to their bower; and hearing her outcry, he made great haste, and burst open the door of the tiring-room, and saw his beloved in the hands of Asg-Ard. And the wrath of Sir Lionel was kindled exceedingly against the magician, and he put forth his strength and caught him by the throat. So the two wrestled together, with Ai-Leen between them. But Sir Lionel's strength was great, and he began to prevail over the magician.

But when the magician saw that he was overpowered he took from his girdle a dagger, and smote Ai-Leen through the heart, and her spirit left her body, and she died. Then Sir Lionel, in his mighty rage and anguish, grasped the magician in his arms and hurled him through the window of the high tower, and he fell to the stones of the pavement and was dashed to pieces. And Sir Lionel cast himself down beside the body of his beloved and wept in his agony. And the servants of the temple found him there.

And all this while Pharaoh patiently waited in his private chamber, to hear tidings from the magician; and he gnawed the nails of his fingers because the tidings came not.

But at last there was the noise without of one crying and running, even of a royal messenger, who came into the presence of the Pharaoh and prostrated himself and said: "O king, live forever! I am the bearer of grievous tidings! She whom thou didst honor, the sweet singer, the Princess Ai-Leen, lies slain, and likewise he that was with thee of late is crushed upon the stones at the foot of the tower of the temple; and the valiant warrior, El-Leon, cherisheth her body in his arms, and will not be comforted; and the people are angered because of her death, and say that thou didst conspire with the stranger to destroy her, and they cry for

justice against thee, and great multitudes, with spears and swords, are even now on their way hither to demand of thee an accounting."

And as he finished speaking, there came from without the roar of the multitude at the gates of the Pharaoh's palace. And he trembled and was afraid.

And he said in his heart, "Verily, this is an evil happening. For El-Leon, knowing that I desired the princess, will inflame the people against me, saying that I compassed her death by the hand of the magician. What, therefore, shall I do? O Isis, save me!"

And the goddess who heareth all things answered, "Go forth and meet the people, bearing thyself as one without fear. Make oath before them that thou art innocent of this deed, laying all blame thereof upon the magician, who is dead, and cannot deny thee. And to El-Leon say that thou grieveest with him in his grief, and but that the magician is already dead his life should be forfeit for the slaying of the Princess Aileen, the sweet singer of Mesopotamia. This do, and fear nothing." Thus spake the goddess from behind her veil, being content with her vengeance.

Then went the Pharaoh forth to the multitude and spake to them according to the word of Isis, and they believed him and departed. But Sir Leon was sore perplexed, and neither believed nor disbelieved, but stood with his hand upon his sword, questioning in his heart, "Shall I leap upon him and slay him, or let him go?"

But as he stood there there was heard a sound as of a bird singing, even a nightingale, though no bird was seen; and to Sir Leon the singing was as that of Aileen, his beloved; and he heard as it were her voice saying, "Be comforted, O my lover; for wrongs are not requited by the sword, and I am free, and will be with thee forever. Return in peace to thine own land; I will abide in thy heart and discourse with thee there, and our spirits shall be united; nor shall aught disturb our happiness any more." And other things more wonderful than these did the voice of the enchanted nightingale sing or say to him; but of these the chronicler revealeth naught.

And the great Goddess Isis smiled behind her veil.

CHAPTER VI.

THE VEIL OF ISIS.

THE librarian, walking his beneficent rounds, again paused at my desk.

"Did you find any matter in the little book, pertinent to your investigation?" he inquired in his friendly way. "I've only glanced through it myself, but I recalled catching the name Lionel—your ancestor's name, I think you said—and the year being 1818, I fancied there might be something referring to his mission here."

"Is there any record, to your knowledge," I asked in return, "of a singer from abroad—from the United States, possibly—a Mrs. Asgard; Aileen or Aline Asgard—who gave a private performance before the regent at Buckingham Palace, and afterward fell into disfavor with him, perhaps from not having been compliant enough with the royal gentleman's wishes? I have some grounds for suspecting that my ancestor may have had some relations with her, and that she was killed, under mysterious circumstances, in her dressing-room at Drury Lane Theater. Such an event might account for some obscurities."

The librarian crossed his arms, laying one finger across his chin—his attitude when searching the alcoves of that encyclopedic memory of his.

"Seems to me there was a tragic occurrence about that period—Mrs. Asgard, Aline Asgard, an American; I'm almost sure there was a *cause célèbre*—and that the regent was suspected of a connection with it! But the investigation was discontinued, if I'm not mistaken—suppressed, you know, presumably for that very reason; court intrigues are apt to be problematic, and were especially so in the regent's time. Asgard! I think there was a Norwegian musician or composer of that name, may have been the lady's husband, though she herself was, as you suggest, a country-woman of Captain Heathcote's. My impression is—but I confess I'm very vague on the subject—losing my memory, I sup-

pose—that both Asgard and Aline Asgard were involved in some accident or catastrophe at a theater; but of Captain Heathcote's share, if any, in the affair, I could hardly—er—hardly—”

“Of course, of course!” I muttered. “You're very wonderful as it is!”

“I'll tell you, though,” he rejoined, brightening under the eulogium, “there ought to be some mention in the legal records or state archives of that date of any transaction of which the law might take cognizance; documents, you know, have a way of turning up if one camps on their trail—as you Americans say—persistently enough, and I think, within a day or two, I may be able to furnish you with data which—”

“You're very kind,” I said, “but the light you have already shed on the darkness may be enough to help me out of my difficulties. The prince regent—”

“Ah, a sad dog, a sad dog!” said the librarian, shaking his head. “No woman was safe from him, and he showed considerable ingenuity in covering his traces, too! Still, we won't despair! As your American poet, Emerson, says:

“There is no sequestered grot,
No mountain tarn, or isle forgot,
But Justice, journeying in the sphere,
Daily stoops to harbor there!”

Though it might be said that Emerson himself, as a poet, has never yet had full justice done him. But his time will come; his time will come!”

So the good gentleman hurried away, and I came back to my lodgings here, and found a long letter from Joan awaiting me.

She has been nursing Philip in one of the base hospitals; he progresses favorably; and he has incidentally seen much of the marvels and the tragedies out yonder. She speaks of a wonderful pressing through of the spiritual from the material in many of the wounded and sick soldiers she talks with, many of them men who had never before had any notion of anything above their bodies. She thinks it isn't a religious revival, in the ordinary sense, but a new era, a new dispensation of the spiritual world on earth. Men lying on the battle-

field have seen spiritual armies sweeping by; they have been led by spiritual guidance to do things incredible; some of them have a strange look in their eyes as they lie on their cots, as if they were beholding visions. Relatives of those who have died have seen and spoken with what they believed to be their spirits. This state hasn't the characteristics of a contagious excitement or delusion, Joan says, but is quiet and confident, as if they spoke of every-day and unquestionable things.

Yes, it may be that the thunders of Armageddon portend that after so many blindfolded ages, the veil of Isis is being lifted at last! Some of us at last may consciously be admitted to intercourse with souls disincarnate, and hear nightingale notes of paradise. How can I doubt it!

The French marshal seems to have stemmed and turned the tide, and the people that pass me in the streets have the light of victory in their faces. The air that blows toward us from the death-laden trenches bears the scent of immortal roses. In the East the light of a new morning kindles the mountain-tops!

The veil of Isis!—the veil of mortal sense, perhaps? But though on this plane of existence the body does but clothe a spirit which was before, and will be after, how can mortal sense make us aware of spiritual beings, or these have knowledge of us? To each, its own! To mingle them would be confusion!

And yet the insight or inspiration of a poet has affirmed that on his journey through the world, man “by the vision splendid is on his way attended,” and that Nature may not at all times avail to make him “forget the glories he hath known, and that imperial palace whence he came.” And surely I have, at moments, caught “the visionary gleam—the glory and the dream.” It would be treason to the highest that is in me to deny it.

Aline Asgard, the sweet singer, the woman with dark, sparkling eyes and red-gold hair; how has she beckoned me onward, now from this side, now from that, by what paths of surprise and seeming accident, but always approaching nearer, each glimpse of her more veritable than the last! With each

advance, the confusion seems to be dissipated, like night mists under the rising sun, and a truth and reason superior to our facts and logic to appear. What has wrought the miracle? Is it love? Is it lack of love that keeps us from heaven? But one mystery succeeds another, and the final gate is never passed. What is love? All my awakening understanding tells me it is life. But if I ask what life is, I am dazzled by rays proceeding from the source of the Infinite!

Aline and her Lionel! Now that I have so painfully learned her name, I think I always knew it; but the recovery of it renders her more distinct than before. Then am I Lionel? Is he something—some one—hitherto unacknowledged, who is more myself than I have ever been? Is he the impulse, the stirring, the yearning to be expressed, far within the closed chambers of my nature, whose emergence some unexplained fear has always prompted me to oppose? Fear of what—his rivalry? But how can the rivalry between the outer and the inner self be other than wholesome and purifying? Or I be worthy of Aline if I flinch from putting to the test my birthright in her?

It is Sunday afternoon, and there is a rhythm and swell of far-off music—the congregation of some neighboring church, as I think, praising God for the promise of overcoming the world's evil with good. I have opened all my windows, and the door of the bedroom; a warm July air draws through the apartment, and the sunshine falls aslant on the faded old carpet. I am probably alone in the house; Kittie, the chambermaid, has her half-holiday, and good Mrs. Blodgett, though there be no male of her kin at the front, is none the less conscientious in regular and punctual attendance at her place of worship.

As I sit here in the great chair, I am reminded of a day in my boyhood at home when I awaited, in my room—I was convalescent from an illness, I think—the return of my mother from an absence. My father had long since died, and the relations

between my mother and myself had always been very close and tender. We had seldom been out of each other's reach. But she had been away, and was now on her return. I might hear the wheels of the wagon at any moment. I sat there in a tenseness of happy anticipation, impatient, but in a sort of latent joy.

Similar to this is my state now. I am sensible of the gradual oncoming of some revelation or fulfilment. I can't formulate any forecast more precise. I don't dread it; I welcome it. And yet there is a kind of awe in it. Perhaps it may be the approach of death! But, no! There is in it too much of the fire and triumph of life for that.

I can write no more at present.

CHAPTER VII.*

THE VEIL GROWS THIN.

SINCE our parting I have lived in a place midway between an abyss and a mountain, where the sick and wounded of earth go to be healed, if seeds of health be in them, or if not, to perish. The dead go down into the abyss; those freed from death ascend to their felicity. But for our love, O heart of my soul, I should have chosen death; but because our love could not die I live, and our reunion is near!

I tried to tell you of my coming, but for a long while my voice was muffled, and I was bound hand and foot. When I would speak, my tongue stumbled, as if its use were forgotten. I must, as it were, train a dull and sluggish learner to utter my words and do my will. Of myself, I should have failed; but you helped me, beloved; your light and beauty and music molded the clay and warmed and guided it; and now I know that the stumbling-block was in truth some ignorant image of myself which, animated and instructed by our mutual desire, should at last understand and serve!

Of what is to come for us we know, and need know no more than that, in every thought, emotion and sense we shall be one.

* This is not in my usual handwriting, though, beyond question, no other hand than mine can have written it. It covers several pages of my journal immediately succeeding the foregoing entry. Such phenomena are, of course, familiar to modern experts in the "occult," but new in my personal experience.—J. H.

But the impulse rushes upon me to recover our beginnings, so that the foundations of our house of happiness may be established, and its symmetry complete. For whatever is immortal has its root in time, and the loveliness of its fulfilment is not comprehended till its source be known.

On a spring day, with some chance companion, I sat me down among a multitude in a hall of audience where musicians fiddled and blew: a careless soldier, indifferent to beauty, unconscious as yet of his own soul. But as I sat there immersed in my vain musings, the instruments were hushed and a voice, clear, pure and ravishing, ascended and soared out of the stillness, gathered power magically, shivered deliciously in my heart, rose again to slenderest pinnacles of ecstasy, and tinted the air with tremulous rainbows. I looked up and saw a slim figure, white-armed, with ruddy hair, and dark jewel eyes under wide, clear brows. She stood erect and serene as a Moorish column, robed in shimmering black, pranked with blue ribbons on shoulder and flank. I had marched to drum and fife, but music was created for me in that hour. And she that sang was music's incarnation.

All that had preceded that hour was an abandoned and meaningless desert, and I was born! When she had gone out I read on the program: "Mrs. Emma Aline Asgard." Aline! Aline! The name printed itself on my soul, like a slender lily in an illuminated missal. Her other names did not concern me—garments worn before the world—but Aline was mine! In the primal morning we belonged to each other, and all temporal accidents since then, for her or for me, were trifles without substance, which the breath of love should blow away.

Let me go to her! But that fat, bedizened tailor's block in the royal box had sent her a message—she had won his gracious approbation! An American soldier, who had seen his lobster-backs scuttle and crave mercy, could be heedless of court etiquette! I stepped before him and took your hand in mine. Your eyes laughed and sparkled, and you said, "At my house-warming, Thursday!" I kissed your hand, saw the jowls of his royal highness grow purple, and went out. What cared I for favor at court, for

the success of my mission, who had made my tryst with you!

But on that day our words were few, for again a crowd surrounded you; only our hands and our looks met, and we foresaw, I think, what was to come. "To-morrow I shall be alone." Hours after, at sundown, I found myself leaning on Richmond Bridge, having walked thither, conscious only of your radiance in my heart. In the trees of Kew, over the still waters, nightingales sang, but your voice was sweeter than theirs!

I waited in the quiet room, with its green walls damaskened with gold. I had brought a little gift for you of a book, lately writ by a young poet, after reading in which the night before I had written, *To the heart of my soul, from Lionel*. It was the poesy of love, and therefore ours. I laid it on the table, and beside the table was a great arm-chair, and I said, "In that chair will we two sit, and read the book together!" Then the door of your chamber opened, and we were face to face! As we looked in each other's eyes, you knew that the arms of my soul were around you, and you swerved back a little, not in fear, but in a lovely coquetry, as who should say, "Ask a blessing ere you drink!" I bowed myself before you in the true reverence of a knight before his lady. In my rough journey through the world I had little heeded law or measure, but in you I knew my law and my gospel.

"Stand there, exquisite and adorable," I said, "and let me drink you with my eyes!"

So you stood there, within arm's reach, in your soft, dark raiment, a lock of your red-gold hair dropping to your shoulder, now glancing up in seriousness, now lowering your lids with a half smile, and a long breath rounded your bosom like a dove's, and then subsided.

At length my gaze still unquenchably drinking you, you began to palpitate and said plaintively, "Never before did a man's eyes so burn me! Is it lest you forget me?"

"How can I not gaze on you, who have been prophesied to me from the beginning of the world?"

"I had thought I came into the world to please ears rather than eyes!"

"You came for the delight of all senses, and each whets the other's appetites. You are poetry's soul, and music, till you sang, was but a hope. You have created me, and though as yet I do your skill small credit, have patience and finish your work!"

You laughed, like the mounting thrill of a bird, and tossed your head flowerlike. "Was it for the making-over of grown men, do you think, that I crossed the ocean?"

"You lack still one step of your journey's end," I said. "Come, what is one step to the wide ocean?"

Then you searched me with a grave and deep look.

"It is the longest step in the world!" you said.

"It is the world itself!" I answered. "Come, put it behind you!"

You crossed your arms over your breast, clasping each shoulder with the other hand, as if on the brink of a gulf, your eyes still searching me.

"We have been prisoners too long," I said; "there is but one freedom!" and I held out my arms. But you said:

"I am content as I am. Why do you disquiet me?"

"It is love that disquiets us both, and now only love can give us peace," I answered. "You bade me stand here, and here I am, and here I stay, unless some one takes me!" you said, with tears and smiles at once.

After that, there was no need of words.

"I am to sing to-day—you must go now," you said; but in the very saying it, your arms came round my neck, and your lips were so close that mine felt them speak.

There was a portrait of the prince upon the wall, with his compliment writ on it. I knew that you had been commanded to the palace that afternoon, and he had sent you this portrait by the messenger. My anger rose up against him.

"Are we to be parted at this pleasure?" I demanded.

You made me sit in the great chair, and perched yourself on my knee.

"Hear me, only beloved of my soul and body," you said. "You and I have con-

sent, for our love's sake, to forget the world. But we cannot forget it if we begin by fighting it. The prince is the world; let his picture hang there; but you are flesh and blood and spirit, to whom only will my door ever open. Since the reality is ours, we may leave the world its shadows. I left the cruel cage that tortured me, on the other side, and you too took your liberty; shall we tempt them to molest us by proclaiming our happiness? To be free to meet, our meeting must be secret. Silently, step by step, like nymphs and fauns in the forest, we can withdraw, while the world's thoughts are turned elsewhere; but if we shout defiance, we shall be pursued and hunted down. Dearest, let me sing my songs for a time; they protect that of me which even you could not protect; and when I see my audience listen, breathless, I feel a better right to be yours than if that power were lost to me. My only pleasure in honor is to honor you; if we became outcasts, only my naked self would be left for your compensation. My art is my shield and my crown; what answer could I make to God, if I abandoned it? All the more do I need it, since your love has made me sacred in my own eyes. At best, peril waits on all who take the law into their own hands; what the end may be, we cannot tell; let us not tempt it wantonly!"

I sighed, and kissed you. "May I come here after you return?" I asked you.

Then you ran to your harpsichord that stood by the partition, and played and sang:

"Come in the evening, or come in the morning,
Come when you're looked for, or come without
warning;

Kisses and welcome you'll find here before you,
And the oftener you come here, the more I'll
adore you!"

So I let the prince hang there, and went out and walked London streets, my mind full of wonder, and my heart of worship, till evening, and then came back and hung about the shadows of the corner, like a foot-pad, till I saw your coach drive up; then I ran up, and as the door opened, I caught in my arms the muffled figure that

alighted—but it was not you, but your dark-haired maid, Nellie! How your laugh made music in the silent street, as you came after! So in we went, I stepping lightly, lest old Caleb Blodgett, the landlord, hear me in spite of his deafness; and afterward, Nellie—a quiet and skilful handmaiden, who like all who come near you, adores you—made a little supper for us, most of which I, that had fasted since breakfast, and was full of happiness and hunger, devoured, you feeding me, white-fingered and sparkling-eyed, while you told of your triumph—indeed, the table was heaped with the flowers they had showered on you. When Nellie had cleared away the dishes and said her good-night, you lay in my arms a while, in our big chair, and kissed me for the book of poetry, and for joy, and for love. Oh, how sweet and slender you were in your rustling silken frock, through which I felt the warmth of your fragrant body!

One day we had been, for sport, to have the famous Ayub tell our fortunes; and then out to our villa at Twickenham, where the lawn was softer than the cushions of the Grand Turk's harem; and Nellie brought us a dish of tea beside the old sun-dial, under the tree where the nightingale sings at evening.

You said, "We should have asked him for a spell to change me into a nightingale, so that you could have taken me about with you safely!"

"He told us to beware of a man from across the sea," I said. "I think he and I will meet some day—the last day of his life!"

"Sooner let it be the last day of mine!" you murmured, turning pale. "Lionel, to kill him would part us forever!"

"Not that he is your husband, but that he mistreated you! But for that, he might live, for what I care! But why do we speak gravely of the maunderings of a lying charlatan? Had Master Ayub warned us against a prince, we might have given heed!"

"The prince! I would as little fear a stuffed doll as that poor creature! Besides," you said, kissing a white rose from

the vase and fastening it to my breast, "it is months since an audience has heard me sing, and the prince has forgotten me. Grand Turks have short memories, love of my life!"

"Could any man that has looked in your eyes and heard your voice, forget you? You would be remembered in the dust of the grave!"

When the English summer was done, we planned for Italy. There had been many letters, beseeching you to sing once more; and betimes one morning, while I, at the window, idly cut the letters of our names on the oaken window-shutter, and you sat before your mirror binding up your glittering hair, you said, "Dearest heart, shall I give them one song more?"

I looked around at you, sitting there in your soft blue morning-robe, your naked arms lifted and your supple hands busied with the golden braids; the outline of your delicate cheek, pure against the shadows of the further chamber, and the image of your face in the mirror, which reproduced its hues but faintly, as if it were your own wraith looking back at you from another world; and thinking of the glories and eternities of joy which that little room had held for me in the gift of yourself, my heart swelled with a loving tenderness well nigh beyond bearing. Surely God has made us for each other, and if, in the years while we were blindly seeking each other, we had turned aside from the true path, it was but that the union to come might be more perfect!

In the summer days now past, while under the magic of love you had muted your nightingale notes from the ear of the world, and made yourself invisible in our nest under the lime trees, foregoing fame and applause for love's sake—we had dwelt together in a fairy-land enchantment that seemed to remove us forever from memory or desire of outer things. Yet I had learned to recognize the sovereignty of art in the artist, who needs to express the gift as the plant its blossom, and if the expression be too strictly or too long withheld, forfeits also something of the vigor and delight of spiritual life. And that hint of

yours that you be permitted one song—one public triumph more, struck me with remorse, that I had selfishly bound your divine genius to a privacy too close.

I put an arm about your neck, and as you leaned back your head upon it, kissed your upturned lips.

"Your glory is mine, beloved," I said, "go forth and lead captivity captive! The great theater shall be prepared for you; you give me, a hundredfold, what you give them! Renew your reign over them, and shame them of their earthly dynasties! The skies of Venice will be the brighter above us for the fogs you dispel in London!"

You may have caught an accent in my extravaganza that raised some ghost of a doubt of its full integrity; but our embrace overbore it, and my own heart repudiated it. If I had misgivings, I banished them. Your eyes held mine for a moment in one of those looks that explore beyond mortal plummets, but I blindfolded you with kisses, and you were reassured. One song more, and then for Italy!

Events not yet born in earthly time create currents in the spiritual atmosphere which we sometimes heed, but oftener disregard. Twice, when I had been on my way to you, I had been aware of a tall figure walking near, with heavy eyebrows and bushy, grizzled hair—something foreign in his aspect. Once, when I had borne a communication from our minister to his royal highness, this same figure, I fancied, had appeared at the end of the corridor, but had turned aside before we met and closed a door behind him.

Once, our minister himself had said to me in private: "A certain personage, I think, has not forgotten a slight you put upon him some time since; don't rely too much on formal professions of favor; we diplomats must always be circumspect!"

But I was confident, and full of prefigurings of our happiness to come—a long lifetime of undisturbed communion! Meanwhile, all preparations were made in the great theater for your farewell song, and all London was eager to hear you. And though, on the morning of the day, it was given out that previous arrangements made

it impossible that the royal box should be occupied, it caused no abatement in the enthusiasm of the people, who had made you their uncrowned queen, and little concerned themselves with the movements of other royalties!

On the morning of that day I had been closeted with our minister, to close up some affairs before taking the leave of absence for which I had already applied, and which would be longer than he imagined!

At parting, he pushed aside the papers and looked kindly upon me.

"Captain Heathcote," he said, "young as you still are, you have shown qualities which justify the forecast of a distinguished career for you—it may be, a very great one! But I have observed faults, too—chiefly such as belong to youth and a free temper—which in affairs of state, might seriously impede you. To a young man, certain hopes, certain purposes, may appear cogent, which the judgment of later years might rate less high. A man must choose, finally, between personal and public interests; in your case, I might perhaps say, between himself and his country—his love for what concerns himself alone, and that impersonal passion that we call patriotism! He may imagine that secrecy and discretion may enable him to follow the one without abandoning the other; but experience of the world proves that things the most secret are often proclaimed from the housetops; no barriers or silences can safeguard them! And in casting up his last account and striking the balance, he may find that the impersonal passion would have been the wiser. Pardon this little homily from a man older than yourself; you may neither need nor heed it; but I beg you to believe that only the most cordial interest in your fortunes prompted me to utter it!"

"I so understand it," I said. "I thank you, and shall not forget it, and whatever fate lies before me, I shall rejoice to have met you and won your good will."

With that, we clasped hands and said farewell.

In years to come, I thought, when we had long rested secure in our felicity, I might relate to you this interview, and we would smile at the wisdom of this

world, which, to gain success in life, would leave life itself out of the reckoning. But I would not speak of it to-day, when you were bending your thoughts and summoning your energies for the signal event of a few hours hence.

As I went up the darksome stairway of our little London lodging, the sound of your voice at the harpsichord, testing itself at passages of the coming performance, came to my ears like warblings of the birds of Eden. Oh, unmatched and unmatchable one! A moment of that music were worth an age of an existence unknowing of it! Yet was it but the imperfect expression of the lovely and beloved source from which it came!

At my entrance you sprang from your seat and gathered yourself into my arms like a beautiful and tender bird, all atremor with art and love!

"Heart's darling!" you said, "how immeasurably more precious than all other things are you to me! I've been thinking that perhaps it was wrong and foolish of me to wish this last meeting with the people. It was only that I desired you to be proud of me—to feel that in giving you my poor self, I was bringing you something higher and better! But I've had doubts, fears of I know not what! Tell me the truth, dearest; and if it be your pleasure, we will even now send a message to the theater, and set out to-night for Venice!"

I laughed, and kissed your sweet breath away.

"Because we are to take our ease in Venice is no reason for foregoing your victory to-night," I said. "You are overwrought by the anticipation, as always when you sing your best. Lie quiet here in my arms, and rest and be at peace. To-night, when all is over, you will laugh at these misgivings, and rejoice that you overcame them."

"Oh, blessed afterward! I wish it were now!"

"Think how I am worshiping you, while you sing," I said, "and outdo even all you have done before! Feel my kisses on your lips, giving them courage to enchant the world! All will be well."

From my place in the theater I saw you stand, slender and alone, before that mighty audience, while those divine notes hushed them to breathlessness and lifted them to ecstasy. When the last strain had died away, there came a wondering silence; and then an outbreak like storm-waves suddenly thundering upon an entranced shore. Above that enormous tumult I saw your dark eyes sparkle in a smile from your pure face; all the multitude was on its feet, and men were struggling to cast garlands on the stage before you.

I turned and fought my way against the throng, striving to reach the stair that led to your tiring-room, where we were to meet. Though much delayed and buffeted, I came to it at last, and began to mount the narrow windings toward your aerie. Ere I was half-way up, I heard a scream that plunged through my soul like a rapier—your voice, in deadly peril! I leaped upward swifter than a bodiless thought, and flung myself against the door. It was torn from its hinges, and I plunged inward.

NOTE—The narrative breaks off here, and is not resumed.—J. H.

CHAPTER VIII.

OLD MEMORANDA—1818.

I HAVE several times reread the foregoing, attempting to trace in some part of it participation, conscious and independent, of my own mind. In a certain sense, which I can't precisely define, the entire contents appear to me deeply familiar—as if they treated of events, sights, emotions, which had been both forgotten, and were yet, when thus set forth, interiorly recognizable. But I cannot charge myself with having knowingly formed a single sentence; and I shall provisionally regard the writing—which more resembled the script in the old volume of "Endymion" than my own—as belonging to the phenomenon which physic professors term "trance-writing."

In a sort of structural coherence with my own previous entries in this journal, however, it seems to claim a place in the

logical continuity of an experience which I shall not at present characterize, beyond remarking that it is inexplicable on ordinary grounds, and unprecedented. I will add, that I find myself unable to supplement, from any sources of my authentic memory, the narrative which some inadvertent movement of my own, or external accident, may have interrupted. I might no doubt, on a basis of probable conjecture, complete a description of the episode; but I am particularly solicitous to suffer no invasion of that kind to corrupt the integrity of this record.

For days past I have been intending to revisit the Museum Library, but was withheld by an obscure reluctance, which I this morning only overcame. In the interval, I discontinued writing, and tramped over some of the environs of London—Hampstead, Highgate, Blackheath, Greenwich—with no declared object in view, and with no result, unless it be an improvement in my appetite and general physical condition. But to-day, on a sudden impulse, I renewed my edifying intercourse with the librarian.

“You enter like an actor on his cue!” he declared. “I’ve been mousing about, in odd moments, as my habit is—and it’s wonderful, sir, how prolific odd moments may prove!—and this very morning I happened on something which I think may have a bearing upon your investigation!

“The period of the regency, as you know, is a trifle difficult for the explorer; whether by chance or design, many promising ‘leads’ land one in a cul-de-sac. The regent had many private interests and affairs which were also half public, if you know what I mean; and in his desire—natural, no doubt—to conceal the private part, he might find it necessary to obliterate the public record along with it. But to come to the point—I have unearthed a little bundle of memoranda kept for his private use by a member of the bar from about 1815 to 1820, among which are included notes of information supplied by his solicitors in various cases that came into his hands. Parts of the memoranda are

missing; and in others there are erasures or lacunas; but taken by long and large they give one, as I might say, a line!

“Now, one of these copies of information refers to a tragic incident which took place at the Theater Royal, Drury Lane, in the autumn of 1818, in which the name of your ancestor occurs. I have the papers here, under my arm; take a desk, and I’ll indicate the passages that seem especially pertinent.”

I sat down accordingly—I have never seen the librarian seated—and bending over me, with the papers on the desk, he turned them over as he proceeded.

“Performance, Drury Lane, principal attraction, Mrs. E. Aline Asgard, American, husband a Norwegian composer, from whom she was separated on grounds of cruelty—h-m! h-m! Mr. Asgard had arrived quietly in London—h-m! In consequence of information to effect that H. R. H. had betrayed interest—ah, an erasure!—here we pick it up—had granted several private audiences to Asgard; in consequence of which, under sanction of H. R. H., Asgard laid plans to—page missing here, I fancy—h-m! Ah, here we begin again: Obtained access, either before or during performance, to her private dressing-room in upper story of building—coach in waiting below—as she entered room, seized and attempted to gag her—vide testimony of Mrs. A.’s maid—Captain Lionel Heathcote, overhearing screams, hastened up the stairs and entered room.

“Well, my dear sir, there you are! Examine the report at your leisure. During the struggle, as you will see, the lady received an immediately fatal wound. When attendants of the theater entered, they discovered her lifeless in Captain Heathcote’s arms, the window of the room shattered, and, soon afterward, the dead body of Asgard on the pavement below. Legal questions to be determined—by what person or persons were these homicides inflicted, or was either, or were both of them, cases of *felo de se*? What connection, if any, had or did Captain Heathcote hold in respect to Mr. and Mrs. Asgard?

“Maid testified in effect that Asgard killed his wife, and that in the struggle

following Captain Heathcote's appearance, Asgard fell or was forced out of the window. But prosecution contends maid's testimony untrustworthy, as being interested party—and so on and so on! Quite a pretty little nut for legal teeth to crack, you see! But study the documents for yourself—I merely glanced over them; you will notice that on the eve of trial, the government withdraws charges against Captain Heathcote, and indicates acceptance of the double suicide theory. Query, whether this action was inspired from a higher source, in order to block investigation which might expose connivance or conspiracy of eminent personage—but all that is crossed out.

“You will note that United States Minister Richard Rush, who had taken an attitude in support of Captain Heathcote, expressed himself satisfied—and so forth and so on! The captain is thought to have returned to his own country—as was perhaps only natural—to be expected, you know! His availability as a diplomatic agent would be invalidated by such an occurrence, of course. And so the waters close above the scene of the tragedy, and the river flows on as before! Quite a little romance, with a tang of mystery, as the novelists would say! But I must be running along—if I can be of any assistance, let me know—I've merely outlined the situation. Ah! I see Professor Hyndman beckoning me—he wants that palimpsest. Yes, professor!”

The amiable, interminable chatter ceased, and I was left to myself with the old barrister's memoranda. I leaned my elbows on the desk and closed my eyes.

I had listened to the ripple of his talk with my outward ears; but, within, I was enacting the drama itself with a passionate intensity and particularly that omitted no detail either objective or subjective. I heard the scream, I was bounding up the stair, I was in the room, the gray-haired ruffian was writhing in my grasp, his left hand clinging to her who was the heart of my soul, whose red-gold hair, flying loose, brushed my cheek, whose dark eyes, even at that moment, sent into mine a look of love unutterable. In a blur beyond was the crouching, moaning figure of Nellie.

Ha! A knife—as my fingers found his throat, the blow fell, and the blade sank to the hilt, not in my breast, but in hers! In the whirl and frenzy that followed, there was a crash of glass, a splintering of wood, and I stood panting and alone, with her worshiped body at my feet, one white arm flung out, face downward, the turgid lamplight glittering on her hair. I kneel down slowly and tenderly lift her. Oh, the hilt of that murderous knife, stiffly protruding, like the stump of some black plant of hell, from her sweet breast! Beloved face, that has so often been pillowed thus on my arm in slumber or in waking, but in love always! Body, still warm, still supple and exquisite as in our kindlings and trances of delight, but gradually chilling and stiffening in the trance that lasts forever!

In that hour, no whisper or admonition of immortality found way to me, but I was buried in a blackness of despair, in which my own soul seemed to be conquered by death. In that blackness I sought her in vain.

After a time, the duration of which I could not measure, I lifted my face from my hands, and looked about me. Above rose the hollow of the great dome of the library, around were the studious alcoves, and the circular sweep of the desks, with figures bent over them, busied with books or writing; other figures pacing leisurely, or hastening; muffled sounds, soft echoes; the present sunk into the past, but the present still. But the vision of a century ago was as yet more vivid and real to me than the life of the passing moment. It faded by imperceptible degrees.

I yawned, and stretched my cramped arms and legs, mechanically collected the papers into an orderly pile, reached for my hat, and got up, heavily, from my chair. A neighboring student said something to me, but I stared vacantly at him, and made no reply. Presently, I found myself standing in the chilly outer air, at the top of the gray stone steps that descended to the street. Was it I that stood there, or some other, wearing my shape? I peered this way and that, with a sense of estrangement from what met my eyes. But my lodgings

lay somewhere over yonder. I went down the steps and mingled with the human flow along the sidewalk. As I mended my pace, the unreal impressions fell away, and I reached my door in a normal mood.

CHAPTER IX.

THE RENDING OF THE VEIL.

AN unexpected message from Joan, who has arrived back in London with Philip; the armistice is concluded; she and her husband are proposing to visit America, and she asks me to come to them to-morrow—they wish me to go with them.

I feel no present inclination to do so. It is true that I have no intention of further pursuing the investigation for which I came here. Like Saul, who went forth in quest of his father's asses, I have found a kingdom—a kingdom of spiritual revelation, the discovery of which has worked changes in me that are deep-lying, but which I believe have not yet arrived at a satisfactory conclusion—something, I don't know what, still awaits me. This may be a baseless assumption, but I shall remain here until it is either exposed as such, or some alternative is confirmed. However, I will call on the Dalrymples to-morrow. It will be easy to excuse my refusal of their invitation.

I have just lighted my lamp, and my watch tells me that two hours have passed since I wrote the preceding passage. At this time of year London daylight is brief. But those two hours have sufficed me to complete the longest journey mortal man can undertake, and return to the place whence he set forth. In Homer's story, the touch of Athene causes Ulysses to recover the youth that he had lost many years before, and the youthful love that was its inspiration.

I can read into that episode a meaning truer and broader than any I had perceived in it hitherto. The transformation is not magical, but may take place in the life of the humblest. It may be suggested in the statement that love and beauty are not subject to the accidents of time, but,

in measure as their temporal manifestation alters and decays, these deathless qualities retire into their own purer sphere, where they shine and bless immortally.

The event that has just happened is as natural and simple as the genesis of flower from seed—miraculous only as any function of nature involves miracle, that is, by the concealment behind the screen of cause-and-effect of the intrinsic, infinite marvel. I cannot term it unexpected, because, at the moment of its arrival, I recognized it as inevitable—the perfect consummation of an approach subtly heralded from the beginning. Nothing is changed, except that the horizon which was confined to a span, now finds its arc sweeping beyond the galaxy. And as no one's character can be understood until death places the episodes of his life in their right light and proportions, so the nature of spirit remains enigmatic until the riddle of death is solved.

The state of which I have just had experience has been succeeded by another—the “every-day” state of a man in possession of his proper senses, and subjected to his customary limitations. The difference between the two, immense though it be, evades description, because it is a difference not of scene but of quality. This homely little apartment of mine, its furnishings and trivial characteristics, didn't withdraw from sight and touch; they remained as matter-of-course and obvious as they do now. But something additional, which has now ceased to manifest itself, became manifest, and in its due season will return, obeying the rhythmic law of its order.

I know it will never be lost to me, because it is in union with my own being—as would the turning round of a Greek vase by turns reveal and withdraw a figure sculptured upon it. I cannot see and touch, now, what was sensible to me a few minutes ago; this argues no change in the object, but only in my faculty of apprehending it. My vision cannot penetrate the marble vase, nor can it—save in its periods of exaltation—pass through the veil between physical and spiritual.

I set down these obvious reflections merely as a sop to reason; but reason, as I have said before, is superseded by the

certainties of the soul. These are on a superior plane, which corresponds with the lower as does wisdom with light; but we cannot demonstrate from one to the other, any more than we can prove the mind in terms of the body—though the latter be nevertheless but the cast, in matter, of the former.

The bodily senses are the debatable ground—the no-man's land—between the two camps. It is conceivable that they are designed to function on both sides—that man, in his full estate, should be as freely conscious of spiritual as of physical phenomena. But we have either lost, or have not yet attained that double faculty; and in consequence of this defect we are prone to regard the radii of our senses as determining the limits of creation. It would rather seem that most matters of true importance lie beyond it.

I linger at the threshold of what I have to tell like a child that covers his eyes with his hands, lest the too-much beauty of the Christmas tree overpower him!

When the dusk made me lay aside my pen, I fell into a fit of pleasant musing in this roomy old chair. The singular incidents of the preceding months passed before me, from that first shock of what Joan called the "been-here-before feeling," to the barrister's memoranda of this morning. Discoveries in the realm of material facts had, all along, fitted in with disclosures, impressions, suggestions from the spiritual region, in a sympathetic cooperation, like the systole and diastole of the heart. It was as if matter and spirit had alternately taken me by the hand, as it were, and both had led me toward the same goal. But the goal itself—what was it?

Aline, I knew, had met me at my first coming here, and had ever since been near or remote, probably according to the posture of my own mind, though upon the whole each approach had been closer than the last. First, a vague impression, then, an imagination, not distinctly defined, later, a memory as of some one actually seen and known; later yet, a vivid and poignant vision, which had caught my breath and wrung my heart. I had seemed to hold her lifeless body in my arms. But not

even then had I been led into confounding an event of the past with the living present. There had been no hallucination.

As Aline had advanced toward me on the one hand, Lionel Heathcote had come forward on the other. My flesh and bones had progressively become the vehicle of his manifestation. In the narrative that he had, through me, addressed to Aline, his possession of me had been, for the time, practically complete. But during that time, I—what I must call myself was unconscious of his action—I was in the condition known as trance. But during that brief and terrible scene at the theater there had been no question of distinguishing between him and me; and whether I should say that I was he, or that he was I, is irrelevant, since we were one and the same—or, to come yet closer to what seems to be the truth, my memory had become identified with his.

But what can be predicated of a person whose memory is that of another? True, I also have what I must call a memory of my own—a connected series of personal events from my early childhood to the present. There is no confusion between this memory and that of a hundred years ago. The only interpretation appears to be, that the one is the continuation of the other! And that would mean, in plain words, that Lionel Heathcote, after the natural termination of his own proper span of existence, was once more alive in me, and was intent upon establishing a conscious and full communion with the spirit of the woman he had loved and lost in the London of a century since!

This is as far as I can go toward placating uneasy reason. It is all in vain, and it does not really concern me. I am content with the revealed truth.

As I sat quietly in the dusk, I felt all at once, with a delicious tremor of the heart, that Aline was in the room. If I turned my head a little to the right, I should see her. A very little would suffice, only that I feared to make even the slightest movement, lest it cause her to vanish. I had had impressions somewhat similar before, and they had failed to develop. This influence, however, was more powerful

than any preceding one. It was that of her substantial, breathing propinquity—something that might be touched and heard as well as seen; and indeed the faint fragrance always associated with her presence was clearly perceptible. She was there!

Faith is the key of miracle. "Have faith!" I said to myself.

I turned my head at last, and looked steadily in the direction where I felt her to be.

The dusk had become darkness there, but, to my unspeakable joy, I at once discerned the figure that I sought. It was she! She wore a flowing negligee of dark blue silk, with lace upon it, and a wide sash encircled her body just below the breasts; her arms and neck were bare, and, with her face, seemed warmly and softly luminous. Her hair was wound turban-wise about her head, one lock hanging down in a thick coil in front of her left shoulder. Her eyes, in shadow, rested upon me with a speaking intentness, as if awaiting a signal of recognition. There was a beautiful lightness in her pose, not as if she were unsubstantial, but were filled, like the upgush of a fountain, with a wonderful vigor of life.

At moments, however, she seemed to recede or to become dimmer. I recognized that these alternations accorded with the strength of my faith. Thereupon, with an indrawing of breath, I summoned into my gaze all the longing of my spirit. "Come—come! I believe—I believe!"

She responded; she was nearer; I caught the sparkle in her eyes, and her well-remembered smile trembled upon her lips. I cannot convey the emotion which her drawing near created in me—a vibrating triumph of the heart, like the shivering of sunlight on the ripples of a brook. The look which we now exchanged recalled those ineffable privacies of love when earthly hindrances fall away, and we pass beyond the veil to intimacies which mortality is powerless to recover. In such periods there is an upsurging of the soul, and love clothes itself with a body competent to fulfil its celestial aspirations. It is, doubtless, the body which will invest it in the kingdom of love, hereafter.

She was within arm's reach; my joy was tinged with awe as I realized the mystery that impended. She put forth her hand, and I felt her finger-tips pass down my face, and then her warm palm against mine. My arms opened, and her body entered into them and tenderly nestled itself up to me, with the lover's yearning to be one flesh. Now the baby-smoothness of her cheek touched mine, and rubbed against it with the childlike movement that I knew so well. Presently, slightly shifting her position, she lifted her head. I was conscious of the sweetness of her breath, and then she slowly set her parted lips on mine. The hazel darkness of her eyes passed into me under her half closed lids, in the dream-gaze that deepens joy into seriousness. And there followed an interval when the soul, too potent for further companionship with the body, withdrew into its invisible chambers, and performed there its holy rites.

Gradually we awoke to a mitigated intercourse.

"Lover of mine, it has been permitted us at last," she said. "We know and feel each other. Your Aline could never become herself till she was yours."

"Aline, soul of my heart! In what underground caves have I been groping, fearing to know what I could not understand? Let me never go back there!"

She gave a little laugh—such a laugh as I used to liken to the bubbling of golden wine from a flagon of silver, so soft was it, so full of sumptuous mirth.

"Must Lionel still see before he believes?" she asked.

"Love, you are in my arms!" I now said. "The weight and litheness of your body—I feel it! I breathe you! I shall never doubt any more!"

"I'll tell you a secret," she said, her whisper thrilling at my ear: "'Tis an old story that seeing is believing; but remember this—that belief is sight!"

"I have learned it! But, Aline, now that I have you again, I'll never let you go!"

A loving little cry, like a bird-note, broke from her as my arms tightened strongly about her. When she next spoke, she used

the tender Quaker form of speech that we had been wont to use in our love-talks:

"Doesn't thee know that thee and I are immortal?"

But that recalled to me the gulf between us.

"That is true of thee; but I am still on the other side!" I answered.

"Thee does not know very much!" she retorted playfully and lovingly. "That thee is in thy mortal body does not change thee; and I tell thee again that this is immortality; but immortality is the flood-tide, which ebbs and flows like the sea, but after ebbing, always flows again; the flood-tide of life, beloved, whether the mortal body be with us or no!"

I wondered at this, and asked:

"Can there be immortality on earth?—or anything in heaven but immortality?"

She nestled closer, and her bosom pressed to mine, so that I felt the beating of her heart, which throbbed with a low, continuous speech, reiterating love—nothing but love, yet conveying meanings and communings such as no speech can utter or mind conceive, though echoes of it may be divined in the varying intonations of an infant's murmur, between rest and waking. Between her soul and mine there was a mutual interflowing, as of sunlit oceans.

This was the intercourse of spirit with spirit. Our mortal utterance in a thing of space and time, one word painfully succeeding another, and step by step, like the building of a pyramid, constructing the thought or vision we would impart. But the speech of spirits is immediate revelation, as when, if a curtain be lifted, the whole breadth and depth of the landscape is revealed. The ear, in such interchanges, acquires the sovereign gift of the eye, and mind keeps pace with mind.

Thus Aline and I, in our dear, long-delayed embrace, lived again together

scenes and thoughts and emotions of the past. Through it all we could now recognize the movement of a tender power that knows the end from the beginning and never ceases to incline the traveler thither—as a river gleaming through mountain mazes, and sometimes threading underground caverns, fails not to lead the wanderer at last to the ocean. In the passages that had seemed most fearful, that eternal current still flowed on. We had gone astray; we had suffered purgations; but we were safe at last.

"But our union is not yet complete, dearest," I said. "Why is your spirit free, and mine still obstructed by the flesh? When shall I be fully delivered?"

"I know only that the obstruction will vanish by and by," she replied, smiling on me. "Such joy as ours needs, at first, its intervals; our moments of meeting are our immortality, which flows and ebbs and flows again; but at last, perhaps, they will be endless moments. We were impatient before; we can be patient now! The penalty for the laws we broke has been suffered; thee knows how bitter it was; but it has passed, the hurt is healed, and soon there will be no more partings."

She stirred in my arms, as a bird about to take flight.

"But thee will come back to me?" I asked in fear.

"We do not really part," she said, touching my lips with hers. "Though I seem to go, thee will know that I am still here. Love is presence!"

She pressed her sweet hands over my eyes, as, in our old times, she would sometimes playfully do. After a while I no longer felt their pressure. I sat in darkness; but I knew—and know—that I am not alone.

NOTE—This volume of my journal contains no further entries.

(The end.)

For an Entirely New Slant on the Author of "The Untamed," Read, Next Week

THE FEAR OF MORGAN THE FEARLESS

BY MAX BRAND

A Short Story, but a Crackerjack



Smudged Names

by Maxwell Smith

HARRINGTON BOYD stopped at the head of the stairs. The spectacle in the broad living-room below made him numb. Silently he drew back into the shadow. He had to steady himself. The revelation was so astonishing, so thunderous in its unexpectedness!

Elizabeth and Elliott Sewell, his friend and guest! It took him some time to grasp the situation.

When his brain resumed functioning, Boyd found himself dully wondering how long since they had come thus together. Elizabeth! Hadn't it been understood since she, a distant cousin, had come to live in his mother's home—in *his* home—that she would be his wife? There had been no doubt in his mind about that. Hadn't he been waiting these last two years for her to—to grow up? And now—

Their embrace, he told himself, was too close to be anything new. Elizabeth was too snug and content in Sewell's arms.

Of course they had counted upon his returning by the front door. They would have heard him and been warned then. *Warned*—that was the way Boyd looked at it. His obsession for the girl broached on egomania. He never had dreamed of her in the arms of another man.

He had a motor breakdown to thank for what he considered his discovery. It had left his hands thick with oil and grease. He had entered the house by the rear and gone straight to the upper floor to scrub-up. Thus by accident had the light been brought

to him—light which must change his whole life.

It struck him that they had been stupid to leave the table-lamp burning. But for that he would have been unable to see them. He would have gone on down into the living-room had the place been dark, and they certainly would have heard him.

Preoccupied with his obsession for the girl, Boyd believed they had something to conceal.

A movement as he approached would have aroused no suspicion in him. Why, it would have been the most natural thing in the world for them to have turned on the lights to see who was coming. He would have thought nothing of that. He had been so sure of her and of Sewell's honor and friendship. It was dishonorable of Sewell, of course, to come into his home like this—a love pirate!

Yes, they had been shortsighted to leave that one lamp whose shaded light had revealed the lower half of their bodies as they stood together.

Elizabeth's whisper as she withdrew from Sewell's embrace floated up to Boyd. She stepped into the gloom beyond reach of the lamp. Sewell laughed.

Boyd flushed. The blood rushing to his head brought the impulse to rush down and denounce them. To kill them then and there.

As his legs moved to obey he checked himself. If he did that how would *he* escape?

Coldly he began to review the situation.

He wouldn't have a chance before a jury. He did not see why he ever should stand before a jury. Why not avoid that?

Another light was switched on downstairs.

"Better turn 'em all on," laughed Sewell. "Make a sort of beacon for the wanderer. Shall we tell him to-night, sweetheart?"

Boyd did not make out Elizabeth's answer.

Quietly he retreated along the hall. His calm in the face of this upheaval amazed him. He had become so entirely centered upon Elizabeth! Always he had thought—No; he *never* even had contemplated Elizabeth as belonging to any one else. She had become so much a part of his life that this intrusion of Sewell was analogous to the violation of his home! It called for primitive action—for a tearing with the hands; execution of a positive penalty.

But now, like his world, he found his ideas turned topsyturvy. True, he was possessed of an intent to kill Sewell—and Elizabeth. Instead of flaring to an immediate execution of that purpose, however, his fury was strangely chill. He had to think of himself unless he too was to be sacrificed.

Back at his bedroom he shut the door noisily and again headed for the stairs. In case they hadn't heard the door slam he broke into a whistle. He did not wish to arouse any suggestion that maybe he had seen them. Half-way down he hailed them with a cheery "Hello!"

Elizabeth was in a window seat. Sewell was in a chair at a table, pretending to read.

Elizabeth crossed to meet him. He marked her composure. His own was no less but he kept his eyes from her lest she should see the smoldering hate boiling to the surface. At that moment he realized that his feelings toward her had been wholly reversed.

The arm she put around him meant nothing. Nor did he respond to the closer contact when, as was his habit, he slipped an arm about her.

To Boyd her caress was hypocrisy. It was beyond his warped conception to understand that she might have a genuine affection for him—the affection of a relative.

While they walked over beside Sewell the

caught a glance between them into which he read relief that they had not been stumbled upon in the intimate pose which he had seen from up-stairs. Their every action now fed the fire within him.

Sewell looked at his host, stretched and smiled.

"Lordy, Elliott"—Boyd was amiable—"it must be lonesome for you up here. I never thought of that until this minute. You looked so desolate and bored sitting there. It's good of you to come out and keep us company."

Subconsciously, Sewell sensed something behind the friendly speech. He stared before answering, but Boyd was bland. He appeared tired; that was all.

Sewell burrowed deeper into the chair.

"You don't mean that, Harrington," he declared. "You don't know how I treasure these little visits up here. It's darned good of you to bring me along. This quiet"—he waved outdoors—"is the thing to rest a chap after the city. Believe me, you had a real thought when you built away by your lonesome."

As an uninterested spectator might have done, Boyd admired the way in which Elizabeth and Sewell carried it off. Had he been in their place, he feared, he would not have remained so at ease. Still, wasn't he himself playing up well? They chatted on.

"Will you ring, Elizabeth?" he asked after a while. "I could stand a—"

"I'll get the ice," she smiled. "The servants are out."

That was what he wanted to know: How they had taken chances with the servants around. That they had been absent simplified affairs from his standpoint, too. His mother was away visiting. There would be none to come forward and say that he had witnessed that scene between Sewell and Elizabeth. He did not want to be linked in any manner with that fact that Elizabeth and Sewell had been more than friends.

Throughout the couple of months that remained of the season his relations with Sewell were unchanged. Sewell continued to visit Boyd's country home. He was left alone as before in the company of Elizabeth when the circumstances so turned.

But Boyd did not go out of the way to throw them together. That would have lacked finesse. It would have put them on guard. It would have betrayed him, given an inkling that he had a suspicion at least that they had come together. He wondered why they did not come into the open. And hoped they would not.

Throughout long days he planned what was to happen. How he could proceed safely with the elimination of Sewell. That was the initial consideration. Sewell had to go first. Nights he lay awake perfecting his scheme and multiplying the hate he forced himself to conceal.

At times when he gave way to introspection he could not entirely comprehend his own callous craftiness. There were occasions when he became aghast at the brutal deliberation with which he purposed encompassing this man's death. Not only the man's, but Elizabeth's, for he maintained that she, too, must pay—as though she actually had been his wife. Rage would overcome him and with it the temptation to go search out Sewell and have it over.

Then the cunning that had taken possession of him would reassert itself. The desire for self-preservation would predominate.

His cause, he would tell himself, was just. Had not Sewell stolen in on his love? Since the law would not punish him for that it was necessary to take the law into one's own hands. When a person was executed according to law, the executioner was not punished. Why then should he, who simply was taking the place of the executioner, be punished?

Thus he persuaded himself as time wore on and his plan reached the last details. All that remained was to await the opportunity to put it into effect with assurance that he would escape. Sewell opened the way. He sought to interest Boyd in a company he was forming.

They discussed it a number of times in conjunction with Sewell's other associates. Boyd said he would think it over. He wanted to be alone with Sewell when the closing arrangements were made.

The conferences at which the other men had been present would serve him well.

They would show that he had been on close terms with Sewell; that the meeting which would be Sewell's last on earth, had been logical and legitimate.

Raising the curtain on the finishing step of his exploit of murder, therefore, Boyd phoned Sewell to meet him. He did not mention the reason. Had Sewell known that, he might have called some of the others to attend. That would have balked Boyd.

Boyd and Sewell had luncheon together, Nearing the actual commission of his vengeance, Boyd experienced a brief feeling of nausea. While they talked through the meal he wondered if he were quite sane. It did not seem so. For more than three months his mind had been clamoring on this one demand for the death of Sewell. Trembling on the verge of the act, he was icy cool.

Even the hatred he had nursed toward Elizabeth and Sewell had passed. There was nothing in him except a passionless determination.

He was willing to concede that he was mad. That would help him in after years when the satisfaction of his deed had perhaps worn away. He could down any pangs of remorse by remembering that he had been insane.

He brought up the subject of the new corporation, casually.

"If you care to run over to your office now, Elliot," he remarked, "I'll sign up on that deal you've been pestering me about."

Sewell leaned across the table eagerly. He had been praying that Boyd would come in—Boyd had the capital they required.

"You will! That's fine, old man. It saves us hunting around, for, while we've succeeded in convincing you that the proposition is good—and it is good—we might have difficulty with others when it came to a question of so much money."

Harrington Boyd nodded. The months of scheming had wrought little change in him, except in his eyes. In them the uncontrollable desire for Sewell's death reflected itself often. He had developed a habit of gazing through half-shut lids.

It was so that he now regarded Sewell,

that his victim might not read the unholy pleasure that burned over the prospect of the killing.

"It looks all right to me," responded Boyd. "There doesn't have to be anything formal about it, Elliot. A memorandum will do. I guess we know each other well enough to get along with that."

"But," Sewell demurred, "don't you think we'd better have the other members there and make it formal at the start? They might—"

"Don't worry about that. We'll go over to your office now and fix it up. I'll give you my check and later on the formal papers can be drawn up when I obtain my stock."

He knew that Sewell was a stickler for formality. That had been reckoned on by him. Sewell proved it by insisting that the others interested be summoned.

"If you and I can't put a friendly matter like this in shape without a session with a bunch who'll insist on making speeches and what-not," announced Boyd, "we'll call it off. Honestly, Elliot, you make me tired with your red-tapish ways."

Sewell couldn't afford to let Boyd withdraw. Boyd knew that. Also that if he did drop out he would lose this Heaven-sent opportunity. They compromised when he yielded to Sewell's insistence that they record the transaction by a signed memorandum.

They were entering Sewell's office when Boyd suggested:

"Tell her," he pointed to the secretary in the outer room, "that you're going to be busy and don't want to be disturbed."

Sewell turned to the girl who occupied this office with another stenographer.

"You can handle anybody that calls, Miss Ford," he said. "I don't expect any one of importance. Don't bother me unless I ring."

"Very well, Mr. Sewell," said the girl and acknowledged Boyd's bow. She knew him as an intimate of her employer.

Inside with the door closed, Sewell and his backer went over the project. Boyd was to put in \$65,000 working capital. He wrote a check for that.

Sewell called Miss Ford and dictated the memorandum to be made in duplicate.

"By the way, Elliot," said Boyd, as they waited for her to return, "you haven't been out to the house for a long time. We're having half a dozen folk there two nights from now. Want to come?"

The transient gleam in Sewell's face gave Boyd a devilish glee. Sewell wouldn't be able to look like that much oftener. Pretty soon—pretty soon his expression would be welded for all time. At that moment Boyd confessed that he was crazy.

Sewell perceived a strangeness in his manner. His answer was slow in coming. For the first time in weeks he had seen clear into the depths of Boyd's eyes. He did not enjoy the sensation. It left a clammy feeling!

"I—I would like to," he stammered, and cursed himself for having succumbed to a foolish impression. He straightened from the rigid attitude into which that spark of fear had thrown him.

Boyd's eyes were masked again. He leaned back in his chair, ignoring the other's hesitation.

"All right," he said. "I'll tell Elizabeth that you'll be there."

Miss Ford came in with the memorandum and stood while Sewell read it over. Boyd toyed with a wicker letter basket on the desk. Putting a paper-weight in the center of it he tried to balance the basket on the point of a long paper-spike. He continued absorbed in this occupation after the girl had gone.

"Wait a minute," he laughed when Sewell handed the paper to him for his approval; "wait till I get this thing set."

They laughed together at his efforts.

"No good!" Without having accomplished the balancing feat, Boyd gave up. He put the weight back in its place, and the basket. The spike he shoved aside.

"You'd never get a job as a juggler, Harrington," grinned Sewell. "Stick to financing."

Boyd laughed again and Sewell joined him. That was in line with his program. The girls in the next office would relate with truth what good terms the two men apparently had been on.

Glancing at the paper which merely recorded that he had turned over sixty-five thousand dollars to the new corporation, Boyd signed the first copy.

"That's O. K." He passed it back.

Sewell attached his name. Boyd folded the document and put it in his pocket. He signed the second copy.

Sewell was still bent over, after having done likewise, when Boyd exclaimed. He pointed across the room. Raising his head, Sewell turned to follow the direction of Boyd's finger.

Like lightning Boyd picked up the paper-spike and rammed it with all his force into Sewell's eye. The one gasping cry that burst from his victim was drowned in Boyd's boisterous laughter.

Without the loss of a second, he grasped Sewell's sagging body and flopped it across the desk. One arm he doubled underneath. The other he thrust out, upsetting an inkwell in the process so that the hand lay in a pool of ink.

When he was through, the dead man lay face downward as though he had fallen on the spike in a fainting spell.

Stepping back, Boyd surveyed his work. Everything was as he had planned. The only item that could upset his program was the premature entrance of some one into the room, the appearance of a third party before he had time to get out.

That was an improbable contingency. Sewell's secretary was the only person likely to enter and she had been instructed not to do so unless he rang. To Boyd the course seemed clear enough.

Unhurriedly he took up his hat and went to the door. He halted there, listening. In calculating his procedure he had marked the positions occupied in the outer office by the girls. He knew exactly how much they could see of the inner office when the door was open. Sewell would not be visible to them provided they were at their desks.

The sound of a typewriter came to him through the door. That was all. He assumed the girls were in their accustomed places. The door then was open.

With no trace of nervousness he opened the door. A swift glance confirmed that the girls were at their desks.

Boldly he held the door open and addressed a parting remark to Sewell—a remark that called for no answer. Miss Ford looked up as he pulled the door to. He smiled at her and commented on the weather.

The door clicked shut. A step away he turned and reopened it a few inches. Inserting his head he spoke again—to the dead man! He laughed and in the midst of it muttered, then spoke in his own voice.

Finally closing the door he nodded to the girls and went out.

Half an hour later Miss Ford went into the room and found her employer dead.

Harrington Boyd was questioned by the police, of course. He was the last person to see Sewell alive. He went through the inquisition with a good assumption of horror over the death of his friend but without a tremor.

Miss Ford and the stenographer, Miss Mitchell, were there. As he related his visit, Boyd turned to them in remarking that Sewell had been well when he departed.

"You remember," he looked full and frankly at Miss Ford and her companion, "that he spoke to me as I went out?"

The girls faltered. Not that they thought Boyd had anything to do with the death—that it was not an accident, as the authorities were ready to believe. But somehow they had been wondering whether Sewell really *had* spoken at that time. They could not have sworn to it. Yet they could not have sworn that he had not.

"When I reopened the door," reminded Boyd. He did not speak anxiously; he referred to it as a trifling point. "When I reopened the door and said I would expect him at the house two nights hence and he replied that he would be there. You remember that, Miss Ford? And you, Miss Mitchell?"

"Why—why—" Miss Ford looked dazed. She was shaken by what had taken place practically at her side. With only the thickness of a door between, Sewell had died horribly. Her puzzled glance was returned by Miss Mitchell.

Now that Boyd mentioned it they weren't at all sure that Sewell had *not* spoken.

While Boyd, they recalled, was laughing with his head through the partly opened door.

The district attorney addressed the secretary. He put her hesitancy down to the shock. He never entertained a thought that Boyd was not telling the truth.

"Do you recollect that, Miss Ford?" he asked.

"Why—why—" she stammered again, and strove desperately to make sure in her own mind before she declared one way or another: "I—I think he did."

"Think?" The district attorney made further allowance for her excitement. "You heard him, surely?"

The girl caught Boyd's eye. It would be terrible if she should cast any reflection upon him by her indecision. She could not do that. And she really had thought that Sewell had answered Boyd. Since Boyd had recalled the point she could not have been mistaken. She became convinced.

"Ye-es. I heard him. Mr. Boyd was laughing at the time and I didn't catch what Mr. Sewell said. But I heard him."

"And you, Miss Mitchell?"

She answered more readily. Whatever uncertainty she had known had been removed by Miss Ford's statement on top of Boyd's. Had Miss Mitchell been told that she was imagining something, that she was responding to suggestion, she would have resented it. But—

"Yes"—she believed—"he said—he said, 'I'll be there,' I think it was. It sounded like that."

She looked at Boyd and he nodded.

"I don't remember his precise words," he interjected, "but he said he'd be out to the house as I asked him. Probably he used the words Miss Mitchell quotes."

The coroner and his physician entered. They had just finished an examination of the body.

"How do you figure it happened?" queried the district attorney.

"Way the police look at it," the coroner scratched his head, "is that he became dizzy and was leaning on his hands on the desk when he collapsed. Howard, here," he indicated the doctor, "agrees that is about the only way it could have taken

place. Do you remember where about his desk that spike was lying, Mr. Boyd?"

Boyd shook his head regretfully.

"I don't. There was the usual clutter of things and I paid no attention."

"I can't quite make out how he fell so straight on the spike," said the doctor. "Even though it did strike a soft place, the eye, it is odd that his weight falling forward to a certain extent, didn't knock the spike off its base. You'd expect it to be deflected, but it ran straight in."

"One of these—ah, inexplicable accidents, doctor?" commented Boyd. "Poor old Sewell. And he was so enthusiastic about putting over this new company."

The doctor agreed. "A freak that couldn't happen once in a thousand times," he said.

As they talked further one of the detectives who had gone out on the alarm drifted into the group. He didn't take much part in the conversation but his gaze dwelt on Boyd. His attention was due only to a professional interest in the last man to talk with the victim.

Boyd went home to dinner that night. Elizabeth arrived a few minutes later. He was in the sitting-room rereading the account of Sewell's death when he noticed her presence. She stood in the doorway, her face shrunken with horror, a newspaper crumpled in her outstretched hand.

"Hello, Elizabeth! He took his feet off the stool and sat up. 'I see you know about friend Sewell.'"

The woman advanced a step, swaying. She wet her arid lips, tried to speak and choked.

He went to her side, offering his arm.

"Let me help you, Elizabeth. Somewhat of a shock, eh?"

Her eyes bulged and she drew away from him. Then he knew that she saw his hand in the death of Sewell.

"You—" She pressed a hand to her throat to control the twitching muscles. "You—"

His wide open eyes feasted on her and strangled her words. She observed to the full the light that, blazing up at times, had frightened her these last few months. Till

now she never had been sure that it was there. With the realization came the instinctive knowledge that he had learned of her and Sewell.

"You—knew?" she whispered: "I—I loved him."

Boyd nodded.

"You did—this?" He barely heard the words, with their indescribable terror as she held out the newspaper.

Boyd shrugged. His brutality was not assumed. His callousness was not a pose. It was simply that he had no emotion. He knew no more compunction of his act than—than Sewell had known when he stole Elizabeth, or she when she accepted Sewell.

"He trespassed, my dear Elizabeth," he stated and considered that sufficient.

"Trespassed!" she started indignantly. "On whom?"

"On me, Elizabeth." His look devoured her. "You were—mine!"

She dropped on a lounge, but could not take her eyes off him. His utter calm as much as his claim upon her astounded and hypnotized.

He sat on the arm of a chair, swinging a foot. Only his stare was murderous.

"Shall we dine?" He actually smiled.

She shivered. A thought made her lean forward.

"And the police—"

Boyd laughed, scornfully, not unpleasantly.

"They're all through. They say it was an accident."

The woman started up.

"You think that!" Her hands reached out, the fingers curving like claws. "You are wrong. I—I can tell them it was not an accident. That you killed him!"

He smiled again tolerantly.

"And even if they believed you, my dear Elizabeth, they could do nothing. A woman cannot send a man to death or to prison on her unsupported word. I'm afraid," he chuckled, "there would be a steady procession if that could be done."

The color flamed to her cheeks.

"I can give them a motive. I can tell them of—of"—a speck of blood trickled on her lip as her teeth ground into it—"of

the jealousy revealed by your insane claim on me."

"Even so, Elizabeth," his tone was patient but sardonic, "but you forget that the two girls in Sewell's office *heard him speak* to me as I passed out! He—er, couldn't very well have spoken with that spike in his head! And I couldn't have stuck it there after I left him! You must admit that."

Silently she watched him. The tenseness left her body. Her arms wilted at her sides. She saw the truth of what he said.

The two girls had committed themselves to the statement that Sewell had exchanged words with Boyd after Boyd was out of his office. No matter whether they reversed that declaration. A jury would have to give Boyd the benefit of the doubt. With two important witnesses—the only witnesses aside from herself—contradicting themselves, there would be an absolute absence of direct evidence. There could be only one verdict.

She saw how Boyd had played his cards to accentuate the friendship between himself and Sewell, down to the investment of a large sum in Sewell's business.

"Besides," he broke in on her thoughts, "I would deny that I had known of any reason for jealousy of Sewell—that *I* had any occasion for jealousy. It would be hard to prove that I had. You and I were not engaged. You had not announced an engagement to Sewell—that might have been a trifle for you to go on, but you kept the affair so secret. You see, your motive, as you call it, would be smashed at the very outset. It would develop into a case of you trying to send me to prison or to the chair without an iota of corroborative evidence. My social and business connections with Sewell would all tend to swing the weight to my side. The fact that you, on your own admission, were madly in love with him, would bear up a contention that you were unhinged by the tragedy."

His smile froze her. She was tottering.

"Furthermore, my dear," he added, "I might suggest that you were a fit subject for an asylum and possibly get a court to agree with me."

He caught her as her knees gave way and she swooned. Without calling her maid he

carried her to her room. He was at the bedside when her eyes fluttered. He waited till she was fully conscious.

"I have wondered, Elizabeth," he said mildly, "why you threw me aside—for Sewell?"

She could not meet his eyes this time. Her head moved in its frame of black hair against the snowy pillow. Her twisting fingers ripped the lace of the counterpane.

"I don't know," she whispered. "It just—happened."

"I see." Boyd arose. "Aren't you coming down to dinner? No?"

He walked to the door and turned.

"There's one other thing I think it's only fair to tell you, Elizabeth." He paused and she quailed before the fiendish glance that seemed to sear her. "I didn't warn Sewell, but it's different with you. You understand that some day I shall kill you, too? Unless—"

When her brain stopped whirling he was gone. He would kill her, too. Unless—She understood. Unless she saved him the trouble!

It was ten o'clock that night when the detective called at Boyd's home. He was the one who had listened while Boyd had conversed with the coroner, the district attorney and the doctor in the afternoon.

"Just a couple of questions," he apologized as Boyd met him in the hall and led the way to the library.

"Yes?" Boyd was not alarmed. Some formalities for the record, he supposed. He gave his visitor look for look, unruffled.

"You finished a business deal with Sewell to-day, didn't you? You signed a paper with him—an agreement about the money you were putting in?"

Boyd did not gather what this had to do with the case except that it was a part of his—his propaganda, so to speak. They couldn't know that. He gave no hint that the question perplexed him.

"I have a copy here," he replied. "Want to see it?"

"No—no." The detective nibbled at a finger nail, maintaining his apologetic demeanor. "If you will," he changed his mind, "let me look at it, please."

Boyd started from the room. "I'll get it. It's in another coat."

Returning with the paper he evinced no curiosity about why it should be examined. The less he said, without being secretive, the better it would be. So far he had taken a half-and-half way—giving information freely without volunteering too much. He counted himself secure. They couldn't put anything on him.

The detective smiled.

"It's only a detail, but which of the papers was signed first? This or the one Sewell kept?"

For the fraction of a second Boyd hesitated. He asked himself what bearing this could have? He decided it could not affect the issue.

"This one," he answered truthfully, but could not help adding: "Why?"

Instead of answering, the detective asked:

"And after you and Sewell had signed both papers you visited a while?"

Once more there was that infinitesimal lapse before Boyd spoke.

"Yes. We chatted a few minutes before I left."

His brain was darting here and there for the object of this interrogation. What could this none-too-intelligent-looking man be aiming at? What, if anything, did he expect to attain by all this? It could mean nothing. The two girls had *heard* Sewell—there was the king-pin of Boyd's assurance which they would have to dislodge if it came to the test.

"Could you say how long you talked after the papers were signed—both papers?"

"Oh—" Sewell professed to think. "It's difficult to place definitely a matter like that—unless there is an incident to give it significance. In this instance, of course, there wasn't."

"I know," agreed the detective. "But we want to fix the time as close as we can. How long would you say—roughly?"

There was no trace of eagerness in the man's tone or manner. He bore the atmosphere of one doing a wearisome duty.

"I should say," Boyd ran his hand over his forehead to hide the contempt, "approximately ten minutes."

"Ten minutes." His visitor hitched for-

ward in his chair. "Not more than that? It was about ten minutes before you left him?"

"Yes. Easily ten minutes. Not less."

The detective got up.

"Thanks. That's about all."

His right hand went into his coat-pocket.

Boyd also stood. In his heart he admitted that he had been a little anxious. He still couldn't make out what the signing of the memorandum had to do with the matter. But, he told himself, this policeman and his fellows hadn't any more idea, so what difference did it make?

He offered his cigar-case.

"Have one?"

The detective's hand leaped from his pocket. A handcuff snapped on Boyd's extended wrist. Before he could recover from the surprise his other wrist was encircled by the steel.

With fallen jaw he gaped. A minute passed before he could regain his voice.

"What in the name of—"

The interruption came crisply:

"For the murder of Elliot Sewell!"

A portière in the doorway shook and was pushed aside. Elizabeth clung to it. Her face was deathlike, yet it lighted with triumph.

"I was going to save you the trouble of killing me, as you promised, Harrington," she said quietly, "when I heard you talking. Now—I shall stay and help convict you."

Boyd snarled and swung to confront the detective.

"You're crazy, man, like this woman. Take these things off."

"At headquarters we'll do that—" His glance went to Elizabeth. He didn't know where she figured, but if she could tell anything he reckoned the case would be bomb-proof.

An ice of fear went creeping through Boyd's bones, but he held himself together. It was ridiculous. His position was too unassailable. He had builded too firm an alibi. They never could convict him. Yet—the detective was very confident!

The sweat beaded on Boyd's forehead. His tone was good considering the dryness of his throat and his accelerated pulse.

"What is the basis of this silly performance?"

The detective smiled, not vindictively. Elizabeth was tottering.

"It isn't as silly as you think. It won't hurt to tell you. Remember that you told the agreement was signed by you—and Sewell a good ten minutes before you left him?"

Boyd glared, but kept silence.

"All right! You remember also that under Sewell's body on the desk was his copy of that paper?"

Elizabeth, close beside the detective, was straining forward to catch every word. Her lips were parted expectantly. Dull spots of color came and went on her cheeks.

"What of it?" Boyd rasped.

The detective picked a cigar from the floor where it had rolled from the fallen case. He bit into it.

"We-ell," he drawled, "remember in addition that Sewell had on a light gray suit and," his voice quickened, "that I tested the ink you both used. Write as heavy as you can with it, even using a stub pen, and that ink won't stay wet more than six minutes! Get me now?"

There was an element of admiration in his glance, but Boyd missed that as he let loose a frightful oath. He saw where they had him.

"That's it," concluded the detective. "The signatures you say were written at least ten minutes before Sewell died are smudged on the front of his coat. You laid him over that paper before the ink was dry."

Boyd looked at Elizabeth. She laughed hysterically.

"Some day," she mocked wildly, "I will kill you, too!"

He pulled his nerves together. He was sorry that his job was only half done. He had planned so elaborately to take full measure of vengeance! If he had known that his scheme was to go for naught through such a puny oversight, he would have killed them both that night he saw them together. But after all he *had* eliminated Sewell. That was something.

"Let's go," he said quietly. "She will complete your case."

The Head of Arsenjo

by Ray St. Vrain.

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

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

WHEN Owen Vaughn, celebrated New York detective, accepted the invitation of his friend and coworker, Margot Dale, to attend Mrs. John Bashford Whympers's musicale, where the musical sensation of the season, Señorita Dolores Arsenjo, was to play her violin, he had looked forward to an evening of pleasure unmingled with business.

At the close of the concert, while Margot listened to the raptures of young Lieutenant Bateson, and the audience seemed to have been swept off its feet by the weird effect of the final number, a prized possession of the hostess, a costly Chinese vase, was suddenly discovered to have been thrown to the floor and shattered.

On examining one of the broken bits Vaughn found it was not the original vase, which he knew well, but a clever reproduction. Moreover, he also learned that Señor José Arsenjo, who arranged his daughter's concerts, had particularly stipulated where the vase was to be placed, the night of the concert, asserting his daughter's playing was subtly influenced by the atmosphere imparted by a work of art. Vaughn's professional curiosity was at once aroused. Mrs. Whympers secured an invitation to an Arsenjo recital at the home of Mrs. Foulkes, which Vaughn attended in disguise. Here he found that an atmospheric "prop," a genuine Blakelock, disappeared at the final number of the concert, and a clever fake had been substituted for the original. Vaughn found the paint of the signature was still wet. A suspicious box of flowers for the artist gave the detective his lead. Bateson had again been present, and when her accompanist was taken ill, Bateson played for Señorita Arsenjo. It was evident the young American had fallen for Dolores Arsenjo.

At the next Arsenjo concert, at the home of his friend, Dr. Durant, Vaughn secured a place of advantage in a small room which communicated with the drawing-room. The detective learned that just before the mysterious final number, Arsenjo, by means of a miniature atomizer, discharged some subtle gas over the heads of the audience. This was the famous "spell," which all but robbed the audience of consciousness, and which invariably made Dolores Arsenjo faint at the end of the evening. Next he saw Miguel, the Ecuadorian's factotum, take down the three Henners, valued at fifty thousand dollars, which he replaced with three copies.

Hardly had his man disappeared with the pictures when Arsenjo reappeared and announced that his daughter's priceless Stradivarius had been stolen; and he suspected Bateson. In fact he went to Vaughn the next day and engaged him on the case, with the suggestion if the detective were to search the lieutenant's rooms, he thought the violin would be found.

Michael McSurely, whom Vaughn had sent to shadow Arsenjo, returned with a story of how he had followed the Spaniard to a house on Staten Island, where he had left a parcel which was about the size of the Blakelock painting. In the midst of the detective's calculations, Señorita Dolores Arsenjo was ushered into his private office.

CHAPTER VII.

VISITORS.

VAUGHN was astounded—as he had a right to be.

"You!"

"You know me?" she laughed.

"I have heard you play, *señorita*."

She sank into the big armchair. "Mr.

Vaughn, do you know why I wore this ugly veil? I didn't want the public in general—and my father in particular—to know I intended consulting a detective. I've seen you somewhere!" she cried suddenly. "You're the K'ang-hsi man! Have you found Mrs. Whympers's vase yet?"

He looked at her straight. "Not yet,

Señorita Arsenjo."

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for June 14.

Her gaze did not waver. "The strangest things happen at my recitals. Mrs. Whymper lost her K'ang-hsi while I was playing at her house—and last night just after my recital at Dr. Durant's my precious violin was stolen. I've vowed not to play another note till it's found. You'll get to work this very morning, Mr. Vaughn—this very hour?"

"What if I'm too busy already?" he queried smilingly.

"But you're not—you can't be. Think what the world would lose if I never play again! That may sound insufferably egotistical. But honestly I don't care for my playing. My peculiar limitations are so stupid—limitations which make it impossible for me to play in public—that is, for the public—for vast throngs, I mean. I should like to play in the streets—in the public parks—so the people—everybody—might hear."

"You interest me, *señorita*. What are these 'limitations' that forbid your playing before large crowds?"

"I faint dead away at the end of every recital I give—before the end indeed. Isn't that ridiculous—incredible?"

"It surely seems so. You look to be in excellent health. Do you faint any other time?"

"No, never. That's the astonishing part of it."

"What are your sensations?"

"I seem to lose consciousness very gradually—everything grows light and airy around me. People who rave over my playing declare it affects them in a similar way. It's very mysterious. I've asked my father about it—" She paused.

"And what does he say?"

"His theory is that it's caused by some undiscovered vibration of music. Isn't that remarkable?"

"Very remarkable indeed," assented Vaughn dryly.

"Another odd thing—I never faint unless I'm playing one of his compositions."

Vaughn smiled. "If you really want to play before large crowds why don't you leave his works off the program? Then you wouldn't faint—"

"But he wouldn't allow it. He has the

queerest ideas about the common people. He says they can't understand music—"

"Play for them anyway. Give a recital without his knowledge. Rent Carnegie Hall, charge a nominal admission and play under an assumed name—"

"How perfectly fascinating—it would be just like a story or a play!" Her brow clouded suddenly. "But I shouldn't dare. My father would be sure to find it out—and he's a horribly stern man. As for that, I'm taking a great risk in coming here to see *you*. Last night I wanted him to telephone the police the violin had been stolen. He refused. We had quite a little argument—we're both rather self-willed—" She gave a highly expressive shrug. "He said the thief might be some one whom we would dislike to prosecute, so we had better wait a few days to give him the chance to see the error of his ways and bring back the violin. This sounded downright silly to me. Then I asked him to consult a private detective—I even mentioned you as a well-known one—but he insisted he'd manage the case himself. I decided to do a little managing of my own. Do you blame me?"

"Not at all," laughed Vaughn. "It's your property that was stolen. Now what were the circumstances in connection with the violin's disappearance?"

She narrated them with some detail—not, however, even mentioning Lieutenant Bate-son's name. Indeed she expressed the frank opinion that one of Dr. Durant's servants might be the culprit.

"Don't you think my theory reasonable?"

He smiled. "Hardly, *señorita*. I have already made up my mind as to the identity of the thief—and, moreover, I feel sure I can recover your violin by to-morrow."

She looked her incredulity. "So soon? Why, you're cleverer even than I thought!"

She was frankly thrilled and begged him to take her into his confidence; but he insisted he never made a report on a case until the report was ready. And so with this she was forced to be content, shortly taking her leave and promising to call again to-morrow afternoon. "Unless," she qualified gaily, "my father has discovered I've been here and so keeps me a prisoner in the house. But he'll have to lock me in to

have his way! Good day, Mr. Vaughn—and good luck. But, remember, the case may not be quite as easy as it looks. So work hard!”

Vaughn looked up Bateson's address in the city directory and found that he had rooms at a bachelor apartment-house in the West Fifties. Immediately after luncheon he called. Luckily the young soldier was in. His greeting was cordial, but he looked rather surprised at sight of the detective.

“Sit down, Mr. Vaughn,” he said, indicating a big armchair by the window. “Will you smoke with me?”

Both lighted cigars, and while Bateson chatted on politics and the war, Vaughn was making up his mind how best to broach the subject that had brought him. At last he decided to be perfectly straightforward. Not for a moment had he believed the young man guilty of the theft, Arsenjo's absurd story bearing on its face the unworthy motives that had engendered it. Under the circumstances to have followed the usual crafty procedure of a detective in “scenting out” a case would have been an insult both to Bateson and his own professional ability and knowledge of human nature; so without any ado he casually remarked in the first lull in the lieutenant's talk:

“By the way, have you heard that Señora Arsenjo's violin was stolen last night at Dr. Durant's?”

“What!” Bateson looked his blank astonishment. “They must have discovered it after I left. But, go on—tell me.”

Vaughn thereupon told him of the calls of Arsenjo and Dolores at his office that morning. He gave Arsenjo's version of everything that had happened from the ending of the recital to the discovery of the alleged theft. He did not, however, refer directly to the Spanish-American's “suspicions.” Bateson listened with breathless interest; but through innocence or a pardonable stupidity—perhaps a combination of both—he failed to see the quite obvious implication. Presently Vaughn was forced to say:

“Señor Arsenjo thinks he knows who the thief is.”

“Good. Who is it?”

“You.”

The cigar that Bateson was lifting to his lips dropped to the floor. He flashed at Vaughn a wondering look—then burst into a laugh.

“I see. It's a joke.”

“Not so. It's quite serious.”

“Serious? Good God, man, do you mean to say—” He drew a long breath. “Well, somebody's crazy, that's all.”

Vaughn smiled. “You're right. Arsenjo's the madman.”

“But—Heavens! How can he be mad enough to accuse *me*?”

“Shall I be frank, lieutenant?”

“Certainly. Let's get at the thing.”

“Arsenjo says you're badly in debt—”

“That's not true. I discharged my last obligation some months ago. At the most I owed less than three thousand dollars, and none of my debts were ones I need blush for. They weren't gambling debts or money spent on women—I didn't don this khaki to disgrace it. Some foolish speculations in the Street turned out the way foolish speculations usually do—that's all. So this man says I stole—think of it, *stole*—and *her* violin—to get money to pay my debts, eh?”

“Exactly.”

“Good Heavens, what a fool! He wants to discredit me in his daughter's eyes, but doesn't he realize he can't get away with a thing of this sort? Did he really expect to prove me a thief on his unsupported word?”

Vaughn was amused at his incredulity. “Certainly not. He says you have the violin in your possession—”

“What!” Bateson sprang to his feet. “He dares say that? And you've come to make the search—” He flushed hotly. “Well—”

Vaughn rose and laid a friendly hand on his shoulder. “Now listen. You're not going to make me say in so many words that I believe you're innocent. That would be taking Arsenjo's ridiculous charge too seriously. I didn't come here to make any search; I simply wanted to put you on your guard—”

Bateson burst into a laugh. “By Jove, it's the best joke of the season. Come, Vaughn, enjoy it with me—” But he

sobered suddenly and his mouth took on a grim, set look. "We'll take him seriously to this extent at least—we'll make the search."

"Nonsense. I won't make any search—"

"Then *I will*." His angry gaze swept the room. "Where shall I begin? How's this wardrobe for a starter? Maybe I hid the violin in there!" he cried ironically, going to it and flinging open the door.

Vaughn, watching him amusedly, saw him start back in wonder, gaze intently into the wardrobe, then bend down and with gingerly fingers bring forth a violin-case. He opened it and took out—Señorita Arsenjo's Stradivarius.

"You—you knew it was here?" he gasped.

Vaughn smiled. "This is where he said I'd find it—"

"But—how came it here?"

"Get your thinking apparatus to working, man. Arsenjo had it brought here, of course—probably by the *mestizo* Miguel."

"The dog! I'll have him prosecuted for this—"

"No, you won't. He's done this mad thing simply because Señorita Dolores—to be perfectly frank—has flatly refused to obey his commands regarding her attitude toward *you*. Surely you won't drag her into this ugly business—"

"Good God, no! I hadn't thought of that. But what shall I do? Take the violin to the *señorita* and tell her all? Otherwise, how can I explain having it?"

Vaughn thought a moment. "Will you put yourself in my hands?"

"Unreservedly."

"Good. I'll take the violin. All I ask of you is to keep mum—most of all, to Señorita Dolores. Are you likely to see her to-day or to-morrow?"

Bateson blushed like a schoolboy. "We were going to make a desperate effort to run the blockade and go for a motor ride; but maybe the loss of the violin has so upset her—"

"Nonsense," laughed Vaughn. "She'll need you to console her. But remember, you don't know a thing. You must be the most astonished man in New York when she informs you of the theft."

"Trust me," chuckled Bateson. "I'll do my tutor proud."

So it was all arranged. Vaughn, pressed for time, left at once, taking the violin to his office, where he locked it in the safe. He found McSurely waiting for him. Mac had looked through the newspaper-files and had found the names of the society people who had had Señorita Dolores give musicales at their homes during the past season. They numbered some eight in all. Three were out of town.

Vaughn immediately telephoned the five ladies who were in the city and brought all his resources to bear to secure interviews with them at once. This was naturally a difficult thing to accomplish. Society folk are quite the busiest people in the world in their own small way; and had Vaughn been less prominent in his profession he would have found it impossible to get to see so many without having made previous engagements. But when, with portentous gravity, he informed them that he was working on one of the most important cases of his life, a case in which they themselves would probably be directly involved, they were frankly impressed and so without much parleying agreed to see him.

He prepared a set story to tell all of them. Until he was ready to "spring" the case in its entirety he did not want any inkling of it to reach the public either *via* police channels or newspaper scare-heads; so while he admitted candidly that this mysterious thief *de luxe* had been working in the Arsenjos' train he carefully refrained from implicating the *señor* in the robberies. Thus stating the purpose of his calls, he had no difficulty in interesting the five ladies—and alarming them—to such an extent that they told him everything they could remember in connection with the recitals—particularly regarding the character of Señorita Arsenjo's "atmosphere"—and allowed him to inspect all their *objets d'art*—paintings, mosaics, ceramics, statuary—which might have been exchanged for more or less clever reproductions.

By noon of the next day he had interviewed the last of the five ladies—as well as those of their footmen who were on duty

at the front door on the recital nights—and had completed his investigations with the following interesting results:

Each footman distinctly remembered the stock incident of a messenger bringing a box of flowers for Señorita Arsenjo toward the close of the recital. This man always insisted on seeing Arsenjo. Arsenjo never failed to answer his summons. Sometimes he talked to the man in the hall, sending the servant away on some errand or other. Once Señorita Valdez had suddenly become ill, requiring the footman's services; and on two other occasions footmen had been sent to the nearest dealer's to get resin for the violinist's bow—Arsenjo always tipping like a prince.

Each of the five ladies had lost some priceless *objet d'art* or oil painting through Arsenjo's highly specialized system of exchange, the losses including a Bouguereau "Venus," a Cezanne landscape, a Chinese mandarin vase, and an unfinished Rodin bust of Victor Hugo. The copies had been made with remarkable skill, the Victor Hugo bust being especially noteworthy. The original—Vaughn had seen it some months before at a private exhibition—was of an odd yellowish color, similar to the Balzac head in the Rodin corridor at the Metropolitan Museum of Art; and in the reproduction the peculiar shade had been imitated perfectly. The entire head had been molded with a versimilitude that was almost uncanny. Vaughn stood before the splendid cheat a long while lost in ungrudging admiration. What a strange genius the *mestizo* Miguel was! He had declared he could paint anything, make anything, do anything—and this amazing piece of work proved it.

That evening Vaughn was called up on the telephone by Arsenjo. The South American was rather belligerent.

"Well?" he demanded.

"Well?" sharply repeated Vaughn, who was human enough to be offended at his tone.

"Have you no news? Haven't you been to see Lieutenant Bateson yet? Yesterday morning I gave you the case. Why this delay in presenting a report?"

"I present a report when it is ready,

not before. Perhaps, Señor Arsenjo, you're in such a hurry you'd prefer to put the case into somebody else's hands?"

Immediately the *señor* became much less choleric. "Certainly not, my dear Mr. Vaughn. I don't regret giving you the case—far from it. Only my daughter is worried about her violin—quite naturally. Besides, I'm somewhat perturbed myself. Bateson has been hanging around my house again. He had the audacity to take Dolores motoring—" There came a splutter of rage over the wire. "I had ordered my servant Miguel to keep them apart at all costs—but they held their tryst and rode off under his very eyes."

"Too bad!" exclaimed Vaughn in surprisingly sympathetic tones. "You must have been rather angry, *señor*?"

"Rather angry!" came the derisive echo. "I was furious—insane. I horsewhipped the dog until he bled—"

"What!" Vaughn was really astonished. "Who is this Miguel? What sort of man is he to stand such treatment?"

Arsenjo was unwontedly communicative. "Man?" he sneered. "We in Ecuador don't call the Indian dogs we have enslaved men! This Miguel is a *mestizo*. I have civilized him—educated him—made him what he is. Your so-called 'free-and-equal' America has put foolish notions into his half-breed head; he's actually beginning to think he's a human being. But I fancy the horsehide will make him remember that a slave in Ecuador is a slave everywhere else on the globe!" A cruel laugh sounded. "But come, Mr. Vaughn, you have seen Bateson?"

"Yes."

"Good. You found the violin?"

"Yes."

"Ah! You're convinced *now* he stole it?"

"I have grave doubts."

"What! After finding it in his possession?"

Vaughn gave a short laugh. "A pick-pocket not wishing to be caught with the goods drops the watch he has 'lifted' into *your* pocket. Does that prove you the thief? No, *señor*—"

Bang! went Arsenjo's receiver into place.

"What an angelic temper!" chuckled Vaughn. "He horsewhips Miguel and now he's trying to drive *me!* It will be a wonder if this same temper doesn't provoke somebody into killing him—"

The telephone-bell cut short his soliloquy. He took down the receiver—and, as he had half expected, found Arsenjo once more on the wire.

"Mr. Vaughn, you must pardon my impulsiveness," came the oily words. "Please attribute it to a loving father's natural anxiety. Take whatever time is necessary—but remember that suspense is deadly! You'll let me know when anything happens?"

"Certainly."

"Thank you—" in the same smooth tones; and that was all.

CHAPTER VIII.

MIGUEL'S MYSTERY.

LATE that same evening Bateson made an unexpected call at Vaughn's apartment. He was in a gay mood. He informed Vaughn that he and Dolores had had the "best drive yet," going up the Hudson as far as Peekskill and not returning till long after dark.

"I may as well tell you, old man," he blushing went on, "that Dolores and I are engaged to be married. Rather sudden of course—we haven't known each other very long. But the circumstances of the case—her father's attitude and so on—demand quick action—understand?"

But Vaughn shook his head soberly. "I'll be perfectly frank, my dear fellow. Don't you think you'd better not do anything rash? You must admit Señorita Dolores is rather unfortunate in having the father she has. His irregularities are not confined to the scurvy trick he's trying to play on you. He's a man of pretty big operations. In a few days I'll have a story to tell that will make New York gasp—"

"What!" exclaimed Bateson, astonished. "Why not tell me now?"

"Not yet. Meanwhile don't you think it wise to go slowly?"

Bateson did not reply. He turned away

and bit his lip; then, facing about suddenly: "Look here, Vaughn—I hate to ask this question; I'm surprised you haven't answered it already without my having to put it in words. It almost seems like a lack of belief in the girl I love to ask you—"

Vaughn read his thoughts. "I believe the *señorita* is entirely ignorant of everything—"

"Thank God! I knew it. I know human nature—"

"Wait, my impulsive young friend. I didn't say I *knew*—I said I *believed*—"

"Well, I *know*—and that's enough for me. She's goodness itself—"

"*Will* you listen?" broke in Vaughn overwhelmingly. "I want you to promise to wait at least a week—"

But Bateson gaily snatched the word from his lips. "A week? Certainly. I'd have to wait that long anyway." He laughed happily. "I'm going back to camp to-night and won't return to town till next Saturday. An army man, you know, can't always be as precipitate as he'd like." The love-smitten young fellow apostrophized Señorita Dolores for some fervid moments, much to Vaughn's sympathetic amusement; then, glancing suddenly at the clock, he declared he'd have to go or miss his train. So he gave the detective a hearty handshake and hurried away.

On arriving at the office the next morning Vaughn was surprised to find a caller awaiting him—Dolores. She looked pale and hollow-eyed and her manner betrayed an inward agitation that seemed rather disproportionate to the loss of the violin, valuable though it was.

"My dear *señorita*," he said reassuringly, after cordial greetings, "I know you're worried about your violin, but I'm quite confident—"

"I'm not here to see you about the violin, Mr. Vaughn. Something so much more terrible has happened—" Her voice broke. Can you—can you imagine me as *not* Señor Arsenjo's daughter?"

"What!" he cried. "You mean it?"

She smiled faintly. "Can you imagine me as—well, an American girl?"

He looked at her. Yes, he *could* imagine it. Her blond beauty, her spirit, her inde-

pendence, her courage—all these were typically American. As for any resemblance to Arsenjo—physical or mental—there was none. He had remarked that in the beginning.

“Can you imagine it?” she insisted.

“With the greatest ease.”

Involuntarily he reached toward her and grasped the little hand that lay limply in her lap. She smiled bravely, then half shuddered in spite of herself.

“Now, Mr. Vaughn, I may as well tell you at the start that this is purely a professional call—I want to put you to work on the ‘Case of Dolores Arsenjo’—or whatever my name is. Forget my violin, or let one of your assistants hunt for it. You must find out who I am.”

“Suppose you tell me the thing from the beginning,” he said.

“There’s not much to tell—that is, Señor Arsenjo told me only a very little. He was furiously angry, or he wouldn’t have said even that much—” She drew a long breath. “We had been having an unpleasant discussion about Lieutenant Bateson. He warned me never to see him again. Of course, this roused me and I daresay I said some cutting things. Suddenly he amazed and horrified me by falling on his knees—actually—and declaring his *love* for me—not the love of a parent, he hastened to explain, but the—the other kind—the love of a man for a woman. ‘And I have the right to love you like this,’ he cried, ‘for I am *not* your father. Not a drop of my blood flows in your veins. All these years I have loved you madly—jealously—’”

She paused, her face white. “I—I thought I could tell you what he said—but I haven’t the courage. He talked like a madman. At first I was too dazed—horrified—to speak—to question him about my parentage. But at last I broke in upon his insane ravings and begged him to tell me the truth. He must have read my mind—must have realized the wild joy I felt at the thought of my utter independence of him—for he sprang up, declared he had been lying, and rushed from the room.”

Vaughn was considerably silent a moment.

“Now tell me something about yourself

—your life at Quito—your childhood,” he said.

“My earliest recollections are of a long, low, blue-tinted house in Quito with barred windows and a *patio* in the center—and Señor Arsenjo, who, with his wonderful head, fascinated me as a child. That head! Arturo Michelena, the famous Venezuelan artist, begged the privilege of painting it; a sculptor in Florence used it as a model for one of his Homeric figures; and Miguel, who is a sort of universal genius, has sculptured and painted that head dozens of times. Miguel is our confidential servant, you know. He is a *mestizo*—a half-breed. I think him an artistic madman—”

The term struck Vaughn. “Artistic madman—”

“He’s so passionately fond of art in all forms, so hopelessly ambitious to be the greatest painter, sculptor, designer in the world. When he was a little child his first sight of Señor Arsenjo’s perfect head thrilled him as some children are thrilled at the sight of firearms—he began painting it and modeling it in clay and has done so at intervals ever since.”

“Very astonishing,” commented Vaughn, intensely interested, “a most curious mania. Who is this Miguel?”

“The son of one of the Indian peons on Señor Arsenjo’s cacao plantation. Indian peons in Ecuador are virtually slaves of their masters or landlords. Miguel’s father was practically a slave. But Señor Arsenjo was attracted to Miguel on account of his artistic gifts; so he educated him. But reverting to the *señor’s* head—don’t you think it a beautiful one, Mr. Vaughn?”

“Very beautiful indeed,” answered Vaughn dryly. “But that noble brow will never solve the mystery of your parentage—”

“True enough,” she laughed. “Well—my childhood in Quito was like that of other children of my class. I attended day school at a convent and studied music under Señor Arsenjo, who was a really excellent violinist and composer—”

“A professional musician?”

“Oh, no—just a very clever dilettante. He devoted most of his time to his enormous cacao business. When I was twelve

I had an English governess. The *señor* sent to London for her. He told me that much of our life would be passed in English-speaking countries and I must learn to speak that language as perfectly as I spoke Spanish. Later this governess accompanied us to Paris—where I studied music for several years—and then made a European tour with us.”

“Señor Arsenjo was with you all this time?”

“Yes.”

“And the *mestizo* Miguel?”

“Yes—as the *señor's* body-servant.”

“I’ve heard of the *señor's* cruel treatment of him. Why hasn’t he left Arsenjo?”

“I don’t know—unless the *señor* has some hold on him—or unless he has been dangling before Miguel’s eyes the bait of an artistic career, which has always been the poor *mestizo's* dream. Miguel believes implicitly that Arsenjo is the greatest man in the world, the greatest developer of artists. That, I daresay, is the reason he has remained with him. Besides, a Quinchua of Ecuador is born but to obey the whites, to suffer any and all indignities at their hands.”

“Well,” said Vaughn after a moment’s thought, “I rather think we’ll have to turn to the *mestizo* to learn something of your parentage. Miguel—”

The telephone on the desk rang.

“Yes?” queried Vaughn, taking the receiver.

“Miguel is here to see the young lady who is now with you.”

“Miguel!” Vaughn repeated, astonished.

“He here?” cried Dolores.

“In the outer office. He wants to see you—”

“Why, how very remarkable! I wonder—” She rose.

“Have him come in here,” suggested Vaughn. “I want to see him—speak to him.”

She agreed and he directed the telephone-operator to have the visitor shown into the private office. In a moment Miguel stood before them smiling, hat in hand. Vaughn suddenly remembered the two times he had met him at the Fouldera Gallery. But the *mestizo* gave no sign of recognition. He

was perfectly at his ease—or his acting was worthy the cleverest Broadway star.

“What do you want, Miguel?” inquired Dolores.

Miguel, still smiling, flashed a covertly curious glance at Vaughn.

Dolores, irritated, frowned and continued sharply: “It must be something rather unusual, for you’re not in the habit of following me about to speak to me.”

“I wanted to tell the *señorita*,” answered Miguel, with eyes continually shifting to Vaughn, “that I am her friend.”

“Yes? But why did you come here to tell me?”

He laughed softly. “I would not follow *señorita* if she came any other place—”

“You mean, Miguel, you wanted to see me?” put in Vaughn.

There was a flash of white teeth. “Yes. *I never see you before, never in my life.*”

The crudely strong emphasis laid upon the words showed he was lying. Of course he remembered seeing Vaughn at the Fouldera Gallery—but why was he insisting on the contrary?

Miguel continued suavely: “I want to see Mr. Vaughn, for he is friend of yours. He help you. I like him because he help you. I want to help him help you. The *señorita* understand?”

Dolores did not attempt to hide her impatience. “Certainly not. What *are* you talking about?”

His smile—which, despite its good humor, had a slightly mocking quality—vanished suddenly; he grew portentously grave. “Miguel hear what the master say to *señorita* last night—”

“What!” she cried.

“I hear him say he is not your father, but your sweetheart—”

“Miguel!” She flushed crimson.

“I mean no harm when I say that. The master, *he* mean no harm. He—” He hesitated, glancing furtively at Vaughn. “He tell you the truth because he want to do right thing.”

Both Dolores and Vaughn gazed at him in astonishment. What was his object in defending the man he hated? And why in the same breath was he assuring Dolores he was *her* friend?

"Miguel," she said coldly, "you must know your opinion doesn't interest me in the least. Your impudence in following me here is unpardonable. I shall have to apologize to Mr. Vaughn—"

"Wait," interrupted Vaughn pleasantly. "There is a misunderstanding. I'm sure Miguel means well. Perhaps he wants to prove his—shall I say gratitude?—to both of you, the 'master' and his *adopted* daughter."

"Mr. Vaughn speak truth!" cried the *mestizo* eagerly. "You say just what I say if I talk English as well as—" He paused, smiling at Vaughn, then continued slowly, a mocking gleam in his eyes, "As well as I make copy of Victor Hugo's head."

Vaughn almost betrayed himself by a start. Was not this reference to the reproduction of the Rodin bust—the original of which had been one of Arsenjo's biggest pieces of booty—a challenge?

"Miguel," said Dolores, "come to the point. When you say you're my friend do you mean you know something of my childhood that you'll tell me?"

He nodded.

"Oh, Miguel," she begged, "tell me now—"

"Not yet, *señorita*. I speak *next Saturday*."

"Why must I wait?"

"I must have week to get all facts ready. Then I tell them to you—and Mr. Vaughn. Mr. Vaughn is your good friend. I tell Mr. Vaughn, then he tell you."

"Why tell me at all?" queried Vaughn, puzzled. "Why not tell just the *señorita*?"

"Ah, but it is *your* case. You must have glory. I want to be good friend to the three of you—the master, whom I love, ah, like dog love master, like *slave* love master—to the *señorita*, who is good young lady—and to you who are famous detective that never lose a case. And the only way I can be friend to all of you is to wait till next Saturday."

Vaughn eyed him intently. "You say you'll tell us what you know. But do you know anything?"

"Everything!" His tone had a convincing ring. "I tell *señorita* of her father who came down from America to Panama,

and then to Guayaquil, and then to Quito, where he meet the master. Next Saturday I tell all, all. *Adios*." And, bowing, the *mestizo* turned and went swiftly toward the door.

"Miguel!" entreated Dolores.

But with his soft laugh he had already gone.

"What cruelty to make me wait," she sighed bitterly. "What do you advise?"

"We must wait till Saturday—"

"But how can I remain under Señor Arsenjo's roof all this time?" she cried, shuddering. "This man is not my father. He—"

"Señorita Valdez is still with you, isn't she?"

"Yes; but she is no protection—she is afraid of him."

Vaughn studied. "If you were to leave now you might never learn the facts of your parentage—Arsenjo might silence Miguel forever—"

"You mean he might *kill* him?"

"Why not?"

"Why, Mr. Vaughn—that's the same as calling him a criminal—a—" She fixed her wide eyes upon him. "Do you know something about him? Is he involved in some case you're working on?"

He rose and then with grave friendliness took her hand. "My dear *señorita*—"

"You'll tell me—*now*?" she begged.

"I'm not ready—yet."

"But all this makes me more eager than ever to leave him. Surely, Mr. Vaughn, you won't ask me to remain under the roof of—oh, *what* has he done?"

"Isn't there some member of the household you can trust?" Vaughn asked. "Haven't you a maid?"

"She left me only yesterday—"

"Just the thing," he cried, turning to the telephone with a triumphant laugh. "I'll provide you with a maid who will be mother, sister, protector to you until you leave Arsenjo—Margot Dale, the cleverest woman in New York and incidentally my good friend."

"A—detective?" queried Dolores eagerly. "A miracle-worker like you?"

He nodded as he called Margot's number. Fortunately she was in; and in a few mo-

ments he had explained his pressing need and secured her consent to enact the rôle of Dolores's maid for the next week.

"Miss Dale will report for duty this afternoon," he said, hanging up the receiver.

Dolores was delighted with the arrangement; and when she left she was entirely willing to stay out the week under Arsenjo's roof.

Vaughn hurried to Margot's Washington Square apartment, where he told his clever coworker a detailed story of the case to date. She was lost in wonder at its rapid development and was naively glad to be "in" on the inevitably thrilling *dénouement* now so imminent; so in less than an hour after Vaughn's departure she had metamorphosed herself into a trim lady's-maid, taken a cab to Arsenjo's Riverside Drive house and been "employed" by the amused *señorita*. Toward evening she telephoned Vaughn with reassuring cheer:

"Everything's all right, Owen; couldn't be better. Don't worry—I'm in a phone-booth in a drug-store and nobody is listening. *Señorita* Dolores has taken me to her heart. Arsenjo has given me only a passing glance. Not so with Miguel—the sinister half-breed flashed on me an inquisitive look from those outlandish eyes of his; but I don't think he suspects anything. Why shouldn't I be here? The *señorita* can't get along without a maid!"

He laughed. "Of course not. Now listen, Margot. If you have the chance try to lay a stealthy hand on some of Arsenjo's atmosphere—in other words, the mysterious drug he uses at the recitals. But be very careful—and keep an eye on the *mestizo*. Good-by."

CHAPTER IX.

BEHIND THE GREEN CURTAIN.

THE next day Vaughn resumed his investigations into those of the Arsenjo recitals which had been given prior to the one at Mrs. Whympers's. He had already interviewed five of the society women at whose homes Dolores had played. Of these, two had returned from week-ends in the country; and he immediately made

engagements to see them. The remaining one was in the Far West. He had her attorney secure her permission for him to search her town house for spurious *objets d'art* which Arsenjo might have exchanged for valuable originals; and by Friday he had finished his investigations.

The results were only what he had expected. Arsenjo had made away with some priceless piece of booty from each house where Dolores had played—and by methods similar to those he had used at Mrs. Whympers's and Mrs. Foulkes's. The case was completed. But Vaughn decided to wait until the morrow—the fateful Saturday on which Miguel had promised to make his disclosures—before swearing out warrants for the *mestizo* and his master. On that day, too, Lieutenant Bateson would be in town.

The week did not pass without several incidents which threatened for a time to precipitate matters and discount the coming *dénouement*. For one thing, Arsenjo waxed furious on the subject of the "stolen" violin. He telephoned Vaughn a number of times without getting any satisfaction, and at last called at the office, imperiously demanding the instant arrest of Lieutenant Bateson as a thief.

Vaughn's answer was a challenge. "You don't have to wait on me. Swear out the warrant yourself—if you have the courage."

This did the work. Arsenjo immediately calmed down, mumbled a few meaningless phrases about having too much respect for an American army officer to resort to such rigorous measures personally; then, assuring Vaughn he would await his good pleasure, smilingly departed.

Early the next morning Margot telephoned the detective some rather startling news. Arsenjo had confided to Dolores the whole truth about the disappearance of the violin, admitting that he had "framed" the theft, sending the instrument to Bateson's apartment by Miguel, who had gained entrance with a pass key.

"The man is just about crazy or he never would have told her," said Margot. "He knows you have something up your sleeve and thinks it better to forestall you

and throw himself on her mercy. He frankly admitted the frame-up was an act of sheer lunacy, but his excuse was his wild love for Dolores and his wilder fear that Bateson might take her from him."

Thus Margot in telling Vaughn had anticipated any revelations Arsenjo himself might make; and when the detective, full of the story, drove to his office and found the South American waiting for him, his involuntary smile might have betrayed the fact that he knew all, if his visitor's perception had not been less acute than usual. As it was, Arsenjo plunged without preliminaries into a full confession of the framing of Bateson. He spoke without reserve, and expressed regret that he had resorted to such a sorry business.

"I'm perfectly sincere in saying this," he insisted. "This is proved by my making a clean breast to you. I also intend to make an apology to Lieutenant Bateson."

That evening Vaughn had another unexpected telephone message from Margot.

"Strange things have been happening out here on Riverside Drive. For a day or so Miguel had been mysteriously missing, and this afternoon when he returned, Arsenjo proceeded to horsewhip him. The *mestizo* bore the brutal beating smilingly—it almost seemed triumphantly—then he confounded the slave driver with the explanation of his absence. He had been to the Dutch house on Staten Island and had found Conchita—I gathered she is the woman who takes care of the house—ill in bed; so ill, indeed, that he declared she would undoubtedly have died if he had not stayed and ministered to her. The telephone happened to be out of order, and so he couldn't inform Arsenjo of his whereabouts.

"But the most interesting thing of all was this—one night while he was there burglars tried to break into the *room*—he emphasized the word strangely. In this room Arsenjo no doubt keeps his booty. At the news of burglars the South American grew wildly excited, but Miguel reassured him, saying he had frightened them away. He then explained he had wired the room in some way so as to install a burglar-alarm—an invention of his own.

"Arsenjo thanked him sheepishly and expressed regret he had resorted to the horsewhip. 'No, no, master, don't be sorry,' replied the *mestizo* with a queer gleam in his eyes. 'It is great honor to be whipped by man with wonderful head like yours. All I ask is that you go out to Dutch house in the morning to see my burglar-proof room. You will?' Arsenjo smiled and promised. What do you think of it all, Owen?"

Vaughn laughed. "It sounds too fantastic to be true. Maybe Miguel was lying about the burglar-proof room. At any rate it's too late to protect Arsenjo's booty *de luxe*—"

"Are you going to clamp down on Arsenjo to-morrow?"

"I see no reason for delay—"

"But I do! Owen, think of that poor child, Dolores, and her sweetheart, Lieutenant Bateson. She adores him. Imagine her shame when all the details of the case are known. The public will link her with the robberies, and the disgrace will kill her. I'm begging her to go with me to some secluded place in the Adirondacks for a couple of weeks—and if you'll wait till the first of next week I think I can manage it. What do you say?"

"We'll decide the question to-morrow," answered Vaughn. "To-morrow's to be the big day anyway. Lieutenant Bateson is coming to town and Miguel is to tell his story."

"Do you want me to go over to the Dutch house with Arsenjo and Miguel? I can arrange to have Dolores ask Arsenjo to take us in the car for the ride, and I might happen to make an interesting discovery or two."

"A good idea," Vaughn agreed. "If possible try to take a look into the room where the booty is kept."

Evidently Margot was determined to keep Vaughn's telephone busy that night. Half an hour later she called him up again.

"Everything is arranged beautifully. Dolores and I are going over to the Dutch house—and *to-night*. We'll remain there till to-morrow morning. I had Dolores ask Arsenjo to take us. Miguel is to drive us out in the moonlight."

"Fine," laughed Vaughn. "You're a clever girl."

At ten o'clock the next morning he had another telephone message from Margot, who to his surprise was still at the Dutch house on Staten Island.

"I thought you said Miguel declared the phone was out of order," he began involuntarily.

"It was, but that remarkable *mestizo* repaired it. Listen, Owen. Dolores has a splitting headache—she's really too ill to drive into town. Besides, I'm not feeling well myself. Miguel is ready to tell her—and *you*—the whole story of her childhood, as he promised; but can't you come out here to hear it? Miguel will go in for you in the car and bring you back. What do you say?"

"I'm willing. But where is Arsenjo?"

"He, too, is unwell, Miguel reports. He had his coffee in his room as usual."

"Has Dolores said anything about seeing Bateson? I dare say he's in town this morning."

"She's going to ask him to come out here this afternoon."

"Indeed!" He gave a short laugh. "It seems the whole center of action is shifting over to the Dutch house on the island. Odd how fate works. Have you had a peep into the booty room?"

"Not yet. Be sure to be ready when Miguel calls. By-by."

The next moment Vaughn tried to get Lieutenant Bateson on the telephone. The lieutenant was not in. However, he had returned to town last night, the house operator declared. She said further she had seen him drive away an hour ago with a dark-faced man who had called for him in a large car.

The dark-faced man was of course Miguel—but Margot had just said the afternoon had been chosen as the time for the lieutenant's visit. What was the meaning of this?

Toward noon Miguel called to drive Vaughn over to the Dutch house. The *mestizo*, suave, smiling, presented a rather arresting picture in a new suit of smart cut and material. Heretofore he had been dressed in chauffeur's cravenette or house

livery, and Vaughn wondered what had caused this sudden blossoming.

"Mr. Vaughn ready to go to Dutch house?" queried Miguel, noting the detective's puzzled look and evidently enjoying it. "The *señorita* tell him I am to drive him out?"

"I'm ready," answered Vaughn, "and I'm going to take one of my men with me." And he signed to McSurely to accompany them.

Miguel, at first rather taken aback at having an extra passenger, soon was smiling blandly as ever. He made a rather queer request of Vaughn when they reached the car.

"You do me favor? You ride in front with me? I say something fine to you on way out."

Vaughn agreed.

The drive down Broadway to the ferry and the sail across the bay were made in silence. It was not until they had reached Staten Island and were speeding up Richmond Terrace that Miguel said the "something fine" he had promised.

First he flashed a glance back at McSurely, who was stretched comfortably in the big tonneau smoking a satisfying cigar; then, bending toward Vaughn, he said in low tones:

"Now listen. *I take you to window of booty room and let you look in.*"

Vaughn's composure usually was shock proof, but now he gave a perceptible start. Miguel chuckled.

"Mr. Vaughn like to take peep into booty room? The master keep his treasures there. The K'ang-hsi vase—the Blakelock—the three Henners—all the rest—are there! I would take good Mr. Vaughn, who never lose a case, *inside* booty room, but the master kill me if I do that; so best I can do is to give you peep."

So this mysterious Miguel, this half-breed, knew all! He was most emphatically "in" on the case. Vaughn, astonished, asked a quite incidental question first:

"How does Arsenjo happen to leave up the window curtains of *that* room?"

Miguel smiled. "He knows nothing about it. *I attend to that.*"

Vaughn gazed at the dark profile intently. "Why are you going to show *me* the room? To revenge yourself on—the master?"

The copperish face took on a deeper copper. "Why should Miguel revenge himself on the good master?"

"Don't you realize that what you're doing will help land Señor Arsenjo in prison?"

"Ah, but I'm going to beg the good Mr. Vaughn's mercy. I take all blame myself. I help him steal things anyway—you know that. Arrest *me* for crime. I confess all. I go to prison. Let the good master go free. The *señorita* can marry young soldier. You get glory from case. And all end happy like story book. You—"

"Careful there!" cried Vaughn, giving the wheel a sudden jerk and thereby swerving the car from the curb toward which it had been veering. "You'd better drop this absurd talk and attend to driving."

No further word was spoken until they drew within sight of the Dutch house. Then Miguel pointed to a window in the north wall.

"Booty room," he said laconically. "Not as easy to get into as it looks. I make set of adjustable bars to put inside window to fool burglars. I also wire room to sound alarm." He chuckled. "I am wonderful man, yes?"

The day was warm and pleasant, and Vaughn had half expected to find Dolores and Margot outside on the lawn to welcome him. But not a living creature was in sight. The silence—the loneliness—somehow had a chilling effect on him. Suddenly he remembered that Lieutenant Bateson had preceded him here by some two hours. In his wonder at Miguel's desire to save Arsenjo he had entirely forgotten the young soldier—and the odd fact that Dolores had sent for him so much earlier than she had at first intended.

"Where is Lieutenant Bateson?" he asked abruptly as Miguel shut off the power and approached the house slowly and noiselessly.

"With the master."

"With—*him*?"

"Yes."

"So the *señorita* didn't have you bring him out so early, after all?"

"No. The master have me bring him out."

"What for?"

Miguel flashed a smile—then his face grew grave. "The master, who is best man in world, want to tell lieutenant he is sorry for sending me with violin to lieutenant's house so lieutenant will be proved thief. So he send me to him very early to-day with letter begging him to come out at once. The master want to beg his pardon."

This sounded like the truth. Arsenjo had told Vaughn only the other day of his desire to apologize to Bateson. But why had he not gone about it in a simpler way? Why had he asked him to make a trip of twelve or fifteen miles out into the country?

Vaughn put the question in so many words to Miguel.

"The master is sick. He cannot go into town this morning. So he ask the lieutenant to come out here."

This sounded reasonable. Vaughn asked: "Did the *señorita* see the lieutenant when he came?"

"No. I take him straight to the master. The master want to see him first."

"What were they doing when you left and came to town for me?"

Miguel burst into a harsh, irrelevant laugh. "Having grand quarrel."

"A quarrel? What about?"

"The master in most beautiful, humble way tell the whole truth to lieutenant, not only whole truth about violin, but whole truth about not being father of the *señorita*. The lieutenant struck dumb. He say nothing. He just glare—like red sun in storm. Then he find hoarse voice and ask the master why this terrible thing. The master go very red, then very white, then very purple, and he scream out he love her, love her, love her. At this the lieutenant grow purple, too, and they start grand quarrel."

"And then you left?"

"Yes."

"Why didn't you remain to see what happened?"

Miguel chuckled. "Mr. Vaughn ask too much of poor Miguel. If I stay I surely kill lieutenant for saying cruel words to the good master. I don't want to become murderer—so I hurry away."

The machine came to a halt near the north wall. Vaughn cast a sweeping glance around. Still there was no sign of life about the place—and once more he was seized with the same mysterious foreboding he had experienced on first beholding the house.

"Come," said Miguel, "we take look into booty room." He turned to McSurely, who was yawning after a snooze. "You, too," he added, smiling. "More—merrier, yes?"

The three alighted and approached the window. Miguel was slightly in advance. He glanced into the room—then gave a sudden, horrified cry. Vaughn and McSurely half pushed him aside and looked for themselves.

What they saw froze their blood.

Lieutenant Bateson, his hair disheveled, his clothing half torn from him, his face distorted with rage, was bending over the decapitated body of Arsenjo. A huge knife, red with blood, was clutched in his hand. Like a madman—a savage—he had cut off his victim's head.

"Good God!" gasped Vaughn, turning sick and giddy and instinctively glancing toward Mac.

Mac himself looked sick—sicker even than the chief. As for Miguel, he looked the sickest of the three. He leaned against the wall and seemed on the verge of collapse.

Vaughn, still faint, almost nauseated, turned to that window of horrors.

Blank green met his eyes. The curtain had been drawn. Bateson had looked out and seen them.

CHAPTER X.

BOOTY AND BLOOD.

VAUGHN, throwing off the deadly sickness that had overcome him at sight of the murderer bending over his decapitated victim, turned to Miguel,

who was leaning limply against the wall, and roused him with a shake.

"Come," he said, "lead us inside."

"The master!" wailed the *mestizo*. "My master! He is dead. Lieutenant cut his head off. Oh, what awful wrath of God!" And he fell on his knees and made the sign of the cross.

Vaughn gave him a rather ungentle pull. "Here, get up and take us into the room."

"Yes," put in McSurely, "get a move on, half-breed! He may give us the slip. He already knows we're here, or he never would have pulled down that curtain."

Miguel, shuddering and muttering incoherently, staggered to his feet and then led them around to the front portico and into the long, broad hall. Nobody was in sight; not a sound could be heard. The house—inside as well as outside—still seemed to have that curious air of being uninhabited.

"Which is the door?" snapped Vaughn.

Miguel pointed to the second of two doors in the left wall. It was closed. Vaughn, closely followed by McSurely, hurried to it, opened it and entered the room. The *mestizo*, showing signs of collapse, reeled in after them.

The curtain was drawn, but the room was well lighted by the unusually brilliant sun outside. There on the floor lay the ghastly headless body—but the murderer had disappeared!

"Look there!" cried Miguel, pointing to the window.

Lying on the floor immediately under the broad, old-fashioned casement, was Bateson. His face, pale but calm, was toward them; his eyes were closed.

"Bateson!" called Vaughn sharply.

No answer. Vaughn went to him, shook him, called his name in his ear—then realized the truth. The man was sunk in unconsciousness deeper than that of sleep. He had been in a terrific fit of rage, as the hideously distorted look of his face as seen through the window had proved; and this no doubt had culminated in a sort of syncope. Seeing the onlookers outside, he had rushed to the window, drawn the curtain, and dropped senseless.

"Where is master's *head*?" cried Miguel. "What did murderer do with it?"

The decapitated head! Vaughn shuddered in spite of himself. What a fiendish, unheard-of murder! He looked around for the head, as did McSurely and Miguel—everywhere. *It was gone.* So was the big, blood-stained knife. What had Bateson done with them? Where had he hidden them? How had it been possible to hide them in the moment—the mere instant—that had elapsed between the onlookers' view into the room and the drawing of the curtain? Vaughn searched the murderer's clothes—no knife. The hands were stained with blood; there was even a dark, sinister trail of blood on the light-colored floor-matting from the corpse to the window; but the head—that magnificent head of Arsenjo—and the knife that had severed it were nowhere to be found.

"The master's head!" wept Miguel. "The beautiful head that I paint so many times! Where is it? Dog!" he screamed, rushing to Bateson and kicking him madly. "Dog! I kill you for this. I—"

Vaughn pushed him away from the prostrate lieutenant and sent him reeling across the room. Then, with McSurely's help, he pulled down the draperies from the locked double doors that led to the next room and covered the murdered man's body and the pool of blood beside it.

"Now we must notify the Richmond police station," he said. "I suppose the phone is in the hall. Miguel!"

There was no reply. Had the *mestizo* collapsed at last? Both Vaughn and McSurely glanced about the room expecting to find him stretched prostrate in some corner, but, oddly enough, he had disappeared.

Vaughn uttered an impatient exclamation. "Where has that lunatic gone?"

At that moment the engine of the motor-car outside began roaring. Vaughn ran to the window, raised the curtain and looked out. Miguel was at the wheel turning the machine around. Vaughn tried to raise the window. It was locked. He broke a hole in the glass with his elbow and then called out:

"Wait! Where are you going?"

"To police station to bring back police to arrest murderer of my master!"

"Come back. I'm going to telephone the police—"

But with a wild cry the *mestizo* was off, racing down the road at top speed.

"He's gone clean crazy," commented Mac disgustedly.

"Small wonder," said Vaughn, with a look at Bateson stretched at their feet and then at the covered *thing* in the center of the room. "Mac, you stay here with Bateson. Bring him to if you can—but hold him. You have your gun?" Mac nodded. "Good. Now I'm going to phone the Richmond station—that mad Miguel may not be able to find the place or may steer into a tree on the way there." And he hurried out into the hall.

There was no telephone in sight. Vaughn knocked on the door immediately opposite. No answer. He opened it and advanced into the dining-room. Here he found the telephone. He immediately called up the Richmond Borough police station, briefly stated the facts of the murder so far as he knew them, and requested the captain to send the patrol at once.

Returning to the hall, he remembered with a grimly amused start that though he had been in the 'booty room he had not seen any of the booty—indeed, he had even forgotten to look for it. Since the ghastly sight through the window his mind had been dominated wholly by this most monstrous of crimes. A sinister spell was upon him—even as upon the entire house.

He glanced around, then up the broad stairway—curiously, almost with a sense of dread. Where was everybody—Dolores, Margot, the housekeeper Conchita? Had the crime been committed without rousing a single soul? Or aware of it—and terrified by it—had the inmates of the house fled up-stairs and locked themselves in their rooms? It was conceivable that Dolores and the housekeeper might have been frightened to this extent; not so Margot. She was used to danger and had the calm courage that comes of it.

Vaughn, hesitating no longer, bounded up the stairs and knocked on the first door. It was opened at once by Margot.

"Owen! When did you come? What's the matter? You look pale as a ghost."

"Where is Señorita Dolores?" he asked.

She pointed to a half open door leading to an inner room. "She's been very ill—so have I, for that matter. We must have eaten something that poisoned us. She's asleep now. But, Owen, *what* has happened?"

"Have you been asleep, too?" he queried grimly. "Has everybody in the house been asleep?"

She looked her amazement. "Why, no. Dolores and I have been up here ill. She almost lost consciousness in the awful nausea that seized her shortly after breakfast—and I've felt nearly as bad. As for the *señor* and Conchita, I don't know what they're doing—but I don't think they're asleep."

"And—Bateson?"

"He isn't here—yet. He's coming this afternoon. Owen! What has happened? You—"

"Margot," he said, "Arsenjo is dead."

"What!"

"And Bateson killed him."

"Owen!" she gasped. "Impossible! Lieutenant Bateson— Oh, I can't believe it."

"I couldn't either *if I hadn't seen him, knife in hand, bending over his decapitated victim.*"

"Decapitated!" she cried, horror-struck. "He really cut off— Oh, it can't be—"

He briefly told her of the circumstances that had led up to his looking through the window and the frightful sight he had beheld, and then took her down-stairs to the scene of the crime. The covered corpse on the floor, the blood stains on the matting, the unconscious slayer under the case-ment—these things brought the tragedy home to her as a grimly obtrusive and undeniable fact. Once accepted as a fact, her cool, impersonal professionalism reasserted itself; and while McSurely described the grisly scene they had witnessed through the window, amplifying Vaughn's rather meager details, she bent over the prostrate Bateson and tried to bring him back to consciousness.

Meanwhile Vaughn, in a half mechanical way, had begun to hunt for the murdered man's booty—the fruit of his robberies *de*

luxé. It was not a difficult search. In boxes and packing-cases, hidden behind tapestries and various pieces of furniture, he found Mrs. Whymper's K'ang-hsi vase, Mrs. Foulkes's Blakelock, the Bouguereau "Venus," the Rodin "Victor Hugo"—everything save the *three Henners*. What had become of them? Miguel had brought them here.

He turned suddenly and looked at the motionless covered thing on the floor. Arsenjo would not have to pay the penalty *now*. But Miguel remained! And Miguel had been *particeps criminis*. The grim set of Vaughn's lips became grimmer as he thought of how unrelentingly he would put the *mestizo* through.

"Owen," called Margot softly, "he's waking."

Bateson was indeed opening his eyes. He looked around blankly, not seeming to realize his whereabouts or recognize those about him. Deathly pale, he suddenly grew paler still, his skin taking on a livid green.

"I'm sick," he gasped, trying to rise, "nauseated! Help me to the window."

He staggered to his feet, McSurely assisting him. Vaughn knocked out the rest of the broken pane, and he leaned out and relieved his stomach.

"That is not assumed at any rate," murmured Vaughn to Margot. "I've never seen a sicker man."

"I don't wonder he's sick—after *that*," pointing to the covered corpse.

In a few moments Bateson, relieved, reeled from the window and dropped into a chair. He then sighed heavily and closed his eyes.

"Bateson!" called Vaughn sharply.

"Yes," came the dreamy murmur.

"You'd better stay awake. The police will be here shortly."

"The police?" He was still drowsy. "What for?"

"To arrest you."

"Me? What for?" His eyes were wide open now.

"For the murder of Arsenjo."

"What! Arsenjo dead? And I— What is this you're telling me?" He rose, fell back upon the chair weakly, then man-

aged to gain his feet again. "Where am I? And who are you? Ah—Vaughn! What are you doing here? And I—why am I here? Ah, I remember—Miguel! Where's Miguel? He came for me. He said Arsenjo wanted to see me. Where's Arsenjo? What has happened, anyway? Did I faint? There's a strange feeling in my head—and oh, that horrible sickness at my stomach."

"Superb acting," whispered Margot to Vaughn. "Why does he resort to it? He must know it's worse than futile."

The puzzled look in Bateson's eyes deepened. "Why are all of you staring at me? What has happened? Where is Arsenjo?"

"Here!" cried Vaughn, bending down and sweeping the covering from the headless body.

A Sir Henry Irving could not have done it more dramatically, with more of a repressed passion of accusation; and again, a Sir Henry Irving could not have expressed more effectively Bateson's combined astonishment and horror as he exclaimed hoarsely:

"That Arsenjo? That headless body? Good God! Who did it?"

"You."

"I?"

"You." And Vaughn covered the corpse again.

"Man, you're joking! I haven't seen Arsenjo. Miguel brought me here to see him, I admit—but he didn't appear. I was ushered in here by Miguel and told to wait. Then suddenly—or gradually—I really don't know which—I became deathly ill—strangely—horribly ill. Then I must have lost consciousness—since you found me here. You *did* find me here, I take it?"

Vaughn, astonished by this gigantic pretense of innocence, did not answer. Bateson continued agitatedly:

"I had already made an engagement to come out here this afternoon to see Señora Dolores, so I was surprised when Miguel brought me this message from Arsenjo asking me to come this morning." He fumbled in his pocket and brought out a crumpled sheet of paper and handed it to Vaughn, who took it mechanically and

glanced hastily at the three rather ill-written lines:

I have something important to say regarding the violin. I wish to confess all. Please come at once—and say nothing to any one about it. Miguel will bring you. ARSENJO.

Vaughn folded the paper and put it into his pocket.

Bateson went on: "Naturally I came. I didn't set eyes on Arsenjo till just now. That is true, as God is my witness. Miguel—or somebody else—committed this barbarous crime."

Vaughn, disgusted by this barefacedness, took up the challenge. "Miguel? Why, I saw *you* with the knife in your hand, your victim at your feet."

"Saw me?" gasped Bateson. "When? Where?"

"Ten minutes ago—and here, of course, on the exact spot where the body now lies."

"You looked through the window?"

"Yes."

"And saw the knife in my hand?"

"Yes. What have you done with it?"

"I repeat I had absolutely nothing to do with this dastardly murder. I'm not a madman—a fiend. Even if I wanted to kill a man, do you think I'd cut off his head? Why—"

"That reminds me," interrupted Vaughn grimly, "what have you *done* with the head?"

Bateson flushed hotly. "Didn't I just say—"

He broke off abruptly. There was a sudden sound at the door, and Dolores, pale, hollow-eyed, a bit disheveled, came into the room.

"Lieutenant Bateson! And Mr. Vaughn, too!" she exclaimed, blushing rosily. "This is a pleasant surprise. I hadn't expected you so early—at least you, lieutenant. I—" She seemed quite embarrassed—almost confused, indeed. "Margot, I was hunting you. I awoke a minute ago and came down by the back stairway. I found Conchita quite ill; the poor creature thought she was about to die. She said she hadn't seen you, and so—" She broke off, glancing perplexedly from one to the other. "What *is* the matter?"

All of you look as though something dreadful had happened. Where is Señor Arsenjo?" Her gaze suddenly fixed itself on the covered heap on the floor. "What is that?" she gasped, advancing a step toward it. "It looks like—like—"

Margot went and put her arm around her. "My dear, come up-stairs with me."

"No! What is that—that thing on the floor?"

Bateson, beside himself, gave a wild laugh. "Señor Arsenjo!" he burst out, despite Vaughn's desperate signal for silence. "He's dead—murdered in cold blood. His head is cut off. And these people say *I* did it. They even say they *saw* me do it. Good joke, eh?" He laughed again; then, realizing the cruel shock he had given her, apologized precipitately. "Forgive me for speaking with such brutal frankness. But all this has driven me half mad. I can only say I am innocent, and—"

But Dolores, succumbing to the blow, sank back in Margot's arms in a dead faint. Vaughn directed McSurely to carry her up-stairs. Margot accompanied them, leaving the detective and Bateson alone. The accused man, having recovered his composure, stood motionless a moment, gazing thoughtfully at Arsenjo's covered body, then, giving in to a sudden impulse, approached Vaughn and held out his hand appealingly.

Vaughn hesitated, then half turned away.

"I'm sorry," he said. "But after I saw—"

"Say no more," Bateson interrupted proudly. "Of course you've telephoned for the police?"

"Yes."

He made as if to speak further, bit his lip, gave a weary shrug, and strode to the window, where he stood motionless, looking out. The policemen found him thus when, a few minutes later, they dashed up in the auto patrol to take him to the station. He smiled with a sort of tragic amusement as Vaughn pointed him out as the man who had committed the murder; but thereafter he wore the expression of a stone man. He refused to say a word in his own defense or answer any questions.

Even during the examination of the ghastly, headless corpse by the medical officer, he stood motionless, his arms folded, his gaze steady. There was nothing theatrical about his attitude.

The detectives searched the premises for the missing knife and head—that superb head of Arsenjo which had elicited the wondering admiration of everybody who had beheld it—but could find neither. The sarcastically smiling Bateson was then bundled into the patrol and Vaughn and McSurely were taken along as witnesses. The corpse was to be left in charge of a policeman until the arrival of the dead wagon.

The patrol had scarcely pulled away from the house when one of the detectives turned to Vaughn and inquired:

"Where's our chief witness—that half-breed you told me about who brought Bateson out here and heard the quarrel?"

In the welter of developments Vaughn had forgotten Miguel entirely. "Isn't he at the station?" he asked. "He motored there. You didn't meet him on the way—dark—black-eyed—enormous shoulders—driving a big foreign car?"

"No—didn't meet anybody."

"He perhaps missed the way. No doubt we'll see him at the station or meet him as he comes back. He was so upset he hardly knew what he was doing."

But they ran into no wild-eyed *mestizo* tearing back to the sinister house in the woods; and when they reached the police station the desk captain declared he had not been there.

Then for the first time Bateson spoke. With a derisive smile he turned to Vaughn.

"Don't you think this precious *mestizo* as you call him, has run away?"

"I do."

"You remember I told you he had probably killed Arsenjo. Well, doesn't this look like it?"

"Why so?"

"What's he running away for if he isn't guilty of something?"

"He is—but not of murder." And Vaughn smiled. "He was *particeps criminis* with Arsenjo in a series of bold and stupendous robberies. He knew I was

working on the case, so he's seized this chance to give us the slip. I'm sorry—"

"You're not as sorry as I am!" cried Bateson hotly. "That dog killed Arsenjo. And now, owing to your colossal negligence or stupidity—maybe both—this murderer will be enabled to get back to South America—while I, an innocent man, may be railroaded to the electric chair on the unsupported testimony of you and your underling sleuth."

"That's just about what will happen, Lieutenant Bateson," answered Vaughn quietly; "that is, as it applies to you. As for Miguel, we'll do our best to apprehend him. But let me tell you this—if he takes the witness stand your conviction is all the more certain. *His testimony will supply the motive for the crime McSurely and I saw you commit.* So, even if you prove we have glass eyes, the State will still have a pretty fair case against you."

That evening Vaughn received the following letter by special delivery:

MR. VAUGHN:

I send you this quick, so you will not worry, you are such good man and such wonderful, wonderful detective. If I do not do this, you wonder where *mestizo* Miguel is, and what he is doing, and if he ever come back. You wonder so much, you get sick in head, yes: That is bad, so I take all this trouble to write you, and pay extra postage besides. When you get this I am far away. You never see me again. I am gone forever—with the *three Henners*. Ah, you jump at this and grow red in face? You kick yourself and call yourself fool?

Did you really think Miguel fool enough to stay here and go to prison for robberies? I help my master, yes, for he was good man, but I do not like prison bars—no. In prison I cannot paint or do any of the other things I want to do. So I take just the three Henners—that is all, give the rest back to owners with Miguel's compliments—I take three Henners, sell them for one hundred thousand dollars, become great artist, and live happy ever after. And you get glory from case just the same.

I have double reason for going away now. I am crazy with grief because the master die. He was good man. I cannot stay where everything remind me of him. If I stay I break into jail and kill man who murdered him. He cut off the master's *head*. Think—that head that was the only one in all the world! But I know Bateson die for it, for you see him do it.

The *señorita* is good young lady, but I owe her nothing. I love her not—I hate her not. Her mother is dead when her father bring her to

Ecuador, a little baby. He is good young man, but he has no relative on earth, he tell Arsenjo. Arsenjo good man, too, but he can play trick on young man. He sell young man cacao plantation that is rotten swampland that grow nothing. Young man go there and get fever and die. But he beg Arsenjo to take his baby. Arsenjo has spell of remorse. He take her. That is all I know. She know rest.

Here I say *señorita* know nothing of robberies. She is innocent as baby. So is *Señorita Valdez*. Sometimes the master give her medicine without her knowledge to make her sick at house where *señorita* play so he can call footman away from front door, so I can make exchange of copies for originals, and then get away while footman gone; but *Señorita Valdez* know nothing about it. Nobody know anything about it but the master and me.

Good-by, Mr. Vaughn. You are great man—you never lose a case! I hate to leave you, yes. I like you ever since I first meet you in gallery where you find me copying three Henners. Excuse me if I laugh. You were working on case then—and you think you make wonderful discovery when you find me painting three Henners. Excuse me if I laugh. *Adios*.

CHAPTER XI.

MIGUEL'S THE MAN.

EARLY the next morning Dolores, accompanied by Margot, called on Vaughn at his office. Her calm demeanor surprised him. She had recovered from her illness of yesterday and showed no effects of the shock she had sustained. "I know everything," she said, smiling faintly. "Margot has told me about the robberies—all."

"I had to," laughed Margot, in answer to his look of surprise. "She forced it from me—she guessed at the truth so cleverly and persistently."

"To-morrow's papers will have the whole story," he said gravely; "but there won't be one word of reflection on *Señorita Dolores*."

She flushed. "Thank you, Mr. Vaughn. I *am* innocent; but oh, how blind—how stupid I have been! I didn't come to talk about this, though. I came to ask a favor. I want you through your influence with the police to secure me an interview with Lieutenant Bateson. Will you?"

This was her first reference to Arsenjo's slayer. Vaughn was disappointed. He

had hoped the shocking nature of Bateson's crime had cured her of her fondness for him.

"I know what you're thinking," she said. "You're wondering how it's possible I want to see him after what has happened. *I believe absolutely in his innocence.*"

"What!" protested Vaughn. "But McSurely and I *saw* him—"

"I don't care. He says he is innocent, and I believe him. You don't know him as well as I do. He's incapable of lying. You and Mr. McSurely have made some terrible mistake, that's all. I know you *think* you're telling the truth. Your senses played some tragical trick on you."

Vaughn smiled and promised to try to secure her the interview with Bateson.

"Oh, how can I thank you?" she cried brokenly. "This is the greatest of favors. By the way, will you ask if I can see Miguel at the same time? I want him to tell me of my childhood, as he promised."

"Miguel is not at the police station."

"Wasn't he taken along and held as a witness?"

"Miguel has run away; he disappeared immediately after we found Arsenjo's body. The police are scouring the city for him." He took Miguel's letter from his pocket and handed it to her.

She read it eagerly.

"You must find Miguel, Mr. Vaughn! He is the man who can clear up the mystery of the murder."

"But there is no mystery to clear up. When an act is *seen*—"

But she interrupted him excitedly, insisting that if Miguel could be found and made to speak, all evidence against Lieutenant Bateson—even the direct ocular evidence afforded by the view of Vaughn and McSurely through the window, would collapse. "I'm not saying Miguel himself committed the murder," she qualified, "but I do say he knows enough about it to clear Lieutenant Bateson."

Vaughn did not discuss the matter. It was too absurd. But her ingenuous belief in the man she loved rather touched him for all that; and he listened patiently enough to her amusingly formidable mar-

shaling of reasons to prove that seeing is *not* believing—that human sight, of all the senses, is the least trustworthy; and when she and Margot left he again assured her he would try hard to secure the interview with Lieutenant Bateson that very afternoon.

He succeeded. Dolores had a long talk with her sweetheart. Margot, who accompanied her to the police station, gave Vaughn a rather affecting report of the meeting. "Honestly, Owen, they behaved gloriously—not a tear, not a word of protest against fate, not a word of reproach for *you*. Both are facing the music heroically. They feel a terrible mistake has been made by somebody—most probably by you—but they don't blame you. Lieutenant Bateson said to me: 'I believe every word Mr. Vaughn says. He simply had an optical illusion.'"

That evening Vaughn called at the Riverside Drive house. Dolores, who had come in from Staten Island and taken up her residence in town again—with her faithful Margot as indispensable friend and companion—greeted him cordially and gave him *carte blanche* to hunt through Arsenjo's effects for the drug which had been used at the recitals. Going to the dead man's room, and forcing a drawer in a Japanese cabinet, he found it—a curious, grayish substance, a sort of rough dried paste made from various leaves, particles of which were still showing. It filled several good-sized tin boxes and had a sickening, sweetish odor which savored of the miasmatic equatorial forests. With it were a number of small atomizers. In one of these was an opaque liquid which had the same odor as the pasty substance in the tin boxes.

Chemical analysis proved the drug to be unique. The chemist—one of the most skilful in New York—declared he had never run across such a peculiar and powerful anesthetic; and when Vaughn experimented with the liquid on McSurely and several of his office force, including two young women, the evidence was complete—beyond doubt the drug was the one Arsenjo had used. The sensations of Mac and the others were strikingly similar to

those of the smart auditors at Señorita Dolores's recitals.

The next morning the newspapers published the whole sensational account of Arsenjo's amazing robberies; and this story, following that of the murder, which had appeared only the day before, added the finishing touch to New York's wonder. In cafés, tea rooms, clubs, hotels, the double cases of Arsenjo—the slaying and the thefts—were the only topics of conversation.

Several days later Dolores made another call on Vaughn. This time she was unaccompanied by Margot. Her glittering eyes indicated latent excitement; but she seemed to have gained a new independence of spirit, a new strength. Vaughn wondered what had happened. He soon learned. Plunging at once into the subject that had brought her, she gave him a distinct shock.

"Mr. Vaughn, yesterday I returned Mrs. Whymper every cent of the four thousand dollars she paid Señor Arsenjo for the recital I gave at her house—I returned every cent *everybody* paid to hear me play."

"What!"

"This is not all. I reimbursed Dr. Durant for the loss of his three Henners which Miguel took away. Dr. Durant didn't want to accept a penny—he protested most gallantly. He insisted he still thought me a great violinist." Her voice broke a trifle.

"You must have a good deal of money," was Vaughn's dry comment.

"I haven't a cent *now*," she laughed. "I had over a hundred thousand dollars which Señor Arsenjo had given me in my own name."

"What's become of the rest, then?"

"I've given it all to the Red Cross."

"But—don't you think that rather reckless generosity? One must live, you know?"

"On *that* money?" she flamed. "Remember how it was acquired. Part of it was stolen, part obtained through false pretenses. Besides, why can't I *earn* some money?"

"You can," he agreed enthusiastically. "Give some recitals. You'd be a star attraction just now. For months the public has been longing to hear you play, and

you could fill Carnegie Hall every night for a week at double usual prices."

"There are just two reasons why I'm going to play—not for small, huddled companies of the socially prominent, but for as big crowds of plain, every-day people as will come to hear me," she said gravely. "I want to show the world I *can* play even without any drug to impart day dreams to my hearers—and I want to earn money enough to pay Owen Vaughn, miracle detective, for the *very difficult work I'm going to ask him to do.*"

"Have you a new case for me?" queried Vaughn, covertly amused.

"Yes—one that will tax even your powers; a murder case."

"Murder! Why, who has been killed?"

"Señor Arsenjo."

"Arsenjo! But you said it's a new case."

"Listen, Mr. Vaughn. *I want you to forget everything you know about this case except that Señor Arsenjo was murdered, and that Miguel disappeared immediately after the crime. I want you to forget that Lieutenant Bateson was out at the Dutch house at the time—that you saw him with the knife in his hand—that he has been arrested and is now facing trial—in short, that he exists at all. Then I want you to assume that Miguel is the murderer. There is your case. Will you take it—at your own price?*"

Vaughn listened to this astonishing speech with mixed feelings. The absurdity of Dolores's proposal might have awakened his derision had it not sprung from her desperate desire to save her sweetheart from the electric chair.

"You keep on forgetting the unforgettable fact," he said gravely. "I *saw* Lieutenant Bateson—"

But she interrupted him with gay beligerence. "You must forget it, too. Now listen, here's a fair question. If you hadn't seen—or fancied you had seen—Lieutenant Bateson with the knife in his hand, wouldn't you feel justified in strongly suspecting Miguel as the murderer?"

"Not necessarily. Where is Miguel's motive?"

"*The head of Arsenjo!*"

Vaughn gave a start. "You mean—"

She was trembling with excitement. "Listen. You know what a mania Miguel had to paint that head. He was always raving about it."

"But he didn't have to commit murder to paint it. Arsenjo had let him paint it many times."

"You don't understand—you really don't know Miguel. The time came when he was content no longer with merely *painting* the head—he had to *possess* it."

"Horrible! Incredible! Miguel wasn't a madman."

"But he was. And he killed Arsenjo for his *head*. How are we to explain the head's disappearance otherwise? Lieutenant Bateson hadn't a motive in the world to hide it—you'll admit that?"

"Yes."

"Then what became of it? It has never been found."

Vaughn, motionless, sat gazing at the eager, flushed face—but with unseeing eyes. Beyond Dolores—through her indeed—he was gazing—envisaging as though under a spell the *head*, Arsenjo's matchless brow, the crown of white hair, the cruel, sinister face beneath. That head! It had astounded him when first he had beheld it—now it gave him a thrill. Always carrying with it a strange sense of fatality, it now seemed to be drawing unto itself, like some monstrous magnet, all the brooding

grotesquery of the murder, making of itself at once the motive and the mystery of the crime.

Mystery? It was the first time Vaughn had admitted to himself there *could* be any in connection with a murder he had seen committed. Dolores saw the changed expression of his face and clapped her hands like a happy child.

"You'll do it! You'll take the case!"

He gave a start. The head faded. He came back to himself—and laughed. "But I *know* Bateson killed Arsenjo."

"Listen," she interrupted feverishly, "if you insist on refusing this case, will you take another?"

"What sort of case?"

"*Find Miguel.*"

"But the police are already trying to find him."

"I want *you* to find him. Find him for *me*. I'm not asking you, *now*, to admit you might have made a mistake when you thought you saw Lieutenant Bateson kill Señor Arsenjo. Simply find Miguel—I'll do the rest. Will you?"

"Yes," he cried, swept off his feet by her unconquerable enthusiasm, "I'll do it!"

Dolores, wildly grateful, seized his hands and thanked him in tremulous tones; then, fearing he might change his mind, she hurried away, a gay, half-hysterical laugh on her lips.

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.



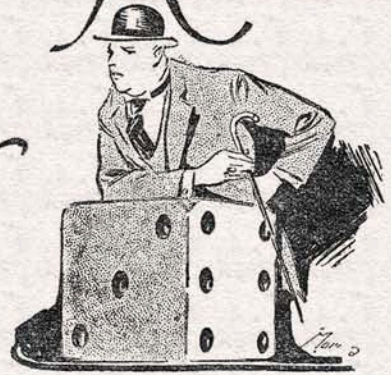
THE BRIDEGROOM'S GIFT

BY L. W. INGALLS

BRIDEGROOM, for gift to me
 Gave you what I desire—
 Not diamond, spark of fire,
 Nor sapphire, star of sea,
 Would I from you require.
 Give to me honesty!
 Give to me constancy!
 No other jewelry
 Ever would I desire.

His Lordship Rolls the Bones

by Leonard Wise



HE was known among places he frequented as "the Sport," yet there was nothing about his personage to indicate that which the average man looks for in a sport. He had the appearance of a broker rather than that of a sport. Yet sport in the finest sense of the word was Frank Twoomey—a gambler who was absolutely on the level.

The Sport had finished his breakfast in a troubled frame of mind, for he had reached the end of his money, and the indications were that he would have to dismiss his valet, give up his rooms at the hotel, and find some settled employment. Moodily he started down Broadway.

At Thirty-Seventh Street his thoughts had become particularly bitter. He was walking head down when he ran into a man coming his way. He was about to apologize when the man reached out and grabbed his hand, nearly shaking it off.

"Well, well, if it isn't Frank Twoomey! I would have known you anywhere; you have not changed one iota since the old school days."

Twoomey glanced up, the puzzled expression on his face quickly changing to one of welcome: "By Jove! If it isn't my old roommate, Russell Swift!"

To Swift's question, "What have you been doing all these years?" Twoomey answered, "Oh, just drifting mostly; made a pile, but have got rid of most of it. Tell me about yourself."

"I finished up at the university, and then went to work for the Woodward Iron Company in Birmingham. I did fairly well—got advanced to superintendent; then threw my lot in with the Ocean Steel Company in Gadsden; was given quite a bunch of the stock, and bought a great deal more when it was selling around fifty cents. Then the war started, and you know Ocean Steel took a jump up to forty-three dollars. Every one said sell, but I held on, and we got the British orders, and zowie! she went up to one hundred and ninety, and has been around that ever since."

"I was pretty lucky, too, in a lumber deal. You know how lumber has advanced since the war; and now I have more than any one man has a right to, and don't ever have to work again if I don't want to; have my yacht up here and am taking a vacation, the first since I left school. But give me a more definite line regarding yourself."

"As I said before, Russ, I have done nothing much; just sort of speculated around; made some here and dropped some there." For some reason which the Sport could not explain to himself, he did not want to let his old friend know the existence he had been leading since they parted ways. It was the first time in his life he had ever denied or in any way evaded that he was a gambler, and he felt ashamed.

"Let's have a drink, Frank, just for old-times' sake. How about it?"

"Lead me to it, Russ."

At the bar where they ordered their drinks, some loungers saw Twoomey and nodded, "Hello, Sport!" at which Frank blushed like a sixteen-year-old girl receiving a compliment. Russell noticed the blush, saying: "What's the matter, old boy; they used to call you that at school, and you never turned color. Remember how you used to bet your money? Boy, you certainly had the nerve in those days; have you still got it?" And without waiting for an answer plunged into a story of the other's gambling spirit at college.

"Drop it, Russ. I don't like to be reminded of these things."

"Well, well; so the old boy has quit gambling, eh, and don't want to be reminded of it?"

A stranger at the bar, at this remark, turned to see to whom it had been addressed and burst into a loud laugh.

Twoomey, quietly addressing the stranger, said: "I don't know who you are, nor do I care; but it is evident that you are laughing at our conversation. We both happen to be Southern gentlemen. One more pleasantry from you and I will take the matter up personally."

Twoomey spoke in a quiet but convincing tone. The stranger said: "Pardon me, but I mistook you for a gambler who used to run a crooked joint on Forty-Second Street. This gambler was called the Sport, and had the public fooled into thinking his was a straight place. But I am mistaken, and you can see how comical the remark sounded to me, thinking you were the professional, when your friend said you had quit gambling."

Twoomey simply turned his back, as if neither the conversation nor the stranger any longer interested him. The stranger flushed, moved as if to say something, looked at the sturdy shoulders of Twoomey, remembered the dangerous look in the eyes, paid for his drink, walked to the door, and said mockingly, "Good morning, Mr. Southern Gentleman."

At the same time there entered the place a man in a light-gray suit, flashy tie, and a large diamond stud. Seeing Frank, he walked straight up to him, saying: "Hello,

Sport! I hear you are about down and out. If that is so, I would like to talk business to you, as the bunch that are running things can't get a play from the big suckers; but if you come in, your name will get them all in, and we will do the operating and trim them to a fareyewell.

"You don't have to know about the 'works' at all; just get your twenty-five per cent every day. The suckers will break the door down coming in if they know you are connected with the house, as they know you have never pulled off anything shady. What do you say?"

Frank, who had been toying with his drink during this address, picked up his glass, raised it to the level of the speaker's face, and threw the contents at him, saying, "That's all, Abe!"

"All right, Twoomey!" came back from Abe angrily, "some day you will be sorry you are so darned proud"; and with that he walked out a great deal faster than he entered.

Russell said: "What is the matter, Sporty, boy; did he want you to back a crooked stock-selling game?"

Frank, seeing that Russell thought he was in the brokerage business, said: "Yes, he wants me to go into a wildcat scheme to fleece the public. Has tried twice before to get me. You see, I have a pretty large following, who believe in me and would buy anything I recommend."

Russell, looking at his friend with an air of pride, remarked: "Well, I don't blame them for wanting your name in any enterprise. There never was a squarer man. I'll tell you what we will do. Let's go out to the yacht club and get on my boat, and enjoy life for a few weeks."

Frank thought for a minute, then said: "Delighted! But first I must get in touch with my man."

"All right, bring him along, and give me the privilege of watching him dress you in the morning."

As they started to the club, Frank felt better than he had for years. While he always looked upon his "profession" as a square one, he had always felt deep down that he was not the man his mother thought he was, and he did not always like the class

of people with whom he was familiarly thrown. To-day this had been rankling in his breast. Now, for the first time in years, something of his old self-respect came back to him.

When they arrived at the club, they found two notes awaiting Russell. One was an invitation from Reggie Westervelt, a large stockholder in the Ocean Steel, inviting Russell to a stag affair at his house for that evening, to meet Lord Terrence, Earl of Donneghaly, who was over here with the British mission. Another was for a dance, secured through the courtesy of Westervelt.

Russell immediately called Westervelt on the phone, and told him he would have to decline the invitation for the stag, as he had just met an old friend whom he had not seen since leaving college. Westervelt would not take "No" for an answer, and insisted on his coming and bringing his friend.

When Russell told Frank about it, the latter exclaimed: "What are you in Ocean Steel that a man like Westervelt should urge an invitation on you?"

"Oh, nothing much," Russ said; "only president."

That evening, while putting the finishing touches to his toilet, Frank inwardly prayed that none of his former patrons would be there, and, if so, he hoped that they would not recognize him. His name told nothing. He was known only by his nickname the Sport, to the great majority of men who frequented his former palaces.

True, when Warren H. West had first organized his steel and ship-building company, he had offered Twoomey a lucrative position and a chance to buy stock in the company. He had done this out of friendship for the gambler, in whom he saw a man of more than ordinary ability. He had also told him that at any time he wanted to start in the business world to call on him.

But to-night Frank wanted to sail on his own. It was with a slight feeling of misgiving that he entered the waiting car, and he felt that if it were not the same as welshing a bet, he would even now back out.

Both men seemed to be in a pensive mood

as the car drove up-town toward Pelham Bay Park, where Westervelt's home was located. As they passed through the town, Broadway, with its myriad lights, never seemed so cold, so distant, to Twoomey as it did now. Heretofore he was the most ardent of New Yorkers. To-night he wanted quiet, wanted to get away from it all—from himself and all his past, and start anew.

What caused this discontent he could not analyze. It was not being broke, for he had Russell, who would let him have almost anything he desired. It was unexplainable. As they were held up by the traffic policeman on the corner, he heard a soldier making a speech, asking men to join the army. If not able to join, then at least do something useful for their country.

Then the Sport knew what was the matter. He felt that he had never done anything useful for his country or fellow man. There was more to life than merely being on the square. He made a mental resolution to go into some work that would be useful, either in the army or where he could serve best. In the morning he would see Mr. West and get his advice.

On their arrival they were announced, Mr. Swift and Mr. Twoomey, of Alabama. With one quick glance Frank's eyes swept the room to see if he could recognize any one who, in turn, might recognize him.

He saw two men whom he knew. One was an author, a very good friend, who lived in Washington Square, and with whom Twoomey had passed many a pleasant evening; the other was the stranger who had bade him "Good morning, Mr. Southern Gentleman" in the saloon that morning. There was that about the man's appearance that Frank did not like. If he had seen him at one of his former "clubs," he would have classified him as a disagreeable loser.

An announcement was made that Lord Terrence had been delayed and would arrive later, but that dinner would be held for him. The guests then turned to the billiard and card room. Frank drifted onto the porch. He could plainly hear the conversation in the front room.

His friend the author, Roy Masters, was talking, and here as in other places, when

he talked others listened eagerly. The man was magnetic. He was telling them the majority of people did not realize the seriousness of the war; that we were in for a long and a hard fight; that the war would revolutionize business; that these changes would call for men who had the ability to organize and lead. The men who had gone to the first officers' training camp would never regret it.

A young officer, who had just finished the first camp at Plattsburg, laughingly said that as long as the army was being discussed, he would gladly give an exhibition of skill with army equipment, and, taking out a pair of dice from his pocket, saying, "No officer's equipment is complete without them," offered to bet a hundred dollars he was right.

In less time than it takes to tell, a real crap game was on. Frank watched through the window for a few minutes, then thought he would drift in and make a bet or two. It was not until he reached the table that he thought of his depleted finances. As he reached the table the dice reached his place at the same moment.

He hesitated a moment whether or not to shoot or to let the dice pass to the next shooter, and to his credit the thought of "handling" the dice never entered his mind, though they were shooting on a soft Navaho blanket with which the billiard-table was covered, and men much less expert than Twoomey could easily "even roll" on such a surface.

Just as he was getting ready to say he did not shoot, the man on his right said: "Well, Mr. Man, who gets mad if told he looks like a gambler, have you nerve enough to make a shot?"

Frank merely smiled, threw down one hundred dollars, which was covered by the speaker, whose privilege it was to fade the bet, and threw the dice.

"Six-ace, seven," called a voice from the other side of the table; "the shooter wins."

Frank breathed a sigh of relief. At least he could shoot again, and if he lost be none the worse off, as he could leave the table by the time the dice got back to his place.

"Shoot," the man on his right said. "Don't pike; shoot the two hundred and

give me a chance to do something besides break even on your shot."

"All right," said Frank; "two I shoot," and threw the dice out. "Eleven" called the man at the far end of the table. "Shooter wins again."

"Quite a slicker," came from the man who had faded the bet; but laughing cries came up from around the table: "Why, the shooter doesn't even look at the dice when he picks them up, and throws them the full length of the table; in fact they bounce away from the cushions back on the table."

More nettled by the way in which the rest of the men repudiated his insinuations than he showed, he said: "Well, shoot the four hundred, and if you hit, then I will fade that, too, Mr. Southern Gentleman."

Frank laughed, reached for the dice, saying, "It all goes," as he threw the dice.

"Tray-ace"—came from across the table—"four. Well, it looks as if you let it ride once too often."

The man on his right was jubilant.

"Two to one on four," he began. "Now, Mr. Southern Gentleman, if you think you have the nerve, you can take that bet in any amount up to ten thousand dollars!"

Frank looked at him quietly for a minute. The speaker's face was flushed; he could see eight hundred dollars on the table about to come to him, as four is a two-way point—that is, can only be made in two ways, either with two deuces or three ace, while seven, the number which loses when the shooter has a point, figures a much higher percentage on the dice, and under ordinary circumstances a four is not made one time out of five.

Frank said in his usual quiet tone: "I was not here, sir, when you were announced. Perhaps you heard my name called. Anyway, it is Twoomey. In the future, instead of calling me Mr. Southern Gentleman, call me Twoomey. Now, if you wish to bet ten thousand to five that I do not make a four, I will call the bet. I presume that you do not carry that much cash with you; neither do I, so we will write out checks."

The man on Twoomey's right gave him a nasty look; he evidently had no intention of making such a bet, thinking that Twoomey would not have nerve enough to take the

short end of the bet. He turned to Twoomey and said: "How do I know your check is good?"

Twoomey replied: "You don't know it; but I am taking more of a chance than you. I don't even know your name."

At which the fader flushed, turned, and looked Twoomey directly in the eye, saying, "Colis is my name. My father controls the M. and B. T. Railway. Now do you think my check is good?"

Frank replied: "Sir, I have never questioned your check. If you will recall, you will see that it is you who have had doubts as to whether a check was good or not. I always take a man to be a gentleman until he proves himself otherwise."

As soon as the young man had said his name was Colis, Frank immediately remembered where he had heard the name. He had lost money in a gambling-house during his college days, and had squealed to the police, trying to make the house give it back to him, but without success. He had also got into trouble with a chorus girl in one of the musical shows, and men around town had said Colis had acted like a cad. The house where Colis had lost his money was one that Frank was not interested in, but through those various channels in which different club owners kept each other posted, he had heard the incident.

From his answers and his general attitude several men around the table were drawn to Frank during the argument. One or two of these men thought he did not understand anything about dice, from the careless manner in which he was throwing them. They tried to keep him from taking the bet, explaining that in gambling-houses the odds on a four were two to one, and that Broadway's most famous gambler, the Sport, always said where a man won one such bet, he again lost five; and that if the percentage did not figure more than two to one, the house would not be giving such odds.

Frank thanked them; then said: "Gentlemen, I wish to call the bet, not so much for the money involved, but frankly I do not like Mr. Colis's manner."

He reached for the dice, rattled them hard in his hand, and threw them across the

table. Hardly had the dice left his hand before Colis called out, "My dice," which made the shot no roll. There is a gentleman's agreement that when one of the players calls no dice or my dice, then the dice do not count on that shot.

"Four-tray," called the voice from the other end of the table. "Colis, you certainly made one grand little call then. You called yourself out of about sixteen thousand dollars by that little piece of nastiness."

For be it known that one rarely calls the dice when a shooter has a point unless he thinks the shooter is using a crooked shot; and as Twoomey was throwing the dice without apparent interest, this could hardly have been the case. As it was, Colis would have won the bet had he not called "my dice."

Colis answered: "Well, I am fading this snake, and I guess I can call them if I want to, eh?"

Frank merely smiled, not saying a word. When the dice were handed to him he said: "Well, maybe I will make the four after that bad call. I believe luck is my way," and threw the dice out again.

"My dice," again came from Colis.

The dice stopped on five-ace.

"Six," called the man at the far end of the table. "Say, Colis, let the man shoot! Don't you think we want to shoot at this end of the table? If you don't want the bet, get off. I am sure Twoomey will allow you to withdraw the bet, won't you, Twoomey?"

"Well, I guess, yes," said Frank.

Every one laughed, for they all thought that Twoomey had no chance whatever of winning the bet. Just at that minute the Earl of Donneghaly was announced. The earl entered the room, bowing to his acquaintances, and walked straight up to Frank Twoomey with outstretched hand.

"Well, Frank, my boy, it is a pleasure to see you," he said. "I have been meaning to look you up every day for the past two weeks, but have been so busy with Washington that I have not had a chance."

Twoomey's face was a study in confusion. He opened his mouth as if to say something, but no words issued therefrom.

He turned white, then red, and finally reached out both hands and clasped Lord Terrence's hand, and, reverting to his soft, Southern accent, said: "Well, suh, I suah am glad to see yeh."

Then his face became more composed.

"I was shooting dice, sir," he added, "and was being faded by a Mr. Colis, who bet me ten thousand to five thousand that I could not make four after catching it for a point. And Mr. Colis seems to think I was trying to do something to the dice, as he calls 'my dice' on every roll. Will you, Lord Terrence, as a personal favor, shoot the dice and make that four?"

"Certainly, my dear friend, I will be delighted to, all parties willing, though I am not sure whether I can make any point, as I usually lose at your blasted indoor sports."

Roy Masters, who never, never overlooks a point, in relating this afterward, said he noticed at the time that Twoomey did not ask Lord Terrence to *shoot the dice*, but asked him to *make the four*, and that made him look twice at the earl. Roy turned to Colis, whom he never liked, to say: "I know little about shooting, but if you care to give any more of that two to one, I will take the same bet as Twoomey has."

But the dice had already left the earl's hands. Slowly they rolled toward the center of the table, sticking almost together.

"Tray-ace—four," called every one around the table.

Twoomey's voice, quiet as usual, with no trace of exultation in it, came floating over: "Lord Terrence, if any one but you had rolled that shot, I might believe they were what is known among gamblers as 'even-rolled,' the dice I mean. However, you made the four and I win the ten thousand, also the eight hundred originally bet. Let us now enter the dining-room."

"I am sorry, old chap, that it finally got you. You are the one I would have staked my life on as being straight; but that was rich, was it not?" the earl said.

Frank laughed. "You would have won your stake at that, sir," he said. "I would like very much to see you to-morrow."

"At my hotel at eleven," replied the earl.

The next morning at eleven sharp a neat-looking young man entered Suite 412 at the

Ford. The Earl of Donneghaly waved his secretary aside, gathered the young man to his bosom, and said: "Oh, lad, why didn't you quit when I did and stay straight?"

"Why, Terrence McGowan," said Twoomey, "you don't think I am crooked, do you? I never beat a man out of money crookedly in my life. The nearest approach to it was last night, when I put up a check for five thousand dollars when I did not have that many pennies in the bank. I meant for you to make that four honestly, if possible. When you shot, I knew that you misunderstood me, and thought that I wanted you to make that four even-roll or any other shot; but that Colis was a nasty loser at that.

"I have here a receipt from the Red Cross for ten thousand seven hundred dollars, every nickel that I won last night, leaving me only a little over a paltry hundred dollars to my name; and now, for Heaven's sake, satisfy my curiosity regarding this Earl of Donneghaly stuff, as I am dying to understand it."

"Ah, Frank, there is not much to explain. I came from the nobility, and on the death of an older brother, who was childless, inherited the title five years after leaving you. Ah, but lad, lad, you must pardon me; you haven't changed a bit; giving away your all because it is tainted. Ah, Frankie, me lad, flush or broke, it's all the same with you. Sport you are."

Well, the rest you all know. How Twoomey emerged from a training camp with the title of lieutenant in aviation; of the chances he took "over there"; how he became an ace, and how, at the close of the big war, he married a first cousin and ward of the Earl of Donneghaly, and came back to his own United States to live.

One night he and his wife met Masters and greetings were exchanged. Before leaving, Roy said: "I say, Sport, some evening I want you to show me how to 'four.' Come to Washington Square and give me a lesson." But Frank only laughed.

His wife said: "Frank, why do so many people you used to know call you Sport? Were you ever sportily inclined?"

"I'm afraid so, my dear," Frank said.

Four Quarts of Rubies

by H. Bedford-Jones

Author of "Rajah of Hell Island," "Malay Gold," "Nuala O'Malley," etc.

CHAPTER X.

THE BRONZE BUDDHA.

KELPY was all alone, and he was riding hell-to-leather. The Malay guards ran out as if to stop him, but Kelpy saw me on the terrace and he turned the horse and headed for me. I knew something must have happened, for he had lost his hat and there was blood on his face, and his pony was white with slathered foam.

As he clattered out on the terrace, Kelpy swung about in the saddle as if he could hardly keep his seat; then he reined in suddenly, and the horse slipped, and they came down in a heap almost beside me.

"What's happened?"

I ran out to help him, but Kelpy staggered up, looking like death.

"Miss Graves!" he gasped. "Get her away—quick!"

"She's gone," I said. "She discovered things—Buck took her to the schooner. No one suspects anything. I stayed here to warn the rest of you—"

Kelpy gave an awful laugh.

"Too late, me lad!" he said, staggering. "A rare plucked un, you are—but they jumped us in the bush. Marshall's dead. They got Fong and Graves—I broke through to get warning to Miss—Graves—"

At that Kelpy just coughed and sank down, dead. He had a bullet clear through his body from side to side, and I guess it was only sheer will-power that had kept him

in the saddle until he could get here with warning. He was some man, Kelpy was!

The Malay soldiers came crowding around. They poked me back with their guns, and two of them lifted Kelpy and carried him off out of sight, while the rest got the horse up and led it toward the stables. They left me alone there on the terrace, and it was plain enough that I was to stay there. So I stayed.

I could see now that the old devil of a Sultan had laid his plans pretty well, and that he had caught us all. From what Kelpy had said, I judged that Fong and Graves were prisoners, and still alive. Where I was coming out did not worry me particularly, because I was supposed to know where the treasure was; I was safe enough for the present, and I hoped that Buck had got Leora down to the schooner.

By this time it was late in the afternoon. The sun was setting, and the palace was all flooded with red light, just as it was when we first saw it. More of the Malay soldiers came over to the gates, and then the Sultan himself came out and started toward me. Behind him stalked Lim Perak, the body-guard, and two soldiers came ahead of him and stood near me, with grounded rifles.

Sultan Lumpur had shucked his frock coat and all the rest of it. He was got up in the most gorgeous Malay outfit you ever saw, with jewels glittering on him and a big kris in his belt and two pistols showing. He looked like a monkey dressed up

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for vaudeville purposes, and as he came toward me I was in two minds whether to pull out my gun and shoot him, or not. I was pretty well worked up over what had happened, you see.

Luckily for all of us, however, I remember something Buck had said to me one day when we were talking about cards. "Don't forget one thing, Dave," he had said. "There are just four aces in the pack, but all four of 'em won't do a man any good if he doesn't know how to play 'em. One little ace circumflexed in the hand of a wise guy will paraflute the other three in the hand of a fool."

The gun that laid under my gold-spangled vest was an ace—not a very big ace, but the only one I had. If I played it now, I might kill the Sultan; but it would get us nowhere. But if I sat back with my one ace, I might get a chance to take a pot with it. So I laid low and said nothing.

Sultan Lumpur had no doubt seen Kelpy's finish from the palace, for he came up and looked at me—a sharp, bird-bright look that pierced into me—and then he looked at the flare of blood on the stones.

"Sit down, Mr. Perkins," he said. "'Pon my word, a charming afternoon, what? Haw, haw—Miss Graves not back yet, eh? No matter. There is to be a gorgeous full moon to-night. We must have a water fête, what? By all means."

He was perfectly grave, yet there was an icy undertone in his voice that frightened me. He took a chair, and so did I. He looked me over very carefully, and nodded, then sent the two soldiers away; he probably figured that I was unarmed and helpless, and that Lim Perak was all the guard necessary. I did not say anything at first, and he chuckled as he watched me, thinking I was frightened. So I was, but I was more mad than frightened.

Now a whole flock of servants came from the palace. One of them brought an elegant red silk coat, lined with tiger-fur, and the Sultan climbed into it and then reclined in his chair again; it was warm enough, but I guess his blood was old and thin. The other Malays got out a table and spread it and fetched silver and glass and dishes, and set up a royal spread.

"Well," I said when the silence got unbearable, "what do you aim to do, anyway? You've killed Kelpy and Marshall, and you're figuring on marrying a decent white girl—but that's where you slip up, Sultan."

He looked at me and cackled.

"You are a very foolish young man, Mr. Perkins," he said. "But I presume you—haw—know to what you owe your safety?"

"Sure," I answered. "Because you want the treasure of the Buddha, and I know where it is, and no one else does."

"Exactly, young man, exactly!" His wizen monkey-face grinned all over. "And you shall find it for me. Then you shall go free. But—what's this, eh?"

This was a horse coming at a good speed. It was the horse Candelario had ridden, but a Malay came on it. He jumped off near the lake and ran to the Sultan. When he got to where we were, on the first terrace, he got down on his knees and bobbed his head on the ground.

He and the Sultan had a talk in Malay, and Lumpur was the most furious man you ever saw. He turned to me, dismissing the Malay.

"What do you know of this? Señor Candelario tells me that Miss Graves and Mr. Buck took a boat at the Malay village, and went down the river!"

That relieved me a heap, and I sat back with a grin.

"I thought old Buck would turn the trick," I says. "We've been wise to you for quite a spell, Sultan, only we did not think you would act so quickly. If you get Miss Graves off the schooner, you'll have to go some!"

His wrinkled brown face spat at me. He was like a snake, some ways.

"They will never reach the schooner, young man," he said. "They will find fishing proas stationed in the lagoon all around the schooner, to guard against just such a contingency. And the good, kind Señor Candelario has departed to bring Miss Graves back to me!"

That made me feel cold clear through. I could just picture Buck heading down-river smack into the hands of those pirates, and Candelario coming along a bit later.

However, Buck was a pretty hard guy to get into a corner, so I trusted to luck that he would slip through somehow.

All of a sudden I saw the Sultan sit up and rub his hands and grin all over. I looked up—and saw Fong T'sai and Graves coming. The professor had a bandage around his head, but Fong, although he must have put up a fight, was unhurt. The wound Traddle had given him had not disabled him to mention. Both men had their hands bound behind them, and they were escorted by four Malay soldiers.

"Good evening, gentlemen," said the Sultan, cackling, as they were halted before us. "We are charmed that you arrive in time to witness our entertainment—"

Professor Graves lit out on the Sultan for fair, not cussing, but giving him a talk that had a steel edge. Lumpur just grinned and seemed to enjoy it.

"No use, professor," said Fong T'sai calmly. "This brown devil has got us. I believe, however, that Miss Graves is quite safe."

The Sultan cackled again and turned to me.

"Tell them, Mr. Perkins!" he said. "My word, old top—tell them! Perfectly ripping, what?"

I told them about Buck and Leora going, and what the Sultan had said about trapping them at the schooner. Fong's face changed slightly, and I judged that this was mighty good news, in spite of the trap which the Sultan had laid.

"But, Mr. Perkins," broke in the Sultan smoothly, "why did you not go with them?"

"I stayed to tip off our friends," I said.

"Noble young man!" sneered Lumpur. "As reward, you shall now assist at our entertainment, our *fête d'eau*."

Graves started in to talk about the rights of Americans, but at a sign from the Sultan the guards shut him up; then he and Fong were taken off to one side. But as they went, I saw Fong watching me, so I gave him a wink. Perhaps he understood about that ace under my arm, for he smiled his inscrutable smile and kept quiet.

Well, what followed was the most gorgeous affair I've ever witnessed; partly,

maybe, because there were no restrictions here—the lid was off, and everything went. I judge the Sultan had toned things down considerable while Leora was on hand, not wanting to shock her.

The sun was down, and up in the sky a nearly full moon was hanging over the tree-tops and just turning from silver to yellow, reflecting itself in the water. The Sultan began to gorge himself, sending food to me and Fong T'sai and Graves likewise, and down on the lower terrace appeared all the ladies he could mutter up, I reckon, with the orchestra to boot. And, believe me, those damsels were a scream! They were dressed—well, I had better skip that part; they had lots of flowers, anyway, and for as much as half an hour they did fancy dances all over the place and enjoyed themselves immensely.

Meantime, the Sultan drank pretty steadily, sitting there like a little brown monkey in his fur robe and watching everything. I took a little wine, and nothing else except an orange—a nice, ripe, juicy orange, which I kept juggling in my hands. I had a notion what to do with that orange, if the time ever came.

Presently the Sultan gave an order, and the servants cleared away everything, then put cigars and cigarettes on the table and withdrew. Lumpur sent cigars to Fong T'sai and Graves, and passed me one; but I had already smoked one of his cigars that morning, and I said I'd stick to my pipe.

Then it came—without any warning.

The Sultan clapped his hands and gave an order. The dancing ladies quit cavorting all at once and crowded around the edge of the lake. Out from the center of them stood one who was all solid with flowers, ropes of them from head to foot; the moonlight was bright now, flooding the whole place with silvery radiance, and I could see the girl's face—she was Kapit Ai Perang!

I did not know what was coming, of course, but I felt mighty queer. The Sultan said something in Malay, and the orchestra started up, and all the girls gave a laughing yell and closed around Kapit Ai Perang, so that she was hidden from sight. Then they broke apart and we heard a single shrill, piercing scream—and there was noth-

ing left of Buck's pretty friend except a lot of flowers floating on the water!

"It is a pity that Mr. Buck missed the entertainment, what?" said the Sultan.

It made me sick—yes, it did! I cannot think of that poor girl yet, thrown out among the crocodiles, and the flowers floating on the rippling water, without feeling sick. I came pretty near pulling my gun and letting that devilish Lumpur have a bullet; but I held back. I was not sure I could hit him, anyhow, because I was ten feet away and had never shot a revolver before.

"Now, Mr. Graves," and the Sultan cackled at me, "we shall have a bit of entertainment for *you!* Watch very closely, for I do not think you have ever seen anything like it in America."

"Don't worry about me," I said. "I've seen a heap already, Sultan, and if I was you I'd just let things run along without bothering much."

"There is nothing like politeness to a guest, my dear young man," he purred. "And we must finish with this matter before Señor Candelario returns. What is more to the point, you will get an excellent idea of the exact fate which awaits you in case you do not prove obliging in the affair of the jewels—he, he!"

He seemed considerably tickled over what was going to happen, for some reason. I tried to stave him off.

"By the way," I said, "what became of our friend, Traddle, Sultan? Did you bump him off, or did you really send him to the schooner?"

Lumpur looked at me and wrinkled up his face.

"Mr. Traddle," he said, "seemed as though he might ultimately prove useful. I sent him down to my own barge. I presume that Señor Candelario enlisted his services in bringing back Miss Graves; the two gentlemen were very friendly, what? Well, well, we must return to our muttens!"

There was no use trying to make him forget what was on his mind, so I sat back and played with my orange and waited.

The Sultan gave an order, and the ladies and orchestra all faded away, off to the sides of the round lake. Lim Perak was

standing beside the Sultan's chair, and a little behind; he was gorgeously got up in Malay fashion, and he looked like a big burly boy out of a circus side-show, only he had a strip of naked brown stomach just over his sash.

Well, when the stage was all cleared, with the moonlight flooding down on the lake and the big Buddha in the center and the little thin slat of a walk that went nearly out to the Buddha, the Sultan turned to the four soldiers guarding Fong and Graves, and said something in Malay. I saw Fong T'sai start and give a glance at the lake, but of course I did not understand what was going on at all.

The four soldiers moved forward. I thought at first that they were going to pitch Graves and Fong into the water, but then I saw that they were not. They marched the two prisoners to the little walk that went out to the Buddha, and two of the soldiers went out first, the other two following.

The Sultan leaned forward from his huddled fur, watching everything with a snakish enjoyment. Lim Perak, he was watching *me*, probably having his orders in that respect. The other soldiers and the dancing ladies were lined up at the sides of the lake, but too far away from the Sultan and me and Lim Perak to take any particular interest in us. They were all watching Fong and Graves and the four guards, with a breathless, intent interest. Of course, if I had known what was going to happen, I would have acted, but I did not know.

When the six men came to the end of the narrow walk, and were in front of the big bronze Buddha, one of the guards reached down and from some recess drew out a wide plank. He set this across the gap between the walk and the statue. Over this Fong and Graves walked, their bound hands behind them; then one of the guards skipped after them, mighty nimble. I could not make out what caused him to be so spry, until I saw that he and Fong and Graves were standing on the base of the statue—which was about six inches under water!

The guard shoved them up against the statue and swung something out of the

water around them—it was a chain, holding them there. Then he gave a quick jump and was back with his friends. Fong and Graves stood there with their feet in the water, and everything fell silent as death, watching them and waiting.

Even then I did not quite understand, until one of the guards leaned down and struck a gong suspended at the end of the stone walk, right over the water. It reminded me of a dinner-bell—and then I did understand, just as I saw something heave and ripple out on the moonlight water.

Fong T'sai and Graves were chained there for the crocodiles to come and get!

CHAPTER XI.

GIVING ROYALTY A BATH.

THE Sultan leaned over and grinned at me.

"The saurians," he said, "are a little slow about coming at times. However—"

Right there I played my ace. I saw that it was no time to delay matters, because any minute now one of those crocodiles might pop up around the Buddha. In fact, I had already delayed too long and I had to make up for lost time.

So, having to figure on Lim Perak most of all, just as the Sultan spoke I let go of that orange, and I got a pretty good swing to it. It caught Lim Perak in the stretch of brown skin just above his sash, and it doubled him up before he could reach a gun. Then I slipped out that automatic of mine and got over beside the Sultan in a hurry. He had pulled a gun, but he dropped it real quick.

"Tell those soldiers to let Fong T'sai and Mr. Graves loose," I said, "and don't waste any time! Speak up, you brown monkey, because I'll shoot you when the first crocodile shows!"

It was too bad about Lim Perak; I thought he had better sense than he had. Of course, the orange had not hurt him to speak of, and he undoubled with a kris in his hand and came at me, regardless that I had the Sultan covered. I did not want

to shoot the Sultan, because we would have too much need of him; and if Lim ever got at me with that kris, it was good night for me.

So I whipped about and pointed the gun at Lim, and shot him.

He went down all in a heap and the kris sped out of his hand and went slithering over the stones down to the first terrace, like a silver snake in the moonlight. The Sultan, he twisted about at me with his pistol, but I grabbed his hand and tore the weapon away from him. Then I yanked him out of his chair and his fur robe, with one hand, and kicked him good.

"Speak up!" I said, being too excited to feel badly about killing a man, like the hero always does in a book. "And keep your soldiers back or I'll kick you into the drink!"

He understood me all right, because he let out a yip to his men, and followed it up with some more chattering. Whether or not they understood the fix he was in, I could not see; but they stayed back. The four men out on the stone walk, they turned and jumped for the big bronze Buddha, and one of them leaped over and loosed the chain. Fong and Graves lost no motion whatever in getting to safety, and they had barely done so when there was a swirl and heave of the water, and a crocodile poked his nose out and looked mighty disappointed.

I was in a cold sweat all the while, and I could not help feeling bad over what had happened to poor Kapit Ai Perang. Now that I knew what that big Buddha was for, out in the lake, it felt like I was gripping a snake when I sunk my fingers in the Sultan's scrawny neck. I landed another kick where he would feel it most, and told him to have his four guards untie Fong T'sai and Graves and then beat it. While he told them, I frisked him and got a real collection of fancy knives and three good revolvers.

"Well," I thinks, "old Buck was right as usual! This old boy was so sure of himself, having Lim Perak and most of the face cards in his own hand, that I laid over him with my one little ace—"

"I say!" Sultan Lumpur was speaking

to me. "I'll take the skin from you an inch at a time for this, you beggar—"

"Yes, you will!" I says. "If you ever get the chance, go to it! Now you speak Malay and nothing else, or I'll bait you one over the head, you snake! Tell your boys to saddle three horses and fetch them out to the second terrace, down there."

He sang out as directed. There had been quite a hubbub at first, but now all the Malays had come to understand what was going on, and they were keeping still as mice, waiting to see if I did anything to their little tin god.

I caught up that gorgeous fur robe on my arm, still holding the automatic in my hand, and got a better grip on the Sultan with my left hand. Then I urged him forward down the steps to the second terrace, by the lake. I was just in time to meet Fong T'sai and Professor Graves, as they came in the narrow walk; their four guards had gone to join the other Malays off to one side.

"Where's Kelpy?" sang out Graves.

"He's dead," I said. "Fong, you go over to the crowd and get some weapons."

Fong T'sai looked at me, and then at the Sultan.

"What do you intend to do with him, Mr. Perkins?"

"You leave him to me," I said. "He's my property, and I know what I'm going to do. You get those guns and don't ask questions!"

A smile flickered over Fong's stony face, then he turned and went. But Graves came up to me, and to my surprise he was as cool as ice.

"Perkins," he said, "you're a human wonder! I'm proud to know you, upon my word I am! I hope you are not going to leave that brown devil here, however; we owe him a good deal, and he may come in useful farther on."

I had thought of that, but he would be more bother than use, I judged. Besides, I knew exactly what I wanted to do with him. Of course, neither Graves nor Fong T'sai knew about Buck's flirtation with Kapit Ai Perang and why she had been murdered, and there was no time to explain things now, so I let it go.

"No, professor," I said, "I reckon I'll leave him here. But don't you worry about what we owe him—I'll fix that!"

"Well," returned Graves, inspecting me in the moonlight, "what's the idea in keeping that fur robe over your arm?"

"It's about the finest thing of its kind I ever saw," I told him, "and I figure that it would make a dandy wrap for Leora."

"Oh!" he said. "For Leora, eh?"

"You bet," I came back at him. "And, besides, I mean to wrap up the treasure in it, because I aim to get those jewels before I go aboard the schooner."

"You seem to have taken command here," he said dryly.

"All right," and I grinned at him. "If you don't like it, take command yourself!"

"Your work suits me," he said, laughing a little. "Keep it up!"

And all this, mind you, with those Malays ringed around the place watching us, and the moonlight flooding down, and those flowers still floating on the water where poor Kapit Ai Perang had gone down!

Then Fong T'sai came up with three rifles and he outfitted Graves, and a minute later a bunch of Malays came with the three horses. Fong took charge of them, and sent the brown men back, then he and Graves mounted.

"Well?" said Fong T'sai, looking down at me. "What next, Mr. Perkins?"

I took the Sultan by the scruff of the neck and hauled him to the edge of the water.

"Sultan," I said, "I ought to shoot you, but the job is past me—you're so crooked the bullet would slide off you. But you sent a poor innocent girl down into that pond, and Heaven knows how many more before her; besides which, you had the nerve to figure on Miss Graves as your next intended. You're not a human being but a monkey, and I don't give a damn whether your folks pull you out or not. So, here goes—"

With that I hauled him up and landed a good, vigorous kick against his pants, and sent him flying out into the lake. I did not wait to see him splash, but turned around and scrambled up into the third saddle.

"Beat it!" I yelled. We got off on the jump.

Two or three guns banged out, but as I had figured, most of the Malays were too much interested in saving the Sultan from the crocodiles to give us much attention at first, and we got in among the trees without a scratch.

I had never had much experience as a horseback rider, and the English saddles that the Sultan used were not much better than nothing at all, but I got my feet into the stirrups after a while and managed to stick on. That fur robe flapped around the head of my horse and must have scared the liver out of him, for he gave a snort and lit out down the road like a streak of lightning.

Not that I minded a bit how fast I got away from those Malays; besides, Graves and Fong T'sai thought that I was shooting ahead of them so as to keep command of the party, and they had no objections to that, either. Fortunately, the road was a good civilized one and could not be mistaken even in the moonlight.

I must have got a much better horse than the other two, or else he was so scared by the fur robe that it lent him wings, because he walked right away from them, and first thing I knew I was streaking toward that wharf where the Sultan's barge had been tied up. I knew that Candelario had taken Traddle and had gone after Buck and Miss Graves; so I reckoned our best plan would be to swipe the Sultan's barge.

But, as that horse of mine snorted down near the wharf, I could see in the moonlight that the barge was not there at all. Manifestly, Candelario had taken it, or maybe Buck had done so. There was no time to figure things out, because any minute now the Malays from the palace would be along after us, so I yanked the horse's head around and turned him into the path that went to the Malay village, a few rods farther down the bank. He was slowing down by this time, so when we reached the village I stopped him and slid off.

Everything was dark and quiet among the thatched houses, and I did not bother waking any one up, but hoofed it for the shore of the river, going as quietly as I

could. Some dogs barked, but there was no other disturbance. If any one saw me in my Malay dress, they would perhaps take me for one of the Sultan's men.

So, without any alarm, I got to where the boats were. There was no beach here, and the boats were tied up to the mangrove trees that grew along the bank; there were big boats and little. I saved one of the small ones, with paddles in it, and untied the others, sending each one out into the stream with a push. The current was fairly swift here, and took them out right away.

Then I heard a deep, sullen booming from far away—it was some kind of a big gong or drum up at the palace, and I judged it was an alarm. So it was, too, for all the dogs began to bark and the Malays in the houses began to wake up. At that minute, however, Fong T'sai and Professor Graves came along, and I hailed them.

"Here I am under the trees—get a move on!" I said.

Somebody yelled, in one of the houses, and then began to hit a gong. But Fong and the professor had found me, and they tumbled into the boat, and I sent her out with a shove.

"Maybe they have boats drawn up among the trees," I said, pointing to the ones that I had shoved out, drifting down ahead of us. "But I've attended to most of them."

"You're an excellent general," said Fong T'sai, as he grabbed a paddle. "All that worries me is not killing the Sultan."

Graves gave a grunt. "You needn't be worried then," he said. "I expect the Sultan's heir will be going over the accounts in the morning, because a crocodile bobbed up close to Lumpur while he was splashing around. Does your conscience worry you, Perkins?"

I did not answer, for a burst of shots came from the village behind us, and the maddest yells you ever heard; the Malays had discovered that we were gone with their boats. We did not bother firing back at them, and their bullets came nowhere near us, so there was no harm done.

Taken all in all, I felt rather disappointed over the way we had escaped, particularly

after Kelpy and his friends had been killed. It looked to me as if we had done mighty little damage. Not that I am bloodthirsty, or anything like that, but I've noticed in books that slathers of natives always get slaughtered; it seems to be expected. All I had done was shoot Lim Perak, and maybe put the Sultan in the way of a hungry crocodile. As we went down the river, however, Graves said that Marshall and Kelpy had accounted for quite a few natives before going under, and there had been considerable shooting at the time.

However, here the three of us were, unhurt and with a ten-mile paddle ahead of us in the moonlight; so we settled down to work and kept our boat spinning along. There was no sign of pursuit at all.

As we paddled along, I told Fong and Graves about what had happened that day. There was a lot of it, more than I had realized before; things had certainly hummed from the minute Buck tipped his hat to poor Kapit Ai Perang. All of a sudden I remembered what the Sultan had said about his fishing-boats catching Buck, and I blurted it out.

"Do you suppose they could have got Buck after all?" I said. "Most likely he took a boat down, and Candelario and Traddle, they went along in the Sultan's barge. But what's become of them all?"

"You seem more worried over them than over how *we* are going to reach the schooner," said the professor in a dry voice.

"Oh," I said, "I know what we'll do; that doesn't trouble me a mite. But what about Leora? See here, Fong T'sai, do you suppose the Malays have captured your schooner?"

That was one of the few times I ever saw T'sai really grin. It was a wolfish sort of grin, too.

"No," said he. "I only wish the dogs would try! But they know better. Are you sure that Buck could not reach the schooner?"

"The Sultan was mighty confident about it," I returned. "He said that fishing-boats were anchored all around her, ready to gobble any one who came along; that he had prepared against just such a contingency. Lordy, I hope Buck did not run into them!"

Fong took out his little pipe, filled and lighted it.

"Spare your anxiety, Mr. Perkins," he said. "When Buck is caught in a trap of that sort, it will be very strange indeed. You're sure he said nothing about any other place—"

I remembered, then, and gave an exclamation.

"Why, of course!" I said, disgusted with myself for forgetting it. "He's probably gone where we're going—to Hell Island. I told him that if anything came up, he would find that secret chamber in the Buddha a dandy place to wait. I bet a dollar he's there!"

Graves drew a sigh of relief, and Fong T'sai nodded slowly.

"Exactly," said Fong. "I think we may conclude that Buck and Miss Graves are either there, or safely aboard the schooner. But, Mr. Perkins, I do not think we shall go to the island—"

"Now, Fong," I said, turning around to face him, for I was in the bow of the boat, "you said yourself that I was running this party, didn't you? Well, I've made a good job of it so far, and I mean to keep it up. I'm simply going to get those jewels, that's all."

Professor Graves laughed. "You'd better humor him, Captain Fong," said he. "Certainly he has earned the right to lose his illusions about that moving stone, if he wants to—and, by George, he has captained this affair like an admiral!"

"Conceded," said Fong, looking at me in his steady fashion. "You're on a false scent about that hidden treasure, Mr. Perkins—but go ahead. How do you propose to reach the island without running foul of Candelario?"

"The same way that Buck reached it, if he went there," I explained. "Where it enters the lagoon, this river has a lot of channels and islands, and is mighty wide, isn't it? Well, instead of going straight ahead, we'll cut off by one of those side channels and come out on the north side of the lagoon, not so far from the island.

"You can land me there," I went on, "then you can exercise your own judgment about getting aboard the schooner. Once

you get aboard, you can bring the schooner over to the island, or come in her boats. You may have to chase off those Malays, but I judge you can do it."

"All right," said Fong, taking up his paddle.

We slipped down a few miles farther, and then paddled out of the main channel and began to find our way along the network of channels to the north.

CHAPTER XII.

THE STONE THAT MOVED.

GETTING down to the lagoon was a longer job than I had reckoned on, but we got there at last, and it was pitch dark by that time, except for the stars. The moon was still in the sky, but it was so far down that its light did not reach anything except out in the middle of the lagoon. We could not see the schooner, but out in the moonlight, about a half-mile from us, was the Sultan's barge. It looked to be anchored and entirely deserted; the chances were that the Malays aboard her were asleep. The stars did not light up the lagoon very much, and we could see no fishing-boats.

The water was beautiful, being all full of phosphorescence. Fong was afraid that the Malays would see the light we made, stirring up the water with our paddles, so he paddled us by himself, and it was slow work. He had the bearings of the island, however, and presently it showed up ahead of us—a great black mass looming high against the stars.

"Think you can find the statue in this obscurity?" whispered Professor Graves.

"Sure!" I whispered back. "If I get started from that big stone wharf, it will be a cinch to follow the tunnels that were cut under the jungle. I know just what turns to make, too."

"I think the wharf is ahead," breathed Fong T'sai. "And there seems to be a boat lying there—no, two boats—"

We slid along, silent and slow. Pretty soon I could make out that we had come to the stone wharf, all right; then, just as Fong had said, two boats appeared ahead

of us, tied up at the stone stairway which cut up to the top of the wharf. The bow of our boat drifted in beside them, and I gripped the stone and jumped out.

As I did so, I stubbed my foot on something and hurt a corn.

"Darn it!" I exclaimed, louder than I had meant to.

Then I jumped, scared stiff. From the top of the wharf, right over my head, came a soft voice.

"Hello, there! That you, Dave? I was just about to peragulate you with a bullet—"

"Buck!" I exclaimed.

"Correct," said the voice. "Who's there besides you?"

"All that's left of us—Fong and the professor. Come on down! Where's Miss Graves?"

Buck came slithering down beside me, and I heard him chuckling as he shook hands with Graves and the big Chinaman. They were pumping questions at him, too.

"We've had no trouble," said Buck. "That is, none to speak of. Tock Gump got it into his head somehow that Miss Graves wanted to catch a fish or two, so we got off in a boat before his suspicions became moraverated. Unhappily for himself, he tried to coerce me with a gun, and I had to persimerfy him.

"Then we dropped down the river to the mouth of the lagoon, but I saw the Malay boats contravering around and suspected something, so we laid up at an island and waited. Along toward dark the Sultan's barge came down-stream and laid alongside the boats, chatting with them quite a while. I was pretty certain that we would not get to the schooner, so, after dark, we cut across to the island here."

"And Leora?" asked the professor. "Where is she?"

"In the treasure-chamber, under the statue," said Buck. "I left her there, while I stayed here on guard. She's asleep by this time, and snoring."

Fong T'sai explained what a fool I was in regard to wanting to look for the treasure. Buck, he chipped in and tried to put a wet blanket on me by saying that he had already gone over the room in the

statue, and the floor was as solid as my head.

"All right," I said, "but I'm going to look over the place myself, just the same. I know more about this treasure business than all the rest of you gumps put together, and you'll look pretty silly when I come along with my pockets full of rubies and diamonds!"

"Oh, hell!" said Graves, laughing. "Let him alone, you two! Just because you're too sophisticated to have dreams—"

"You're right, professor," broke in Buck. "Go ahead, Dave, with my blessing! But what about Miss Graves, eh?"

"She is safer where she is," said Fong T'sai. He briefly explained the situation to Buck. "We may get aboard the ship all right, but we'll have trouble picking these two up. The best plan would be to take Perkins and Miss Graves aboard with us, and hoist anchor."

"Not me without the jewels!" I said. "And I can look after Leora, all right."

"Go it, then," said Fong, irritably. "We'll come and pick you up later on, since you insist. In that case, Miss Graves is safer where she is than with us, as we may have to clear the Malays out of the lagoon. Come aboard, Buck. Have you a light, Perkins?"

That was the first time he had omitted the "Mr." when he addressed me, which showed that he was angry; but a lot I cared. Buck had an electric torch, which he handed to me, and shook hands as he did so. I grabbed the fur robe and my automatic, and started off, with a low good-bye to the crowd.

After that, it was just night all around, but I was thankful that I had had my way at last. I had begun to think I never would get to take a look at those jewels.

The darkness was intense and terrible. I wanted to flash that electric torch, but of course dared not, so I stumbled across the stones and vines, and after a while I came to the tunnel which had been cut into the jungle; even then I missed my way a couple of times, but finally got started all right.

That was a long and interminable journey. In cutting out the jungle, we had

often just cut a wide enough place for a body to pass through, so that often it seemed as if I was up against a blank wall. Once or twice I had to use the torch, regardless, but after a mighty nervous time of it I got along toward the statue for which I was looking.

It was hard for me to realize that only about thirty hours ago we had left this place to go aboard the Sultan's barge. It seemed as if a million things had happened in the mean time. It was not quite midnight yet. Only yesterday we had all gone up to the palace, feeling blue about not finding the treasure; and now I was back again, with every one calling me a blamed fool for doing any more treasure-hunting. Coming down the river I had been more or less sleepy, but now I was wide awake and looking forward to the jewels.

I got to the statue at last, bumping square on it in the dark and locating it with my elbow. I cursed a little, then took out the torch and flashed it around. I was at the corner of the base, and with a few steps got around to the back, the square hole looming black above me.

Putting the fur robe around my neck, I started up. It was no slouch of a climb, but the stones were well worn and the carving helped, so that finally I got up to the hole. Just as I got my chin over the edge and was reaching inside for hand-hold, something round and cold was poked into my face.

"Sur-surrender!" said a voice that was quavery but meant what it said.

"I've done it," I said, recognizing right off who it was. "Don't shoot, because that gun is aimed right at my jaw-teeth and there's no dentist around this neck of the woods—"

"Oh!" exclaimed Leora. "Oh, it's you!"

"It's what is left of me," I said, wriggling into the hole. "Buck said you were asleep, so I was not looking for ambuscades. Now look out, because I'm coming in."

I got inside and stood up, unwrapping the fur robe. Then I pulled the electric torch and lighted up the place.

Leora was standing there, an automatic in her hand, and she dropped it in a hurry. I did not keep the light on, because my

general impression was that she had been asleep and maybe would not like to be inspected with her hair down. However, I pointed the light at the fur robe and shoved it at her.

"Here's a present I fetched along," I said. "It's a beauty, too."

We shook hands just like two pals, and Leora got into the fur robe, and said it was fit for a queen; so I said that was why I had given it to her, and she did not ask any questions about where it had come from.

Then we sat down on the stone floor and talked, while I smoked a pipe. I told her all that had happened, leaving out a few things which I judged might disturb her dreams, and she told me about the trip here with Buck and what a fine chap he was.

"Have you done any looking for the treasure?" I said, trying to keep cool and calm. "Buck mentioned it—"

She reached out in the dark and patted my hand, then drew her fingers away again. I could see that she felt mighty sorry for me.

"Yes, Dave," she said. "We looked at every stone in the floor, and every single one is as solid as a rock and set in cement! I'm afraid that you have dealt too strongly on what must have been a mere idle penciling. It's too bad, but it's true."

I knocked out my pipe on the stones, and began to feel discouraged about that treasure. Her tone was convincing; and I knew she was a level-headed sort of girl. She had done enough poking around ruins with her uncle, too, so that she would know a loose stone if she saw it. I could see she had taken some stock in my theory, too.

"What about the walls?" I asked.

"All solid."

"And the roof?"

"The roof?" She gave a gurgly laugh. "Why, Dave, who would look at the roof? If any loose stones were there they would naturally fall, wouldn't they?"

"I don't know about that." It was a new idea to me, but it was all I had left. "You take some of these old ruined temples, and they're built pretty queer, Leora. What's up above us? Why, the statue of course! Now—"

"But a loose stone would certainly fall!" she cut in.

"It might and it might not," I said judicially. "These old heathen folks were mighty wise, hiding their jewels just where a body would not look. I remember one book that told about down in Peru where the hero found a buried treasure under tons and tons of masonry that moved at a touch, because when a lever was moved a river came along and—"

She tried not to laugh, but I caught the sound of it in her voice.

"Oh, Dave!" she said. "You're the funniest boy I ever knew!"

"All right," I said, getting up. "When it comes to that, I'm a year older than you, because your uncle said one day that you were just twenty; I get to vote when I reach home, which is more than you do unless you live in California. And as for being funny, you'll think that maybe I know something about buried treasure when I get the stone out of the roof."

With that I slid the button on my electric torch. It flashed for a second, then died out—used up.

"Well," I said, disgusted with the luck, "if I ever write a book I'll bet I can lay over some of those folks that do it for a living! I never saw a book yet where the hero's flash-lamp ever needed a new battery—"

"Here's one, Dave—I had a tiny lamp of my own," and Leora put one in my hands. "And, Dave, I didn't intend to be a horrid mean cat when I said you were funny—"

"Good for you!" I broke in, flashing on the lamp. "You're a jewel, that's what you are! Now we'll take a look at this ceiling."

As I said before, the roof of the chamber was only a scant six feet from the floor, so that I had to stoop in moving around. The little flash-lamp lighted it up fine, and the first thing we saw was that the roof was made of big square stones like the floor.

"They're set in concrete, too, aren't they?" asked Leora.

"No!" I exclaimed, feeling a thrill run over me. "They've got seams in between. Here, let's find the center one!"

"Mr. Buck and I found the center of the floor," said Leora. "It's right here—" and she pointed to a stone. "The one in the roof will be above it."

I went over and stood on the one she indicated, and she came beside me. I could see that she was getting excited by this time, too. Right over us was one of the square stones.

"Now," I said, putting out the flash-lamp, "reach up and touch that stone for luck, Leora! We'll take for granted that the roof-stones correspond to those in the floor—"

I put up both hands in the darkness, got them against the stone, and heaved up. For an instant nothing happened; then Leora's arm came up past my face, and she pushed on the stone—just a touch, too. And talk about luck! That big flagstone began to move, and it did not fall, as Leora had said it would; instead, it slid upward until my hands were touching empty air!

A startled, frightened gasp came from Leora—and then I felt her hands grip my arm—they gripped so hard that they hurt.

"Be quiet!" she whispered. "I heard some one outside!"

I had been all ready to let out a yell of triumph, but I choked it down in a hurry. For as much as half a minute we stood right still, listening. I could hear nothing at all except some queer bird-cries from the jungle, and I started to tell Leora that she had been deceived, when she checked me.

"Hush! Something is out there—"

We waited again, and I got out my automatic in case anything happened. Thinks I it may be a tiger, or some of those beasts, or maybe a big snake! Then, without any warning at all, a voice broke out close at hand. And it was Traddle's voice.

"Damn you, Candelario! You didn't see any light at all—it was a firefly. They have not been here yet."

"All right," came the silky voice of the half-caste. "But where did that fool Buck go to with the girl? We know he did not come near the schooner."

"Prob'ly he smelled danger and waited up the river," said Traddle with a curse. "When the others came down they may have encountered them. But we know that

Perkins had the secret of this jewel cache, and the chances are ten to one that we'll nab the whole crowd here."

"At this time of night?" Candelario sneered. "They are doubtless asleep somewhere near the mouth of the river!"

"Then they'll be here by daylight," said Traddle. "And remember your bargain—you take the jewels and I get the girl!"

All this showed up the situation mighty clear, and it did not seem a bit pleasant.

Fat Traddle and Candelario were in partnership, and evidently they had been informed of everything that had happened. They were slick enough to guess that I would come here to find the jewels, so they had come to catch me, while they had left the channel guarded as before by the fishing boats. They figured that I would bring the whole crowd here at dawn. But since the two of them seemed to be here all alone, I did not mind particularly.

"Wait till they come in!" I whispered to Leora. "When Traddle pokes his fat head in that hole I'll have a surprise for him—"

She touched my arm again, and then it was I who got the surprise.

"Better send in one of the Malays," growled Traddle, "to let down a rope for us."

Candelario laughed. "Nonsense, my friend! See, I shall easily mount to that opening, and I shall drop the rope for you. Let the Malays stay here—"

I did not wait for any more, but turned to Leora, shoving the automatic into its holster.

"Here!" I breathed. "They've got natives there—we could keep 'em out, maybe, but we can do better than that. You put your foot in my hands and get up through that opening; can you make it? Then we'll drop the stone again and they—"

She caught on in an instant.

"Good!" I heard her laugh softly. "We'll try it. But I can't see anything up there, Dave! What if that stone should—"

"Don't say it," I broke in with a little shudder. "We'll take chances on that. Hurry on—I can hear Candelario scrambling up!"

I locked my hands and she rested her foot in them, and I lifted her up. My scheme had been to get into the secret chamber above and drop the stone before any one came, but right away I saw that it was no use. Just as Leora's weight lightened, telling me she had got a grip above and was drawing herself up, I heard a puffing and blowing at the entrance, and a gleam of light flooded into the chamber. Candelario was coming through the hole, and he had an electric torch in his hand.

They had caught us good and proper!

CHAPTER XIII.

TRADDLE TAKES THE POT.

A SWIFT glance showed me that Leora was just disappearing through a black opening overhead. There was no sign of the flagstone, which had apparently gone straight upward.

I was not thinking of the jewels at all now, because I was occupied with more important and pressing business. Until Leora got through the hole in the roof I was holding her and had no chance to move, although I could hear Candelario scrambling into the chamber. By the time I was free to act, Candelario had turned his light on me and was pulling a gun. Of course there was no longer any hope of fooling him and Traddle as to our whereabouts.

Candelario did not try to rise, but lay there on the floor, half through the opening, pointing his electric torch at me; he grinned as he jerked his revolver forward, and I noted that his gold earrings were jiggling beside his brown cheeks. All this while—it was not more than ten seconds, I judge—I was trying to get the automatic out of my armpit holster, but it had caught somewhere and would not budge.

I saw in a flash that I was not going to get my automatic free in time, so I turned half around, pointed it, holster and all, in Candelario's general direction; and pulled the trigger, shooting from under my armpit. He fired almost at the same time, and something seemed to yank me around. I did not realize, however, that his bullet had hit me.

The torch fell from Candelario's hand; the button had been shoved in so that it continued to burn. Then from his other hand dropped the pistol. He stared up at me, his sleepy cat's eyes looking a whole lot surprised over something—then he slowly slid backward through the opening, with his hands dragging limply on the stones. I had hit him, all right. An instant later his face vanished in the darkness.

I leaned forward, picked up his electric torch, and tossed it up through the hole in the roof so that it would light things up for Leora.

"Dave!" came her voice. "Are you hurt?"

"Haven't had time to look," I sang out. "I'm coming up!"

I jumped and tried to catch the sides of the stone opening, but missed it; for some reason I felt weak. Leora saw that I could not make it, so she let down the fur robe by one corner and called to me to grab hold. Then she pulled and I climbed, and in another minute I was through the opening and standing beside her—in another chamber.

This was no room like the one down below—or, rather, it was the hollow insides of the immense statue of Buddha, for there was no roof at all that I could see! The flagstone which had been pushed up hung about seven feet above what was now our floor; it was supported by an iron bar from above, and this was connected with a system of weights.

"Quick!" I said. "We'll have to get this stone down—and they'll be a long time finding out where we are. I guess Candelario will not tell them, and if we pile something over the stone—"

I reached up and yanked it down, Leora helping me. The stone stopped two feet above the floor and would go no farther; but there were some loose blocks of stone around, and I picked up one and hammered at the iron bar. It must have been pretty ancient—Leora said it was pure iron like the pillars somewhere in India, which resist rust—but, at all events, I gave it the finishing touch and it broke. The flagstone mighty near caught my toes as it came down, and I jumped away.

Somehow that jump hurt me. I dropped the stone and stood feeling at my side. Leora picked up the electric torch that I had thrown up and directed the light on me.

"Oh!" she cried out. "You're wounded—there's blood on your sash—"

"I've discovered so," I said, trying to crack a smile. "I guess Candelario managed to do something with that bullet of his. Lordy! There's a sore streak—"

Leora was beside me in two steps, a little knife in her hand.

"Stand still!" she said firmly, ripping open my silk garments. "Hold this light for me, and keep it steady. My gracious—there's blood all over you! Now keep still a moment and I'll have you fixed up; I'm the best first-aid nurse you ever saw."

A minute before, Leora had been scared and trembly, but now she took charge of me as if I was a kid. She knew how to do it, too! The way she cut up my silk upper garments and bandaged me was mighty efficient. Candelario's bullet had cut across the ribs on my left side and plowed a deep gash, but there was nothing broken and no harm was done except a loss of blood. Of course Leora fussed around considerable, but I gathered that there was nothing to be scared of.

So, finding that I was not going to die, I began to take interest in what was going on and where we were. The place was a room about twenty feet square, and it ran from the base of the statue clear up into the head, as I could make out by the electric torchlight. It had no windows or openings of any kind that I could see; but up one side ran a series of jutting stones like steps, that ended in a little round balcony about where the Buddha's face must be. Around us everything was still and solemn, like a church, because the stone shut out all noises. We could not hear anything from below, either. Now that the flagstone was broken from the iron rod and the weights, I was not afraid that Traddle and his Malay friends would discover and lift it in a hurry.

"Well," I said, getting out my pipe and filling up, "up above there is a balcony, and that was where the priests used to stand and talk, while the ignorant heathen down

below would think Buddha was talking—that's an old stunt, according to the books. There are openings up there, so we'll get lots of fresh air."

"And you were right, after all, about that diagram!" said Leora.

"You bet," I said, striking a match. "Fong thinks he is pretty smart, but I guess he will look sick when he hears about it. And Buck, too—old Buck, who never thought to look at the roof! Well, let's have a look at the treasure."

We had forgotten all about it being late at night—after midnight, I judged; and we never thought about being sleepy.

There was considerable rubbish around there—loose stones and other things. It was musty and damp, too, but it looked as though no one had ever been there, except the native who had told Findlay about it, since the place was built.

Leora and I each had a good torch, so we set to work while the batteries would last. There were some jars standing around, but they were empty, and all the rest seemed to be only rubbish. It began to look as if there were no treasure after all until I heard a cry from Leora, who was over in one corner looking at some stone crocks.

"Dave!" she cried out. "Come here—*quick!*"

I ran over—and there it was. Yes, sir! Four of those crocks, that held as much as a quart each, were filled to the brim with jewels!

Excited? I should say we were, both of us! We sat down by those stone crocks and went through them to the bottom, and each one was crammed full of the most glorious red jewels you ever saw! We sat and played with them like water, running them through our fingers, and under the torchlights they glowed and glittered like red flames. Most of them had been mounted and still had bits of gold or silver with them, where they had been chopped out.

"Well," I said, "here we have the wealth of the Indies right in our hands. In books it always makes a body feel delirious and sort of crazy—but shucks! I guess the fellows who write books never found any treasure of rubies like this."

"Oh, some of them have," said Leora, laughing. "And how do you feel, Dave?"

"Disappointed a heap," I returned.

"What!"

"Sure. I was all fixed up to find a mixed assortment—diamonds and ropes of pearls and emeralds and all the rest of them. Well, there's nothing here but rubies!"

Leora laughed again. "Four quarts of rubies! That ought to be enough, Dave. What 'll you do with it all?"

"Who—me? Why, you get one of those crocks, and Buck gets another, and Fong T'sai another, and one to me. That's only fair, isn't it? I wonder how much they're worth!"

"Oh, millions and millions, I expect." Leora let some of the rich stones trickle through her fingers again. "But you must not divide them up that way, Dave. You've found them—"

"Never mind all that," I said. With some difficulty, owing to the stiffness of my wound, I rose to my feet and yawned. "Lordy! Who would ever have suspected that this old Buddha was hollow up to his topknot! I'm going up to see everything there is."

"Can we get out that way?" asked Leora.

That made me stop and think. When I had thought, I began to feel cold chills chasing themselves up and down my backbone, although I tried to keep Leora from suspecting the truth.

We were shut inside of this big stone Buddha like rats in a trap! To lift that big flagstone, about three feet square and a foot thick, was past us; nor could we connect the ends of the iron rod which I had broken. So far as we were concerned, we were sealed up in there, tight as a drum! Even should Fong T'sai come, how would he know where to find us? We could hear nothing, and no one outside could hear anything of what passed inside.

Yet, upon second thought, my fear passed into mere uneasiness. Up above there must be openings, and by means of them we could apprise Fong T'sai of the situation—when he came. If he were delayed beyond sunrise, we might be up against it, for we

had nothing to eat or drink. However, thinks I, the thing to do is to make sure of those openings above!

So, leaving Leora with her electric torch extinguished, I took the other and began the ascent. It was no easy matter, either, for the stones stuck out barely a foot, they ran up steeply, and there was only the wall to hang on by. To make it worse, my side was beginning to hurt. The one comfort was that Leora did not realize that we stood in any particular danger from anything.

At last I got up to the little round balcony; and then, I tell you, I began to sweat in earnest! There were openings here, three of them. Two of them were high up, the other was down almost at the floor of the balcony, and I judged they went to the eyes and mouth of the stone face outside. But they were small, maybe an inch or less in diameter, and by flashing the light into them I saw that they had been cut for a foot or more through the solid stone. I could make some kind of a noise through them, but when you remember that the face of that statue was about forty-five feet from the ground, and away up among the trees, you can see what chance I would have of making Fong T'sai hear what I said, or understanding it!

And when I say that I sweated, I mean just that. I stood before those tiny little holes and wiped the sweat from my face, although it was not hot inside the statue. Leora and I were up against it hard, and no mistake this time!

To save my life, I could not see how we were going to get out of there. If only I had not shot Candelario, he would have known where we had gone; but I had shot him, and now no one knew. To try to break through that statue was hopeless. To shoot down one of those holes would tell nothing, and they were not large enough to push a flag through and wave it; besides, such a signal would remain unseen among the tree-tops.

"Damn it!" I said to myself. "If I hadn't broken that iron rod we would have been all right! But I couldn't pry that flagstone up with a crowbar—even if I had the crowbar."

So I picked my way down the steps again, by which time my electric battery was used up, and it went out before I hit the floor. I told Leora to save hers until later; then we sat down, and I told her the exact truth. There was no sense in keeping it back any longer, and I thought she might be able to find some way out of the fix we were in. But she could not. First thing I knew she was crying.

"It would make anybody cry," she said, trying to be brave, when I did my best to cheer her up, "to think of being sealed in this old statue and starving to death!"

"If we had old Traddle here," I said, "we could live off him for a month or more!"

That shocked and horrified her out of her crying spell, as I had judged it would. She caught her breath with a gasp; and right on the heels of that we heard Traddle's dirty laugh!

"We've got you, Perkins," said Traddle's voice, chuckling. "Don't start shooting, young man, because I have something to say!"

I was scared stiff for a minute, hearing his voice come out of the pitch-darkness like that! Then I grabbed Leora's lamp and turned the light on the flagstone. Sure enough it had been heaved up a couple of inches!

"Be mighty careful what you do," says Traddle, an ugly note in his voice. "I've got enough men here to force up that stone, and we've a pile of brush ready to light. So if you want to be smoked out go ahead and start something."

No explanations were necessary. Candelario had been wounded, maybe, but was not dead, and had told Traddle about the stone in the roof. Some of the Malays were forcing it up, and Traddle had figured that we could be smoked out.

Well, he had figured it right. With only three small openings up above, we saw right off that we were goners the minute he lighted that fire. A little while before I had been cussing because nobody knew where we were—and now I wished that nobody *did* know!

"Come on up here, if you want to," I sang out. Traddle laughed sneeringly.

"Not yet, young man! Who's up there with you? Don't lie. I heard you talking. Who is Leora? I trust you were not indiscreetly referring to Miss Graves in that fashion?"

"What do you want?" I demanded. "Smoke can't hurt us here, you fat blockhead—it 'll go right out the top!"

"The Malays say different," said Traddle. "Pass down the jewels, then come down—both of you. Blockhead am I? Well, I guess I've got more brains than all the rest of the crowd put together!"

I switched on the light and looked at Leora. She was white to the lips; but she met my gaze and nodded slightly. She knew that Traddle had us—there was no use fighting now.

"We'll have to, Dave," she said, her voice low and clear like a bell.

"All right," I sang out to Traddle. "Shove up the stone. We surrender."

CHAPTER XIV.

JEWELS—AND JEWELS.

TRADDLE told the truth when he said that he had brains. His devilish idea about the fire of brushwood was what put the crimp into me. If we had had any idea when Fong T'sai would return, we might have held Traddle off; but for all we knew Fong might not come for us until after sunrise.

Leora gave me the fur robe, and I dumped the crocks of jewels into it and made a bundle. It came to me that if I was a fiction hero I could drop down on Traddle and his Malays with a gun spitting from each hand, and kill every last one of them—but I was not that kind of a hero. When it came to dropping through the hole, I judged I would need both hands to lower myself by; besides, Traddle would be waiting for me with a gun.

The flagstone began to heave up at one end, then it stopped. The Malays could not reach any farther, and they were getting sticks to shove up the stone with. We could hear Candelario's voice, but not right close; he was wounded, and was outside the base of the statue, and he wanted to come

inside. For some reason or other Traddle did not want him.

The half-caste cursed in Spanish, then he began to talk Malay.

"Quit it!" sang out Traddle. "Leave them men alone, Candelario! They'll fetch you the jewels—"

Candelario was so mad that he could hardly speak English.

"Send me two of those men queek!" he cried out. "I know you, Traddle! You thenk because I am wounded that you can keel me and take the girl and the stones, too—but I am for come up there queek!"

"All right," said Traddle, but cursing under his breath. "Tell two of them to come down and help you up. The other two can get this cursed stone up—this pole will do."

So they had four Malays with them! I judged that Traddle did not trust Candelario any more than the half-caste trusted him, and that gave me an idea. I caught Leora's hand and drew her over, away from the stone, where we could speak without being heard down below.

"Now," I whispered, "if Fong T'sai and your uncle heard any shooting going on here they would come in a hurry to save you, see? Well, you stay right here. As soon as I crawl through that hole you shoot your gun a couple of times—aim past me and shoot down there at random."

"I—I can't do that, Dave!" she said quietly. "You know they would shoot you in a minute—"

"No, they wouldn't," I said quickly, trying to make her believe it, anyhow. "If you are up here alone, Traddle won't try to smoke you; even if he did, he could not send up enough smoke to do any harm before Fong T'sai got here. I'm going to try and clear them out of that room down below—"

"You're a dear boy, Dave," she said; "but you must not try such a mad thing—"

"Hush up!" I said.

"I won't," she flung back. "And I'm not going to shoot."

There was no use talking to that girl—she had made up her mind, and she would not change it an inch. So I had to give up the whole scheme. There was nothing left

except to surrender and see what would happen.

We went back to the flagstone. It was up a foot at one end, and Traddle had lights down below, so we extinguished ours. We could see the end of a pole shoving up the stone, and the two Malays at the other end of the pole were having hard work, for we could hear them panting. Traddle called out for me to get a move on.

"What do you want first, Traddle?" I sang out. "Me or the jewels?"

Traddle laughed. "When you're out of the way I'll attend to the jewels. Let Miss Graves bring 'em. I'm takin' no chances on you, young fellow!"

"Hoist up that stone some more, then," I returned. "I'm wounded and stiff, and I can't do any contortionist stunt."

Traddle repeated what I said to Candelario, and the half-caste ordered the Malays to heave up some more—Traddle did not speak their language. From Candelario's voice I judged that he was being helped up to the hole in the base of the statue from outside.

The stone heaved up more and more until the upper end was about three feet about the floor. It was plenty wide for me to get through.

"All right," I said. "Hold her steady—I'm coming."

I turned around and shook hands with Leora. "Keep away from that stone," I whispered. "If it falls, it'll make a smash. See you later!"

Then something most surprising happened. We were in the dark, except for what light came up around the stone; and suddenly, I don't know just how, either I kissed Leora or she kissed me, or both of us kissed each other—I'm not a bit sure about it.

"Lordy!" I breathed, wondering if she was angry. "I—I don't give a hang what happens, now—"

"Get a move on!" yelled Traddle. "Think we can keep this stone up all night?"

I dropped to the floor and stuck my legs through the opening, and slowly let myself down. My side hurt something awful as I did it, because I had to hold myself up by

my elbows until I got my body through; but finally I did it. Then I lowered until I was hanging by my hands, with my feet near the floor below.

And for about a minute I stayed just that way, not daring to move. Two torches were burning, making a lot of smoky light; and two Malays, off to one side, were holding the pole that supported the stone. Right in front of me stood Traddle, grinning all over his fat and dirty face and poking a revolver at me.

"Now!" says he. "When you drop—I shoot. Say your prayers quick!"

He meant it, too; but it was not that which held me there. Behind Traddle, and to his left, was the opening in the base of the statue; and framed in that opening were the head and shoulders of Candelario. He had a gun in his hand, and he was aiming at Traddle—and he had him dead to rights!

"Put up your hands, Traddle, and drop that gun!" said Candelario softly.

Old Traddle looked over his shoulder, startled. He jumped, and turned a pasty white. Then, knowing that he was gone, anyway, probably, he just whirled around and started shooting at Candelario. And Candelario shot back.

That lower chamber was a regular inferno, what with the noise and the smoke. I let go and fell—just in time, too, for the two Malays dropped the pole and jumped at Traddle. As the stone crashed down I jerked out my automatic and let fly with all the bullets I had left.

That was all I remember. The Malays had cut a pretty stout pole, and when the stone came down the pole came down too; it was ironwood, and as heavy as lead, and it caught me square across the head. I just tumbled over in the corner and went to sleep.

I suppose there is no use prolonging the agony any more, because every one knows that if I had been killed I would not be writing this story about it. That stands to reason.

Well, all the while Traddle had been getting me to surrender, Fong T'sai and Buck had been at work. They had found the Malays all demoralized, because news had

come that the Sultan had been swallowed by a crocodile—probably where I had kicked him in, although we never learned for certain—and the Malays did not know what to do. They told Fong T'sai about Candelario and Traddle being on the island, so Fong fetched over a boatload of his Chinese and reached the scene of action just after Candelario and Traddle started shooting each other up.

Candelario had shot Traddle, and my bullets had got the two Malays, and Fong shot Candelario a couple of minutes later, while the half-caste was aiming at my senseless body. The other two Malays, outside, were killed by Fong's men, but not before they had told about the stone in the ceiling. Professor Graves and Buck were along, so they got Leora and the jewels, and Fong had me carried to the boat, and that ended the whole business.

When I woke up it was the next day—my knock-out had passed into sleep. I was in the stern cabin of the schooner, on the sofa, and she was at sea. Buck had wakened me up on purpose, so I could eat something. Fong T'sai was there, and Leora, and the professor; and on the table was the fur robe with the jewels heaped up on it.

We had a great time exchanging greetings and talking over what had happened. After eating something I felt pretty good, and could walk all right. Leora told them what I meant to do with the jewels, and everybody said nothing doing; old Buck, he said that he had lots of money, and so did Fong, and so did Graves.

"All right," I said, and bundled up the jewels in the fur robe. "Overboard they go, then."

I got as far as the stern windows when Buck grabbed me and said he would take whatever I wanted him to—and the others agreed, too. Then I got a shock.

"They are not rubies," said Fong T'sai. "They are garnets, mostly—a few rubies are scattered through, but not many. In ancient India, you know, garnets were esteemed very highly."

"Garnets!" I repeated. "Then—why, they aren't worth much, are they?"

"No fortune," said Professor Graves, laughing. "What with the rubies among

them, I imagine that the whole pile would bring ten or twelve thousand dollars."

That hit me pretty hard, because those jewels had made me think in millions.

"Well," I said at last, drawing a deep breath, "that's three thousand each—and I never had three thousand dollars before, anyhow! So I'm satisfied. Yes, I guess I'm a heap satisfied to get off that well."

I got off a little better than that, however, because we got about twenty thousand dollars out of those stones.

So that ends the story. We hit for

Singapore, and said good-by to Fong T'sai there; and Buck and I came back to the United States with Leora and Professor Graves.

P. S.—My persteamed young friend, Mr. Perkins, was in such a hurry to get through that he forgot to end up his story in the usual and comperfluous manner, so that I must do it for him. In other words, he contraglected to say that there is now a Mrs. Dave Perkins—given-name, Leora.

JEREMIAH Z. BUCK.

(The end.)



THE MOVIE IDOL

BY STRICKLAND GILLILAN

CHESTER McPIFF is a beautiful stiff—

His stage-name is different, quite!

His work "on the boards" brings people in hordes,

For his face is the flappers' delight.

He gathers more pay than some farmers have hay

(His press-agent says, so it's true!)

He spends not a cent but for victuals and rent,

As thrifty folks say we should do.

Sometimes he'll barter his face for a garter—

The fact that he wears it will sell 'em!

He scribbles his name 'neath a boost for the same—

That's getting stuff easy, I'd tell 'em!

The builders of dope for the countenance hope

He'll fall for a dicker; and bribe him

With vats of their goo if he'll let 'em—"please do!"—

As one of their patrons inscribe him.

No film-fan will buy either stockings or pie

Till he, blessed being, O. K.'s them.

From this make to that, at the drop of the hat,

This celluloid deity sways them.

They're balmly, you say? Perhaps, in a way.

They *may* be as mad as the dickens.

The answer? Tut, tut! Why a nut is a nut!

Let Chester McPiff have his pickin's!

The Clean-Up

by Captain Dingle

Author of "The Pirate Woman," "The Coolie Ship," "Steward of the Westward," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

JIM GURNEY, wastrel, was asked by Lynn, the aid of a British government official, to make a "clean-up" of a gang of pearl pirates and all-round criminals, led by a woman of unusual beauty, who made their headquarters on the island of Tarani, in the South Pacific. Jim accepted, and resolved to make a clean-up of his life, too. He reached the island in a small boat, was cast up on the beach, and rescued by Barbara, the beautiful eighteen-year-old daughter of Ronald Goff, an English trader. She had been brought up free from conventions of any sort, and her father regarded her as a child. But she was budding into womanhood, and objected to being treated as a "kid" by Jim, whose good pal she became.

Goff had natives build Jim a house near the beach. One night some members of the pirate gang, who lived on the other side of the island, came to Goff's store to trade, and their leader, Mme. Miriam Jobert, a woman of rare but barbaric beauty, came to Jim and suggested that he leave the island. Jim laughed at her, and his house was set afire. The next day he went into the mountains and was captured by some of the woman's followers, but escaped after a fierce fight, and after he had been left to die on the beach.

For Jim Barbara changed from her usual unconventional attire to the clothing of civilization, but to her deep anger he paid her but passing notice. But her father realized that she was no longer a child.

Mme. Jobert again came to Jim's hut, told him that she loved him, and suggested that he become a member of her band. Again Jim laughed at her. When Barbara saw the woman with Jim, she ran away in jealous anger. Mme. Jobert told him that if he cared to come to her, he would find the path open.

Jim rescued a book of romance that Barbara had flung angrily into the sea, and hung it up in his hut to dry. Realizing that he must make his clean-up, he started for the gang's settlement. On the way a native shot an arrow at him, thinking that he was one of the gang, who treated the natives with terrible brutality. Jim made a friend of him, and called him "Useful."

From a point of vantage he saw a fleet of sloops come in and their crews land at the outlaw village. As darkness fell, sounds of revelry came to him. Leaving Useful, he entered the village, and confronted the men in the dance-hall. There was a fight, and when things looked bad for Jim, Mme. Jobert interfered, and ordered a man who had been about to shoot the intruder to be executed. Then she asked Jim to dance with her—and he accepted.

Meanwhile a steamer had landed Lynn—arrived to check up the clean-up—at Goff's store. Lynn did not know that Jim had been assigned to the job. The Englishman was greatly impressed by the fresh beauty of Barbara and vaguely jealous of Jim, who she called her *Lancelot*. While on a trip along the beach they entered Jim's hut, and Barbara saw the book that he had rescued. Overjoyed at this discovery, she became aware that Lynn was regarding her strangely.

"Don't look at me that way! I hate you for that smile," she cried.

CHAPTER XXIV.

LYNN TAKES A DARE.

LYNN'S smiles were rare. They had not that impudent, devil-may-care cheeriness of Gurney's, and mostly they were veiled behind an impenetrable mask of outward coldness, but at such times as they really showed they held a sterling quality of friendliness that none but a sus-

picious misanthrope could possibly withstand.

Even as Barbara vowed hatred for him, stamping her small bare foot angrily, her brilliant eyes met his and gradually dimmed to a softness which soon became shy apology. Her heart recovered from the fluttering caused by the touch of her beloved book so recently in *his* hands, and the resulting glow of pleasure in its possession ir-

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for May 31.

radiated her charming face with renewed comradeship.

"I don't think I hate you, Mr. Lynn," she remarked, gazing at him steadily and smiling. "Sometimes I say things that I don't want to."

"Then say something which you do want to, Miss Barbara," Lynn smiled back.

"Well, then, nobody ever calls me miss," she rippled, and in a moment their relations were reestablished firmly. "I am Barbara, and I want to say that I ought not to have brought you here to waste your time with my fancies. Let us get some food and—oh, do you like fishing, or sailing, or tramping best?"

"I like best that which pleases you, Barbara. And I would very much like, first, to have you tell me who is this fortunate knight whom you call *Lancelot*."

"*Lancelot*? Why, he is just *Lancelot*!" she cried, and her animated face shaded again for an instant to be immediately suffused with smiles. "No other name fits him, you know," she added.

"H-m! Then I hope some day that you will find a name for me as fitting," he said, and once more his eyes shone with a baffling, cold light. He hastened to reply to her other question, for he sensed that he was touching upon difficult ground; and while his official life found him eminently fitted to deal with difficulties, his difficulties had not hitherto included a conflict of moods with such a springtime sprite as Barbara.

"I rather think I like sailing to-day," he smiled, "if you mean sailing in that corking little canoe I saw you in an hour or so ago."

"All right then, we'll sail out to the reefs. You'll find something for lunch in that big box." She indicated a packing-case, serving as a pantry. "And there is fishing tackle too, if you care to fish the lazy way."

"I think I can postpone the fishing, Barbara. Let us sail. But you shall tell me as we sail how to catch fish in the way which is not lazy."

They put out from the beach in the canoe. She had run back home to get the boat while Lynn collected such things as she hinted to him, and sped back for him while he was yet walking down the shore. She was not experienced enough in the

world's manifold ways to see unwarranted tardiness in his preparations; and his cool exterior showed her no sign of the thorough search he had prosecuted in the hut during her brief absence. He had delved deeply into the question of *Lancelot's* identity; he had secured nothing except the certainty that the unknown knight was a man of few wants and fewer belongings, and a reasonable degree of human tidiness in his habits.

Hint of name or race or even color there was none; but he refused to believe that *Lancelot* could be a fitting name for any but a man of his own race and a fair amount of white man's decency. When he stepped into the canoe he had covered himself with a garment of visible pleasure, entering into the prospect of the trip with all the outward glee of a boy just emancipated from class-room restraint.

Their brown-sailed craft flashed over the sparkling sea like an autumn leaf blown by warm breezes, and as he sat amidships, watching the girl steer her boat with consummate skill, he thrilled in every fiber at the vision of her. He tore his gaze away many times, hotly realizing that in other circumstances he would never be so rude; but ever his eyes came back to her, and as time after time he met her own steady eyes fixed upon him with a frank, unembarrassed smile in their starry depths, he grew more at ease in the thought that she was, too, truly a child of Nature's own free family to see in his regard the rudeness he feared he was showing.

She did, however, notice his silence, and it was such an utter change from his earlier chattiness that she almost became sure that the sailing was not suiting him. And recalling another occasion, when *Lancelot* had given her a similar feeling, only for her to find after putting him ashore that his anxiety to quit her boat was due to other motives, she could not now start the conversational ball rolling with her usual spontaneous merriment.

"Are you seasick?" she inquired, then colored at the inanity of the question.

Lynn started, caught unaware in the midst of a field of whirling fancies. Deep buried his soul was, under the accumulated coats of years of officialdom, but it was still

a strong soul, a strong man's clean soul, and it stirred within him as never in all his life before in the overpowering intoxication of his companion and surroundings.

Stretching out astern of him the beach lay in a dazzling streak of silver sand, edged and ruffled on one side by tufting little curls of surf that sent their musical murmur clear over to him still; on the farther side the beach was sharply outlined by the dark fringe of the lower jungle, in whose whispering blues and multicolored greens gleamed vagrant and elusive flashes of silver-shot purples and blazing crimson.

Reared above and beyond all the black cone of Tarani loomed in stupendous barrenness, like the bald crown of an Ethiopian Titan above a shock of tangled, luxuriant locks that fell to his shoulders. Seaward, old ocean rolled and played, boisterous play it was, hinting in his gambols at the fathomless might to strike a deadly blow should a playfellow scratch in his playing; and above, heaven's dome hung blue as Barbara's eyes, little puffs of gleaming white cloudlets coming and passing across the azure like the dancing lights came and passed in those eyes.

And there, before him, within touch of a barely extended hand, she sat and steered her flying bark, a creature unmatched in his dreams, unhopd for hitherto in his mortal life. One foot was curled under her, the other almost touched his, the fine, smooth skin gleaming like pale copper where the sun shafts caught it. Wayward breezes clutched at her ragged brown garment and wrapped it snugly about her as if sent by the gods to make for them a mold of human perfection to serve as pattern in the creation of goddesses. Her lips were parted like a newly opened red rose with the dew on it, and her white, faultless teeth gleamed forth a detail of beauty.

And her blue, blue eyes—pools of shining glory they were, brimming with truth, fearless and as pure as purity itself. The vague shadows that passed across the blue of them only accentuated their loveliness. Lynn was awed by the very innocence of the girl; stupefied by his proximity to such a creature, knowing full well that there was no conscious allure in those so alluring per-

fections. He replied to her inquiry lamely enough:

"No, I am not ill—physically." Then he, too, realized the inanity of such conversation, and, more expert than she in guiding or choosing words, recovered himself with a well-concealed effort and added lightly: "You must think me poor company, Barbara. It must be the sleepy swing of this splendid little boat. She is like a soaring gull."

"She is indeed!" she cried, pleased at his praise. "She is the best boat ever built. *Lancelot* built her for me."

In an instant she was all animation again, childishly gleeful that the silly constraint had passed. A second of doubt assailed her when she laughed up into his face and saw more darkness there; but he cast aside the poignant irritation her mention of *Lancelot* had caused to recur, and met her smile with one of rare brightness.

"Good man, *Lancelot*," he agreed. "I hope to meet him one day. But now suppose we forget him and talk about ourselves? Tell me, first, what is the method of fishing you spoke of. Can we try it?"

"Oh, we cannot forget *Lancelot*, Mr. Lynn!" she protested quickly. "You perhaps may, since you don't know him; but I? I see him every moment, waking or sleeping, in the water and the air in every beautiful thing under heaven I see his face, and it smiles on me and forbids me to forget him. No, he must not be forgotten, sir, but you need not think of him if you prefer not."

She held silence for a long moment, pouting and fixing her eyes on her feet so that he should not detect her displeasure and perhaps suffer another fit of silence which she so disliked. But she flashed a merry smile at him presently and continued:

"But I can tell you of the fishing if you like, and show you, too."

She explained her own method of catching fish, illustrating with swift little gestures, enthusiastic on a subject that had only taken on importance since Jim Gurney had told her it was something commonly beyond the power of human swimmers. And as she chattered, she knew from Lynn's face that he was as doubtful about this

method as Gurney had been until she had shown him.

The doubt aroused her spirit, and she would speedily show this superior stranger how little he knew; she would find out, also, whether he was a man to compare with *Lancelot*, for she would challenge him to a test. Plunging her steering paddle deep she put the canoe about and headed back for the horn of the reef where she usually fished and remarked warmly:

"I will show you, Mr. Lynn. I will convince you, and then you shall show me what you can do. I find it simple, and so does *Lancelot*."

Again *Lancelot*. Lynn maintained an outward smile, but inwardly he chilled, and in so far as he was capable of emotion with regard to other men he now felt a gnawing hatred of this infernal *Lancelot* who, absent, yet persisted in forcing his presence between this amazing young lady and himself. There was also a strong desire to get on the ground and see to what heights he must attain in natation to emulate the *Perfect Knight*, who might after all, he told himself with sarcastic enjoyment, prove to be a copper skinned amphibious Islander.

"Then let us make haste," he urged her with mock anxiety. "You have aroused my curiosity—and my ambition."

The canoe sped, and the blue of the sea turned to green spotted with black, then the fangs of the reef were close to and Barbara, with a graceful sweep, ran her craft alongside a smooth boulder. Lynn stepped out and turned to give her his hand; she had already leaped to the rocks, painter in hand, and turned to flash a smile of derisive thanks into his admiring face.

Then, with no perceptible pause, she swept a turn of the grass rope about a rock, securing the canoe, and stood poised before him, tiptoe on the pinnacle of the rock, her gleaming, rounded arms above her head, her tawny hair blowing about her laughing face in a dusky cloud.

"Look down!" she cried. "Watch. This is my never-failing storehouse of fishes. See, there are beauties of silver and gold, of orange and purple. Which would you like?"

"I'd like a golden one," he laughed, bending low and scanning the cool crystal

waters. He accepted her words in a spirit of fun, never believing that she could mean to try anything so foolish as catching live fish with her hands. His view of the sparkling depths was shattered into a myriad ripples the moment the words left his lips, and suddenly a glistening brown shape darted into the watery picture swift as a sunbeam and he glanced up to where she had stood only to find the rock bare.

"Jove!" he gasped. "Jove! What a dive!" He stared into the sea again, incredulous, and his incredulity was confounded even as he looked, for, right before his frankly amazed eyes Barbara rose waist high from her dive, laughing merrily into his face and holding up a glistening fish of gold and scarlet. "Here is your golden fish, sir!" she cried, and climbed up to the rock like a sleek brown seal.

It was pure luck, of course, he decided, and she could not repeat that performance. He challenged her to get him another fish, and peered into the water in search of one to specify. A line of finny beauties flashed past the rock, and he chose a slippery black fellow with an eel-like head. Surely human hands could never catch and hold that fellow in the water, he thought.

"Get me the black one," he invited, meeting her eyes with a look that plainly said: "It cannot be done, my dear!" She gave one swift glance at the fish, and now he was watching for her plunge. He saw her slim body arch like a bow, saw the small, strong feet impart the impetus that, communicated to her shapely, muscular ankles, sent her curving over to straighten out, arrowlike, into a clean, splashless dive which shot her down past the rocks like a streak of light.

She seemed to pause beneath the water, and Lynn chuckled delightedly as his wise selection, for he knew she had failed to hold the slippery black chap. But his wondering eyes were to open wider yet; for like the fish itself she twisted and flashed in another direction, moving apparently without effort, and then in a moment she shot upward into the air, ten feet away, but triumphant in the possession of the elusive black fish.

"There!" she cried, panting slightly and

tossing back her wet, clinging hair from her face. "Can you do that? *Lancelot* can. You try it—I dare you!" and she laughed maddeningly at him. He stood before her, holding the black fish, but with no thought for it.

In his breast was something^{*}awakening which threatened to choke him. As he stared at her, glistening with sea drops, panting and rosy, warm as love itself, revealed to his sight in all her beauty by the audacity of her saturated garment, Lynn's studiously acquired indifference failed him utterly and strong human passions surged through his being.

He stared at her, and she sensed something in his aspect not entirely due to admiration for her piscatorial skill, and her sparkling eyes began to cloud. Then his good breeding rescued him from himself, and he remembered what was due to the daughter of his host.

"Splendid, Miss Barbara," he said in cool, untremored tones. "I don't think I will attempt that to-day. But another time you shall teach me, and I may surprise you. Do you mind if we return now?"

They sailed back home, and Barbara prattled along in her own merry way, scarcely noticing that he was more silent now than when first starting out. He was engaged in a contest with himself; he had sloughed the character of his castaway dress and was again the calm, precise man of the world. She, noticing nothing of this, was elated at the thought that he, unlike her *Lancelot*, had taken her dare!

CHAPTER XXV.

TWO MEN AND A WOMAN.

BARBARA kept Lynn in mind of the fact that he had not yet accepted her dare to a fishing contest, and persevered for the rest of the day and through the next. But he was queerly unresponsive, declined to enter into the fun she was having at his expense, and appeared so totally different from the Lynn of her first acquaintance that she grew piqued at him and took herself off alone to indulge in wild swimming and sailing performances.

She could not, however, maintain this attitude very long; it was entirely foreign to her nature; and very soon she sought him out, found him pacing a desolate stretch of shore alone, and taunted him:

"I frightened you, didn't I? Aren't you afraid of the sea now? You're the very first man I have seen who took a dare and wasn't ashamed of it!"

Lynn regarded her steadily for a moment, and something in his cool, searching eyes made her strangely uneasy. There was no menace, no unkindness in his expression, but rather a deep, unutterable longing which stirred an unsuspected chord deep down in her being and brought a wave of color to her cheeks. She remembered those uncouth men on the sloop, who had hunted her canoe, and she readily recalled the beast-of-prey look on their brutal faces.

She vaguely compared their expressions with Lynn's, and felt a little afraid; then she looked more deeply, and knew that he was incapable of feeling as those other men felt; instinctively knew that this was a man of different mold entirely, to be feared by no woman. Still his eyes puzzled her, and the longer she stood before him the greater grew the puzzle, until she was forced to speak again, since he refrained from answering her.

"I think you are ill, Mr. Lynn. If my canoe made you ill I am very sorry, and I'm sorry too for what I said just now."

Lynn smiled softly down at her, and a wonderful light glowed in his handsome face. She might never know his feelings at that moment, or know of his inner conflict since he left her after her fishing exhibition, but somehow she knew that he was not and had never been afraid of any physical test, that his uneasiness was a thing beyond her present knowledge.

He, on his part, trained as he was in quick decisions, had not yet satisfied himself on a subject sorely debated in the past few hours. From the moment of meeting Barbara Goff, he had been unable to go directly to his appointed work; the more he considered the more intense became his indecision, until he was angry with himself. In his lonely walk he had argued whether to dismiss Barbara from his mind as if he

had never seen her, and to go about his business, or to put his new but terribly strong passion to the final test in order that he might proceed on his duty untrammelled by outside thoughts.

So he debated; and he knew more certainly the more he thought that his passion was not a thing of a moment, not a physical, sensual passion, but a pure, white, honorable gentleman's first and final love. Yet he was not satisfied that he ought to pursue that love. Every detail of his life was antagonistic to the course of a level, conventional current of domestic happiness, and he was so thoroughly aware of it that honor itself warned him against bringing possible regret into the life of such a girl.

Against this feeling was the rising tide of his heart's desire; and there seemed no possibility of an end to the conflict. Therefore he still repressed his longing to pour out his soul to her, and replied to her second question in a miserably unsatisfactory sentence:

"Thanks, Barbara, I am quite well. I am simply discussing business with myself and scolding myself for not going about it."

She saw the mixed emotions in his face, where others might have seen nothing but impersonal kindness; but, not understanding those emotions, never dreaming they concerned her, she answered him with a bright smile that thrilled him again, and asked with a pert little toss of the head:

"Your business? Business is so brisk on Tarani, of course. Yours must be very important indeed to cause you to look as gloomy as the mountain before a storm. Tell me what your business is, and maybe I'll believe you are not ill."

"I am what men call an agent," he smiled back.

"An agent? Oh, I know; you sell things, don't you?"

"Not precisely, Barbara. I try to discover things," he replied slowly, and again his regard made her uncomfortable. He saw the uneasiness creep into her face, and with a tremendous effort of will he cast off his own indecision and rallied his wits to meet her on different ground. He laughed pleasantly, and took her arm.

"Come, Barbara, forgive me for all this

gloominess. Let's say it was due to my disappointment with Tarani, shall we? Then things can get no worse; they must get better, because I have decided there are hopes of my discovering something of incalculable worth on Tarani after all. Take me for a walk to the cliffs, and show me where the old witch lives."

They renewed their initial intimate comradeship quickly, for Barbara could no more smother her bubbling high spirits than she could understand fear. And under the witchery of her eager interest in every new turn of the way, Lynn became the Lynn she had first known, a splendid companion, full of spirits as high as her own.

She led him through the jungle, full of mystic lights and shades, odorous with moist earth and dew-dripping foliage, carpeted with leaf-strewn black soil that gave the spring of velvet pile. Out to the goat trail up the cliff they climbed, and her face assumed fresh loveliness as the eagerness in her eyes intensified; for, though her companion could not know it yet, her heart had gone soaring upward ahead of her to the mountain top, seeking the absent *Lancelot* whose lantern had not failed to wink its good night "all's well," but whose anxiously sought figure remained unduly long away.

While they halted, midway up the slope, Lynn fell back into his early morning uneasiness, and in spite of himself he could not keep his gaze from her. The uneasiness soon communicated itself to Barbara, and she frowned with annoyance, for she thought him a much more agreeable companion in any other mood than that which seemed to possess him now. She leaped up and ran into the jungle, gathered great bunches of wild grapes, and returned to him, hoping to find him back in his better mood; but while his smile was soft and kind, there was again that other mysterious quality in it that had caused her uneasiness. She gave him grapes and looked her annoyance, then said decidedly:

"These will quench your thirst, Mr. Lynn, but I think we will return to the shore now. I am sure you are ill, and I feel uneasy. Let us go now."

To her surprise, he responded readily, and they clambered down by a new path,

eating their grapes in silence. Lynn kept behind her all the way down, and only joined her when they emerged from the bush and trod the beach again within a hundred yards of *Lancelot's* castle.

As if drawn by a magnet, Barbara walked directly to the hut, and seemed unaware that Lynn had stepped to her side and was looking at her hungrily. A faint flush had crept into his tanned face, and the gleam of his eyes was the reflection of a holy fire blazing in his breast. The sight of that hut brought him to a swift decision as nothing else could have done; and now, on the ground rendered sacred to the girl by memories of her *Perfect Knight*, Lynn put his fate to the hazard.

"Barbara," he said very softly, and his hand sought hers, "I told you that I hoped to discover something of great worth on Tarani. I have found it, a jewel whose worth is beyond appraisal."

Barbara stared at him and tried to withdraw her hand. His fingers retained hers in a tender, firm grasp; and she knew instinctively that unsuspected power reposed in the man she had called afraid. She colored, then went pale, feeling angry at his freedom, but sensible of that overpowering quality in his eyes which assuredly gave no reason for fear. But the delicate bloom came into her face again, and her eyes filmed softly; for she was Eve's daughter, and needed no teaching in the great lesson of love.

True, this was the first time in her young life that she had looked into a man's eyes and found what she saw in the clear eyes fixed upon her; but her heart told her with tumultuous insistence that here was love, tremendous love; a lover wooing her for his mate, and she could not meet his eyes then. As from a great distance she heard him speak on:

"Barbara, I have found the jewel of the ages. I have found love, and you shall not tell me it is not for me; you cannot. Look up at me, girl; look into my face, and judge of the strength of my love for you, then let your heart speak in answer for you."

Barbara looked up bravely, and there was no longer any anger in her face. Rather

did her expression reveal a deep, sincere pity, the pity more often found in a mature mother than in a maiden confronted with her first wooer, for such can often be cruel; but there was no flame of responsive passion in her gaze, and a chill hand clutched Lynn's heart when he read her answer before it was uttered.

He believed he knew the reason—that he had made his plea too soon; that in spite of her rich loveliness and womanly charms, Barbara was still a child unwarmed by the fires of passion. He almost felt satisfied that he might renew his suit at some not-far-distant date with success, and before she spoke he was convinced of it. Her reply showed him how far in error he had gone, and astounded him with the depths of feeling she was capable of.

"Mr. Lynn, forgive me if I must hurt you," she said, and her voice and manner were those of inherent breeding. Even with the stab he knew that he had judged her rightly; that she was a woman fit to hold place before the earth's chosen ones. "I like you very much indeed; I like you terribly, and we can be good friends as long as you remain here, if you wish. I will gladly swim and sail with you, show you the mountain and the shore, do anything I can to make your stay happy; but"—gently, yet with unexpected strength, she released her hand from his—"except in the hand-clasp of friendship, please do not put your hands on me. Body and spirit, sleeping or waking, living or in death, I am *Lancelot's*, all *Lancelot's*!"

Her speech ended in a passionate outburst, and Lynn stood transfixed. If he had thought her lovely before, if he had deemed her wholly desirable, he was suffocated now by the surging blood that leaped and throbbed from his heart at the picture of her standing before him erect and stately, blushing with her confession, her breast revealing the tumult within her, shy in her maidenhood, dignified in her limitless love.

Lynn's emotions warred within him. Proof that she was capable of love was there before his eyes; but he could not, or refused to, believe that such passion was to be squandered upon a beach-comber such as he now had no doubt this *Lancelot* must be.

Faint irritation moved him to reply; and govern his feelings as he might, he could not avoid a trace of subtle sarcasm creeping into his response.

"I should very much like to meet this fortunate knight," he smiled. His smile was unconsciously indulgent, for deep down in his heart he believed the girl had come under some childish spell of romance which had molded her emotions. And a spark of anger at her father's culpable neglect of her training began to grow into a blaze also. He resolved to speak plainly to Goff that very day. His smile growing more indulgent, he inquired: "Tell me, fair lady, does the brave *Lancelot* know of his great good fortune?"

Swift resentment flared in her eyes, for she detected the sarcasm in his voice and words. She faced him with quivering lip, and replied so that even he was abashed:

"He does not know, but what does that matter? It can make no difference. I know. I have dedicated myself to him, body and soul, and in good time he will know. That is sufficient for me; it must be sufficient for you, a stranger!"

His desires urged him to ridicule her attitude; his intelligence told him that, mistaken or not, Barbara was very much in earnest in her belief; and his good sense rescued him from a bad situation before he irreparably offended her. He bowed with courtly grace at her reply, and his changed aspect soothed her, gratified her, because it so perfectly matched her mood at the moment.

Her mind was filled with the perfections of *Lancelot*; Lynn's cultured courtesy seemed to her just then the homage of a knight to the lady of an absent brother in arms. She was very willing to respond to his peace overtures when he begged her, his own good, calm, controlled self once more, to continue the walk and not to think too badly of him for what had passed.

So they walked along the edge of the surf, quickly resuming their merry comradeship, and arriving at a degree of intimacy which persuaded Lynn that he might renew his suit at a future day with no fear of offense. They reached the point from which the trail to the mountain start-

ed, and paused, debating whether to go that way or to leave the shore for the sea a while; and while the debate was scarcely begun, Lynn's ideas of future wooing received a rude shock; for Barbara suddenly sprang forward toward the trail with a glad cry on her lips, and her companion stared at her amazedly. She radiated supreme joy, heartfelt thanks, and, crying little words of worshipful love, she bounded into the bush and out of sight of Lynn. His eyes followed her until she vanished, then sought and found the reason for her flight.

High up on the perilous path, leaping from rock to rock with the sureness of a goat, a virile figure rapidly grew in size as he descended, and Lynn uttered sharply:

"*Lancelot*, no doubt! Now we shall see fair Barbara's *Perfect Knight* and judge of his worth!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

"YOU SHALL BE MY KING."

BYOND the mountain, down by the shores of the little haven, Jim Gurney played with fire. With the voluptuous form of Miriam Jobert in his arms, and her warm, fragrant breath on his neck, he danced in ecstasy that became delirium when she uttered that low, seductive laugh, and now it was he who made advances.

"Let's quit this dancing and walk by the sea," he said, and felt her tremble in his arms. Fires burned in her eyes, fastened wide and unwinking, thirsty, triumphant upon his face, and a sigh that swelled her bosom pressed her form against him mad-deningly.

Subtle enchantress that she was, that sigh usurped the place of speech; she gently released herself from his clasp and silently led him, taking his arm, out of the hut, leaving behind her a gestured command which redoubled the din of fiddle and feet.

Beyond the glare of the lanterns they walked, and from time to time their glances met and held for an instant. Unnoticing, Gurney went where she led, careless whether sea or sky, earth or domdaniel, were the destination; until after five speechless minutes of insensible progress he came out of

his trance to find himself at her side in the garden of the larger house he had seen from the cliff.

Shadowy figures flitted before them noiselessly, and tiny hidden lamps began to twinkle like glowworms about the place, until the entire house was softly bathed in dim radiance. He walked up two low, wide steps at her side, felt her hand guiding his, and sank down on a broad, billowy couch in a heap of clinging pillows that surrounded him with the same sensuous perfume that she used on her person.

He heard her whispering to an unseen servant, then she joined him and sat beside him, leaning heavily against his shoulder, and putting her lips very close to his. At her touch he gasped harshly, flung his arms about her, and crushed her to him, seeking her lips. She placed a strong hand on his breast and repulsed him, laughing again that low, melodious laugh.

"I knew you were a man," she whispered, and under her lowered lashes he saw the fires leap. "Now we shall understand each other, my Jim, shall we not? But just a little while, but a moment, and we will be alone. Then I shall tell you that which will thrill you more deeply than the wine now being brought."

A shadow resolved itself into a silent native maid, and a tray with crystal decanter and ruby glasses was set down on a small table beside the couch. The maid vanished at a word from Miriam in the native tongue, and the rapidity of her disappearance spoke eloquently for the force of the quiet order.

"Now you shall look into my eyes and drink to me, Jim," the woman cooed, pouring wine that held globules of rich light. He took the glass from her, and their glances met ardently across the rims as they drank. But he was silent, uttered no toast, and she showed pique.

"What? Am I not worthy of a health?" she cried, and then stopped sharply; for he drank his wine at a draft, flung down the glass, and again crushed her to him, replying hoarsely:

"A health? What spoken word can satisfy? This is my toast!" and he kissed her lips.

"Oh!" she gasped, and a flash of anger lighted her eyes. He, heated though he was, detected that flash, and it lighted a spark in his brain, undoing in an instant much of the spell she had wrought on him. He smiled at her, saw the anger die and change into death-calculating submission, and in turn his smile became a slow, understanding laugh.

That which a moment before bade fair to become slavery of soul now reverted to what it truly was and had been—momentary enchantment. She swiftly sensed the change, and feared him less than she feared failure; thus, instead of her anger flaring into fury at his laugh, she became all woman, soft, yielding, sorrowful that she had hurt him.

"Jim, forgive me," she pleaded, her lips again close to his. "I am not angry. I was taken unawares, that is all. You know, Jim, no man has ever touched my lips before. I was frightened. Now I am not afraid. See, I give my lips to you gladly."

"You're forgiven," he replied, but refused the kiss; and now his face was no longer suffused with hot blood, his eyes and lips wore his old-time, natural, merry grin, for that flash of anger escaping her had jolted him partly back to cool reason. "You're forgiven, but now I'm going to be mad, too. There, sis!" and his laugh rang out mockingly as he mocked foes who sought his life.

The woman leaped to her feet; he could hear her panting furiously, and she paced the dim veranda with swift, tigerish steps. Back and forth she passed, while he looked on amusedly, every moment regaining more of the grip he had all but lost, every moment taking his own rightful place in the party, that of the dominant partner. He could only surmise what emotions stirred her then, but made a shrewd guess when he recalled her method of treating disobedience in her own men; and he waited curiously, yet unable to subdue the tide of admiration for her physical magnificence that had taken hold of him.

"But that wasn't her first kiss, I'll bet my red head!" he chuckled, watching her closely. "Surprised her, no doubt, but

surprised or not, her lips stuck like glue, by hickey! If she should try to kiss me intentionally—oh, boy!”

Perhaps some mystic voice warned her that the longer she lingered from him the cooler his ardor must grow; perhaps, too, she set great store upon the opportunity that had by lucky accident come to her. Surely she realized that only the gods could have drawn her telescope focus from the distant steamer down to her own settlement to reveal to her the man of all men she desired at that moment. And that same mystic voice reminded her, perhaps, that by seeking him and finding him she had neglected to watch the steamer out of sight, thereby lapsing from a duty in a manner which she would have repaid with death in one of her crew.

Fury and longing, ambition and hate, fought for the mastery within her, and ambition and longing conquered. She came back to him, with her splendid head drooping, her jeweled hand extended in peace.

“I want you, Jim—want you as woman never wanted man since the world began,” she said, and stood there bowed before him. “I need you now, when you laugh at me. If you will only look at me again as you did before, God! how I can love you.”

Gurney was his own man again, and, whatever physical attraction she might exercise upon him, there was no danger of his heart yielding, for he appraised the woman by worldly standards, remembered how often he had heard such words as she spoke flung at brutal, drunken sailors, at a price. But he enjoyed the game she had carried him into, and was willing to continue playing, but reminded her beforehand of what he had previously told her.

“The game of love’s a merry-go-round, Miriam,” he smiled at her. “I’d hate to disappoint a lady in love, and maybe I won’t; but you forget that not so long ago you declared war on me, then a truce, neither of which was of my seeking. You said you would make me free of the island, but I made no promises, did I?”

“To tell you the truth, I don’t feel very friendly toward your outfit, whatever I may feel toward you in the end. Nothing would suit me better right now than to wade in

and mop up your bunch of toughs, if for no other reason than their treatment of the natives.”

“Ah! I love you for those words!” she cried, and seized his hand impulsively. “Now we can come together on common ground, Jim. Let us climb to a rock in the cliff which commands the haven. I have so much to tell you, and under the stars you will listen and know that I speak truth. Come. I am pleased with you again.”

Mildly astonished, Jim accompanied her, and they scaled the lower cliff and arrived at an overhanging rock which dominated the entrance of the inner channel, and looked down upon the dance-hut, now silent and dim.

“My beasts have guzzled their fill,” she cried contemptuously. “Now they seek their trembling prey!”

Slowly the grin spread upon Gurney’s face, for such words from such lips struck him grotesquely. He thought of a poor devil of a man even then lying bound, with the tide creeping up to him. He visualized his own predicament, escaped through no softening of heart in the author. He remarked derisively:

“Such beasts are not lacking an efficient trainer! I don’t remember trembling, but I was prey, all right, not so long back, and not of the beasts either.”

He knew that her eyes were fixed intently upon him, though he kept his face averted. He felt the warmth of her body, the alluring softness of her, pressing gently against him as she adjusted herself to her share of the narrow seat; then her voice came like music to his ears, in words that shattered all his carefully maintained coldness.

“It is because to train my beasts I have been forced to do as I required them to do that I am a lonely, heart-hungry woman, begging for the love of a strong man who mocks me. Jim, your sufferings at my hands were as nothing to my own at having caused them.

“I fought with my own heart while I could; but when I knew I had found in you the first real man of my life, I saw in the future release from this horrible existence,

and reached out greedily for you. If you feel angry because my brutes ill-treat the natives, I feel furious. But while I must remain here I must keep them loyal by all means, and cannot restrain them as I would.

"In other matters, as you saw to-night, I hold them by merciless measures." She paused, turning her face full toward him, and he caught the glow of her eyes under the stars. "Jim, I am weary of it all. Come to me, and it shall all cease—you shall do as you will with this prison settlement and carry me where you will. I shall rely on your goodness."

"That requires thinking about, Miriam," he replied, meeting her gaze with a non-committal smile. "You know I'm a law-abiding sort of cuss, don't fancy funny business at all, and before I meddled in with a crowd like yours, except to trim some of 'em, I'd want to know more about them. I can't see why they're here at all, in the first place. As for what to do with 'em, I'd give 'em to the natives they've wronged and use 'em for fertilizer. That's my notion."

Intense eagerness marked her vibrant attitude as she replied:

"Take me, and do as you say with my crew, Jim! That is what I long for—to be free of them utterly—and it is such a task for a woman to kill one by one such a gang of ruffians. Yet they must not go from here! They must never carry my secret to the world."

Again she paused, and her agitation was unrepressed. Such a mixture in words of passionate longing, cold cruelty, and implied treachery had never come to Jim's ears before, and he sat there on thorns of expectancy, gone utterly from her spell, cognizant once more of the business that had brought him there, and believing himself in sight of the climax. Her next sentence convinced him that he was right, and a passing word electrified him with its fitness.

"Listen. I will confide in you. I shall tell you my secret, Jim, and you shall help me to clean up this nest of snakes before we go, you and I, to our rightful place in the world. Jim, you shall be my king!

And, have no fear, you shall live as no king ever lived, for I am richer than Sheba!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

MIRIAM'S PROPOSAL.

ONE word she had uttered stiffened Gurney as nothing else could. Clean-up, she said; and it acted like a powerful tonic, yet in a way far from her desire, although she knew nothing of it then. "Clean-up" was Jim's slogan, and the sound of the phrase reminded him harshly that but a few moments before he had all but forgotten what its meaning implied to him.

He had come dangerously near to surrender in the intoxicating presence of this woman, and the realization of it brought a hard glint into his eyes and a grim line to his lips. He was careless now whether his methods were strictly proper or not; his errand demanded a clean-up of the whole nest, and that included the mother bird, too.

He did not believe that it was his duty to tell her of this outright, and he felt easy in his mind regarding hearing what she termed her confidences. Had any slight uncertainty remained, it must have vanished the instant he met her eyes; for they were fastened intently upon him, and in their dark depths he saw the fierce cold glitter of a serpent's orbs, shining through the warm softness which was only her outward expression.

"Tell me whatever you like. I'm listening, but I make no promises," he said, then shifted his gaze harborward. As if in fear of losing him, she leaned against him, placing her hands on his shoulder, and breathing very close to his face.

He refused to meet her eyes, but inclined his head, and he felt hot, clinging lips on his neck. The touch made him feel like shivering; but he repressed the feeling, and waited for her to speak. When words came it was in a low, vibrant murmur, and the sentences came rapidly, giving him a thrill of exultation as the tale unfolded.

"Jim, I am called queen of pearls," she said. "In the house where you kissed me,

Jim, are gems that will amaze the world! For years my crews have gathered them, paying no tolls, hiding here until the day when my store is full, content to suffer virtual imprisonment here in the prospect of wealth, rather than risk real imprisonment with poverty afterward.

"That is why I must permit them license in their orgies. But, oh, Jim, how I despise them! For a year past I have diminished their number slowly, punishing by death when chance came, holding the rest by threats.

"But I am afraid now. They are not as they were. They look at me sometimes as if they read my thoughts, and each time one of my vessels comes in from the grounds with pearls, or to escape the patrols, I tremble. I am only a woman, Jim, and they are fierce men—"

"Fierce as pussy-cats!" Jim laughed softly.

She frowned at the interruption, and her fingers tightened on his arm.

"Yes, fierce as cats, wildcats!" she cried, then resumed her low murmur. "To you, Jim, they are not fierce. You have no fear of any man. I have seen it, and that is why I need you. If you will help me, together we will keep them here, now that all are here, and they shall never leave Tarani alive. We, just you and I, Jim, will take our treasure far from here and live as such a man and such a woman should live."

She paused, and waited for him to speak. He kept silence, and she cried impatiently: "Speak!"

Horror and disgust filled Jim's soul at her callous proposition. He saw, too, the unstable situation he was in; for if she could coolly propose the wholesale murdering of her loyal ruffians, he was under no deception regarding his own fate if he aroused her suspicions.

He hesitated to reply, but felt forced to utter some word at least, sensing the tenseness of her pause. He turned her with a smile and suggested:

"How would a pretty little Japanese house in Moji suit your ladyship?"

Lightning flashed from her eyes, and she glared at him from a distance of inches only. He gave her look for look, his im-

pudent grin firmly fixed upon his face, and slowly the alarm faded from her eyes, and she replied:

"I said you might take me anywhere, Jim. But not Japan. Not Japan." She stopped for a short while, as if debating a knotty point, then brightened and faced him again. "I have told you much, and will tell you all; for I know you cannot refuse my plea, Jim. I cannot go to Japan. My pearls are taken from Japanese grounds—"

"Stolen?" Jim put in brutally.

"Stolen, if you will. The word does not matter, does it?"

"Not much. Only I must say you are smarter than most if you have managed to plunder government treasure for a term of years and get away with it as clean as it seems you have."

"I am coming to that, Jim. It has not been wholly what you call smartness. I have a friend who has made it easy, and he expects his reward."

"Pearls?"

"No, me!" she cried savagely. "He is an official high in the confidence of another government, a government ambitious to filch Japanese possessions. He has powerful friends, too, who have made it possible for my fleet to carry on their work in security. In return for this security I have taken care of precious documents for him here, which will surely give his government the object of its desire. So you see, my Jim, it has been a reciprocal arrangement, but—"

She stopped again, and the savage gleam shone anew in her eyes. "But my friend expects that at the proper moment his schemes and the realization of my treasure shall occur together, and then he will carry me away with him. He expects this. I have promised it. I was forced to promise it to secure my position here."

"I see!" Gurney's rejoinder was almost a whisper.

She detected the harsh note and hastened to add:

"But he shall never have me, Jim! I care nothing for his schemes or his precious documents. I have my treasure, and it is for me alone—me and my man. My brutes

here—*peste!* They are swine, and shall I cast my pearls to them? No! With you, my Jim, I shall laugh at their destruction and together we will burn up those foolish documents and leave only gleaming, splendid pearls to jewel our love.”

Gurney looked long and fixedly at her, as at some hideous, loathsome thing which to that instant had fascinated him by a false presentment of beauty. But even if his feelings rebelled, he held firm control of his features, and the cheery grin never wavered, his steel-gray eyes never winked. Thus he was accustomed to look at men while he tongue-lashed them into conflict with him to their inevitable sorrow.

He drew one foot up to the ledge and placed a hand beside it, and instinctively she knew that his soul did not leap out to hers.

She drew in her breath sharply, regarding him with slightly parted lips, and waited for him to speak; then she hung on his words breathlessly. The words were those of the man who had ridiculed her on an evening down by the farther shore.

“Unutterably sweet lady, you flatter me by giving me an earful of that stuff! Please accept my regrets that I am unable at this moment to join your pleasant little party. I’ve been everything going, almost, but never a crook, and never a traitor to a fellow rogue. Why”—he leaped up and stood towering over her, and his voice grated metallicly—“I should be scared stiff to eat food with you after this. Poison would be but a gentle attention to expect from you when you felt tired of me!”

Like a tigress she leaped up beside him, and they stood close together on the narrow ledge, in perilous proximity to the abyss. Stars like small suns gleamed down upon them, and were reflected in the placid waters below, whence came the whispering voices of tiny wavelets. Late night breezes sang about them in the hollows of the cliff; the sharp cry of an uneasy sleeper stabbed the air like ringing steel. And upon the nocturnal chorus the woman’s contemptuous laughter burst.

“You should be more discreet, Jim,” she said. “Poison, you fear? That is for those whom I hate, yes! I can poison, and I can

strike. At this moment the water-tanks of all my vessels are poisoned. Thus have I made sure my escape from those beasts.

“But you—you may not live to taste poison, my friend. Here, on this ledge, are you not in my hands? Fool! Mad-brained fool!”

Jim grinned happily, and the grin swiftly hardened into grim determination, for as she shrieked “Fool!” she drew a knife from her bosom and the steel flashed wickedly at his throat. He matched her quickness, and outdid it. Seizing her arm in an unbreakable grip, he forced her back to the cliffside until he felt his feet secure; then, with no play at gentleness because of her sex, he twisted her wrist until the knife clattered to the rock, and she cried out with pain.

But she possessed no cowardly streak in her being; the knife fell, leaving her unarmed in his hands, unless she could get at her pistol; she fought him with her free hand, and from eyes to chin her fingers tore, ripping the flesh until the salt blood was in his mouth; and again she tore him, laughing insanely.

“So you flout me again, you currish beast! But you will not!” She writhed in his grasp, pressed her body against him, and flung an arm about his neck, twisting a foot about his ankle, and pressed her weight heavily forward until he staggered dangerously near the edge of the narrow footing. “See, I am not afraid! To kill you I shall gladly go with you!” and now she strove desperately to hurl him with her headlong to death.

“Hey, back up!” gritted Jim, fighting hard against her thrust. He fought her as he would fight a man in similar case, not striking, but putting all the tricks of manhandling he knew into regaining lost ground. And as he pressed his head against hers, leaving his hold of her knife hand to clasp her around the body, he felt her hysterically powerful figure give and bend to his pressure, until she suddenly relaxed in his arms with a gasp of despair and sank to her knees.

He stared down at her, and for all his anger he could not refrain from giving her credit for her fighting fury. He dearly loved a fighter—a clean fighter—and the

distinction saved him from the mistake of softening toward her. She had not fought him clean; and those poisoned water-tanks stuck in his memory.

He darted down his hand, tore open her dress, and found the pistol that he knew was there. With that gone the lurking glint died out of her eyes and cunning submission took its place.

"Jim, my Jim, you have conquered me," she whispered.

"You're dead right I've conquered you, lady," he grinned, feeling the pistol to find if it were loaded. "You stay put there a while. I'm taking command now. If you move an inch I'll come up and conquer you some more."

"Don't leave me, Jim; please don't," she begged in a voice of pitiful softness.

She lowered her lashes until to look at him she had to raise her wickedly lovely face and reveal the long, slender column of her perfect throat gleaming like ivory in the starlight. Her tumbled figure might have taken the attitude after long study for effect, so vividly did it disclose her undoubted charms; and as he gazed down at her, scorning her from his soul, Gurney felt an irresistible thrill yet in the contemplation of her physical perfections.

He gave his thoughts a vicious jerk in fear for himself, and told her: "You stay right there until that star there sets." He pointed out Capella, blazing brightly low down in the west, about an hour from setting. "Then you can go home if you like. You'll see me again, lady, unless your good sense makes you get out of here before I return. Take my advice and change the water in one of your boats and beat it. But don't you dare move a step from here before that star dips, for I'll be watching you, and I can shoot almost as straight as you."

"Jim, I am penitent, indeed I am!" she moaned. Had he been less disgusted with her unexpectedly revealed true nature, her piteous plea must have beaten down his anger; for she was an actress of peerless art. "Jim, I lied about the poison. I was angry. Do as you will, but come back to me, for I am lost if you desert me now."

Gurney possessed keen hearing as well as keen fighting instincts, and therein he scored

a point on his splendid foe, which she never guessed. He turned and started to climb down to the camp, simply replying to her that she would see him again soon unless she took his advice and left Tarani; and after his retreating steps her plaintive plea followed:

"Jim, my Jim, come back to me!"

And his keen hearing informed him of her true attitude of mind toward him by carrying down on the trail of the plea, fainter, almost inaudible, the words:

"Pig! Unutterable dog!"

"Good for Miriam!" he chuckled happily, continuing downward. "She's a catamount with ten claws to each foot, and teeth a foot long dripping with venom! Makes it easier to wrestle with her, though."

Every time he reached a turn in the path he looked back and made sure that she had not moved. He saw her face thrust out over the ledge, glaring at him, and at such moments he handled his pistol in her sight, careful to permit the starlight to glint on the polished barrel. At the foot he halted out of her sight for several minutes, then suddenly stepped out and sought the ledge.

She was still there, and whether she was cowed by his threat, or was simply undecided and still hopeful of his return to her in the manner she desired, he neither knew nor cared; he was satisfied to know that she remained where he had put her, and even if she started down after him in a short time it gave him time to do what he had planned.

Stealing cautiously into the settlement, he took out one of his own pair of pistols to reinforce the other, assured himself of the readiness of the spare one, and crept up to the first open door and listened.

Sleep, uneasy and noisy, filled the black interior.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ON THE TRAIL.

JIM stepped inside the hut, his feet making no sound on the sand floor, and groped carefully around the flimsy walls until he reached the board bunk whence issued the strangling snores of a stupefied

sailor. He had no fear of awakening such a sleeper; to put it to a test he coughed loudly, and received the response he had hoped for. The snores went on without a check, but a little cry of fright issued from the blackness, and Jim put his hand gently over toward the cry.

"Come here, Mary, I take you to village," he whispered. The frightened cry was repeated, but quieter, and he repeated his order, running his hand soothingly along a smooth, round arm he had encountered, which trembled violently, growing still, however, under the pacifying influence of his touch.

He was obliged to speak again, and to labor with words to make quite plain his meaning, before the little native girl could realize her release. Then her breath was audible, she gave a tiny murmur of relief, and Jim felt a small hand creeping along his arm to his strong fingers to at last snuggle into them trustingly.

Once outside, he quickly satisfied the woman of his intention to help her and her sisters in trouble, and she aided him by slipping noiselessly into the other huts and bringing out the unexpectedly emancipated natives. As he stood in the midst of the settlement, with the shivering little brown women gathering about him, he keenly scrutinized the cliff and the ledge where he had ordered Miriam to remain.

The stars were waning as dawn approached, but still he could see the ledge clearly, and he chuckled at the discovery that the ledge was empty, although Capella scintillated brightly a handbreadth above the western horizon. He looked, too, at the heights where Useful lay hidden, wondering if the native was as sleepless as himself that night. He could make out nothing on the darker heights; decided that finding the man to act as guide would take too long, and was not essential anyway, since the women surely knew the road home; and quietly arranged his flock into two abreast and whispered the order to march.

"Home, kids—beat it!"

The women, some of them children, hesitated just for a moment, bewildered by the simple fact that they were actually told to go home, and for once afraid of the darkness

and what lay behind them; but Jim passed the word along by means of the first woman he had called out, told her that he was coming right behind them to protect them from pursuit, and the column started so swiftly that he lost sight of them in a few seconds. He was put to a run to catch up, then easily traced his protégées by their sibilant whispers, for they, no more than their white sisters, could withstand the urge to chatter the moment the danger was out of sight.

For fifteen minutes they trotted around the base of the cliff, until, rounding a spur, they entered the jungle and left behind the aridness of rock and sand as a gray, pearly gleam shot up to the sky from the east. Still no uproar back of them came to alarm them. The settlement lay steeped in drunken stupefaction.

Jim only casually wondered about the woman. He had no false ideas about her obedience to his command—she was not that kind of woman—but he felt that he would like to know just what she was doing, or where she was. That she had aroused her men to follow him was a thought dismissed at once, for such men were not likely to plunge out of sleep into a jungle chase as silently as sober Indians.

He did not bother much, however, what she did or where she was; he felt more interested in her as herself, debating her many sides in his mind, weighing her up, so to speak, and coming to the conclusion that as a woman she was a splendid animal, as an animal she was a disappointment.

"I hope she takes my tip and beats it," he reflected as he strode through the odorous, lush jungle, saturated with dew, "If she don't, I'll have to handle her the same as her filthy crew—and I hate to do that, for she has her points, by hickey!"

The hurrying line of brown figures ahead of him had ceased their chatter through sheer weariness, for their previous day and night, ended as it was by broken sleep, fitted them badly for the chill, damp journey, and their animation at their freedom soon quieted. Jim followed the last of the file, and his thoughts did not hinder him from keeping a mental record of their course. He realized they had traveled around the

mountain in a winding arc rather more than a semicircle, but the heavy jungle shut off any glimpse of the high land which might have verified his position.

The women seemed less certain just at that time than they had been in the first flush of release; the woman he had called Mary—it is safe to call any of those women Mary for want of their real name—halted once and waited for him, and he thought the way was lost; but she only placed a finger to her lips, assumed an air of exaggerated caution, and warned him:

“Big spirit of Tarani lib up top!” and pointed through the trees overhead. Then she scurried on to rejoin her companions as if terrified lest the spirit had heard her.

Jim glanced up, grinning at the native fancies, and was surprised to find that the frowning mountainside again broke through the forest there and loomed over them like a forbidding countenance. But the notion of a Great Spirit did not appeal to him; he simply tried to get his bearings from the outcrop, and resumed his walk.

Spirits were less in his mind than the near certainty that his advance guard had lost the way; but he was startled sharply by a sound that came apparently from just overhead, a sound which he failed to place or identify in the flash of a thought. He swung around, alert as ever; unafraid, but neglecting no precaution in that unknown region whose hinterland was full of men emphatically not friends.

Then on the heels of the strange sound came a familiar one, a woman's voice, or it might easily have been an animal's, for it was a cry first, then a snarling exclamation of fury; and almost at his feet two bodies dropped from above, falling in a spitting, writhing heap from which he leaped to get clear sight of them.

A fierce struggle was afoot, ended in short order with a scream and an upspringing of one figure, while the other sprang back in a queer access of fright, for this was the apparent victor in the scramble of a moment before. Gurney recognized the furious voice of Miriam Jobert in that scream of rage, and he stepped before her and glared inquiringly from her to shivering Useful, the other figure of the pair.

“I catch her—she hab knife for you,” Useful asserted in triumphant tones now that his friend stood between him and the awful woman he had attacked. “I jump on back; she fall down hard.”

Gurney swiftly sought on the ground for the knife Useful had mentioned, for he saw Miriam's gaze darting here and there among the shrubbery. She stood there palpitating with billowing passions, yet even in her extremity she used the perfect art that was in her. While she glared vengefully at Useful, and while her brilliant eyes sought eagerly for her lost weapon, she never lost sight of Jim Gurney, never neglected for one second to play to his sensibilities; and when he stooped under a bush and picked up her knife, a murderous wavy-bladed kris, she uttered a low, stricken moan, stumbled, and sank to the ground at his feet; her great eyes, luminous and soft, yet glinting in their far depths with bitter hatred, were raised to his, and her red lips smiled pitifully in the soft light of advancing morning as if to tell him that her eyes belied her true feelings.

He sent Useful on with a grateful word, telling him to take his women home and keep them there without fear, then turned to Miriam. Her eyes followed his every move; she crouched on the ground, half kneeling, and lowered her head as if in shame when he flourished the kris before her face. A moan burst from her again, and she shivered violently as if fighting down other more piteous indications of feminine weakness.

Gurney appreciated the situation fully, and enjoyed it; he felt certain that the woman was playing some deeper game, since failing in her vengeful errand through the agency of the loyal Useful, and now he regarded her curiously; but there was no softness in him when he considered that he might have been the one on the earth, and she standing over his knifed body in unholy triumph.

He was curious to know why she crouched there at his feet, for she had stood stoutly enough after hurling Useful from her. He knelt beside her, taking her arm firmly, and shaking it. She moaned as if in torture, and her body swayed toward him.

“Jim, Jim, I have been mad!” she whis-

pered, and her hand closed on his. "I am punished. Don't despise me, Jim."

Her head fell back, and her eyes gleamed from almost closed lids; her face held the seductions of a wounded Circe. His lips closed tightly, and for an instant the cheery, devil-may-care grin was banished in the recollection of the woman's many treacheries; then his infallible humor returned to him, and he relished the present situation to the full. He laughed outright.

"Lady, you're an awful scream," he chuckled. "D'you know the sort of stuff you pull would make your fortune in the movies? Pearls? Stolen documents? Treachery? Piffle, my dear! They're all small-time stuff. What you need is an introduction to the Marvelous Movie-Mob manager, and a job to do vampire rôles for the nickelodeums, by gosh!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

A MEETING.

HE stood over her, gazing down at her bent head with a cheery grin. She kept her face downcast, but he could see the heave of her shoulders, he felt the scorch of the blazing rage she was glowering into the innocent earth. He tapped the kris blade with his fingers, making the steel ring, and waited for her to make some definite move. She remained motionless except for the visible tumult of her feelings, and Jim made his blade ring sharper and quicker as his patience cooled.

"Come, sis, jump up," he ordered at length, laying a hand on her bare neck. She quivered ecstatically at his touch, but made no effort to rise. Jim went on bantering: "I'm surprised that you disobeyed my orders to stay on that ledge, Miriam. But, then, life's full of surprises, ain't it? You're surprised by my man Useful jumping on your neck, and all your jolly grog-swilling hogs will be surprised to wake up and find they have to get their own breakfast."

"It's a great life, lady—but jump up. I can't wait here all day, and you must get on your way." He tried to raise her, feeling a little uncertain over her protracted atti-

tude of submission. "Come on, up with you. I want to give you a bit of advice, and you'd better take it like a good girl."

"I'm a bit tired of your stunts. Get back home to your gang. Remember what I told you a few hours ago, and get out of here while you can. I'm coming down to your camp in less than no time to smoke out the whole blamed nest. I ought to scoop you in with the rest, for you don't play a sporting game. But I'm a soft-hearted cuss, and hate to fight with a woman."

"Don't be fooled, though. If a woman turns into a she-wolf, I'll fight her to a finish. Beat it while the going's good, Miriam, and if you are a nice, obedient little lady, perhaps I'll give you a letter of recommendation as a nursemaid or something, so that you need not starve where you go."

She looked up at him, her big eyes full upon his, and to his suspicious astonishment there was no rage in her face at his contemptuous speech. She remained on the ground, and her eyes were soft; and scenting mischief in her pose he snapped:

"Well?"

"I believe in you now, Jim, and know you wish me well," she said softly. "I do, indeed. After all I've done and tried to do you treat me as a sister, and I will gladly do as you say. But I cannot walk, Jim. I am crippled. My ankle is sprained."

"Bunk!" he retorted. He placed both hands under her arms and urged her to rise. "Get up. Yes, you can. Try now, and no funny cuts."

She made the effort listlessly, and stumbled to her feet, but fell limply against him with a whimper that touched his heart.

"That's a darned shame, sis," he sympathized. "But you've got to get home, or go to the village, whichever is nearest, and I am short on time. Come, I'll hold up the lame side. Which is it, village or camp?"

She shuddered as she climbed to her feet again, and he felt that the shudder was not entirely of pain. His arm was about her waist, her arm slipped around his neck, and she essayed a few steps, then said: "Don't take me to that native piggery, Jim. Take me home, please."

He was not deceived as to her reasons. Had he treated natives as she had permitted her crew to treat these, he would never want to stray helpless into their hands. He appreciated her preference and helped her along toward the settlement, curious as to what his reception would now be, for he believed she would lose no time in telling her crew of the release of the native women and his part in it, in spite of her protestations that she intended to follow his advice.

His curiosity faded as they proceeded, for in their intimate proximity the woman found an irresistible opportunity again to play upon the harp of his feelings. Her rounded, sleek arm was warm on his neck; his own arm pressed her yielding, lissom body to his, her beautiful face, softened in pain, was upturned and pitiful, the great, gleaming eyes veiled by drooping lashes.

For all his knowledge of her she thrilled him; yet never again could she thrill him as he had been thrilled in that moment when he lost himself in a stolen, passionate kiss; he was sufficiently his own man now, with all her thrill, to notice that her limp was at times almost imperceptible; that in the moment when he clasped her more tightly to him and she responded with a deep sigh and upward sweep of her eyes, she limped not at all.

He was contained enough to give no sign that he noticed this. He continued on his way with as much solicitude for her easiness of locomotion as before; and when at length they arrived at her house, and he laid her down on the great couch and called her maid, she rewarded him with a burning look of gratitude.

"Stay with me, Jim," she whispered. "I am afraid of my beasts now that I am helpless."

But he shook his head. "Can't be done, sis," he replied. "You send the maid out to bring your chief husky tough, and give him orders to change the water in those tanks. That will occupy them all long enough for you to get about on that foot again. It isn't very bad, I'm sure."

"I'm going over to my place now, and when I come back I hope you will have taken my advice and cleared out. See?

Now, while the maid's gone, I'll take charge of those pearls you say are here. Where are they?"

If the woman were shamming an injured foot, Jim guessed his demand must surely force her to throw off the pretense. But she was peerless in her acting, and he admired her for it, for he never for a moment doubted the falsity of her claim to a sprained ankle; he had seen proof enough of it. But she lay there, gave no hint of anger, regarded him so submissively that he admired her art more than ever, and said simply:

"Why must you leave me, Jim? I have told you that all my treasure is yours if you say the word. Take it. Take it all. But take me also, Jim. Tell me why you must leave me now."

"I'm going to carry those pearls to my place, Miriam, to leave them safe." He smiled impudently. "Then I'm coming back here to mop up the beach with your hogs. That's why I say, clear out before the fun commences, for I feel a bit sorry for you. You might be a queen if nature hadn't made you a beautiful devil."

She laughed back at him, a rippling, mirthful laugh such as a happy child might utter, and as she lay there, apparently helpless, she seemed very harmless, very human. She said, and her voice was like wine and music:

"My Jim, you are my king. Take the pearls, the papers—all. I shall await you here, for you will return, and you are sorry for Miriam. Pity, my Jim, is own brother to love; and I am content. You will come back, you shall find me, and I shall yet call you my man. Good-by. Will you kiss me?"

Jim kissed her as he might kiss a chum's first baby; it was expected, and not positively poisonous; and he gazed down at her quizzically, marveling from what human strain such a creature could possibly spring. Every moment she revealed a new side, an amazing side, to her complex nature. He assumed his careless, cheery grin, and said:

"Better not wait, Miriam. I'm not coming over here on any picnic, I promise you. Now show me where the pearls are, and I'll be back all the sooner."

He expected that when the moment came

she would be unable to longer sustain her rôle of injury, or to carry out what he believed to be her bluff regarding the pearls. To his amazement, hidden with difficulty, she raised her head and replied:

"They are in a chest under my head, Jim. Here's the key—" She nodded downward, indicating her corsage, and he saw a thin gold chain about her neck. "Take the key, and the gems are yours. The documents, too, are there, Jim. See, I put myself in your hands utterly!"

As in a dream he drew forth the key, a stout piece of iron in a softly padded silk bag. The chest was now uncovered by removing the pillows, and to his further surprise the key fitted. The climax of surprises was attained when he opened the chest, found bag after bag of magnificent gems, and a small despatch box, removed them, and never once saw hint of treachery.

He gathered up the treasure, and met her eyes; they were filled with an unutterable longing, humid and tender. She smiled at him, smiled when he left her without further word, bearing away the wealth of a monarch, the fruits of her lifetime, almost, of wrong-doing. But he did not hear the words that escaped her twisted lips the moment he was out of sight:

"Now all is done that may be done! If he will not relent and come back to me after this evidence of my trust, my brutes shall wipe him from the earth, and with him that doll-faced girl over there and her idiot father! But he cannot deny me now. Give him one hour in silent contemplation of those gems, and he will come back to me eager and desirous of me. He cannot leave me, a helpless woman, to crawl away like a wounded dog!" and she laughed maliciously at the thought of how she had fooled him with her crippled foot.

He, on his part, climbed the cliff, chuckling heartily at the way she had fooled herself. He labored under no delusion about her parting with her treasures; he knew it was some trick, but a trick which he was willing to watch to the end, and to make the most of. Toward noon he mounted to the summit. He let loose a yell of elation as he started down the other side and caught sight of his hut and Goff's house.

Then he detected two tiny figures away down by the sea, near his house. One was a man, who, even at that distance, he knew was not the trader.

"Back up, Jim," he muttered, and halted to seek a hiding place for his treasure. He would gladly have let Barbara into the secret, but that stranger—

He hastily marked a place beneath a flat rock and resumed his descent empty handed. At the half-way, he saw Barbara run forward, and answered her action with a ringing yell of welcome. She went out of sight as she passed the jungle-belt, and he plunged into it to meet her.

He caught her and swung her aloft like a baby, shaking her and calling her kid and Bobby, and every other name he could think of which had at any time vexed her; and she was not vexed in the least, but in a very ladylike voice, begged to be set down, and turned a blazing face from him, yet permitted a warm little hand to remain in his strong grip.

So they returned to the shore, and the moment they emerged from the bush, Gurney came face to face with the stranger and halted in open-mouthed astonishment. Barbara stared in wonder as the two men stood motionless regarding each other.

"Mr. Lynn? Gee!" was Gurney's greeting, but his face was alight with welcome and he thrust out his hand.

"Glad to see you, Gurney," Lynn replied, hiding his feelings under his ultra-official mask. "I wondered whom I would find down here. How are conditions?"

Thus much in greeting and no more; but Barbara knew, with a tiny feeling of annoyance, and Gurney felt, with an awkward doubt as to the wisdom of resenting the attitude of so great a man, that Lynn was analyzing them both with the coldness of a scientist.

CHAPTER XXX.

A SURPRISE FOR JIM GURNEY.

BARBARA first broke the tension. Suddenly she remembered that her old brown dress was no fitting attire in which to greet her knight; she turned and

sped along toward home without a word, leaving both men smiling at her impulsive haste.

Gurney and Lynn, left alone, had much to convey to each other, and the first thing Jim wanted to know concerned Lynn's presence on Tarani so unexpectedly.

"My life is made up of such things, Gurney," Lynn told him; and the level, unemotional gaze of his cold blue eyes bored into the gray eyes of Gurney in a manner scarcely attributable to business alone. "I go here, there and everywhere, at orders, checking up on the men I pick out for my superior."

"But you said you had no idea where I was to be sent," reminded Jim.

"Nor had I. I had no idea which of the many men I selected I would find here. But I'm glad it's you, Gurney—well, for more reasons than one. How are things going?"

"It's a scream!" grinned Jim, relieved to talk business and escape that inexorable, cold stare that, in spite of her flight, seemed to embrace Barbara as well as himself. "You have a smart nose, Mr. Lynn. You arrived just about in time to see the fireworks."

He went on to outline what had happened, and wound up by mention of the loot with which he had been presented.

"By Jove! Gurney, there's something queer about this," Lynn remarked, seriously. "I must look at those things at your convenience. Everything I have ever heard concerning this woman is against her handing anybody a fortune on a silver platter."

"That wasn't everything she handed me," Gurney chuckled. "Gee, I hate to throw bouquets at myself, but the lady fell hard for my manly beauty, and wanted to slop all over me. She thinks I'm going back to her now."

Lynn stared at Jim's merry, careless face, showing no signs of hardships in spite of his adventures on Tarani, and asked curiously:

"But what of her crew? I understand that you might make a hit with the woman herself, if you used your great experience in that line"—a hint of raillery crept into

his tone—"but those men of hers are no babies, I have heard."

"Babies? Say, Lynn, babies could lick the whiskers off that bunch! Tough? Yes, to look at; and hard cases when their luck is in, but once start to handle 'em rough and they're so easy I'm ashamed of myself for hurting them, honest."

Lynn allowed mild surprise to temper his cold exterior, and replied with a shrug: "Then I am certain they are fooling you, Gurney. I imagined that might be possible. Beat you, I don't believe they could; but it seems as if they have played a fine game of fear with you for some deep reason of that woman's."

"Sure they have," Jim agreed cheerfully. "I'm not quite batty, old fellow. The woman is playing with me now—and she might better play with a volcano. I know well enough why she gave me that stuff. I know, too, that there's no fake about the scare I threw into her huskies. I can handle 'em as I like, and she knows it. But there's no doubt she wants somebody to help her beat those pirates out of their shares, and she's picked me simply because I'm too tough for them to hurt."

"She's tried to cook me and carve me up and drown me, and I believe she's decided it can't be done. Oh, sure I know she's planning a trick on me; I knew it the moment I saw that she was faking a sprained ankle. She can walk as well as I can."

"This is the way I figure it out: If I go back, and agree to beat it with her for parts unknown, everything will be fine, and I'll win a lady friend who would make Lucretia Borgia look like a *crèche* nurse. Money to burn, too. If I keep my promise to her, and start in to clean up whether she's still here or not, does it occur to you what use she can make of me having her loot?"

"I admit it doesn't, Gurney. Your deductions are ingenious, though. Go on."

"It's easy. She knows she'd have one high old time getting those bullies of hers to start something with me again; but if she showed 'em her looted treasury, and told 'em I was the man who had their plunder, they'd fight Beelzebub to get it back. See?"

"It sounds plausible," Lynn agreed, slowly. Then: "But are you sure the woman has not impressed you personally?" He fixed Jim with a piercing stare, for behind his official chill, his human heart burned with thoughts of Barbara, and the thought reminded him that this red-headed, merry-faced dreadnought was the *Lancelot* she all but worshiped.

"Afraid you might have made a misdeal in picking me, eh?" Jim grinned back. "You can ease your mind on that, Mr. Lynn. Perhaps I am taking a little longer about the job because the woman is what she is; but your job is under way, and the finish is in sight, and it 'll be done according to Cocker and up to your requirements."

A reminiscent smile swept over his freckled face, and there was whimsical humor in his steel gray eyes as he continued: "You say she may have impressed me. Say, that dame could impress any man on earth if she set out to. You must see her. She's some eternal feminine, by Hickey! Handsome as paint, with a figure that makes you think of—oh, what's the use!

"Three months ago, Jim Gurney would have jumped at the chance to kidnap that Venus and spend her money for her. But not now, Lynn, though I admit she had me going once or twice. There's a darn sight more in this clean-up for me than you know of, and as I told you when I took the job, if I fail you can say masses for me. That's still good."

Gurney's light treatment of the matter had changed toward the end to a seriousness of manner, which carried conviction to the Briton and made him easier in his mind than he had been since discovering the identity of Barbara's *Lancelot*. A glance along the shore showed no sign of Barbara's reappearance, and he suggested:

"Shall we go up the cliff and bring down those papers? Safer down here, don't you think? I'd like to see just who is the culprit in this infernal mess a brewing between two friendly powers."

Gurney led the way without hesitation, and started the climb with a running fire of irresponsible chatter that went over

Lynn's head and brought no rejoinder. Gurney cared nothing whether his sallies were replied to or not; he simply wanted to talk for once; and Lynn, too deeply immersed in a problem of his own which had nothing to do with pearls or papers, cared nothing whether his companion talked or not.

They climbed with the sturdy precision of healthy, hard men, and the journey was quickly made; but before he reached the rock beneath which he had deposited the wealth of a monarch, Gurney was conscious of a sense of constraint emanating from Lynn and inevitably affecting himself. He stole a look at the Briton, grimaced aside at the stern glint in the blue eyes, and wondered if he had been driven up to the mountain top merely to listen to a calling down for some unknown fault which could not be discussed on the beach.

He lifted the rock in silence, and stood aside to let Lynn examine the hoard, meanwhile, gazing at him in calculating wonder. His wonder increased when the Briton made no motion toward the treasure or papers, but suddenly faced him with a faint, but indubitable, flush on his cheeks and a fleeting, none the less certain gleam of awkwardness in his eyes. It was all so foreign to Lynn's character that Gurney waited in something near awe, so serious did he believe the coming subject would prove.

"Gurney"—Lynn spoke haltingly, not at all in his customary decided, terse manner—"Gurney, this is—er—well, it's confoundedly embarrassing, y' know. I want to—I have, that is, spent a couple of very charming days in the company of Goff's daughter, and I—er—think a great deal of her, y' know—"

Gurney grinned encouragingly. "Good for you, Mr. Lynn," he said, honestly congratulatory. "She's a corking little pal, and I wouldn't think much of any man who didn't care a whole lot for Barbara after knowing her a day or two. I like her pretty well, myself."

"Like her pretty well?" echoed Lynn, and glared at Jim with the crimson flooding his face and his eyes bright with amaze. "You like her—oh, damn it! Gurney, come

out into the open! Don't spoof on such a subject, please."

"Gee, what's the fuss?" Gurney was shaken out of his merry indifference now, for the cold Briton seemed to blaze. "I ain't spoofing. Don't you think I ought to like the girl?"

Lynn regarded him speechlessly for a full minute, all his official veneer shattered, staring as at some queer creature unexpectedly unearthed by a plow. His mouth opened, and shut, opened again and uttered stutteringly:

"C-confound you—for a—bally ass! Like her? Man alive—don't you know she—she—oh, damn it, Gurney, the girl is madly in love with you, you idiot! She says she is dedicated to you—I truly believe she must say her prayers to you—and—she calls—you—*Lancelot*, her *Perfect Knight!*" he finished with a rush.

It was Gurney's turn to stare. His eyes met and held Lynn's for a breath, then the mountain resounded with a peal of laughter so spontaneous, so utterly derisive, that Lynn was forced back to his normal condition by the very shock of it.

"In love with me? Me?" Jim derided. "Gee, Mr. Lynn, she's a little spoofer herself. Say, she's the best little chum I've ever known, and better than any man in the water or a boat; but as for love—oh, pickles! She's only a kid yet, and besides, I've got no time for playing sweethearts just now.

"Forget it, Lynn. I shall be ashamed to meet Barbara after this. It's as much a scream as Mme. Miriam Jobert's amorous inclinations. Let's take this stuff and go down. We can leave it at Goff's house, and you can see for yourself how darned silly your ideas are when I tease Barbara."

They returned to the shore, and even Gurney was silent. Lynn wore an expression not entirely official, nor yet so unofficial as previously, but rather the expression of a man coming out of despair into rising hopes. His keen mind was busy, and he marshaled every fact that had come to his notice with reference to Barbara and Gurney, and the more he considered, the brighter grew the gleam in his eyes; until,

when they entered the trader's house, and were greeted by Barbara in her especial splendor, he glowed warmly with the hope that he might now prosecute his suit unhindered by rivalry.

He watched the girl narrowly as she came forward, and his hopes sank several degrees; for now that she was arrayed for *Lancelot* himself, her greeting was reserved and ladylike, as the greeting of *Lancelot's* lady should be; her eyes were dusky soft, her lips parted in ripe buds, a delicate blush tinged her pretty face and neck, and she extended her hand to Jim as if meeting him for the first time since his departure.

Lynn scanned Gurney's face, in search of reinforcements for his hopes; but now he saw a change, vague, but still a change in the devil-may-care red-head's expression, and the change took place while he stared. For Jim, at first sight, gave Barbara his old merry grin of welcome, rendered the more humorous by reason of what Lynn had so recently told him; but the moment his eyes fell fairly on the dainty picture she made, they softened and darkened, until they matched her own; over his freckled, impudent face stole a doubt which bade fair to cause the doubter considerable worry.

He seized the chance of a talk with Goff, leaving Lynn in company with Barbara to that young lady's dismay; but he found little to talk about; even Goff remarked on his absence of mind; and Jim disgusted the trader into leaving him by murmuring vacantly:

"Darn it! She ain't got points to her elbows! They're round as her pretty neck!"

Goff went in and told Lynn that Gurney was smitten with the woman of the mountain.

CHAPTER XXXI.

GOFF SPEAKS.

BARBARA had become more of a woman than she knew. Glad as she was to be near Gurney, delighted to have her *Lancelot* return to her safely, his

neglect of her brought a pout to her charming face, a gleam of annoyance to her eloquent eyes; and Lynn reaped the benefit to a gratifying degree, for the girl outwardly warmed to him, to show her indifference toward Gurney, and still attired in her splendid great occasion finery, made him supremely happy by spending a bright, chatty hour in his company.

Jim sought out Goff again and talked with him for a few minutes, at the end of which the trader's bored face showed a trace of surprise, and the surprise in turn changed into a brief smile with a nod of acceptance. There was a hand-shake, which caused Goff to gesture protestingly, as if unnecessary, then Jim started off toward his shack to prepare for his promised smoking-out trip to Miriam's hornet nest. And thirty seconds after he started, light, flying footsteps behind him brought him about to face Barbara, bright-eyed, flushed, eager.

This meeting was unlike any other between them. Jim's grin was a pitiful failure; Barbara blushed crimson, and her head drooped in confusion. Speech failed, too. All the good-fellowship that had grown up with them seemed to have vanished. The girl's rosy lips were parted, as if to speak; she raised her head to look at him, then lowered her eyes again, while her small brown hands clenched and unclenched nervously, her satin-shod foot tapped and tapped in the sand. Gurney choked on his words, but after a struggle managed to say:

"Anything the matter, Barbara? Does your father want me?"

"Father? Why should he want you?" she stammered; but now she could meet his eyes, and her rounded chin grew determined; he sensed remotely that she was on the verge of an outburst such as he had been used to laugh at in her. Now he did not feel like laughing, though he couldn't imagine why. Somehow he felt utterly unable to rally his control muscles; he had no desire to meet her obviously growing irritation with jest. She shocked him into some semblance of coolness by saying sharply:

"There is nothing the matter. I mis-

took you for some one else, that's all!" She turned and began to speed homeward, and his speech came back.

"Barbara!" he called after her. She stopped, half turned again, and looked back at him with yearning in her eyes. Slowly she walked to him, and the smile which played about her sweet face was full of an infinite tenderness.

In her white dress and old lace she was as a bride about to meet her groom; and the sight of her sent surging back to Gurney all the awkwardness and chokiness of speech of a moment before. He took her hand, tried to speak to her, and failed miserably.

Savage with himself he attempted to fall back on his old resources of raillery; but it was hopeless. He could only repeat her name, softly, reverently:

"Barbara."

"Jim," she whispered in reply, and both relapsed into silence. But as if by prearrangement they started to walk along the shore toward Gurney's shack, and as they skirted the murmuring surf, with its music thrumming in their souls, neither noticed that words did not pass. Neither spoke; they walked together in a world of melody, content; speech was a non-essential; soul whispered to soul, and the rest was beyond their control.

Almost at Gurney's door Barbara stopped and gazed long and earnestly into his face. He met her gaze, abashed by the sheer, pure immaculateness of the spirit that shone in her eyes, and his freckled face turned red as fire. He was overwhelmed with confusion, and a fleeting color sped across her own face at sight of his; but she recovered quickly, and placing her right hand in his, said simply:

"I must go home now, Jim. Come to me before you go away again. If you cannot, good luck. Yes, I understand where you are going, perfectly."

She was gone, and Jim stood staring after her in a daze. Then he went inside the house and began his preparations for his trip. He laid out a jacket, hitherto dispensed with, and stitched cartridge-holders to it by simply running thread in parallel lines down the pockets; cleaned his

own pair of pistols, and gave a look to the weapon taken from Miriam.

He smiled appreciatively to find that this was no woman's toy, but a capable, murderous gun of heavy caliber and short barrel, short of range, perhaps, but of tremendous smashing power. It was a man's gun, and by great good luck his own shells fitted it.

His armament complete, he ate his early supper, sitting outside the hut, and as he ate his mind went irresistibly back along the beach, flashed thence across the mountain, and speedily became a muddle of confused thoughts.

"Of the two, Jim Gurney, there's only one you are fit to touch," he mused. "A never-do-well roustabout like you've been has no right to play with a clean, pure little lady like Barbara. The other—sure, Jim, she's your sort: the kind you've always played with; of your own kidney—a regular seaport queen with no morals to corrupt and no heart to break.

"And then, what can I give Barbara, even if she wanted to glue to me? Nothing, yet. And if I make a flivver of this job, I'll never have anything. The other, suppose I take her up, help her to cheat her mob and beat it with the boodle, Lynn will have a clear course with Barbara, and he's the sort for her. He's a gentleman who will treat a lady as such. Gee! I dunno."

He sat there for an hour, his eyes fixed in an unseeing glare on the wide ocean, his firm, stubborn chin set in lines of battle; and there came a spark of inspiration which set on fire all the tremendous courage in him. He started to his feet and paced the sand, muttering fiercely:

"Flivver! My Gosh, Jim, what's biting you to even think of it? You can't! And talk of beating it with that brimstone-blooded she-devil!"

He walked on and on, carried on the tide of reflections, until he was submerged in the wave of new emotions that had been stirred into life in the last hour by Barbara herself.

And back at the trader's house Barbara was also the subject of warm regard. She

had left Lynn abruptly to follow Jim, and the Briton concealed his chagrin under his icy official calm; but when he saw the girl turn to come back, ablaze with resentment at something, his heart leaped with elation, and he was very ready to receive her and demand no explanation of her swift desertion of him. Then she turned once more, obviously at Gurney's call, and Lynn bit on his lip when she ran to the red-headed one on winged feet.

"Confound the chap!" the Briton muttered, his handsome face dark for a moment. "Such is the luck of fools! And the girl, innocent and very worldly unwise, is putty in that idiot's hands. It's not right, by Jove!"

He went off immediately and sought out the trader. Goff was busy in some preparations himself, and for once was lacking the air of utter boredom that characterized him. He looked up without welcome at Lynn's entrance, and the Briton plunged straight into the subject next his heart, blundered hopelessly forward, as is the way of his race, without preparation, urged by his desires, fearless of consequences, direct at his mark.

"I say, Goff, I must speak to you about Barbara."

The trader's eyes glittered, and he seemed to freeze at Lynn's brusque tone applied to his daughter. His eyes seemed to say, "Have a care"; his face remained averted. Lynn stumbled on:

"I—er—I—oh, hang it, Goff! Don't you see that I love her? Say something, can't you?"

"What shall I say?" returned Goff, staring at Lynn with mild curiosity. "Shall I say 'Hear, hear!' or 'Encore,' or something? What is there to say?"

"Oh, damn it! Pardon me, old chap," Lynn apologized, and pulled himself sharply together. "I love your daughter, and desire nothing in life except to make her my wife."

He paused, and Goff, expected to make some response, said indifferently: "If you can do that, I shall be glad to have you for a son-in-law, Lynn. I have no objection. Barbara has fine stuff in her—splendid blood—from her mother, y' know,

Lynn, not from me—and she won't make a mistake. She's her mother all over again, and her mother was peerless among women."

As he touched on the subject of his dead wife, the tired, apparently aimless trader of Tarani seemed to fill out with bounding blood, his bored voice held a thrill, the fires of a smothered passion that had been infinite awakened into life; and he concluded in a murmur of reverence.

Lynn was touched. He knew, had always felt, that he could not be mistaken in Barbara Goff. The girl radiated the intangible yet inescapable evidences of the thoroughbred. Her every action and gesture spoke of an inherent influence that was proof against the insidious advances of island relaxation which rarely failed to eradicate all traces of culture in a generation.

The reflection only made him the more eager to prosecute his suit; and his eagerness was chilled at thought of that silent couple far along the shore. He plunged ahead again, feeling a slight bitterness toward Gurney that perhaps caused him to overstep the limits of strict sportsmanship in his speech.

"Thanks, Goff," he said quietly. "I wanted your sanction, of course. And I am gratified to hear my opinion of Barbara indorsed by you. But—er—well, y' know, Goff, the fact is I am sort of second fiddle with Barbara. Deucedly annoying to speak of a chap in this way, but really I don't believe you know the relations existing between Barbara and that Gurney fellow."

"There is very little I don't know, if I desire to know it."

The trader's retort caused Lynn to gape, for it was made without heat, without a movement of the head, coolly and with no cessation of the work of preparation going forward.

"And you don't mind?" stammered the Briton, amazed.

"No. Why should I? My girl is sufficient unto herself. I am pretty much of a useless article, but she—Lynn, that girl's own truth and purity of soul are her best safeguards. Implanted in her by her

mother is an instinct which cannot fail her."

"But, my dear chap"—Lynn seemed unable to shake off his amazement and to recover his own usual poise—"can it be possible that you know anything of this man Gurney?"

"Well?"

"Oh, I say, it's hardly decent, you know, but I cannot see Barbara trusting blindly to instinct when my knowledge of the chap tells me her instinct may be woefully wrong. D' you know—"

He went on to sketch Gurney's history to the trader, touching lightly on non-essentials, bringing into high lights the salient points of his past exploits. Goff listened absently; he scarcely gave a sign of having heard a word, until Lynn remarked upon the peril of Barbara becoming too intimate with such a man as Gurney.

"That will do, Lynn," Goff remarked then, and something in his eyes warned that enough had been said. "Gurney may have been all you say. If you know so much of his history the chances are that he has been even a hotter customer than you think. It makes no difference. Barbara is judge enough for me.

"I have reared her on this island, selfishly, perhaps, but to the best of my ability, and she has blossomed into the fairest flower old ocean ever begot from mother nature. In every feature of her, in every line of grace that marks her movements, her mother peeps out, with her mother's love and mother's wisdom shedding their protection about her. She is a maiden who is also a virgin in heart; and the man who kindles the spark of love in Barbara's breast will be the man of men to her forever.

"That man will be more than my daughter's husband to me, Lynn. I care nothing who he is, or what. The child's instinct will take care of his worth. After that, I ask nothing of him. It will be futile; for her choice will not fall on a bad man, or a weak man, or in any way an unworthy man.

"Court her if you wish, Lynn; but don't speak again of Gurney's past. I see nothing in him, or in you, but a man of the

present. Barbara will not make a mistake. I shall as gladly accept you as her husband as anybody; but if it be Gurney, he will lack nothing of welcome either."

The trader turned abruptly to his labors and Lynn left him, feeling that no more remained to be said. He strode off above the beach, seeking solitude in the belt of jungle, and avoiding letting his glance wander Gurneyward.

He walked for a mile through the lush undergrowth, until the dimness of the glades warned him of departing daylight; then, with his spirit soothed by the lonesome walk, full of the murmuring hush of evening, thrilled by a great hope which, arising since quitting Goff, brought back to his strong face the beauty which was its right, he turned and approached Gurney's shack.

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.

U U U U

I L L U S I O N

BY NEETA MARQUIS

THE girl beside me in the car
Wore yellow flowers against her breast—
Chrysanthemums like woven gold,
That breathed a subtle, pungent zest.

The tang of rain was in the air,
Tristful with winter's gray advance.
Blent with those Oriental flowers,
It stirred vague dreams of old romance.

Who was it sitting by me there?
A languid princess of Cathay.
Gold-broidered were the heavy flowers
Which on her silken bosom lay.

The fingers in her silken lap
Were ivory-smooth; their tinted tips
Touched with the perfumed carmine stain
That warmed the oval of her lips.

An Eastern olive tinged her cheeks,
While all the poetry of skies,
Shot through with unknown fiery stars,
Made up the wonder of her eyes.

Aloof, mysterious, she leaned—
Her jet hair dressed with fragrant gums—
From her pavilion set within
A pleasance of chrysanthemums.

How strange they smelt—those dim gold flowers
That breathed the soul of Old Cathay!—
A wizard-scent, transforming thus
A street-car on a rainy day.

Heart to Heart Talks



By the Editor



SCIENCE is certainly a cold and cruel thing—the original illusion-locust that devours whole all our fondest fancies, most pleasing dreams, and gives us in their place—itsself—an emotionless composition of frigid facts. Even the most sacred passion of the human heart—love—is not immune from investigation, classification, and laboratory experiment. Cupid is metamorphosed to a—germ: a sort of streptococcus or streptoneura or other anisopleural gastropod; the beautiful son of Venus becomes a common or garden bacterium that, placed on a glass slide and magnified one thousand diameters, looks like a denizen of Mr. Abe Merritt's Moon Pool. That, at least, is what Science—or, to be just, let us say, a certain type of scientist—would like to do. But can they? Opinions will probably differ, but the answer from one view-point is made very clear in our novelette for next week—

ONE HONEST TEAR

BY ROBERT SHANNON

Professor Bennett Richard Bogel believed that he had solved the problem of love. That he could control it as absolutely as a chauffeur controls a car. And his beautiful and highly cultured *fiancée* believed it, too. Not only that, but so great was her faith—in both her lover and his science—that when her skeptical brother offered to bet on it and suggested Lorette Logan, the fascinating queen of the Frivolities, and the highest-paid show-girl on Broadway, as a subject, she willingly agreed. So the professor got out his perfume of Eros and then— Well, that is the story, and though it is pure humor all through, there is a very substantial proportion of solid meat and serious philosophy as well. Do not miss it next week.



THERE is a mystifying little man of the East that many a reader of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY regards as a real friend—a quaint, out-of-the-ordinary, very human chap, who achieves miraculous results by means startling in their simplicity; in a word, Swami Ram. Making his bow to our readers in "Into the Fourth Dimension," published in the *Cavalier* magazine of January 11, 1913, this astonishing Oriental has entertained our readers at intervals since then, his last appearance being in "New Jinns for Old," published in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for December 8, 1917. So friends of Swami Ram—and every one else who likes fiction with dulness left out—will be

eager to read the four-part serial that starts in next week's issue—

THE PAGAN

BY FRANK BLIGHTON

Author of "The Invisible Burglar," "Black Crosses," "Mr. North of Nowhere," etc.

In this swift, startling tale, Swami Ram reaches the zenith of his achievements of mystery. But he isn't the only interesting character who plays a part in the story, and there is an involved coil of circumstance, a fascinating web of plot and counterplot, that keeps you guessing from start to

finish. "THE PAGAN" is the sort of tale that, read on a railroad train, makes you ride past your station; or, if you happen to be one of the sex concerned with such matters, makes you forget all about the high cost of living and let the roast burn in the oven. And, just one more warning—don't start to read it late at night if your electric bills have been running high. You'll never stop until you have devoured every word of the instalment.

IN spite of the learned professors and their books, human psychology still remains the great enigma. One can fairly deduce from the academic findings on the subject just how a man ought to act in given circumstances. But only machines fulfil infallibly scientific deductions, and even machines are sometimes intractable. How a man reacts to and is finally conquered by the very emotion which he had apparently completely mastered forms the theme of a characteristic Max Brand story in next week's magazine, entitled "THE FEAR OF MORGAN THE FEARLESS." This is a tense study of a Western bandit, who defied the law and the whole countryside only to fall a victim to suggestion. This story lives up to the Brand standard, and will satisfy the legitimate expectations aroused by this writer's work. Watch for it next week.

ETHEL AND JAMES DORRANCE, whose serials have won for them a wide and deservedly fine reputation among ALL-STORY WEEKLY readers, contribute to next week's magazine a delightful tale of mixed emotions called "VOICES IN THE DARK." It is a sparkling lovers' "comedy of errors," which promises to sweep the contestants into the deep waters of tragedy; but things heard and not seen give way before a face to face encounter with the agents of the mischief. We can't pause to outline the story, but we can promise you some delightful diversion in this pregnant instance of human misunderstanding.

WE cannot speak for other sections of the country, but we know it is an ever-pressing domestic as well as economic problem here in the East to find a house or a home. We are all looking for a modern Moses who will lead us out of the wilderness of rented rooms into the promised land of homes and gardens. We had almost hit upon the solution (so we thought) which was to make us rich and our fellow flat-dwellers happy when we came to the blasting of our dream in "GIPSY COTTAGE," a story by Elliott Flower in next week's magazine. We thought we had found the very thing to turn the trick, and then we discovered this very engaging tale was an emphatic and experimental protest against the very panacea we were about to share with the world. Read this story, and see from what a sad fate Flower saved you.

"A NIGHT SHIFT," by Atrous von Schrader, is a human-interest story with a race-horse atmosphere and a dramatic situation which combine to make an exceptionally gripping little tale. You don't need to know racing or be a judge of horse-flesh to follow this story. If you are human, the tale will drive home, and all unconsciously you will find you are enjoying the victory of Butterfly as much as her owners. Read it in next week's magazine.

DOESN'T LIKE "DIFFERENT" STORIES

TO THE EDITOR:

Yes, the editor's job is some job, and what I write won't help much; but I want to say a word on the "other side." I suppose you hear mostly the gushy things, as the others, I suppose, don't write, as I seldom do myself. I read the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, and expect to, even if it does contain many stories I cannot read. I know it takes all kinds to fit all kinds of people. I suppose we will always wonder at the taste of others; that is part of our egotism.

I like most stories of adventure in business or the detective stories, E. K. Means, or most any of the well-written stories—except—these "different" stories; at them I wonder; the foolish childishness of them never ceases to amaze me—that grown men and women read and enjoy these things! It does not take a novelist of note to write these "pipe dreams," these "foolish-imagination-run-riot" stories; it does take a writer to write an interesting story of a possible happening. My family of five will not read them except when out of other reading matter—just to see the folly and to wonder. "The Girl in the Golden Atom"—I don't wish to say what's in my mind.

Now, I know that neither I nor mine are brilliant; we do not claim to be, but here are six that never tried to influence any other for or against these stories. I take some of the best magazines and papers, and want to say that a writer that has to write unreasonable, impossible things, or travel into the future to find a plot or a situation on which to build his story, had better do something else. I read for rest, enjoyment, or to pass away time. Of course I don't *have* to read what I don't like, and there are evidently some who like these "different" stories, but thought you, maybe, did not get letters knocking on anything—though, I suppose, the knocker is always with us. I like most of the authors, and I don't expect other people to see with my eyes. No, of all things on earth, I would not be an editor. You have my sympathy.

E. W. BUFFUM.

Scott City, Kansas.

THE BATTLE IN THE AIR

We have received a letter from Mr. John Martin Leahy, of Seattle, Washington, in which Mr. Homer Eon Flint, author of "The Lord of

Death," is sternly called to account for certain discrepancies, variations of facts, and alleged astronomical inaccuracies, in that story, which same have caused Mr. Leahy such deep pain and mental anguish that he has proceeded to smite Mr. Flint hip and thigh as follows:

TO THE EDITOR:

In the story, "The Lord of Death," there appears, on page 60, the following remarkable sentence, spoken by the doctor, who is supposed to be a very wise gink:

"Even if he [Mercury] is such a little planet—less than three thousand, smaller than the moon—he must have had plenty of air and water at one time, the same as the earth."

"Smaller than the moon!" This is astronomy with a vengeance! I, for one, would like to know where in the world the doctor—that is, Professor Flint—studied that most fascinating science.

In the first place, the planet Mercury is not less than three thousand miles in diameter, but a little over; and, in the second place, the diameter of our satellite is only 2,163 miles. Since (as any schoolboy who knows his astronomy will tell you) the volumes of globes vary as the cubes of their diameters, it would require (roughly) *three globes the size of our moon to make a Mercury.*

Such ignorance (and there is more of it, even on this same page in question) is not only inexcusable—it is disgusting. If a writer can't get at least a schoolboy's mastery of his subject—well, he ought to write about something else.

Not that one expects a fictionist, when he launches out into the deeps of space, to be a Proctor or a Lowell: that is not the point at all. But one does expect him to know that there is such a thing as a text-book on the science of astronomy.

Truly yours,

JOHN MARTIN LEAHY.

Seattle, Washington.

Being a mere editor and expert in stars, of various magnitude, that twinkle or gleam in the literary firmament only, with but a layman's casual knowledge of the sidereal occupants of outer space, we promptly passed the buck—and the letter—on to Mr. Flint, who as promptly girded on his arms and with trenchant typewriter in hand proceeded to the fray thus:

TO THE EDITOR:

I am absolutely astonished. More, I am horribly hurt. My pride lies shattered on the floor, while my ego positively aches all over. Hereafter, life is but an empty, empty shell, with no re-loading tools handy.

Why? Because Mr. Leahy has dared to question the accuracy of my statements! I, whose reputation for veracity can be computed only with the aid of logarithms; I, who always believed everything I read in the papers, whose life is run on a split-second schedule, and whose meals

are measured with a micrometer! I, I am doubted! Oh, gosh; this is dreadful.

Let us glance at his objection. He mentions text-books. Text-books, forsooth! Does any one imagine that I need rely upon miserable books? I, to whom the heavens are as familiar as the wart on my nose? I, who get all my facts at first hand; who personally surveyed the moon with a two-foot rule, and have just returned from a little trip to the center of the sun, where I discovered that his great heat is due to the presence there of 118,540,103 highly indignant scholars like Mr. Leahy? Does anybody expect me to confine my vast knowledge to the limits of a measly text-book? Huh!

Moreover, it appears that even Mr. Leahy disagrees with the book. The 1918 edition of Young's "Lessons in Astronomy" is at my hand; and in plain black and white, on page 403, it states that the moon's diameter is 2,162.5 miles! Half a mile smaller than Mr. Leahy claims it to be! Yah, yah, yah!

Such ignorance is not only inexcusable—it is disgusting. Until Mr. Leahy explains why he has failed to mention this frightfully important half-mile, I shall maintain a dignified silence as to my own alleged blunder. However, I may point out that it is often just such errata which lead people to study the subject for themselves; and if what I have done produces any such effect, then it will have accomplished something greatly desired, I am sure, by Mr. Leahy, as well as by

Yours infallibly,

HOMER EON FLINT.

May 21, 1919.

A MATTER OF PERCENTAGES

TO THE EDITOR:

I take my typewriter in hand to write you a letter of appreciation. Your stories can't be beaten. I have made a list of some of the novellettes and serials printed in your magazine and the percentage I would give each:

"Broadway Bab," Johnston McCulley, 98; "The Untamed," Max Brand, 94; "Children of Night," Max Brand, 94; "Pug-ly-gug-lo," Joseph P. Copp, 92; "The Lion's Jaws," Victor Rousseau, 91; "The Conquest of the Moon Pool," A. Merritt, 96; "The Substitute Millionaire," Hulbert Footner, 90; "The Grouch," E. J. Rath, 90; "The Girl in the Golden Atom," Roy Cummings, 97; "Who Wants a Green Bottle?" Tod Robbins, 88; "Misery Mansions," Philip Gibbs, 86; "Next Door to Romance," Leslie B. Blades, 30; "The Unsuspecting Suspects," Cohen and Giesy, 90; "Into the Infinite," Austin Hall, 75; "From Now On," Frank L. Packard, 80; "Twenty-Six Clues," Isabel Ostrander, 93; "The Yellow Lord," Will L. Comfort, 88; "The Consolation Prize," E. K. Means, 90; "And Never the Twain Shall Meet," Katharine M. Roof, 88; "That Receding Brow," Max Brand, 94; "The Mind Machine," Michael Williams, 90.

I would like you to print this in your magazine because some of your readers will undoubtedly disagree with me, and it would be interesting to see the variance of opinion.

Yours, hoping for the continued success of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY,

DELWIN R. HALLOCK.

Yonkers, New York.

LITTLE HEART-BEATS

I am reading "The Conquest of the Moon Pool." I have read "From Now On"; it is a dandy, and I would like to see more like it.

Hoping to see more by Burroughs, Packard, and the "different" stories in the future, with best of luck to the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, I am,

RAYMOND STAMBERY.

1380 Bushwick Avenue,
Brooklyn, New York.

Have been buying the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for nearly eighteen months. My opinion of the magazine is pretty obvious, isn't it? Especially as in all that time I haven't missed a copy until December 28; the newsdealers were unable to supply me. I am enclosing coin. Will you kindly forward me that number at your very earliest convenience? I am not going to write you a long list of my likes and dislikes, as there is such a variety in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY that each one can hardly fail to find something to his liking. However, I consider "Hard Hit," by Eugene P. Lyle, Jr., simply wonderful. The E. K. Means stories are delightful. At present am very much interested in "H. R. H. the Rider," and am eagerly awaiting the conclusion. M. J. W.

Detroit, Michigan.

I wish to show my appreciation of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, of which I have not missed a copy for several years. I do not see many letters from Canada, and I wonder at it, as I know many who feel toward your authors as I do. I have very many favorites, but I have a few who are "in a class by themselves, as it were." Max Brand, Jackson Gregory, Edgar Rice Burroughs, James B. Hendryx, and J. U. Giesy are some of them. I have not subscribed, because I have always bought from an old dealer near home, and they have been faithful to me; but I would not be without my magazines for a deal of trouble. Wishing all success,

Toronto, Canada.

MISS J. BROWN.

May I and everybody else have a sequel to "The Untamed"? Please ask Max Brand why he ended that story so everlastingly sad? I demand a sequel! Tell the writer of "Misery Mansions" that he can't be beat. Give us another like it, please, only not quite so sad. Some of the serials I like are: "The Untamed," "The Moon Pool," "Twenty-Six Clues," "The Crimson Alibi"; oh, and "The Lion's Jaws"—that's per-

fectly splendid! You may think it funny when you hear I'm only a small girl ten years of age (although I'm not very small, but tall). The ALL-STORY WEEKLY is a fine magazine; we all enjoy it very much. Shall I ever see this in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY?

MISS PEARL HASELHUHN.

Springfield, Massachusetts.

We wanted to tell you—my sister and I—that we have been reading the ALL-STORY WEEKLY since 1915, and can truthfully say we enjoy it more than any other magazine we have ever read. In our case it seems to be "two minds with but a single thought": the ALL-STORY WEEKLY is the best ever. A. Merritt is our favorite author, and his "Moon Pool" stories were wonderful. Please do not change the ALL-STORY WEEKLY in any respect, for it could not be improved. Hoping to see this in the Heart to Heart Talks, as this is our first attempt, we are,

MISSES FLORENCE AND LUCILLE CROSWELL.

Loveland, Colorado.

Enclosed you will find personal check for two dollars for six months' subscription to the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. We think it the best ever. I certainly do enjoy reading it, and can hardly wait for the future issues. Trusting this check will not cause any delay, as it was impossible for me to obtain a money order at this writing, as we are so far from town. I would like to have my subscription begin with the May 17 issue. My husband laughed until he cried when he read "The 'Fraid Cat," and I enjoyed it so much. Here is hoping there will be another one like it soon.

MRS. F. A. DUTTON.

Beatrice, Nebraska.

Your story, in March 29, of "The Mind Machine" reminds me of a yarn told by a Chinaman, called "China Tom in Helena, Montana, in the '80's." He was a well-known character of great intelligence, and he may still be alive. He often told the story of the history of China having, thousands of years ago, had electric cars, flying machines, and all kinds of labor-saving devices, even greater than the present age. Everything was even more advanced than the present times; so much so that no one was required to work; that the effect, morally, was so bad that the emperor was obliged to destroy it all. He claimed this tradition had been handed down from generation to generation.

Boise, Idaho.

ONE OF YOUR READERS.

I have been a reader of your ALL-STORY WEEKLY for so many years that I have lost count. I think E. K. Means is just fine. "Alias the Night Wind," by Varick Vanardy, was splendid. I hope we get some more of his stories. Of course there are several that I don't like, but you can't please everybody, so keep up the good work.

Callex, California.

L. M. B.

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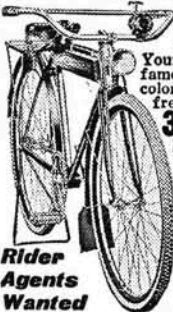
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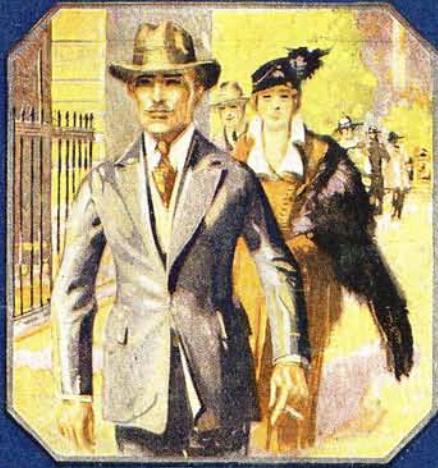
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