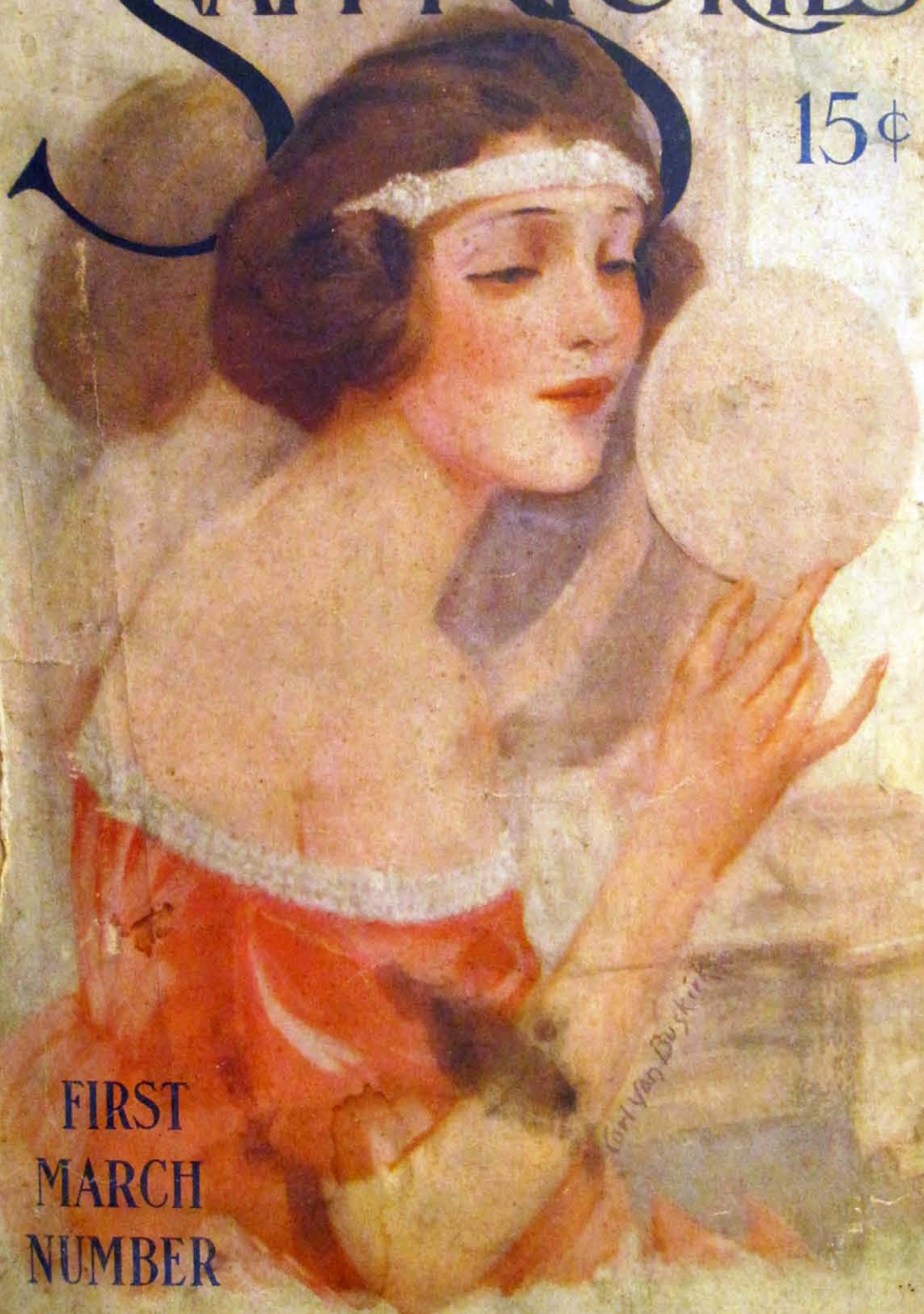


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No. 2

SAPPY STORIES

A MAGAZINE OF ENTERTAINING FICTION

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The Editor will be pleased to consider stories suitable for publication in this magazine. Where stamps are enclosed, every effort will be made to return safely unavailable manuscripts.

YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION \$3.00

SINGLE COPIES 15 CENTS

Twice-a-Month publication issued by

THE NEW FICTION PUBLISHING COMPANY

35-37 West 39th Street

W. M. CLAYTON

NEW YORK

A. M. CLAYTON

President and Treasurer.

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Entered at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., as second-class matter.

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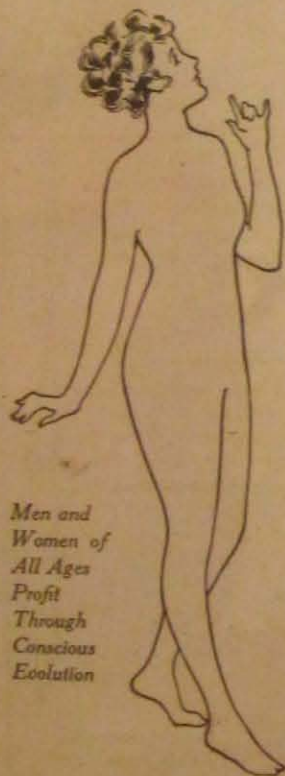
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To read Snappy Stories is a cachet of smartness

SNAPPY STORIES

SECOND MARCH NUMBER

THERE are scores of famous authors whose names hold an honorable place in American literature, but the humorous writers can be numbered almost on the fingers of one hand. It is an editorial axiom that a humorous story is the hardest of all to get, and so in offering Hugh Kahler's "The Stronger Sex," the novelette that will open this Second March issue, we feel that we have achieved something on which we may especially pride ourselves. "The Stronger Sex" is one of the finest humorous stories we have ever read. Its style is pointed without being cutting; its humor clean and spontaneous without being forced or of the horse-play variety, and it's a real story that holds you, quite apart from its ability to tackle your risibilities. We are proud of this story. We know you'll enjoy it.

And then, as an offset to this tale in lighter vein, we have some of the finest and strongest short stories we have ever published. For instance, "A Knowledge of Life," by Walter A. Roberts, is a vivid story of the student life that in happier days centred about the Boul' Mich' and Montparnasse. Tragic, perhaps, for all life is made up of either comedy or tragedy, but with a real lesson and a real warning.

"This Is My Wife," by Rex T. Stout, is an especially strong story of cabaret life in New York; and the second "Confession of a Fashionable Practitioner" is as startlingly original a story as we have ever ventured on.

Again we have to congratulate ourselves upon a new author, Hugh Kent, who makes his first appearance in any American magazine with the little story "Woman-fear," a most intimate and appealing study of the fears and hopes, the joys and sorrows, of a young bride; while "The Blind Heart," by Andrew Soutar, is a worthy sequel to his other stories, "The Law" and "The Safe."

Among the other short stories that we think you will especially enjoy, we might mention "Quid Pro Quo," by Tarleton Collier; "The Girl from Arle," by Dale Drummond; "A Dream Fulfilled," by Harold de Polo; "Things," by Ruth Wright Kauffman; and "Nothing but the Truth," by Harold Vickers; while the one-act play, so popular a feature of SNAPPY STORIES, is this time from the pen of W. D. Hepenstall and carries the engaging title of "Masks."

"Alias Mrs. Jessop" comes to a whirlwind finish in this issue, and there will also be some poetry of the sort that has made SNAPPY STORIES famous.

THE EDITORS.

Look for the Second March Number, on sale February 18th.

THE DRAGON'S CLAW

A Novelette

By Jack Rowes

I
DUSK was falling. Across the water, beyond the two darkening headlands guarding the Golden Gate, the sinking sun flung its avalanche of color—crimson, violet, gold, melting into tender turquoise where the outer edges wedded deeper blue. Over the rippling stretch of incoming tide amethystine shadows flickered through the golden mist. Along the shores of the Exposition, lights were already winking from the buildings, while in the busy "Zone" the entrances to the palaces of amusement shone with the weird hopelessness of electricity attempting to rival the natural light of declining day.

Tired sightseers, hurrying homeward for dinner, drew their wraps more closely in anticipation of the chill breeze which springs up along the Californian coast after sundown. Down the Avenue of Palms, past the ever gushing Fountain of Energy, out through the main entrance of the Exposition, they poured, pausing to glance back at the majestic Tower of Jewels, quivering and scintillating with blinding iridescence under the ardent caresses of the sunset glow.

Down at the other end of the grounds, a girl leaned against a Corinthian column as she feasted her eyes on the most perfect piece of architecture in the inclosure: the graceful temple of the Palace of Fine Arts, now bathed in a pinkish blush by the afterglow. Her slim figure in its gown of deep mourning, strikingly outlined against the pale turquoise, fluted pillar; her chestnut hair, a vivid gold in that same glow; her eyes, mys-

terious, black-shadowed under heavy-fringed lids; the unconscious pathos of her pose—all made a picture so unique that Ransom Fuller turned in the shadow of the peristyle and, concealed behind one of the huge ornamental urns, took in the details in appreciative enjoyment. He was not a man to let any object that attracted him escape him, and this young creature with her creamy pallor, her magnificent, dark, dreamy eyes and crimson, flower-crushed mouth, was the most exquisite thing he had ever seen in this land of nature's beauties and lovely women.

The afterglow faded, and to the right the top of the Tower of Jewels flashed into sudden light as the electrifying of the huge, creamy-tinted buildings began, but still the girl lingered, and still the tip of Ransom Fuller's cigar glowed through the gathering dusk. Neither he nor the girl saw two figures gliding along the peristyle. Not until steps fell on the tiled flooring beside her, was she conscious of any other visitors at that point in the open corridor, nor did she turn her head when one of the men halted beside her and gazed stealthily at her profile.

"This the one? You're sure, Bill?" The whisper to the man behind was answered by a nod. After a brief glance about, in which he failed to discover the half-concealed form of Fuller, the man beside the girl put his hand into his pocket, and immediately something metallic, silvery, gleamed in his fingers. There was a quickly stifled cry from the girl as the needle plunged home; then she reeled, choking, gasping, into his

grasp. The columns of pale turquoise and faintly tinted terra-cotta seemed to crash down in an avalanche of cosmic chaos. A deathly faintness gripped her, then—silence.

Her body relaxed. The two men, quiet, well-groomed, good-looking, carried her towards the entrance, where one of the electrically propelled chairs built for two passengers awaited them. As they brought her out, a small crowd of belated sightseers gathered around.

"A lady's fainted." . . . "Some one's been taken sick." . . . "What a lovely girl!" The murmurs grew as they caught sight of the ruddy hair and death-pale features.

A brown-uniformed policeman pushed his way through the gaping loiterers.

"What's the trouble?" he questioned.

The younger of the two men turned impatiently, with an anxious glance at the girl.

"My sister," he explained rapidly. "She fainted as we were walking through the peristyle of the Art Palace. She's liable to these attacks. Nothing dangerous—just a little weakness of the heart. I'll get her home as quick as possible. Here, you"—as the man in charge of the conveyance waited—"wheel that chair up here and help me lift her in. . . . Now, then, if you'll be kind enough to disperse this crowd—"

A greenback crackled ingratiatingly. The policeman drew back.

"Clear out, all of yer," he invited the crowd impartially. "Yer blockin' the traffic—"

"What's this?" A tall, athletic figure shouldered its way through the mass. "What's happened here?"

Ransom Fuller glanced at the policeman, then at the recumbent figure of the girl, already lying back in the chair. The man at her side, with one arm about her, placed his hand on the steering-gear. "Get out of the way," he snapped.

Fuller came around to the girl's side of the vehicle. One glance at her face

was enough. It was she whom he had watched in the peristyle. The chair began to move even as he laid his hand on her wrist.

"Stop!" he commanded as trenchantly as the other. "This girl is ill—"

"Of course she is," jeered the man who had assisted to place the girl in the chair, and had then stepped back into the crowd. "Drive on, Jim; don't mind the mutt! I'll look in after dinner to see how Ella is."

Fuller, his hand on the girl's limp wrist, found her pulse almost imperceptible.

"There's something more than a mere fainting fit here," he said briefly, his keen gaze on her peculiar pallor.

"Let go of her hand," commanded the man beside her roughly. "You're detaining me. Officer"—he turned to the policeman imperatively—"clear this place for me!"

He pressed the button controlling the power; but his furtive nervousness clenched Fuller's suspicions. He leaned over and jammed home the lever, effectively stopping the light machine.

The girl's supposed brother turned a livid face. "What are you trying to do? Take your hands off this chair or I'll have you arrested."

With a quick movement, Fuller stripped back the sheer black chiffon sleeve covering the girl's arm. There, plain against its creamy texture was a tiny red wound. The man in the chair, understanding Fuller's gesture, gave a snarl of rage.

"My sister may die!" he bellowed. "Take this madman out of my way! Bill, here—"

His friend, adroitly detaching himself from the crowd, appeared at his side. They exchanged quick, covert glances, then "Bill" swung his fist at Fuller's jaw. But Fuller was prepared. Before the astonished officer could interfere, he put "Bill" temporarily out of active participation with a well-directed blow. As

the machine started forward, under the impetus of the "juice," he turned to the paralyzed official.

"Arrest this man," he ordered tersely. "I'll run the chances of its being a mistake. This girl's in no faint. She's drugged. That's a hypodermic puncture."

With an oath, the man leaned forward.

"None of that!" exclaimed Fuller, as the fellow reached for his hip-pocket. "There are too many witnesses for you to make a get-away if you pull a gun."

Appalled at the turn the incident was taking, the crowd fell back. The policeman at last gathered his scattered wits, and moved forward.

"What's your game?" he growled to Fuller. "This here young man says she's his sister—"

"I'll take the chances she's not," retorted Fuller. "Arrest this man, and I'll appear against him. I'll stake my reputation on the fact that this girl has been drugged. I'm a physician—"

Revolver in hand, the man in the chair leaped to the ground with one bound; but before he had cleared two steps the density of the excited crowd impeded him. He struggled to free himself from the hands outstretched to grasp him, but three amazed visitors from the East, enjoying this wild and woolly Western scene, hung on until the officer, roused at last, seized him from behind and disarmed him.

Fuller then turned his attention to the girl. She lay as though already dead, with faint, bluish shadows beneath her long-fringed eyelids. The doctor thrust his hand into his pocket and produced a card, which he passed to the bewildered officer.

"Here's my address; you'll want me in the morning," he said quietly, stepping into the nearest seat beside the unconscious girl. "I'm taking the young lady to the Inside Inn, because it's the nearest place about here, and I've no idea

where she is stopping. She ought to have attention at once."

The officer's brow cleared as he read the engraving:

Ransom Ogden Fuller, M. D.
Office, 3 Grand Avenue,
Los Angeles, Cal.

And penciled hastily in one corner, "The Inside Inn, Exposition Grounds."

"Sorry to have held you up, sir," he said. "Pass on. The chief'll communicate with you in the morning."

Producing handcuffs, the policeman deftly snapped them on his prisoner. The man threw Fuller a baleful glance, then his face cleared as he saw that in the excitement of his arrest his pal had managed to make a clean get-away. Things might have been worse, he told himself. With Chin Ling Wu at the wheel, surely the game was not lost. Bill would make his report, and the "Boss" would find a way out. He resigned himself to sulky silence.

Doctor Fuller gave a quick glance about, then, failing to find traces of the vanished "Bill," shrugged his broad shoulders. The crowd gave way as the electric chair slowly forged ahead. Only a short distance, and the entrance to the hotel gleamed invitingly brilliant.

As he stopped the light wicker machine, the front door "Buttons" hurried out to receive him. The Doctor was gently removing the unconscious figure.

"Come over on the other side of her," he ordered briefly. "She's in a faint."

"Buttons" sprang to attention, and an exclamation escaped him as he saw the girl's features.

"My Gawd, it's Miss Salisbury! What happened to her, sir?"

"You know her? She's staying here?" The boy nodded. Then, "She's had a little accident," Fuller added—all the explanation he cared to have leak out in the hotel.

"Great luck!" he muttered as he helped to carry the girl up to her room, then sent for the chambermaid. "It's

fortunate that they recognized her. I'll notify her family. This raw attempt at kidnaping will be something of a shock to her relatives.

"Miss Salisbury's fainted," he began, without any preliminaries, as the maid appeared. "Where are the members of her family? Who is with her?"

The maid hesitated. "She's alone, sir, I think. She's been with one of the parties that stop here to see the Exposition, but the others left to-day, and she told me she was goin' to stay until another party, run by the same people, arrives here next week, when she's to join them an' go on back East. Her party only stayed here ten days, an' she said she hadn't seen all she wanted to. She hadn't any relative or intimate friends with her, sir."

"I see." The Doctor thought rapidly. Evidently there was no relative to notify of the extraordinary attempt at kidnaping. Her mourning indicated recent loss, while her joining a party for sight-seeing purposes pointed to the probability of her being alone in the world. He crossed to the spacious wardrobe trunk. On it was the lettering: "L. S., Boston, U. S. A."

"Some distance," he mused as, leaving the maid in attendance, he went to his own room for a hypodermic syringe. "An Easterner traveling alone, and a beauty! A tempting bait, no doubt, to white-slavers on the lookout for victims."

The maid, looking up, saw the frown on his brows as he reentered the chamber. During his absence, she had undressed Miss Salisbury, and, as the girl lay supine in her dainty night *lingerie* among the pillows, her perfect physique fired a spark of admiration which may not have been wholly professional in the physician's brilliant dark eyes. Without question, Miss Salisbury was the finest specimen of youthful womanhood ever under his observation. Fuller dismissed the maid, then sat down, his

black brows knit thoughtfully as he regarded the sleeping girl. She looked so young, so strangely helpless, as she lay, utterly relaxed, the sheer, lacy night-robe, low-necked and short-sleeved, revealing the sweet, clear lines of creamy neck and shoulders, the rise and fall of the perfectly modeled girlish breasts as she drew each breath of tranced oblivion.

What was she? What mystery lay behind those long, dark-fringed eyelids? What secret tinged the life of this exquisite young creature?

The girl's intimate personal belongings spoke of refined tastes, with money to gratify them. The solid silver scattered lavishly over the dressing-table was of chaste design and bore the mark of a silversmith of national reputation.

That a girl of her apparently comfortable circumstances should be traveling alone, unchaperoned, puzzled the young physician. Possibly she was married; perhaps even a widow. "Mrs." often sounds like "Miss" on servants' lips. His glance darted to her hands. The left one was concealed beneath the sheet, her right, within touch of his own, lay small, appealing, ringless.

He leaned over and mechanically placed his fingers on the pulse. It was normal in its beat, and her respirations told him she had sunk into a natural sleep. One long strand of her unbound hair lay in a coppery coil, brushing his hand as he withdrew it from her wrist. Obeying an impulse, he lifted it, the waving, silken curls twining sheeny tendrils about his fingers, slipping lingeringly through as though loath to release him from the clinging, caressing touch. A delicately evanescent perfume like fresh crushed violets filled his nostrils—that faintly suggestive scent of the woman whose satiny skin is so seductively sweet that the mere fragrance is an unconscious temptation to men to lose their heads.

Before he realized what he was about,

Fuller found his face just above hers, his big, dark eyes aglow. "Hungry-looking eyes," one of his patients—a woman somewhat *épris* of the stunning young physician—had called them. With no thought that his conduct was unbecoming his profession, for the moment he forgot his degree of M.D. and remembered only that he was, first of all, a man. He wondered how those red lips—for the natural color had returned—would look if they should suddenly break into a smile. Parted just a fraction, the glimmer of pearly enamel gleamed through illusively enchanting. So near that his own breath mingled with hers, Fuller came to his senses with a start. God! He had almost kissed her. He had been on the point of performing the most caddish act of his entire professional career, of deliberately taking advantage of a patient who was under his care.

With a hot flush on his tanned cheek, he wrenched his eyes away from the mouth so like a crushed hibiscus bud, and looked down at the thick, jetty eyelids. They were open, the eyes staring straight up into his. An exclamation escaped him as he moved back.

The eyes into which he gazed, as dark as his own, and tremendously enlarged from the drug, showed flecks of golden flame in the iris. As they looked at him, they dilated with surprise. Accustomed to the usual lethargic condition of patients as the result of drug-poisoning, he leaned over her again, holding her startled gaze with his own as he said:

"You must try to get some sleep, Miss Salisbury. You've had a slight ill turn, and as I happened to be on hand I brought you home. I'm Doctor Fuller, of Los Angeles. You'll be all right in the morning. I'll call in again then to see how you are getting on." He smiled reassuringly.

"Wait!" The hand near him groped for a second, and he took it up, lightly holding it in his own. The warmly vi-

brant current of his magnetism seemed to revive her. A faint flush came into her cheeks, and the dreamy glaze in her eyes cleared into sudden comprehension.

"Ill! I've been ill? But I can't remember anything—wait a moment—yes, I was standing in the peristyle, looking across the water. I must have fainted! But I've never done such a thing in my life. What happened? It seems to me I remember feeling as though all those pale blue and pink columns were falling on my head—"

She stopped, staring into space. He gently laid her hand back on the sheet.

"You mustn't try to think or talk of your illness to-night, Miss Salisbury. You're out of the woods now, and you'll feel quite yourself in the morning, if you'll rest. Plenty of time then to tax your memory. If you think you'd like a night nurse to stay with you, I can get one for you within half an hour. I'll stay with you until she arrives."

He rose in readiness to go to the house telephone.

"A nurse? Why? Am I ill enough for that? How odd! I don't feel sick—only swimmy and light-headed. But even that's better. Still, if you think I need a nurse, of course you may call one in. Won't you tell me what happened? I'm really quite strong, and always so well I know some accident must have occurred. Did I fall? It seems to me I remember two men—"

She started up suddenly, her eyes staring straight ahead.

"I *do* remember!" she cried vehemently. "There were two men. It all happened so quickly I scarcely saw them, but I felt a sharp prick on my arm—" She looked down at its pretty, bare contour. On it the puncture still glowed redly.

"There's the mark!" She peered at it triumphantly. "I felt a stab, and then two men seized me. I remember—remember—and then—I suppose I fainted."

She clasped her knees, gazing up at Fuller, wide-eyed. "Do you know who they were?" she questioned anxiously.

He shook his head.

"I haven't the slightest idea, Miss Salisbury. I hoped you'd be able to clear up that part of the mystery. But the police will find out. They've got one of the men now safely under lock and key. Won't you try to dismiss this whole affair from your mind and get the rest you so much need? Perhaps I'd better call in that nurse—she may be able to accomplish more in the line of persuasion than I."

He paused again as she shook her head.

"Do you think that if you'd been the one who had had 'knockout drops' injected into you—that's what they call it, isn't it?" she appealed to him—"you'd be willing to settle down calmly and go to sleep without wanting to know the whole truth about what had happened? I don't believe you would. You look like a clever man"—he flushed, but she continued excitedly, seeming oblivious of the compliment she was paying him—"and I'm sure you'd have enough natural curiosity to try to find out who did such a thing to you, and why. It's such an outrageous proceeding! I can't think of any one who'd want to do such a despicable thing. I wonder, if I should get up and dress now and drive to the police-station, would they let me see the man who is locked up there?"

She eyed him anxiously. He smiled as he crossed to the telephone.

"I see you're not to be trusted alone"—he could not wholly keep the relieved amusement from his voice—"so I'm going to call in that nurse. I shall tell the agency to be sure to send me a strict disciplinarian."

"Please don't," she called softly. "Really, I'm not a bit ill. My head's just—queer—when I sit up. And of course I won't attempt to go out tonight. It must be late—" She turned

to look at the clock. "It's almost eleven o'clock," she added hastily. "Please, Doctor Fuller, don't telephone for a nurse. I know I shall not want her around. I don't need her—and I've already taken a cordial dislike to her—"

The last words were so like a child's plea: "Please don't—I *will* be good!" that Fuller's lips twitched. But he unhooked the receiver.

"At least, now you're awake, you must have something to eat," he said, and he gave an order in a tone so low that Miss Salisbury heard only an indistinct murmur.

Satisfied, she leaned back on her pillows. Then she suddenly awakened to the fact that she was in a negligée which, while undeniably showing off her loveliness to advantage, was hardly the costume in which she would have chosen to appear before a stranger even with the shelter of an M.D. to play propriety. She desperately caught up the linen under her chin, and snuggled down beneath the sheet, casting as she did so a longing glance at her bureau-drawers, where her dainty wrappers were reposing. In a few minutes the supper would be brought in, when she would be expected to sit up, bolstered by the pillows, and she simply would *not* appear before any man in such scanty attire.

"Won't you be good enough to fetch me a wrapper from the dresser?" she asked. "I shall need it when the supper you've ordered comes up."

"Of course." He rose and crossed the room. "In which drawer shall I find it?"

"The second."

By mistake he pulled out the third, in which a mass of negligible lacy white undergarments stared up at him. Hastily shutting it, he tried the one above, finding therein several silken wraps from which to choose.

"I haven't any kimonos," she called, as he stood undecided. "I've always heard they had such perfectly lovely

Japanese ones for sale in San Francisco that I put off buying any until I arrived, and I haven't had time for shopping yet. That's one reason I stayed over. But I've forgotten. You don't know anything about me, of course. I joined a touring party in Boston to see the West and stop at the Exposition, but as they remained here too short a time to satisfy me, I stayed over to join the next party and return with that. Yes"—as Fuller mechanically took up a violet mass of Liberty satin—"I'll slip that on if you'll be kind enough to bring it here."

Throwing it over his arm, he brought it to her. She looked up at him, her face just visible above the sheet, and as she thanked him he caught the expression of her eyes. Taking the hint, he turned and went back to the bureau, prolonging the closing of the drawer until he knew, from the soft rustling behind him, that she was clothing herself in the wrap. While he waited for permission to turn, he stood looking abstractedly at the various toilet articles on the top of the dresser. Two photographs, which he instantly guessed to be those of her father and her mother, were in a double silver frame in the centre, while from a smaller, single frame, the portrait of a good-looking young man stared back at him defiantly. Her voice roused him from his contemplation, and he turned with a flush.

"I think I heard a knock, Doctor Fuller."

He crossed and opened the door, admitting a waiter with a tray. A small table was spread invitingly at the side of the bed. Miss Salisbury, supported by pillows and swathed in soft folds of shaded satin varying from the most delicate violet to the deepest purple pansy hues, looked like a dainty flower herself, with her face peeping out above the lilac marabou edging. She had managed to twist her chestnut hair into a great, thick coil loosely piled upon her head, and Fuller likened her to the heart of a

violet as, bending over her to arrange the pillows behind her more comfortably, he again caught the odor of freshly crushed blossoms. As she took the cup of black coffee he poured for her, he hastily glanced at her left hand. On the third finger glittered a large solitaire, something in its saturnine brilliance expressive of the young man whose photograph was on the dresser. Evidently she was not a widow in mourning for her husband, but a young girl about to become a wife. An unaccountable desire to rise and demolish that particular picture made him give an imperceptible movement forward.

"Oh!" she exclaimed as she noticed it. "You're not going to leave me yet, are you? I do so want you to tell me all about my—my accident. But, of course, if you have other calls to make to-night—"

"I haven't. I'm entirely at your service." He sank back, ashamed of his sudden mad impulse. "You have the distinction of being my only patient just now. I'm really off on a vacation, but I happened to be on the spot as you—er—were being carried out of the art building, and so I offered my services. I brought you to this hotel as the nearest point where you could be properly looked after, and they immediately recognized you as a guest. Thus you were taken to your own room. It was a fortunate coincidence that you should be stopping here—"

"It was extremely lucky for me that you were there just at that moment!" she exclaimed warmly. "I'm absolutely alone here. My father died last winter—" She paused a moment, winking back the dew which had started in her eyes.

"That accounts for her mourning," thought Fuller, "but *not* for the small photograph!"

"And now, for the first time in my life, I don't know what to do. I'm afraid. I want to see the rest of the Exposition,

but I shan't dare to step outside the hotel until the other party arrives."

Fuller bent over her reassuringly. "I'm going to take it upon myself, if you will allow me, to look after you personally until your party comes. That's a physician's first duty—to take care of his patient—and I have the reputation of being pretty thorough in my treatments. And now you are to begin by trying to get some sleep. I'm going now. If you feel ill or nervous and want to call me up during the night, my room number is 246. But I hardly think you'll need me. When you awake, I'd like to have you call me up, anyway. Will you?"

"I surely will," she replied. "And I most deeply appreciate your kindness to me, Doctor. It's very nice of you to let me feel that I can call on you at any time, although I hope I shan't have to be so heartless as to disturb you before breakfast. Good night, and thank you!"

She turned her head, but he saw the quick tears in her eyes.

"Good night and—God keep you!"

Not until he had softly closed the door of her chamber did he realize that he had unconsciously spoken the last three words aloud. But she had seemed neither astonished nor offended; nor could he know that as the door clicked after him she echoed his words aloud, finding comfort in their tenderness.

II

It was nine the next morning before she awoke to another perfect California day. Still heavy-eyed, she looked out of her open window, breathing in the tonic of the exquisitely fresh morning air. Her chamber window gave the vista of the Lagoon and Art Palace, and she could even see the graceful columns of the peristyle. With a quick shudder, she turned to the serious business of her toilet, and less than an hour later, bathed, gowned, and feeling fit for whatever the day might offer, she called Doctor Fuller on the telephone.

"Yes, I'm feeling very well, thank you. . . . No, I haven't breakfasted yet. I'm going down now to the dining-room. . . . You have some news to tell me? . . . You're downstairs yourself? I'll see you down there, then;" and she hung up the receiver with a little glow of anticipation.

He was not in the lobby as she passed through, nor did she see him until, seated at her small breakfast-table, he sauntered in and paused beside her. With a little gesture of welcome, she motioned to the chair opposite her own.

"Will you have a cup of coffee with me, Doctor Fuller?" she asked, as she poured the steaming, aromatic beverage.

"Thanks—if I may. I had a very light and early breakfast this morning," he replied; then added casually, as he took the cup from her: "I've been to the police station, Miss Salisbury. I thought I might be able to save you the trouble of taking the trip. You're looking so well I think I can venture to tell you all I have learned. It isn't very much, after all."

"Oh, what—what did they tell you? Did you see the man?"

He nodded. "Yes. The chief of police had the man in to question him. We couldn't get much out of him, but the chief hopes to find a way to make him talk. He thinks he's no novice at the game, and that he's probably been a government guest at San Quentin before. The chief's put out a drag-net for the man who escaped—I gave him a description—and thinks they'll have him too before long. So you're not to worry." His fine, dark eyes looked straight into hers as he gave the admonition. "The affair is ended, and I'm afraid, from your appearance, I'm about to lose my one and only patient."

Relief and mischief struggled in her face. "I refuse to dismiss you, Doctor Fuller," she said softly—"unless you're no longer interested in my case." She paused suggestively.

"I never accept any case unless my patient agrees to carry out my orders implicitly, and you may not care to follow my prescriptions. For instance, I think a little run out to Golden Gate Park in my machine would clear your head of any remaining dizziness and bring the color into your cheeks. To be out in the air is the best tonic for a case like yours. If you approve the prescription, I'll bring up the car; if not, I'm afraid I'll have to consider myself dismissed."

With more anxiety than he dared to show, he sat quietly awaiting her reply. With long, downcast eyelashes, a color which needed no tonic to aid it mantling her cheeks, she answered:

"If all your prescriptions are as pleasing as this, you must be the most popular physician in Los Angeles! I can think of nothing which would appeal to me more than a drive out there on a morning so divine. That is one of the places I haven't visited yet, but I hear it's remarkably lovely. You are very kind to suggest taking me. You're sure it will not interfere with any plans you may have made before you—you met me?"

His face lighted with swift pleasure even as a ray of sunlight struck Miss Salisbury's diamond solitaire, flashing a satanic prism into his eyes.

"I've found the keenest pleasures often come without previous thought. Thus, when I take a vacation, I drift without other plans than those which appeal to me for the moment. My time is wholly at your service—as long as you will permit."

Half an hour later Doctor Fuller's long, racy runabout was speeding away from the Exposition Grounds, past the towering, battlemented heights of the Presidio, which forms one of the headlands guarding the Golden Gate. Swinging south, they turned along the famous parkway. On their right, its long line of foam breaking on the stretch of white, sandy beach which ran for miles along

the coast, was the Pacific, so much deeper in its sapphirine waters than the greenish Atlantic to which she had been accustomed.

From the military reservation the clear, sweet call of a bugle announced that a drill was in progress. At a point of vantage, Fuller stopped the machine, and they spent a half-hour watching the drilling and maneuvering of the troops. As they sped on towards Seal Rock, Miss Salisbury inquired idly:

"What's the building on the bluff?"

"That's the Cliff House, rather a popular place for people who drive out from the city to dine and see the moon over the water. It's hardly the time of day for that attraction, but perhaps you'd enjoy lunching there."

Seeing the sparkle of pleasure in her eyes, he drove up to the hotel. Out on the broad, roomy piazza, seated at a corner table where they could watch and enjoy the antics of the hundreds of seals sunning themselves on the little island, they lunched and chatted, Fuller exerting himself to draw the girl out on topics which showed her natural tastes; she enjoying to the full the rare charm of his personality. Now that no future dangers threatened, she was actually beginning to be glad that the accident had happened to her to bring this new acquaintance into her life. Naturally ardent and social, she had tasted the full bitterness of what loneliness can mean to a girl cast entirely on her own resources in a huge caravansary like the Exposition Grounds. Fate had thrown into her path this handsome young physician, whose credentials and manner were all that the most fastidious could require, and the mere unconventionality of their meeting lent to the chance acquaintance added charm.

Driving back, Fuller wrapped her in one of his motor-coats, for she had neglected to bring a heavy wrap, and the chill breeze which combines summer and winter into one Californian day sprang

up at sunset. The sky was a mass of gorgeous hues, crimson banners merging into golden flame. In the far distance, Tamalpais caught the glow on high, rocky crest; to the right, across the bay, behind the little island reservation for convicts, lay Alameda. As they neared the Exposition Grounds, the sun sank behind the river of molten flame, the pathway through the Golden Gate.

"Thank you for the pleasantest day I've had in San Francisco." Miss Salisbury offered him her gloved hand as she was about to enter the lift in the "Inside Inn." "I simply can't thank you adequately. It's just one of those days one remembers. Your prescription is the nicest one I've ever taken."

"I trust you'll feel like repeating the dose—with variations. I'll call you up to find out how you are feeling in the morning, if I may."

Doctor Fuller, cigar in mouth, walked the short distance to the Art Palace and again stood on the spot where he had first seen Miss Salisbury. He had not told her the whole truth regarding the conversation he had had with the chief of police. The man they held in custody was a well-known crook, long under suspicion as a cadet in the white-slave traffic, but always managing to escape arrest by the adroitness of his methods.

"Now we've got him, we'll do our best to make him squeal, but if we don't succeed, there's scarcely a chance in a hundred that we can get the other fellow. It's the big man behind them both that we want—the head of the gang. I should advise Miss Salisbury, if she's waiting over here to join a party, to be extremely careful as to her movements. She's evidently been marked down for their prey, and if she's as pretty as you describe her, and without any relatives to raise a fuss over her disappearance, they won't give her up without a fight. Better warn her not to go about alone. She can hire a plain-clothes man if she hasn't any other escort."

But Doctor Fuller had quietly detailed himself for that duty. First procuring a license to carry a concealed weapon, he had gone to a sporting-goods shop, where he invested in a revolver of the latest design. Slipping it, along with a box of cartridges, into the pocket of his motor-coat, he felt that the question of Miss Salisbury's bodyguard was satisfactorily settled, without worrying her with the knowledge of the necessity for such precautions. Had he known with what powers he was contending, what horrors lay in the following days for him and the girl he sought to protect, he would have accepted the chief's advice.

Each of the following three mornings Doctor Fuller called Miss Salisbury on the telephone, and jokingly "prescribed" a plan for the day which should give her pleasure; and she, accepting the "prescriptions" in the same spirit in which they were offered, saw the wonders of the great Exposition, from the gay amusements in the "Zone," to her own State Building far down at the other end of the grounds; enjoying it all with the companionship of a man who wholeheartedly shared her pleasure even while his hand was always in readiness to close around the weapon in his pocket.

Propinquity necessarily creates interest between two sympathetically attuned natures. Miss Salisbury was no exception, nor was Fuller, although he cursed himself for proving such an easy victim to a girl who he had reason to believe was pledged to another man. She found that the wonders of sightseeing, the beauty of the golden-toned Californian scenery, took on a new aspect seen by his side, and were made doubly interesting by his clever mentality. Three days of intimate companionship goes a long way on that path which leads to the exchange of personalities.

On the fourth morning Miss Salisbury, fearing Fuller was becoming bored, suggested sweetly: "I think I'll go shop-

ping to-day. I'm going to look through some of those fascinating Oriental places where they sell Chinese goods. You've been so kind in taking me about, I feel you need a change, a real vacation—"

"If you'll let me take you in the machine, it may save you time," he suggested hastily, "and it would be a great favor to me also. I want to get a few things to bring back to my sister in Los Angeles, and as I haven't the faintest idea of what would please her, I wish you'd help me to select something."

"Of course, I'll be very glad if I can be any help—" she conceded doubtfully.

"You certainly can—of the utmost. And I'll efface myself whenever you want to get rid of me," he added apologetically. "You mustn't let me interfere with your own shopping. Just let me stay in the background."

"I really haven't much to do except buy some trifles, and look," she confessed. "I *do* love to look at pretty things," she ended, with a naïvely feminine touch.

And Fuller did not think it necessary to acquaint her with the fact that he had purposely created a sister to meet the exigencies of the situation.

As they wandered about in the big shop among the Buddhas and grotesquely carved ivory images, the heavy Chinese embroideries and rare curios, all smelling of that incense peculiar to the Orient, Miss Salisbury paused by a pedestal supporting an immense bronze bowl filled with water. It represented a miniature lake; on the surface floated myriads of water lotus, rose, white, blue, lavender, the exquisite blooms opening their hearts of gold in dreamy, languorous splendor. The girl lingered beside them admiringly.

"How wonderful!" she cried rapturously. "I love these plants so. They're *my* flower, you know. My father was an English officer, and my mother met

him when she was traveling abroad. After their marriage he was sent to India, where I was born. But the Indian climate didn't agree with my mother, so a couple of years afterwards he gave up his commission and came to America. Mother loved these flowers—they're sacred, you know—and they named me Lotus because she was so fond of them. It's an odd name for a girl, isn't it? But I like it because I love them, too, and somehow it brings her very near to me. She died when I was very small."

She bent over them, touching the petals with tender finger-tips.

"It's a charming name, and one which perfectly suggests your personality," said Fuller softly. "You resemble them surprisingly, too. That creamy white one, with the pink-tipped petals, is exactly like you. We have Lily and Rose and Violet and Marguerite for feminine names; why not Lotus also?"

His voice held such a caressing inflection, she turned aside to hide the flush in her cheeks. He certainly had a way with him, this man, and she suddenly wondered if he made himself as attractive to all his feminine patients. Could she have known some of the experiences through which he had passed, her big eyes would have lost their dreamy quality and something else would have dilated them; but Fuller had learned the secret of the successful professional man—the discretion of silence.

"Wouldn't you like a cup of tea?" he asked abruptly; for he fancied she was looking rather white. "We could drive over to Tate's—"

"That would be nice," she acknowledged. Then, catching sight of some wrought jade bracelets: "Oh, what lovely coloring! I *must* get one of those! That one's exactly the tint of Lake Thun in Switzerland. Don't you love these things?"—she picked up a carved sandalwood fan, delicately sniffing the spicy fragrance. "They make me feel all the richness and splendor of

the far East—the real East—the East of the statues in the Court of the Universe—the camels and elephants and veiled ladies and slant-eyed Orientals! The land of mystery! Oh, I wish I could go through Chinatown before I leave San Francisco! I'm dying to see the quaint houses, and the funny little Chinese babies, and the opium-smokers! Could I go there? Would it be safe, do you think?"

He smiled indulgently at her enthusiasm. "It's safe enough to visit the places where visitors are generally admitted," he conceded. "I've never been through there myself, but I know it's vastly interesting. We can get a guide to show us about some day—"

"Your pardon, sir," the Chinaman who was waiting upon them with the patient immobility of his race ventured to interrupt deferentially; "but if you desire a guide through Chinatown, the best way to arrange for the trip is to engage one of the men employed in this shop. They are all thoroughly reliable, and it is safer to hire a courier who comes with the best recommendations. The manager of this shop makes a specialty of that as an advertisement for his patrons. I am myself one of his most valued men." His head tilted back with conscious pride.

"That might be a good idea," suggested Lotus, appealing to Fuller. "We couldn't venture down there all alone, without danger of getting lost, could we? This man could show us a lot of places we'd like to see but shouldn't know about ourselves. What do you think?"

"I certainly shouldn't attempt to go about Chinatown with you alone," said Fuller emphatically. "I'll inquire about their parties at the office. This is one of the best shops in town, and their employees ought to be reliable. If you'll excuse me an instant, I'll go up and see the manager."

He left Lotus torn between the lure of a violet kimono embroidered in trail-

ing purple wistaria vines and an oyster-gray one decorated in snowy cherry-blossoms.

Satisfied with the information received from the affably polite Oriental who was head of the firm, Fuller returned to Miss Salisbury.

"It's all right? I'm so glad! Could we go now?" she queried enthusiastically.

"You'd best have that cup of tea first," returned Fuller. "You want to be fortified, for it's quite a trip. We'll put it off to another day, if you prefer. No?"—as she shook her head. "You're sure you're not tired? Then we might dine at some restaurant down there and spend the evening exploring, I think. Do you like chop-suey?"

"Must I eat it with chop-sticks? And will they serve *Sodeu*?" she asked, laughing. "But I forgot! Being a physician, you probably don't approve of *Sodeu*."

"Not for a regular beverage; but when he's off on a real vacation even a doctor can loosen up occasionally," he retorted. "Shall we drive over to Tate's first? We can meet this man there in half an hour and take him along with us"

Covered with smiles and bowing repeatedly as he escorted them out, Sing Wing, which he apologetically informed them was his cognomen, placed their various purchases in the machine.

"Which kimono did you decide on?" inquired Fuller idly, as he threw in the clutch and the car started off. He privately hoped she had chosen the violet.

"Both!" She sighed ecstatically. "I simply couldn't make up my mind between them, so I told him to wrap them up together. Which did you prefer? Do you think I'm wickedly extravagant?" as she caught the amused twinkle in his eye. "I just couldn't resist them, and they'll be useful—later."

The very slight hesitation suggested an unpleasant possibility.

"She's buying her trousseau," mut-

tered Fuller savagely, "and asking my opinion, thinking that, as I'm a man, my choice might also be that of her fiancé. She can't use me that way!"

Aloud, he replied so disinterestedly that Lotus looked at him in sudden surprise: "They're both very pretty, of course, but I fancy blue might be more becoming to you than either. Men are always fond of blue, you know."

"Oh!" The exclamation was lingeringly prolonged. "I thought you liked them both." Her evident disappointment pleased him. "And, besides, I can't wear any other colors—yet, you know. I—I'm still wearing mourning."

Her voice dropped, and it held the suspicion of tears.

"You won't after you are married, will you?"

He looked carefully ahead, avoiding her eye as he skilfully guided the car in and out of the traffic.

"Married!"

It was such a low murmur the noises of the crowded thoroughfare drowned it before it could reach his ear. With fast-beating heart, Lotus sat silent, her creamy skin tinged with rose. *What* did he mean? Was he—was he becoming—personal? Half frightened at her own sensations, she sat motionless, her hands nervously clenched in her lap. Fuller, thinking she did not care to answer his thrust, kept his own silence until, wheeling up to Tate's, he carefully helped her out and piloted her through the luncheon-room to the elevator. On the next floor they were shown to one of the small tables running along the sides of the long room. The centre of the hall was cleared for dancing, and in a balcony at one end musicians lilted forth the rhythmic strains of the latest musical-comedy hits.

"Isn't it charming!" Lotus' gaze swept the shimmering blue and green walls, done in the gorgeous hues of natural peacock-feathers, jeweled stones, set in the place of the "eyes," casting a

glittering barbarity of opalescent color as the concealed electric lighting struck them from every angle.

"I hoped you'd like it." Fuller, ashamed of his burst of ill temper, ordered an elaborate tea, then exerted himself to atone. It was his misfortune, not her fault, that another man had shown his good taste before Fuller had had an opportunity to meet her himself.

The girl, warmed into renewed life by the artistic charm of the unique café, the excellent Orange Pekoe tea, and the appetizing little sandwiches and pastries, lost her sudden sense of shyness and met him more than half way. Whether the tea *à la Russe* went to his head or the new, dreamily softened velvet of her glance had that same effect, Fuller astonished himself by leaning forward as the orchestra began a seductive waltz, and asking:

"Do you dance, Miss Salisbury?"

"I haven't—not since—for some months—" Then something in his eyes compelled her to add hastily: "But I adore it. I—I'd like to try it—if you care to."

He did; but not until they were half through the dance did he acknowledge to himself that his sudden passion for waltzing had been due to his overwhelming desire to hold this woman in his arms, to feel her light suppleness melt against his heart as he swung and turned and vibrated in perfect harmony to the rhythm of the heavily-accented melody. She had gotten into his very blood, this Lotus bloom from the East, and had her fiancé appeared to claim her at that moment, he would have faced a half-savage man roused to the pitch of madness to fight for his mate, the girl who had set fire to his hitherto surfeited pulses.

Something of his exultation may have communicated itself to Lotus, for, the dance ended, she carefully avoided his eyes as she seated herself again at the table; nor would she dance again, al-

though a new tune was beating out a temptingly insistent invitation.

"We'd better be starting for Chinatown, don't you think?" she suggested evasively to his query of whether she were tired.

Downstairs, the blandly-smiling Chinaman, now attired in conventional European fashion, was waiting for them. They placed him on the far side of the roomy seat, Lotus next to Fuller. Thus they drove to that eastern portion of the city known as Chinatown, into whose inner mysteries even the police of Frisco never venture unless in an armed squad.

"I would suggest you leave your machine here, sir," Sing Wing smilingly informed Fuller, "while we walk about among the shops."

"I've heard," said Lotus, with a side-long glance at Fuller, "that there are a lot of subterranean passages hollowed out beneath here and running for miles under the earth. I'd like to see what one of those is like, if—if it's all right for us to go there."

Wing's face became a blank, and Fuller shot her a warning glance.

"Nobody is supposed to know about these things," he admonished in a rapid whisper. "The Chinese guard those secrets with their lives. You can't possibly—"

"Oh, yes, I understand what it is the young lady wishes to see," Wing interrupted mildly. "It is our theatre of which she has heard. That entrance is, indeed, underground. The evening performance is the best. I think you would enjoy it better after dinner. We will first go through the places where the opium-dens used to be before the law compelled them to be closed. Of course, you know that it is against the law for any one to sell or smoke opium now. It is a special privilege that I am allowed to take you where they used to be—something the ordinary tourist never sees."

"You keep them as a sort of show-place?" hazarded Fuller.

"But that's not what I want to see." Lotus' full, ripe lips pouted. "I want to go where they don't expect sightseers, where they won't all be dressed up in readiness to make an effective impression. I want to see the real underground Chinese life and homes and people—"

"You can't," said Fuller decisively. "That's impossible. That's something even the police do not meddle with. You're seeing all that Europeans are allowed to. We'll go to see where the opium dens used to be, then dine at a Chinese restaurant, and end up by attending a performance at their theatre. That will be quite enough for one day."

Secretly admiring Fuller's firmness, Lotus meekly followed Sing Wing, amused and entertained by the queer, narrow streets with the atmosphere and scents so suggestive of an alien race, the odd sights, and the sounds of natives conversing in their guttural language.

At a low door with a swinging lantern painted in hieroglyphics beside it, Wing knocked in a peculiar manner. A coolie opened the door, and they passed into a narrow passageway, Wing leading them into a small room in the back of the house, where there were bunk-like berths arranged about the walls, and long, slender pipes on braziers, waiting for the opium-sleepers who would not come again.

The close, peculiarly narcotic atmosphere made Lotus gasp. She clung to Fuller's arm as Sing Wing explained the simple process which constitutes the opium-fiend's paradise.

"This is the bunk formerly occupied by the white woman who was called the 'Queen of Chinatown,'" said Wing proudly. "She is very beautiful, that woman, but she no longer smokes here. But that men may know this was her couch, the royal coat she wore has been left here."

With reverent fingers he pointed to a

magnificent, mandarin's coat of barbaric richness. The groundwork was of yellow satin—the Chinese color of royalty—and it was a mass of heavily embroidered dragons' bodies, the eyes emeralds and rubies which winked up with baneful glare. Lotus caught her breath.

"Oh, if I could only find a coat like that!" she breathed ecstatically. "I've always wanted a mandarin's coat for an evening-wrap—"

"You wish to buy?" Sing Wing, ever anxious to please, had understood her whisper. "There is a shop near here where a friend of mine, who imports for the wealthiest class of Chinese, has mandarins' coats of the choicest. Would you care to visit it?"

"I should like it very much. It is not one of those places just fixed up for show?"

Wing shook his head. "It is the beginning of the native quarter—the locality where wealthy Chinese gentlemen have their homes," he explained, as Fuller looked his keen inquiry. "But it is quite safe for you to go there—with me," he added. "I can take you there before you dine at the restaurant."

Lotus' pleasure gleamed in her large, dark eyes. Fuller, satisfied, nodded, and the three passed out of the stiflingly close den into the passageway, then up to the open air, where they threaded narrow streets peopled with soft-footed Chinese. Tiny shops crowded with odd wares peeped out at them unexpectedly. Fuller, with Sing Wing, stopped for an instant to gaze through a window filled with Oriental weapons of unique design, glistening steel blades set in weird, silver-encrusted handles.

Wing drew his attention to a peculiar dirk, beginning a voluble explanation of the characters engraved on its surface. Lotus, just in front of them, turned the corner of the small passageway down which they were to take a short cut to the next street. Fuller, sensing she had gone on while they lingered, and

anxious not to lose sight of her, hurried after.

As he and Sing Wing turned the corner, a long, narrow alley stretched out before them. It was quite deserted. Lotus had disappeared as completely as though the earth had opened and swallowed her up.

III

WITH a swift glance which swept the bare walls painted in Chinese characters, extolling the shop's importations, Fuller noted that no door broke its space. One step carried him back to the street, but no graceful, black-gowned figure lingered at the shop-windows.

Murder in his heart, an oath on his lips, Fuller turned to Wing.

"Damn you! Where is she? Where has she gone?"

He grasped the Chinaman's arm with fingers of iron as his right hand intuitively sought the chill weight which sagged in his pocket. Wing, though he must have realized that death was very near in that instant, met the black wrath in Fuller's face with the bland immobility of the native Oriental.

"Where has she gone?" he repeated calmly. "I don't know. I didn't see her. I was standing behind you, looking at those small swords."

One step forward and Fuller's loaded revolver pressed against Sing Wing's yellow temple. They were well around the corner in the alley in which Lotus had disappeared, and apparently none of the pedestrians in the narrow street behind had noticed the unusual tableau.

"Answer me—the truth!" Fuller's tones shook with rage and anxiety. Then as a faint, sweet odor drifted to his nostrils on some wandering current of air: "My God! What's that? Chloroform! Where does that come from? What has become of her? You're responsible for her safety, and, by God! if she comes to any harm, you'll pay for it!"

With a swift movement he grasped Wing's collar. Even with the cold barrel against his oily skin, Sing Wing's features did not flinch.

"No one can hold me responsible for anything which may happen to one of my party when he or she goes off alone and leaves me," said Wing slowly. "And I wouldn't fire off that gun if I were you, sir. I've a lot of friends in this neighborhood—we're in the native quarter—and the Chinese are not fond of you foreign devils. If you shoot, I won't answer for your life. And that would not help to bring Miss Salisbury back to you."

Fuller lowered the revolver, still holding Wing firmly. The latter made no attempt to break away, but stood regarding his captor stolidly.

"Miss Salisbury! How did you know her name?" demanded Fuller harshly.

For an instant a gleam shot through Wing's beady eyes, gone almost before it revealed itself.

"That was the name on the packages, sir."

"But we took the packages along in the machine! There was no address on them."

"No, sir, not on those; but she had other goods sent to her hotel."

Fuller regarded Wing for an instant, then, hauling the Chinaman along, he plunged down the alley. It led for half a block through walls covered with crudely-colored advertisements, then suddenly opened out into another street running parallel to the one they had left, and much like it in character.

"Where's the policeman on this beat?" His voice so dry he could scarcely articulate, Fuller held Wing by his burning glance.

"No policeman here." The Chinese shook his head. "They come here—two together—once every evening. Every one knows when they are coming. Everything is quiet here then." He showed his teeth for a moment.

"Show me the quickest way to the nearest one around here!" commanded Fuller savagely.

But it was a good half-hour between Lotus' disappearance and the time they succeeded in finding a policeman. He listened to Fuller's hurried story in silence, whistled for a brother officer, and when he appeared they both accompanied Fuller and Wing back to the corner where Lotus had mysteriously vanished.

At a whispered word from the first officer, handcuffs were slipped on Sing Wing before the Oriental could protest, and, leaving him locked securely to the burly guardian, Fuller drew the other officer aside.

"I've reason to believe Miss Salisbury has not wandered away by herself, as Wing suggests. This is no accidental case of getting lost," said Fuller sternly, a white line appearing about his clear-cut mouth. "An attempt was made on her by white-slavers only four days ago. I happened to be on hand when they were carrying her away, and prevented them from accomplishing it. But Chief O'Connell warned me they might make another attempt, and not to allow her to go out anywhere unaccompanied. I've been with her constantly ever since." He ended with a groan.

Haggerty was sympathetic in spite of his long service on the force. He went over the wall, carefully sounding the stucco-work over the bricks, but the solid masonry gave forth no trace of hollow spaces.

He shook his head doubtfully. "It's one o' them mystery cases we can't ferret out," he confessed. "If it's any comfort to ye, I'll tell yer in confidence that in this last month three young girls have disappeared not far from this very spot. They've never been heard from, although we've turned this part of the Chinks' town upside-down. It's me own belief there's a secret passage somewhere hereabouts leading down into the first tier of underground passages. I suppose you

know Chinatown's built more down under the earth than on top, don't ye?"

Fuller, sick at heart, impotent to do anything but listen, nodded impatiently.

"Well, there's six tiers that we know about, one built right on top of the other, but how many more holes below and what deviltry goes on down there in the lowest depths we never even try to guess. We know there's every kind of vice the brain of the foreign devils can think up, and the slave traffic isn't wholly confined to their own race. There's many a young white girl down there that's come from a good home up on top of God's earth, but once them Highbinders gets hold of them, it's the end. When they're—finished—they bury 'em down there. 'Course I'm not sayin'," he hastened to add, as he noted the abject misery in Fuller's face, "that that's what's happened to Miss Salisbury; but it looks mighty suspicious considerin' she's had it tried on her before. Them Highbinders never risk kidnapin' any girl until they've got a line on her, and they're always careful to pick out one that hasn't any relatives near to kick up a row over her disappearance. She must look mighty fine to 'em—the bastes!" He spat venomously at the wall.

Fuller felt the world reeling about him. It was his fault, entirely due to his own momentary interest in Wing's explanation regarding the dirk, that he had lost sight of Lotus for an instant. Black rage against himself in his heart, he impotently clenched his hands until the nails entered the palms. Haggerty, his big Irish heart stirring with pity, offered the only suggestion he could think of.

"Why don't you get the chief to give you a permit, sor, and take some friends and a couple of us in plain clothes along with you and search through all the houses in this neighborhood? It's the only way to get a trace of her if she's locked up. You could pass yourself off as one o' them young bloods—beggin' yer pardon, sor—who comes here when they

feels like goin' off on a spree that's a bit out o' the ordinary—you know! You'd be surprised to know how many of the richest fellers comes here for that purpose, sor. Haven't ye got no friends here who could take ye about as though they was showin' ye a good time?"

Fuller pondered. He had many acquaintances in the city, but no friend close enough to take into his confidence in regard to Lotus. Haggerty's keen eyes searched the young doctor's set, stern features anxiously.

"No friend who knows th' ropes down here?" he probed hopefully. "A man like ye must know *some one* who could take ye off on a bat!"

With the echo of the phrase, the keen, caustic features of Ralph Donaldson, boyish schoolmate and now star reporter on one of Frisco's leading newspapers, rose up before him, the light of a former good fellowship in his smiling gray eyes.

"The very man! Do you know Donaldson of the *Argus*?" Fuller asked hurriedly.

"Sure I do. Every man on the force knows him. He's a member of the secret reserve police himself. Ye know him? Glory to God! There's th' man fer ye. Call him up as fast as iver ye can. We'd better be goin', sor;" for Fuller, loath to leave the spot, lingered vainly. "Ye'll niver find her this way. If it's as we think, some divil has her safe in his hole by this time. The sooner ye get hold of Donaldson, the sooner ye'll be likely to find her."

But as Haggerty moved off with Fuller to where Wing and the other officer awaited them, he muttered to himself: "Poor divil! Sure, one can see with half an eye he's clean daffy about her. Small good will it do him! He'll niver set eyes on her again. Them bastes'll do fer her, sure enough! But he'll likely go crazy off his nut if he don't get lively huntin' fer her. He's the look in his eyes of a madman a'ready. We'll go along with him to keep him in hand

when he finds out the truth and loses his head. Poor little girl! I niver seen one o' them get out o' here alive yet!"

IV

ALL this time, had Fuller and Haggerty been able to peer through the ground below them, they would have seen Lotus Salisbury lying in a tiny room until the fumes of the chloroform which had saturated the cloth about her mouth should have worn off sufficiently for her to be brought before her future owner and master, Chin Ling Wu, the "Boss" of decadent Chinatown, trafficker in souls, master of destinies, the dragon of the underworld.

A withered, clawlike hand noiselessly opened the door, and a stooping Chinese hag, in whose crackling parchment skin the fingers of depravity had creased cavernous wrinkles, slipped in silently, standing above Lotus Salisbury and staring down at the creamy, pale features. The reddish golden hair puzzled her. With curious, prying talons she stealthily lifted the girl's hat.

Lotus opened her eyes. The next instant her shrill scream rang through the room. The hag smiled at her, a facial contortion so horrible that Lotus covered her eyes; then, forcing herself with a strong effort of will to open them, she looked about her. She saw the gaudily-decorated walls of a tiny room hung in pictured rice-paper, writhing dragons crawling in serpentine convolutions across its golden surface. Over in one corner a squat, grotesquely-carved Chinese god glowered in diabolical ugliness. Rich silken Shantung covered with masses of gorgeous embroideries concealed the low ceiling; on a teakwood tabouret a slender pipe lay in readiness to woo soothing dreams of the poppy. The heavy odors of strange spices, the smell of joss-sticks smouldering before the idol, all mingled to produce that other odor peculiar to Oriental life and customs, which, to Occidentals, is too sug-

gestive to be agreeable. There were no windows, the only ventilation being the open door.

"Missee wakee? Likee drink?"

Reiterated gesticulation convinced Lotus the creature was suggesting food and drink. She shook her head decidedly, then unsteadily rose to her feet. She would take no nourishment in this place lest the food be drugged.

With surprising celerity, the old woman reached the door and passed out, shutting it after her and shooting the bolt on the outside before Lotus could follow. There was a small aperture covered with an iron grating, through which the girl peered, but only a narrow passageway met her view.

Summoning all her strength, Lotus shrieked aloud, but only the vibration of her own call answered her. She shook the barred grating furiously, but it resisted all her efforts. Many girlish hands had pitted their puny strength against its iron immutability.

Lotus looked about her in frantic search of some other way of escape, mounting on top of the luxurious, pillow-smothered couch to examine the ceiling, but the hangings covered only a painted wall. The room was simply a box, the door the only exit. An antique Chinese temple-lantern of wrought bronze was suspended from the centre of the ceiling, wicks floating in perfumed oil supplying the dim light. Daylight never penetrated to that cavern, and Lotus, suddenly remembering that she wore her watch, looked at the small time-piece. The hands stood at eight.

Eight o'clock! She should now be seated opposite Doctor Fuller in some fascinating little Chinese restaurant, drinking his health in *Sodeu*, the native wine of the country. What had become of him? How had he allowed such a thing as this to happen to her? Something told her he would have defended her with his life had he known that danger threatened. Had he also been at-

tacked, perhaps killed? She shuddered, pressing her hands before her eyes. Not that! Anything but that! He was so fine, so tender, so brave—

"Plitty tlings makee litle Chinee."

It was Ah Loo, her arms piled high with varicolored silks and trailing sashes. Behind her, ranged silently against the walls, were five sturdy Chinese women of low caste. A chill passed over Lotus even as she resolutely shook her head at Ah Loo.

"I won't change into those things, if that's what you want," she said steadily.

Ah Loo flung up her hands. Before Lotus could resist, two women had passed behind her, each catching a hand; two others, with movements so swift she could only gasp her outraged astonishment, tripped her up and laid her flat on the ground, holding her down effectively while Ah Loo and the fifth woman searched for the invisible fastenings holding the outlandish clothing of the female foreign devil.

The moments which followed were ages of agony to the sensitive, refined, highly-strung Lotus. Helpless as a little child in their hands, she lay at their mercy; slow, scorching tears welling from her closed eyes as she realized her impotence, the full bitterness of her absolute subjection.

After what seemed hours, the fumbling, clumsy fingers solved the secrets of her gown, and drew it off. The dainty lingerie beneath proved an easier matter. An occasional grunt of condemnation or approval belied the stolidity of their expression. Lotus was beginning to understand that the outward calm of the Oriental race is a mask to conceal, rather than express, their governing emotions.

Eyes closed, abandoned to their ministrations, Lotus finally felt the caressing softness of silken folds slipping about her; another instant, and they stood back about the walls, exchanging interested criticisms regarding the success of their labors.

"You clomee 'long now," coaxed Ah Loo, evidently the only one who dared attempt English. "Mathler say we makee you clom damn click!"

Lotus sat up, dazedly putting her hand to her head. They had taken down her hair, and over the blue satin of her gorgeous wrap it shimmered like burnished gold. The women pointed at it, chattering like magpies. The hubbub made her head swim, but she voiced one last defiance:

"I shall obey no orders issued by your master! I shall *not* go to his—whatever it is he expects me to go to. He can kill me if he chooses—I wish he would!"

With a little moan, she buried her face in her hands.

A word from Ah Loo, and before Lotus realized how they had accomplished it she was raised from the floor, hoisted in their arms, and being carried, helpless as a baby, out of the room, down the corridor, and through the barred iron door at the end into another winding passage, dark, noisome and smelling of dank earth. All along this second passage tiny, grated windows appeared at intervals in the walls, small, white blots, like pieces of paper, tacked up beside them. Behind the apertures a dim light glimmered, but not sufficiently strong for Lotus to glimpse the interior of the dens. She shook with a nameless fear; what unspeakable things might not be concealed in their depths! And she, Lotus Salisbury—to what scenes of degradation was she about to be exposed? Her very skin crawled with horror beneath the gossamer-soft, satin covering. It was a magnificent wrap in which they had clothed her, just such a marvelously embroidered, mandarin's coat as that for which she had expressed a desire only that same afternoon. It was hers now, but at what a cost!

A sudden halt, and Lotus saw they were in front of a step-ladder rising straight up to the low ceiling. One of the women mounted, pushing up a trap-

door hardly perceivable in the gloom. Throwing it up to its entire width, she leaned down, caught Lotus' hands, and, with the help of the other women, raised her from one step to another until at last her head appeared above the open space and she was jostled through. The women scrambled after her, closed the trap-door, and, catching her up again, continued their shambling progress through a cellar until they came to a narrow staircase. They mounted in shuffling silence, their padded feet making a curious thudding vibration on the wooden treads.

At the top of the staircase a barred and bolted door stopped them. Ah Loo rapped cautiously, giving an unintelligible answer to a muffled voice from the outside. The door was thrown wide, revealing to Lotus' astonished gaze the luxurious interior of a home belonging to a Chinese gentleman of the wealthiest class.

In one moment she had been transported from the murky dreariness of an underground prison to the richness of a miniature palace. The rooms through which they passed, though small, were crowded with unique curios and priceless articles of *vertu*, which, even to Lotus' inexperience, suggested the resources of an Aladdin. The dark polish of the bronzes, the superbly embroidered teakwood screens, the cunningly executed tapestried walls, done in infinitesimal silken stitches and representing Chinese landscapes—the temples, the rivers, the great walls of the sacred city itself—all limned their details on her vision, although she had small interest in anything at the time save the figure of Chin Ling Wu seated, cross-legged, on a raised dais in one corner of the room. In the distance he looked like a Chinese god, his only sign of life the glint of his jetty head eyes as the women entered, bearing Lotus in their midst.

Carefully setting her down on the ground before him, they kowtowed in unison. Chin Ling Wu raised his hand,

and the women actually seemed to fade away, so noiselessly did they retreat, Lotus, intent only on this man facing her, did not notice their withdrawal, nor that the heavy screens taking the place of doors had been pushed back into place.

V

CHIN LING WU eyed her serenely, his gaze including every detail of her attire, from the glories of her unbound hair to the small Chinese slippers incasing her feet. His scrutiny lingered, criticised, annotated, seeming to pierce beneath the flimsy covering to every curve, every luscious line of grace, of her exquisitely modeled figure. A scarlet flood mounted to her cheeks. This cold-blooded appraisal of her person was an insult under which her very soul revolted. She threw up her head, and, clutching the sheer fabric about her, silently showed her unutterable contempt by turning her back upon him.

For some moments the stillness of the room was unbroken. Her nerves strained to the breaking-point: for inaction, in times of crises, is deadly. Lotus felt that in another second she would shriek aloud. The sound of Wu's measured tones relieved the tension. He spoke in perfect English, the only suggestion of a foreign tongue being a slight difficulty with the letter r.

"My servant tells me you refuse our native dishes. That is unwise. Hysteria and tears are also natural enemies to your most powerful assets, youth and beauty, which are to be valued as divine gifts, Miss Salisbury. This is the last time you will ever hear that name uttered by human lips. Your own name of Lotus Blossom, in our tongue, is the name by which you will be known."

"You know my name?" Surprise tore the query from Lotus.

He bowed complaisantly. "And much more—your history, your age, your accomplishments, your disposition. I would the last were more femininely

yielding, with more adaptability than you are displaying, but that will come later. Those who will not bow to the stress of circumstances must break."

Lotus shrank back.

"Those who are clever quickly adapt themselves to strange surroundings, especially the very young," he went on. "I would that you were only fifteen. Still, your beauty has matured and will increase when lapped in the luxury with which we surround our high-caste women. Come, I will ring for fresh chop-suey and cumquats, and afterwards I myself will teach you the secrets of the poppy-fields. You know not the delights of its dreams. There is no other earthly sensation to which it can be compared. I, who have known them all, say this! You shall taste the blisses of the celestial heights. Waking, you shall sway the destinies of men; sleeping, you shall float, disembodied, in that ethereal paradise whence you will return only for the fulfilment of your own destiny. Come, drink with me to your future in our native *Sodeu*, of which this is a rare, imperial brand."

He lifted a small, round cup of antique chinaware, pouring into it a liquid from one of the fat little jugs, and, inclining his yellow, bald head, offered it to Lotus.

"I will *not* drink! You drugged me before." Her big, dark eyes, languorous no longer, flared desperately. "I believe it was you who had that attack made on me four days ago, although the men were not Chinese!"

Chin Ling Wu's bland features relaxed into a smile.

"You show decided penetration, O Lotus Bloom! I had seen you at the Exposition, surrounded by your party of hideous, middled-aged Americans. In their midst your unusual loveliness glowed like a flower. That which I covet I take steps to acquire, and the weapons in my power permit me to carry out my desires. I had looked you up,

that there might be no miscarriage in my plans. I found you were alone, traveling with a tourists' party. I gave orders to American servants whom I often employ, lest suspicion fall on my race, that you should be brought here. That attempt failed, as you know. I then placed one of my own most trusted servants in the employ of a friend of mine who keeps a shop especially interesting for tourists, knowing that some time you would inevitably visit it. Had you not done so, I should still have found other means to get you. That was only one of my 'plants,' as you call it in the English language. It was my servant who decoyed you into visiting this locality. He also took up the attention of that meddling young fool of a doctor from Los Angeles, who prevented my plans from being successfully carried out the first time. He cannot, however, interfere again."

Lotus shivered. He could mean but one thing, for, had Fuller been living, he would not have rested until he had found her. For a moment the world went black.

The next she knew she felt Chin Ling Wu's touch on her arm as he held the wine-cup to her lips. With a furious gesture she dashed it away. The priceless china fell on the rug, spilling the contents. Her spirit knew no cowardice, but her flesh cringed as she caught the expression in his lashless, beady eyes.

"I will *not* drink!" she panted fearlessly. "I will eat nothing in this place. You've drugged me twice—you'd do it again. I'll starve to death first! I'd far rather die than live the life you're trying to force upon me! Death isn't so much to be feared as a life of torture!"

Something akin to admiration showed in his eyes even as he spread his hands apart in a gesture of disavowal.

"But you do not understand. The future before you is brilliant. You will be the most honored guest in the house-

hold of the most powerful mandarin within the walls of Peking."

"Pekin! My God! Are you planning to send me to Peking?"

"As a most particular favor. I was sure you could not understand the great honors which are in store for you." He beamed unctuously, his oily skin glistening in the close atmosphere. "When I first saw you I knew you to be the woman Lu Tung had ordered me to bring him from America. He has set his heart on just such a face and figure, such wonderful coloring, as yours. You are unique. You were born to wear the imperial yellow, if only as the favorite in the august palace of Lu Tung. He is a great artist in every line which the world has to offer of its best! You Americans know not the meaning of the word 'civilization.' Our own dates back to long before the days of Confucius, many centuries before the Christian era. You are but children; we are the adult race. You shall see the wonders of our great cities. You shall have servants by the score to wait upon you. You will not even be permitted to cross the room without attendants. Under Lu Tung's teaching, you will learn the hundred delights which are yet to you a closed door. For you he will give many hundred *tael* if you prove to be as beautiful as I believe. Up above, in the world of human civilization, 'modesty' is a word to be revered; down here, hidden in the secret bowels of the earth, it is superfluous. This is no time for an exhibition of crude, hysterical modesty. It is a question concerning only the worth of your intrinsic value in my opinion: how many *tael* I may ask for you of the richest mandarin in Peking. You may be worth much—you promise well—but often one finds some crudity of conformation, some defect which discredits experienced judgment. Throw off your garments, O Lotus Bloom, and turn slowly about."

Whirling around, Lotus faced him, the

robe clutched about her, her great, dark eyes blazing insanely. Her voice, when she conquered it, shook with passionate wrath:

"You have a different woman to deal with, O Chin Ling Wu, from any of those unfortunate, tame-spirited victims with whom you have hitherto dealt! I refuse to defile my own self-respect by obeying you. I'm not afraid to die. But you'll find you can't break me unless you kill me. Either give me death or set me free!"

She flung out her bare arms in a superb gesture, her courage restored now that the crisis was at hand. An odd, guttural grunt from Wu answered her.

"You talk nonsense." He clicked out the words curtly. "Do you think I'm fool enough to turn you loose with the knowledge of the secrets of my household which you possess? As to death, I never destroy valuable property. You're not the only girl who has tried to defy me. Many have been quite as troublesome as you. Do you know what has become of them? No? You cannot guess? As you passed through the second corridor on your way to the trap-door, you may have noticed some small openings in the walls, with barred gratings before them? Yes. But you could not see within? Had you done so, you would not have needed me to enlighten you. In each cell lies a young girl as good, as innocent, as foolishly prejudiced against our honorable, ancient customs, as you yourself. And each of those girls has passed my personal approbation. On the outside of their cells a small card bears their new name, weight, physical condition, and points of excellence, signed by the greatest authority in Chinatown, Chin Ling Wu! Each and every one of them was extremely annoying in the beginning. Now, should you open their doors, you would find most of them resigned to their fate, already dreaming of the new country which will be their future home

as they breathe in the elysium of the poppy-seed. Most of them are girls from a class lower than your own—I do not often attempt to remove a girl of independent means. I should not have taken you had I not been satisfied with the result of the inquiries I made. You are the only one of the type Lu Tung commanded me to bring him which I am satisfied to offer him. You promise much. But a successful business merchant is content only with results. We are alone, safe from intrusion. Should you cry with all your strength to your gods, no one would come to you. But you would not be so foolish. This is my private apartment, into which no one ventures save at my command. In a moment you will be at liberty to swathe yourself in as many wraps as you desire. Come, Lotus Bloom, show yourself for what you are: an exquisite woman proud of her own beauty, happy in the knowledge that she is a living human treasure above price."

Shaking with horror, Lotus glanced rapidly about the room. She could see no possible way of escape. But over in one corner a complete suit of antique armor attracted her attention. The glove of meshed mail held a short sword in its clasp. With no other thought save its possession, Lotus backed towards it, her face turned innocently to Wu. Thinking she was choosing a spot as far distant from him as possible in which to obey his orders, he made no move to intercept her, but still sat cross-legged on his dais.

The soft jingle of the suit of mail warned Lotus she had reached her object. Stealthily she put out her hand, hidden beneath the drooping sleeve of her coat. A shudder passed over her as she felt the hilt within her palm. Using the other hand to aid her, she quietly drew the weapon from the sheath, the leather scabbard, from Wu's distant position, still appearing to be filled with the steel blade. Exultation nerved her,

Here was a way of escape if the worst threatened.

"Patience is an admirable trait," Chin Ling Wu's perfect English floated across to her, "but there are cases when it ceases to be a virtue. I have no more time to waste. Shall I call in my servants to carry out the commands I have given you? Obey me at once, or I shall be forced to do so."

Lotus, her hand tightly clenched over the weapon, flung back her answer between set teeth:

"Never! I will *not* obey you! I am not your slave! I will not desecrate myself in my own sight. I—"

The sound of a Chinese gong vibrated, metallically resonant. Chin Ling Wu laid down the padded wand as Ah Loo entered. Quick, guttural mutterings passed between them, and she vanished.

Anger at white heat gleamed from Wu's slits of eyes as he glared at Lotus. Shaking with a nervous tremor, she awaited her fate, her gold-crowned head thrown bravely back, her trembling fingers clasping the leathern hilt. And Chin Ling Wu, keen analyst of feminine moods, tried her with that most difficult test of all—the test of profound, continued silence in which the Orientals are adept. Not a breath disturbed that atmosphere of sinister voluptuousness. At the end of five minutes it was only by a supreme effort of will that Lotus held herself erect.

A sharp cry involuntarily escaped her as the heavy screens swung aside. Into the room a crowd of women poured, all in native costume, but the features of eight young girls were unmistakably American: terror-stricken, resignedly stolid, vividly alert, as their differing temperaments expressed. The attendant native women stood back to guard the screens, the girls grouped together in the centre of the room. They looked with frightened eyes at Lotus' defiant attitude, not one daring to speak to her.

"To see is to believe"—it was Wu's

voice, and at its chill inflexibility the girl shivered. "These are the girls of whom I spoke. Each has been brought from her cell below to prove my truth. Each one was like yourself. Some, wiser than others, obeyed me; others, more foolish, refused to bend. I broke them as I now will break you. What follows you have brought on yourself alone. This is the discipline with which I punish disobedience."

Enthroned on his dais like an emperor, Wu uttered a string of orders to his native women. They moved towards Lotus in stealthy unison. With a bound, she sprang in among the young white girls.

"Why don't you all *do* something?" she flung at their appalled inaction. "We're all Americans—all of us! Are you going to let this monster lock you up forever without a fight? It's better to die together now than to live on in this creature's power!"

One of the women seized Lotus by the shoulder, as another, grasping at her loose coat, sought to tear it away. With a gasp of rage, Lotus turned on them like a beautiful fury.

"Don't you *dare* touch me! . . . Did they treat you all like this?"

She appealed to the girls. Some nodded, others turned aside.

"Oh, it's shameful—shameful!" Lotus cried, and then quite suddenly she lost her head. For other slaves had crowded upon her, bearing her down like a deer surrounded by a pack of hounds. The world whirled about her, the air turned into a red mist. She struck, using the short blade which she had concealed in her sleeve.

Squealing cries of astonishment, rage, and pain brought her to herself. She looked about like a person emerging from a trance. She stood alone; against the walls, as far away as they could get, the white girls cowered, screaming, and the Chinese slaves had also drawn away from her in terror. Two of them were howling in fright, a broad scratch on

the arm of one, a gash across the cheek of another, testifying to the serviceability of the blunt old weapon.

Holding them at bay with her crimson-stained blade, Lotus laughed hysterically.

"I told you I'm different from the rest!" she flung across at Wu. "If you try such a thing again, I'll stab *myself* instead of those devils!"

With one agile movement, Wu swung himself to his feet. Her threat, although she was not aware of it, was the most potent weapon she could have found. She must not be allowed to mutilate her beauty.

"So!" His tones shook from the tempest of anger seething within him. "So! We shall see! You shall be thrown into a cell like the ones in which these slave-girls are locked. There you shall lie alone, in the darkness, in discomfort, until you come to your senses! There you shall be taught to smoke the opium-pipe, whether you refuse it or not! . . . Ah Loo!"

The old native crept up to him. Wu whispered his instructions, a glow of satisfaction flitting over his features as Ah Loo kowtowed and withdrew.

Lotus turned to the cringing girls—eight young, softly rounded, fresh, pretty things, all attractive in their differing types, all with the glamor of youth and health, all apparently frightened to death at her bold defense. They eyed her in appalled admiration.

"We're all Americans," she exclaimed rapidly, "and we're not going to give up our freedom to a demon like Wu! There are nine of us. If you'll help me—"

She ended in a scream, which was smothered by a scarf thrown over her head from behind. The struggle was sharp and brief. From a piercing cry, Lotus judged that her weapon again had done good service before it was wrested from her, and she was caught up, half stifled, helpless, and jostled amid a con-

fusing babel of Chinese expletives. But one voice, which she knew by its sibilant timbre to be Wu's, muttered some crisp phrases which turned her sick and cold as she was borne away.

Down the staircase, then lowered carefully through the trapdoor, down the stepladder; then the grate of a bolt shot back, and at last she was laid on a mattress, and the hands which had pinioned her fell away. With quick scuttlings the women fled from the cell of this white girl who was crazed with the spirit of seven furious fighting devils.

And Lotus was alone to think over those pregnant sentences which had been repeating themselves in ceaseless routine since she had been carried from his private apartment:

"Because you are a bad example to my girls, I allow you to go without having attained my object. Your spirit would awaken the admiration of the high god of our devils himself. You please me greatly. I shall reconsider my decision to sell you to Lu Tung. I am rich enough to indulge my own fancies. Later, I shall come to you to teach you obedience. This will, I feel sure, be the wisest way to deal with such a foreign devil as you, my Golden Lotus."

She struck out her hands blindly. Was there no way of escape save—death?

VI

LOTUS opened her eyes to see what possible means of escape offered within her cell. It was a tiny box, just large enough to contain the mattress lying on the ground, the small brazier with its pale glow, and a rug on which to sit or kneel. The ceiling above was apparently fashioned of the heavy paper which the Chinese utilize for the building of their homes.

Too nervous to lie still, Lotus rose and peered out between the bars of her cage.

"Hello! Hello!" she called softly but clearly. "Is any one near me?"

There was a moment of silence while she waited, tensely anxious. Then a whisper came from the wall beside her: "Hush! Ah Loo'll hear and punish you. You mustn't make a noise. They'll drug you if you do."

Lotus dropped her voice. "Who are you?" she murmured. "How did you get in here?"

"I'm Charlotte Smith. Alameda's my home, across the bay. I was on an excursion-boat when I met a man who—who flirted with me. He sat down beside me, and we talked, and finally he asked me to go to dinner with him. I—I accepted—I thought he was so nice and jolly! He took me to dinner in a little restaurant, and—that's all I knew until I woke up here."

The voice broke in a sob. Lotus' hands clenched.

"And don't you *want* to get out?" she asked. "Aren't you going to make a fuss about being locked in here and—and all the horrors that are coming?"

"What's the use? I did make an awful fuss in the beginning. But you, or any one else, can't get ahead of Wu. If we cry and scream, he punishes us by taking away the opium."

"Do you *smoke*?" asked Lotus, horrified.

"Of course; we all do. The sooner you learn how, the better. You'll have the loveliest dreams! You'll forget everything you've been through and all that's before you. Nothing really matters much if you only have your pipe. And Wu gives us all we want. He's willing we should forget our troubles. It's the only thing that keeps us alive, I guess. You'd better try it, for Wu's angry at you, and when he's like that he'll stop at nothing. He's a devil—a devil—"

The voice filtered away into silence. Lotus writhed in anguish.

"Are *all* the girls here like you?" she demanded. "Don't *any* of them try to—to kill themselves?"

"What for? We're comfortable, and

Wu comes down only once a day to see how we're getting on. There's no chance for escape. I think we're directly underneath his own house. It's one of the show-places in Chinatown, you know, but nobody suspects he's got a subterranean passage beneath his cellar. There's more than one, too. One leads down to the water-front, for Mary Snow was brought in from a boat, and she wasn't doped as much as she pretended, so she knew she was being carried in through a great, long passage. Hush! Ah Loo's coming. If she thinks we're talking, she'll take away my pipe."

Silence reigned. Sick at heart, Lotus sank down on her mattress. Would she ever become like this girl, resigned to her destiny, living only in the ecstasies of her opium-dreams? Again Wu's threat rang through her brain:

"Later I shall come to you to teach you obedience."

A dew of terror broke out over her. She knew he would keep his word. There was no way of escape. She looked wildly about. Against the wall the pale light of the brazier drew her gaze, a nascent glimmer in the dim gloom. If opium but held the power to kill! But death came through that channel only after long months of wasting oblivion, and she knew the drug would never be allowed her in sufficient quantities to injure her physical health.

Fascinated by the dull gleam, she lay watching it with half-closed eyes, until, half hypnotized, it seemed to her that the glow permeated the cell like a living personality. She stretched out her arms to it.

"Light! Flame! Fire!" she cried excitedly. "Fire!"

In that word lay her release. Death by fire was a horror, yet it was a horror to be preferred to a life of unutterable degradation. To set her mattress on fire, and then smother to death in her cell—but that would not help the other poor girls locked up beside her. Freedom for

herself, for all—she would make the attempt.

Her eyes sought the low ceiling. It was not too high for her to reach easily with hands thrown above her head. She got up and tried it, her fingers touching the heavy paper. What lay directly above? She drummed with tentative knuckles. It sounded hollow.

Giving herself no time to waver, she caught up the brazier by its slender bronze legs, and, extending it above her head, held it immovable, the heat from the flame making brownish indentations in the paper ceiling. Presently it began to curl, then catch, and finally the hole widened sufficiently for Lotus to see the narrow width of the hollow between the ceiling and the flooring above. It was of wood, but even the tiniest flame will eventually burn its way through seasoned timbers, and Lotus, patiently holding the brazier, saw the wood shrink and catch, writhe and curl, as the sparks ate their way upward through the heart of the flimsy wood.

The odor of scorching paper, the smoke of burning timber, bore down upon her. Gasping, she set down the brazier while she wet one sleeve of her coat in water standing by in a jug, then, holding it with one hand before her face, she again erected the brazier in the other. Presently the ceiling had curled apart until a sizable hollow appeared. Then it occurred to her to seize the small rug and thrust it into the aperture, thus hastening her work of destruction. Acting on the impulse, Lotus grasped it, and, stuffing it into the hole, applied the whole heat of the brazier to its rough woolen surface.

And then things began to happen. As the rug caught fire, Lotus drew back, her face pressed to the grating for fresher air as she watched the conflagration.

"What's all this smudge? Whew! It's choking me! I can't breathe! Oh, my goodness! We're on fire down here! We'll burn to death! Help! Help!"

The girls' shrieks rang through the small passage. Shuffling steps padded along outside. One glance was enough to tell Ah Loo that the girls were in grave danger. Shooting back the bolts of their cells as she ran, she flung back their prison doors, then, not pausing to see what became of them, scurried away at top speed.

Lotus blindly stepped into the corridor, the wet sleeve still pressed against her face. Eyes smarting, half choked, she yet paused to make sure that no girl had been left imprisoned. From every door a girl crept forth, crazed with fear, ready to beat her way to air and freedom.

"Follow me," called Lotus. "Ah Loo's left the barred door open. Come before she can get help. To the trapdoor—up the staircase—quick!"

They hurled themselves after her. Down the corridor, up the stepladder, into the dark cellar, and up the narrow staircase, they fled, fear lending them wings.

The door at the top was only closed, not bolted. Ah Loo, in her mad flight—for none knew better than she the horrors of a fire in Chinatown—had forgotten to lock it in her wild rush for help. The girls poured into the quiet luxury of Wu's mansion, too excited to use their brains in the opportunity offered for escape.

"You'll have to look out for yourselves now!" cried Lotus wildly. "Try to find a way out of the house. There must be doors and windows. Hurry! We'll be found and locked up again if we don't escape now."

The sound of running feet hastened them. The girls separated, vanishing in different directions. The footsteps and voices drew nearer. With the desperation of the hunted, Lotus flung herself behind a screen in one corner of the room in which she found herself, and, crouching, listened with bated breath as a crowd of Chinese entered.

Ah Loo was in their midst, wringing her hands at sight of Chin Ling Wu's white, set face and glittering black eyes. She was evidently trying to persuade him she was not at fault for the breaking out of the fire, but he paid not the slightest attention to her. In the hands of his followers were fire-extinguishers, incongruous modernities beside the odd, picturesque costumes. The gesticulating crowd passed through without a glance towards the screen behind which Lotus cowered.

Now was her chance. Summoning all her courage, she crept out. She believed she must be on the ground floor. She must find her way out while the household was busy downstairs. She noiselessly flitted through the small rooms, but if they contained windows they were concealed beneath painted panels.

At last, with a gasp of disappointed astonishment, she found herself within the magnificent room which was Wu's private apartment. She looked about vainly for some other passage of escape, so interested that she did not hear a stealthy step creep up behind her.

"So, Lotus Bloom, you tried to set my house on fire. My girls are set loose; some of them cannot be found. My men are smothering down beneath the ground, trying to put out the fire. We cannot call in the fire company, for that would reveal the secrets of my business. In a few moments more it would have been beyond control, and all Chinatown a blazing inferno. And all due to the most troublesome woman-fiend of the Devil God I have ever known! You, my beautiful Lotus Bloom—"

It was Wu's voice, malignant, vibrant with something more to be dreaded than mere anger. With a shriek Lotus fled from him towards the raised dais. Wu followed her, his purpose masked beneath his immobile features, only his eyes telling the tale. Choking, Lotus put her hand up to her throat. With a deadly purpose in his eyes, he followed her,

his gaze that of a tiger intent on its prey.

"I can't—I can't—don't touch me!" she sobbed, her nerves gone at last. And she screamed again as she saw those eyes coming nearer, the look in their depths shriveling her soul. His arms, lithe as steel, closed about her. Fighting, writhing, she fought him off, her screams echoing through the house.

Wu was too intent upon his purpose to notice he had not quite pushed the screen back into place after his entrance, but Lotus saw the crack and redoubled her cries. And then, as Wu flung her, powerless, back upon the dais, a hubbub of noises arose which brought him partially to his senses, half crazed as he was.

Lotus felt her strength going, a deadly faintness numbing her. With one last strangled cry, she relaxed, as the screen was pushed back.

Chin Ling Wu, his face distorted like that of a heathen god, glanced over at the intrusion. A crowd of men stood in the entrance. With an ugly snarl, Wu, balked of his prey, glared his defiance.

"Drop that girl, or I'll shoot!"

Wu impassively stared down the barrel of a revolver as a couple of men sprang forward and clapped handcuffs on his yellow wrists. The revolver dropped, and the man strode over to the crumpled heap lying inert on the dais. One look at her face was enough for Ransom Fuller to know that his search was ended. But Lotus, at sound of his voice, had fainted.

Donaldson, his thin, keen face alert, turned from the tableau, jotting down memoranda for the big story which would form the "scoop" headlines in the morning's *Argus*. From another part of the house echoed the screams of the native women as a plain-clothes man entered, holding a shrinking American girl by each hand.

"Are there any more girls in this place?" questioned Haggerty.

One of the girls nodded. "Six more, but we all got out when Lotus set the underground dens on fire," she whimpered.

"The divil she did! There's a girl for ye!" Haggerty's admiring glance swept over the inert form on the dais, over which Fuller was working to bring back consciousness. "Come on, boys; them Chinks is all down below fightin' the fire. We'll round 'em all up and make a clean sweep o' this dive. We've got th' man we've been trailin', the biggest divil o' them Highbinders, caught with th' goods on!" He scowled at Wu, who had recovered his Oriental impassivity. "Take him out and keep him safe in th' bubble-wagon while we run in the rest. Hike along lively, now."

As Chin Ling Wu, guarded on both sides, was hustled out of the room, he did not even throw a glance at the girl who had been the cause of his downfall. Donaldson had already disappeared with Haggerty and his men, prepared for a clean sweep belowground.

With no thought for anything save Lotus Salisbury, Fuller gently forced some brandy from his pocket-flask between her lips. The luxurious room which had been the scene of so many horrors was very still, the atmosphere surcharged with subtle undercurrents. With a long sigh Lotus opened her eyes, staring straight up into the fine, dark face just above hers. Quite unvolitionally, her arms crept about his neck as Fuller hungrily gathered her up to him.

"You're not dead—you're not dead," she repeated faintly. "Tell me—tell me, did they hurt you? Oh, how I've suffered, thinking they had killed you for my sake!" She shuddered, trembling.

"You cared?" His face was alight with an ardor wholly unprofessional.

"So—so much!"

Lotus gave a little upward tilt to her chin, and the next instant their lips met with all the tenderness, the starved long-

ing, of elemental nature. A number of minutes later, Lotus, sighing ecstatically, murmured in Fuller's ear:

"How did you happen to find me, dearest? I thought Wu had his servants murder you."

"Not a bit of it! He didn't bother with me—it was you he was after. As soon as you disappeared, I got after the police and my old friend Donaldson, and we put the Chinese guide through a third-degree grilling. But he was too clever for us to get much information out of him, so we got permits to search Chinatown, and Donaldson, who knows it better than most white men, and who has had reason to suspect Wu before, brought us here. If we had not found you, we should have dynamited the wall in the alley where you disappeared. There must be a passageway under it—"

"There is. That's where the girls are imprisoned. Wu has a lot of underground passageways running from beneath his cellar in different directions. They took me in through a door in the alley-wall. I saw it when we were on the other side. Then they gave me chloroform, and—and I didn't remember anything more until I woke up—down there!"

Her arms tensed about him. Again they forgot the fears and terrors of the past hours in the sweetness of the present moment.

But they were rudely awakened from their dream of bliss as a babel of shrieks, curses, and howls from below attested that Haggerty's men had been successful in their clean-up. Lotus clung to Fuller in sudden terror.

"Oh, take me away from here," she whispered. "I can't stand any more tonight. I hope the girls are all safely out."

"I'm sure of it," soothed the man. "They'll be under police protection until their families are notified. What happened, anyway? How did you come to be up here?"

For the first time he realized Lotus was wearing Chinese costume. His fine features darkened as certain possibilities flashed across his mind. Lotus understood, and shivered.

"I set fire to my cell, hoping we might get a chance to escape or else be killed quickly," she said so simply the horror behind her words was doubly poignant. "I couldn't live the life Wu intended for me, and he wouldn't let me go. And—I think the greatest of all reasons why I didn't care what became of me was because I—I believed you—were dead."

Cheek to cheek, she whispered the last words in his ear. For a long moment he held her close, immovable, then helped her to her feet, his eyes still dim. She leaned on his shoulder as he threw an arm about her waist to steady her.

She smiled at him tremulously. "You see—how much I need you;" and her shadowy eyes, languorously lovely, revealed more than the words.

"I intend to make myself so thoroughly necessary I'll be absolutely indispensable." His muscles tightened about her suppleness. "To-morrow morning I'm going to apply for a license. I don't know what the laws are here in Frisco, but as soon as we can arrange it I'm going to take you away on a honeymoon to Coronado. It's a heavenly spot, and we'll forget all that's occurred here. I can't understand how you've come to care for me. I'm so happy myself, I can almost feel sorry for that other fellow who has lost you—"

"Other fellow? What are you talking about? I don't understand." Lotus' brows knit in perplexity.

"The one you're engaged to." He lifted her unresisting left hand. The diamond winked up at him maliciously. "The man in the picture on your dressing-table," he explained.

At the note of jealousy in his voice, Lotus' brow cleared. She burst into a clear ripple of hearty laughter.

"You thought I was engaged to John Whitney? Oh, my dearest! One of the reasons I came on this trip was because I wanted to see if I cared enough for him to miss him when he was away from me. I haven't—not a bit! I felt sure I didn't care for him in—in the right way, but he—he wanted me to make sure. I have—*now*." She glanced at Fuller shyly. "And this ring"—her voice sank tenderly—"this was my mother's engagement ring. That's why I value it so much. Perhaps I ought not wear it on that finger, to give a false impression, but I've always felt I couldn't let any man take it off and—and replace it with another until I was—sure. It was a—kind of guard against—the wrong man, you see."

Slowly, with lingering tenderness, his fingers closed about the slender band. As he drew it off, Lotus looked in his eyes, a smile behind her tears. Slipping the diamond upon her right hand, he drew an odd signet ring from his little finger. As the heavy circlet slid over her slim third finger, Fuller lifted her hand to his lips.

"Until I can replace it to-morrow with one more suitable," he murmured.

Once more the silence in the room was intense; then Fuller lingeringly released Lotus, and this time they passed through the house, out into the narrow street in front. His runabout was waiting at the corner. Lotus, clad only in her silken coat, shivered as the chill night air struck her. Hastily wrapping her in a bulky, thick motor-coat, Fuller tucked her in beside him, threw in the clutch, and they moved away from Wu's house of hidden mysteries.

The pallor of approaching dawn was

in the sky, and the streets were bleak and deserted. Now that the glamor of the swinging paper lanterns, the lights twinkling from half open doorways, were no longer visible, this bit of old China lost its charm, revealing itself in all its tawdry sordidness.

Through the heart of the Oriental section, then through the city itself, Fuller drove at a speed impossible in the daytime, but before they reached the beginning of the Exposition Grounds the rising sun was casting its first gleams across the bay. Out beyond them, to the right, the Golden Gate was spreading its arms to welcome another day. Across the amethystine waters, in the misty distance, Tamalpais flushed into tawny crimson.

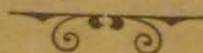
As they passed the Tower of Jewels raising its slender head, priceless gem of the Exposition Buildings, the sunrise kissed the countless rainbow-colored crystals into prismatic glory. Fuller slowed their speed.

"See!" Lotus laid her hand on his arm. "It's the sunrise, Ransom. A new day! How wonderfully those jewels glow in the light!—as though they were warmed into life by the rays of the rising sun and were glad to welcome it—as we are."

The road was clear ahead. Under the rainbow radiance Fuller leaned down and kissed her full on the lips. Her cheeks rivaled the sunrise glow as he echoed:

"A new day! Our wedding-day, Lotus. The perfect dawn of a new life—the life of fulfilment—"

"Together!" finished Lotus softly, as the golden halo merged into the full splendor of the new-born day.



THE STRANGE TRAMP

By John W. N. Sullivan

I T was out in the Connecticut hills that I came upon the Strange Tramp.

At first I was not even sure that he was a tramp. He sat with his back against a tree, his mouth open and his eyes shut, snoring like a new type of orchestral instrument. The tattered remnants which constituted his concession to propriety were obviously the last phase of a suit of Harris tweed.

Near him, on the grass, was the object which made me pause. A dainty yellow-covered volume presented its glaring black title at me—*“Les Fonctions Elliptiques.”*

In my youth I had won distinction in the Mathematical Tripos, but when I found that a thorough mathematical equipment has rather less market value than a rudimentary acquaintance with plumbing I abandoned its study. The volume lying on the grass had cost me many headaches, and I eyed the ragged personage under the tree with considerable curiosity. Suddenly the bassoon solo ceased, and I perceived two black eyes staring fixedly at me.

“Good afternoon,” said the tramp politely.

“Good afternoon,” I replied. “The weather is exceptionally warm for May, don’t you think?”

The tramp nodded briefly, and yawned. He continued to stare at me fixedly, without manifesting the slightest interest. His rather refined, very sunburnt face was surmounted by a shock of black hair. He looked something over thirty. I perceived an old felt hat at the base of the tree.

“His treatment is very clear, isn’t it?”

I continued, nodding at the book on the grass.

“Not bad,” said the tramp, with faint disparagement, “but the notation is hopelessly old-fashioned.”

He rose slowly to his feet, placed his hat on his head and his book under his arm. He eyed me a little quizzically.

“Are you coming along?”

He waved an explanatory hand in a general easterly direction, and I fell into step beside him.

“Yes, it’s sufficiently rare to be a little startling,” he said, answering my unspoken thought; “but I am a tramp because I am logical.”

“Just so, just so,” I assented.

“No,” he continued placidly; “not in the least because I am mad. Originally, I admit, I became a tramp by necessity, but I remain one because my knowledge of philosophy is too great to allow me to do anything else.”

“Philosophy has much to answer for,” I said gravely. We walked a few steps in silence.

“Of course, if you’re going to be rude,” said the tramp, a trifle wearily, “I shall have to tell you the story of my life.”

I nodded encouragingly. “Fire away; I’ve got about three miles to go, and we must talk about something.”

He gazed dreamily at the few white clouds which flecked the blue of the far horizon. It was a perfect day. From a cavity in what had once been a Norfolk jacket, he produced a rather respectable briar, and, taking the hint, I handed him my pouch.

He carefully filled his pipe in silence,

and it was not until the first few clouds of tobacco-smoke had floated out on the still air that he commenced his story. He spoke with a faint flavor of serene dogmatism, and a certain precision of phrase which reminded me singularly of the lecture-room.

"As you seem to have no particular intelligence, and have, nevertheless, done some mathematics, I take it you are a college man. I'm one myself. I went to Harvard on a scholarship, and specialized in mathematics because I had genuine ability. I really liked the stuff. I do now, for the matter of that."

"The strong bias some of us have for the perfectly useless has never been satisfactorily accounted for," I murmured.

"It is probable that I should never have made a great reputation," he went on, ignoring my interruption. "I am not sufficiently emasculated to find all my desires satisfied by tracing the vagaries of 'x.' But one has to mortify the flesh on six hundred a year." He puffed meditatively. "You, of course, never had less than four times that." He turned to me with a peculiar smile.

"Except when I was teaching," I assented reflectively.

He looked at me with some sternness. "So you've actually done teaching! Ah, well, there are shabby sins in the lives of all of us; though, I suppose," he mused, "that deliberately to help a system which militates against development and survival is one of the shabbiest." His frown deepened. "You are, I hope, a moral man," he said severely.

"Er—a moral man? Yes, I suppose I could say I was a moral man."

He looked relieved.

"It would be absurd to expect you to see my point of view were you not a moral man. The key to my whole position is to be found in my exceptionally acute moral sense. All our social activities are tainted; I cannot work and preserve my self-respect."

"Bernard Shaw!" I interpolated.

He looked affronted. "Bernard Shaw!" He repeated the name in a tone of contempt. "My dear sir—really, I hope I go a little deeper than that! Bernard Shaw has not even a rudimentary acquaintance with psychology, or he would not be a Socialist. No—really, I may say, without vanity, I am quite an intelligent man, and—"

"I beg your pardon," I said humbly. "I did not realize—"

"Quite so, quite so," he said airily, waving his hand with a gesture of complete understanding, his irritation instantly appeased. He puffed meditatively for a few seconds before he continued:

"As I was saying, I lived in Cambridge on a scholarship—six hundred per annum. With my parents' help, I furnished two rooms, and I looked after myself entirely—cooking my own meals, making my own bed, and everything. Of course, I practised a rigid economy. Have you ever tasted nut butter?" he asked suddenly.

I shook my head.

"It's awful stuff, but I almost came to like it. I've eaten worse since. Well, I didn't do so badly. I was sufficiently a fool to take an interest in poetry and music, not realizing that it is very unwise to cultivate the emotions on a strictly counted income. I hired a piano at three dollars a month, and saturated myself in Chopin and Keats."

He eyed me critically. "Are you musical?"

"I like music," I replied. "I've never studied it to any extent, but I'm very fond of listening to good music."

His face clouded. "Ah, well, perhaps you're better off." He sighed. "I've never quite decided whether a love of music is a blessing or a curse."

"But I *do* like music," I insisted, a little impatient at his superior airs.

He nodded soothingly: "You think it an agreeable recreation, I have no doubt. You don't quite understand, that's all."

I began to find him a little impossible. He resumed his faintly professorial tone:

"My moods of reaction against the abstract nature of my studies were at times intense. Chopin, in particular, weakened my power of self-control. At times I was a tingling mass of desire, and I could not afford to purchase gratification. There was obviously nothing for it but to find a girl who was unconventional or weak enough to be led—well, astray, as they say."

There was a strange quality in the voice which caused me to glance curiously at the remarkable being at my side.

"I found her without much difficulty," he continued, and then paused.

I eyed him covertly as we walked on in silence. His mouth wore a sneer, and there was a hard look in his eyes. He stared straight in front of him, and he had ceased to smoke.

He broke out abruptly: "You've read 'Love and Mr. Lewisham,' of course?" His query was put with that apparent inconsequence I had noticed before.

"Of course," I answered.

"It's a very disappointing book. Have you got a match? My pipe is out."

I handed him a box of matches.

"Yes," he continued, shielding the lighted match with his hands and puffing vigorously; "the end of the book is absurd. With no degree and no experience, *Lewisham* could never have made enough for himself, to say nothing of his wife." He put my matches in his pocket. "I saw that so clearly, that I refused to marry the girl."

I shook my head doubtfully. "It's hardly right."

"Right!" he shouted, and stopped in his stride to face me. He glared at me furiously. "Is it right, do you think, to condemn two people to lifelong misery in deference to the idiotic conventions of the feeble-minded?" He flourished his pipe excitedly. "What sort of morality is that?" he snarled.

"Well, of course—" I was amazed at this outburst.

"Yes, of course," he repeated. "People like you are not moral; you are only superstitious. What do you think morality is? I'll tell you," he went on, without waiting for a reply: "it's a code of action which suits the convenience of the greatest number. There is no other definition which will hold water for a moment." He glared hostility for a space.

"And so I refused to marry the girl," he repeated.

I maintained surprised silence, and, with an impatient wave of his hand, he resumed more calmly:

"But I had to leave the college. I had enemies, and they were bound to find out. There was one beast in particular," he said venomously, "a flabby-minded, literary person who was troubled by a conscience. The swine!"

The last vestige of his detached manner had vanished. It was evident his memories were very vivid.

"And so you became a tramp," I remarked.

"What else was there to do? It was a choice between that and the humiliation and wretchedness of an inferior teaching job. I did not hesitate. As a tramp, I can at least preserve my self-respect."

"You prefer chopping wood for a meal?" I asked.

"Certainly—not that I always chop wood," he said, with a slight resentment. "You would be astonished at some of the experiences I have had. For instance, I have sometimes got a meal and even a bed as well for playing the piano."

"For playing the piano!" I echoed.

"Yes, you'd be surprised. Some of the better-class houses. It has appealed to their sense of the incongruous. Tramps who play Beethoven and Chopin are not common. And it keeps me in practice. I'm quite well known in certain districts."

"Do you ever give lectures in mathematics?" I inquired sarcastically.

"Not exactly," he retorted placidly, "but I once got bed and board for a week from an amateur astronomer for helping him with his computations. He had quite a decent little observatory."

"Do you give many recitals in this district?" I pursued.

His frown came back. "No, I'm here for a quite different purpose."

I looked interrogation.

"You see," he answered, with an air of lucidity, "the girl never had a child. Nothing happened. I took care to keep in touch. Indirectly, you know."

"Indeed!" I said, surprised. "But what—"

"Exactly. There are two alternatives. She may have been mistaken. That's quite possible, you know. Or she may have read Thomas Hardy. I hardly think her natural depravity would be sufficient. You remember—'Jude the Obscure,' you know."

I looked puzzled.

"A girl lies about it. She thinks the man is bound to marry her then."

"Oh, I see," I said, suddenly comprehending. "And you think—"

"I don't know," said the tramp thoughtfully. Then, with an absurd lapse into his stilted manner: "My scientific training renders unsolved problems utterly repugnant to me. As a matter of purely intellectual interest, I wish to find out the facts of the case."

He seemed very concerned that I should make no mistake, and it was with an almost anxious air he awaited my response.

"And how do you propose to find out?" I asked.

"I'm going to ask her," he answered resolutely. "I heard quite casually that she was in New London, and I shall trust to chance to meet her."

"Don't you think it a trifle brutal?" I suggested. "You have no feeling for the girl, and, presumably, she loves you."

He turned on me angrily. "What does that matter? Is it possible you are chivalrous? Shades of Nietzsche!"

"Oh, that's all bosh, you know," I said, a trifle hotly. "Nietzsche was mad. Women are not angels, but they are human beings."

"You're married, I suppose," he sneered. "Yes, yes, I know what you would say. You are happier so, you think. Perhaps you are, but it is only by refusing to face the facts." He became precise. "Women are clogs and burdens. They are entirely unscrupulous and utterly deceitful. They are disagreeable necessities for the continuance of the race."

I burst out laughing. "The final result of philosophy," I mocked, "the ripened fruit of the tree of wisdom!"

He assumed a bored air. "Your method of debate is somewhat fatiguing."

We walked on in silence. To judge from his face, the tramp was plunged in gloomy meditation, and I was content to think him over for a space. It so happens that I have a very high opinion of women, largely based on my three years' experience of married life. I could not for an instant believe in the sincerity of the tramp's views, and I was convinced that an ordinary decent woman could change his ideas in a very short time. With the bottom knocked out of that part of his absurd philosophy, it was probable that the rest would go, and that the tramp would cease to remain a tramp. That, I confess, seemed to me a desirable result. In spite of his ridiculous pose, I found something likable about him, and I was persuaded he was a man of genuine ability. I conceived the idea of presenting him to my wife. I would offer to employ him for a week. I felt convinced by a sort of instinct that something more than curiosity prompted the tramp's search for the girl he had deserted. I am no great believer at any time in the spirit of disinterested curi-

osity, even in men of science. I have been a scientific man! In my thoughts the tramp's immediate future began to assume an almost idyllic form, when I found that we had arrived within half a mile of New London.

I motioned towards a large, red-brick house on my right and addressed the tramp:

"I hope you'll come in and have some lunch with me. I should like to hear more of your way of looking at things."

He stared at me doubtfully.

"I should like to find her to-night, if possible."

"Oh, that's all right," I replied heartily. "There's heaps of time, and I may be able to help you."

"You're very kind," he said politely.

I ushered him into the library, as being the cosiest room in the house, and the most likely to interest him. His first proceeding was to inspect my books, which he did with the famished eagerness of an educated man who had been too long without them. He kept up a running fire of questions and comments, showing the oddest preferences and distastes, and yet, withal, a keenness of insight and a breadth of reading which somewhat astonished me, prepared though I was to find him possessed of unusual attainments. He was in the midst of a caustic comment on Mr. Chesterton's habit of thought, when the door opened and my wife appeared.

"I thought I heard you come in, Jim," she said, "and—"

She suddenly caught sight of my companion, who was standing with his back towards her. At the sound of her voice the tramp swung round and faced her.

"Let me introduce—"

My wife suddenly swayed and gripped the door-handle till her knuckles showed white. I had not allowed for the effect the sudden sight of my ragged and unkempt visitor would have upon her.

I moved towards her, and she almost fell into my arms.

"Good God!" exclaimed the tramp, and let Mr. Chesterton's "Orthodoxy" fall with a thud to the floor.

"It's all right," I said to him over my shoulder. "My wife is a little nervous, but—come, come, dear," I continued, for she was trembling excessively. "What a nervous little thing it is! The gentleman is a visitor, dear."

"A visitor!" she gasped.

"Yes," I went on. "It's hardly complimentary—"

She disengaged herself from my arms with a nervous little laugh.

"It's very silly of me," she confessed, "but for the moment I thought—" She turned to the tramp with a little smile, but with a lurking fear still in her eyes. "I really must apologize, Mr.—er—"

"Osborne," said the tramp, eying her intently, for my wife is a beautiful woman, and her confusion served only to heighten her charm.

"Well, now, that's all right," I said heartily. "Mr. Osborne is staying to lunch with us, my dear, and perhaps afterwards we can have a little music—I should like you to hear my wife's playing," I broke off to remark to the tramp.

He smiled slightly. "So your wife is a musician," he said pleasantly, with a faint inflection of surprise in his voice.

"You shall judge after lunch," I replied.

"Oh, I don't suppose Mr. Osborne will consider me a musician," said my wife, with a certain defiance. For some reason, she seemed to have taken a dislike to the tramp.

"Well, well," I said, "let us see about something to eat."

"I'll see to it myself," remarked my wife, and walked out of the room.

"My wife is rather easily upset," I said half apologetically, for I was anxious she should make a good impression on the tramp.

"Quite so," he said politely. "My unexpected appearance was doubtless something of a shock to her."

"You do look—er—somewhat unconventional," I laughed.

"Precisely," he said. He regarded me curiously. He seemed on the point of making a remark, and then changed his mind. He walked to the window, and looked out on the lawn.

"I suppose," I said lightly, "that, by your philosophy, I am to be pitied. I am hopelessly in the toils. I am being relentlessly dragged down—down from the giddy heights of perfect egoism to the level of an ordinary happy man."

"Are you happy?" said the tramp abruptly, still looking out of the window.

"I am so entirely deceived as to believe I am," I replied, laughing.

"You have doubtless been married a long time," he said.

"No," I replied. "I first met my wife about three years ago. We met quite accidentally while I was on a vacation trip through the St. Lawrence. Within a month we were married. She was an orphan, and there were no relatives to be consulted. She was companion to the lady with whom she was traveling, and there were no other ties. Oh, I assure you, my conduct was most unphilosophical."

The tramp turned and faced me with a strange smile.

"It was," he said slowly.

At the sound of the gong we moved to the dining-room.

The tramp at first appeared somewhat abstracted, but after his second chop he started to talk. He talked extremely well, and, in spite of her aversion, I found my wife listening to him with an altogether unusual air of interest. But ever and again, as she glanced at him, a look something akin to fear would leap into her eyes. There was evidently something about the man which affected her unpleasantly.

The tramp noticed this, but he seemed quite unconcerned, and appeared, indeed, to derive some peculiar cynical satisfaction from it. I felt disappointed at the

evident antagonism between them, for I had quite expected my wife's charm to convert the tramp into something more human. But her most unexpected antipathy to my guest doomed this hope to disappointment. It was with a feeling of relief, on my part, that we made our way to the drawing-room.

"Now we will have some music," I said cheerily. "My wife has only taken up piano-playing of recent years," I continued, turning to the tramp, who nodded; "but I think you will agree that she may rightly be called a musician. . . . What will you play, dear—something cheerful?"

"Whatever you choose, dear," said my wife, and seated herself at the piano with a sort of defiance.

During lunch the sky had rapidly been growing overcast, and now the first low roll of thunder announced the coming storm. The heavy pattering of the rain supplied an accompaniment to my wife's playing, and the bright and sparkling cascades of notes that rippled from under her fingers formed a strange contrast to the gathering fury of the elements.

The tramp seemed strangely excited during the playing. At its conclusion he remarked harshly:

"You should have played Beethoven. Play the *Appassionata*!"

"I can't," said my wife, and then, abruptly:

"Will you?"

They looked each other squarely in the eyes, and then, without a word, the tramp took the place my wife vacated at the piano. It was soon evident that the tramp had not boasted of his musical ability without cause. He played like a man inspired. Perhaps the thunderous accompaniment of the storm was partly responsible for it, but never before had music so profoundly affected me. As for my wife, she sat like a woman in a trance. Music always greatly excited her, but as I watched her tense and rigid figure, her flushed cheeks, and her glowing eyes,

fixed with an almost terrible intentness on the tramp, I could not but heave a sigh of relief at the final crashing chord which brought the last movement of that tremendous sonata to its close.

For a space there was silence. Then the tramp turned to me.

"Listen! I am going to play something very special." He looked at me. "I am going to tell you a lot of things," he said.

"What?" said my wife loudly.

He spoke very deliberately:

"A lot of things—on the piano," he added, with a curious smile.

His smile changed to a mocking laugh.

"A sort of Song without Words," he said to my wife.

I could never describe the effect upon me of that next performance. I am not, perhaps, very sensitive to music, but in that piece I saw something, I think, of what great music may mean to a musician. He started with a dreamy, tender melody, a very beautiful love-song, which, changing to a minor key, became transformed to something at once pleading and pathetic. It suggested coldness and desolation, and the sense of a great loss bravely borne. And then again it changed, and the first theme crept back, becoming more and more richly ornamented, and gradually working up to a glorious climax of passionate love. I was greatly moved, and I saw that there were tears in my wife's eyes. And then, just as the passionate love-theme seemed changing into a great paean of triumph, there rang out a crashing discord, cynical, brutal, dominating, against the love-theme, which strove ever more faintly to overcome that fiendish chorus. The effect was so unexpected that I started in my chair, and my wife gripped her hands convulsively. And as the notes flew faster and faster, and the music became more wild and terrible, I saw the face of the tramp change till it became the face of a man in Hell. Beads of perspiration stood out on his brow, and

it was with a wild yell that he reached the final climax. Simultaneously with the cessation of the music, my wife fell in a tumbled heap on the floor.

I started to my feet, but the tramp was by her side before me.

"Fetch water," he barked, and mechanically I turned and went. As I entered the room with the water, the tramp raised his head hurriedly. He had been bending close over her face.

"It's only a faint," he said shortly, and rose to his feet.

I knelt down and started to sprinkle my wife's hands and forehead.

"Bring me a cushion for her head," I said over my shoulder.

There was no answer. I screwed my head round. The tramp had gone!

My wife stirred feebly. "Jim," she moaned.

She opened her eyes and looked into my face. "What's the matter, Jim?" she whispered.

"You fainted, my dear," I said.

She struggled to a sitting posture.

"And the other man—the tramp?" she said, glancing fearfully around.

"He's gone," I said soothingly.

She gave a sob of relief, and hid her face on my breast.

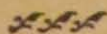
Suddenly she looked up. "But the storm," she said, "and he had no coat."

"He's a strange man, dear," I said gravely. "I think I'm glad he's gone."

She scanned my face for a moment. "I'm very glad he's gone." She drew my face down and kissed me.

I have never seen the Strange Tramp since. Apparently, he did not remain in New London. For some reason, he appears to have abandoned his search, and he is probably still tramping the country, wasting his powers in defense of an absurd philosophy. There was something about the man which attracted me. I feel sure there was more in him than I understood, and that at the bottom he had in him the makings of a man. My

wife does not like to discuss him. He certainly had a low opinion of women, and I sometimes think that his denial of woman's truth and loyalty is fitly punished by his lonely and wandering life. As an old Greek has said: "An unbelieving man merits the anger of the High Gods."



THE WOMAN HABIT

By John Lynch

Love is, after all, largely a function of nature.

* * *

The love of a courtesan is like a badly cooked dinner, that satisfies one's hunger but leaves one filled with disgust.

* * *

To be known as a cynic and a woman-hater is to be despised by men, tolerated by women, and adored by young girls.

* * *

If men treated their mistresses as they do their wives, immorality would go out of fashion for want of candidates.

* * *

If woman must be censured for having commercialized love, man must be held blamable for having made the enterprise profitable.

* * *

Primitive man found love so absorbing that he instituted marriage to give him a chance to think of other things.

* * *

No man can be argued into fidelity, but most men can be cajoled into it.

* * *

When a woman becomes an expert in love, she may continue to inspire it, but her day for loving is over.

* * *

If men were permitted to have two wives, one would not bear the slightest resemblance to the other.

* * *

A woman who boasts of her virtue either fears or hopes that it may be lost.

* * *

God proved Himself a humorist when he made man, and confirmed the fact when he made woman.

* * *

To be happy with a perfectly innocent man, a woman must be endowed with glorious memories or with inexhaustible hopes.

* * *

The secret of happiness in marriage is not to get too well acquainted.

* * *

Marry while you are young; you will know unhappiness, but you will get a sip at the spring of life while it bubbles.

* * *

At seventy all that most men demand is something feminine.

A PROFESSIONAL HUSBAND

By Harold Vickers

"YOU actually want to employ me as a—*a husband?*"

Sinton stared at the girl in frank amazement. She was not exactly pretty, though her figure was distinctly good and her face, if not of the even, insipid charm beloved of those artists who create magazine cover-designs, was not without its attractiveness, especially when the cheeks flamed as they did now, under his startled gaze.

"That is it—exactly." Her voice was level, even, but her bosom rose and fell a trifle too swiftly for complete composure, and her fingers interlaced nervously in her lap. He stared again, his mind a little stunned by the unexpected proposal. To respond to an advertisement calling for "a gentleman possessing unusual tact, discretion, and honor, for a mission of delicacy," is naturally to be prepared for something out of the common; but he had not dreamed of anything so extraordinary as this. He had a momentary impulse to refuse point-blank, but something in the girl's face made him resist it. He realized that he distinctly wished to be of service to her, and sensed that she would assuredly not have conceived her fantastic plan without desperately sound reason for it.

"Why not let me understand the case altogether?" he suggested kindly. "I do not wish to pry, but if I am to consider a proposal so remarkable, I must know something of its details—and if you are prepared to repose in me the vast confidence required by your plan, you may surely trust me with the explanation."

She studied him doubtfully. He was

obviously a gentleman; she had realized that at once. She saw now that his clothes, though tastefully chosen and admirably cut, were worn and already a little shabby. But his face invited faith—a strong, honest, likable countenance, she thought it, and his level blue eyes met hers with a frank, open question in them which her woman's intuition bade her answer.

"If I tell you, will you promise to help me?" she fenced. "I don't dare to explain unless I'm sure—"

"I can't promise unconditionally," he interrupted, as she paused for a word, "but if what you ask is within the possibilities, I think you may count on me. Try me, at all events, and if I cannot do as you wish I can at least hold my peace as to your confidence."

"Have you ever been in Deptford?" she demanded irrelevantly. He shook his head.

"I never even heard of it."

"You—you haven't lived here long?"

"As I said in my letter, I've lived most of my life in Pera. My father was a mining engineer there. I came up here six months ago, hoping to find a business connection which would support me, but the export trade is overcrowded. I'm practically penniless, friendless, and hopeless—which is why your advertisement interested me."

"Then, no one here would be likely to know you?"

"No one here could possibly know me." He was positive on the point. Six months of job-hunting had made him sure of so much, at least.

She took a sudden decision. "I'll

risk it!" she cried. "I live in Deptford—it's two hundred miles up-state—a dead-and-alive little town exactly like hundreds and hundreds of others. I'm the ugly duckling in a big family—all the others are pretty and popular. They all married young—and well, as such things go in Deptford. I didn't. Nobody ever looked at me. They elected me as the family spinster when I was fifteen, and I've been Aunt Ethel, poor, homely, hopeless Aunt Ethel, ever since. Do you realize what that means in a town like Deptford?"

"I can guess." He smiled sympathetically. "Our colony in Pasco wasn't very large, you know. People are very much alike the world around."

"Well, I endured it for years and years and years—until it seemed as if I couldn't stand it another minute. And when, by some miracle, a man—an actual, live man—did look twice at me, I didn't stop to ponder it. All that mattered was that I was going to escape from Deptford and involuntary aunt-hood at last. When this—this man suggested that I run away and marry him secretly, I—I agreed. I had some money—I forgot to say that we're pretty well off, at least according to the Deptford standard—and I packed a bag and left a note saying simply that I was going to Traybany to be married. That was all. I wanted it to stun them, you see—no warning, no explanations, just the blunt announcement."

"It would stun them, I'll admit," he smiled. "What then?"

She hesitated, flushing again. "Well, I met him at Traybany, and in ten minutes I realized what I was doing; but it was ten minutes too late! He—he was wholly impossible. But I knew I'd burned my bridges. I had to stand by it, then. So I wired them at home that I was married and on my way to New York for my honeymoon. *My honeymoon!*" She was silent, her face hard and bitter, her eyes glowing.

"I—I'm very sorry."

She smiled her pathetic gratitude for the trite remark, and Sinton realized that her smile was distinctly appealing. It seemed to lighten her face like the sudden glow of a friendly lamp.

"So I intended to stay on here, letting them back in Deptford think that it was all right. But I might have known that wouldn't do—they were all convinced that I'd made a fool of myself over some fortune-hunter—exactly as I had, and my uncle, who is also my guardian and trustee, refuses to supply me with money unless he is convinced that I'm not wasting it on a worthless husband. He says that if my husband can't support me I'd better come home; and if my husband can support me, why should I need money?"

"But he has no right to hold back your own funds," protested Sinton.

"No; but, you see, he thinks it's his duty to protect me, and that's one way of doing it. I've either got to produce a satisfactory husband, to set his mind at rest, or else go back to Deptford in disgrace, to be pitied and sighed over the rest of my days."

"I see; and if your husband satisfies your people, they will have no objection to giving you your property and letting you go away with him—is that it?"

"Yes. Of course I'd take pains to go far enough away so that none of them would be likely to visit me, and after a year or two I'd write them that he was dead or something, and come home, if I wanted to. You see, the only way I can get my money otherwise is by making a fuss, which will show them all just what a fool I've been. And I won't do that! I won't be pitied and patronized and—and *auntied* all my days. I'll starve first!"

"Then, all I'd have to do would be to play the part of husband for a brief time, and so convince your relatives of my good character that they'll trust you with me—is that it?"

"Yes. Of course I'll provide everything you need to—to impress them—clothes and things, you know. And I—I'll be able to pay you very well as soon as I get my money. It's quite a lot—for Deptford."

Sinton flushed in his turn. He was acutely conscious of his sartorial deficiencies, but every fibre of him rebelled at repairing them at a woman's expense. She seemed to sense his thought.

"You mustn't take offense," she said quickly. "It's no disgrace to be hard up—goodness knows I'll be soon if you don't help me! Of all the letters I received in answer to my advertisement, yours was the only one I dared to follow up. If you won't help me, I'll just have to—"

"I'll do it!" Sinton came quickly to his decision. "We'll show your people that they were all wrong about you. And I'll endeavor to put up an appearance which will turn your sisters green with envy. I've always thought I'd make a jolly good actor."

She beamed on him. "Oh, thank you! I hoped you would. You seemed a—sort of answer to prayer when you came in." She sobered suddenly and glanced at him with a pathetically wistful appeal in her eyes. "I wonder if you'd mind—seeming—seeming very fond of me?" she asked timidly. "Not—not just distantly friendly, you know, but—"

Sinton smiled. "I think I can manage that too," he said.

"No, sir." Uncle Henry Hinkle, titular head of the clan, and financial despot of Deptford, shook his head to emphasize his words. "I don't put much faith in appearances. You look all right, but I'm not going to trust my niece's happiness to a stranger just on account of looks, no, nor yet her money."

Sinton reddened a little at the implied insult, in spite of his determination to face the situation with imperturbable good-nature. "Your interest in Ethel

does you credit, sir," he said quietly. "As to her money, that is none of my affair."

Uncle Henry leaped at the opening afforded by this indiscreetly chivalrous remark. "Then, you don't care whether she gets control of her funds at once or later on?" he demanded quickly, his keen old eyes glittering under their shaggy brows. Sinton cursed his folly roundly to himself, but answered without perceptible hesitation.

"I want Ethel to have her rights, of course," he said. "If her money is due her now, as I understand it is, I want her to have it. I can take care of her, of course, but she naturally wishes to have her own funds, and I want her to have whatever she wants. That is my position."

"Um. I see!" Uncle Henry's voice was dry. "Well, it ain't mine—yet. Ethel doesn't know what's good for her, and I do. I don't know a thing about you. You may be any sort of a rascal, so far as I can tell. I may not have any right to hang on to her money, but I guess you'll find I've got the power. Try suing me here in Deptford and see what you get!"

Sinton realized that he was endangering the success of the whole plan. He forced himself to speak evenly. "I have no intention of dragging family matters into the courts," he said. "Nor has Ethel. We have come here merely to satisfy your natural curiosity regarding myself. I have already explained to you who I am and what I am. You have had an opportunity to look me over and form your opinion for yourself. If that is not sufficient, Ethel will have to get along without her money until you are convinced that it is safe to trust her with it. But in that case she will harbor a natural belief that she has been unjustly treated and perhaps conceive suspicions as to your motives."

"My motives!" Uncle Henry bristled. "What does that mean?"

Sinton realized that he had struck the right note. He laughed apologetically. "I'm afraid she thinks that your reluctance is due in part to a desire to continue in control of her money; that possibly it is of use to you to be able to make her investments and so on. Of course she has said nothing about this to any one except me—as yet, but—"

"That's fine, that is!" Uncle Henry fumed. "My own niece thinking I'm a crook! And all because I'm looking out for her interests!"

"You can't blame her," said Sinton. "And so far she hasn't said anything to anybody else about it. But of course she's likely to talk sooner or later. Women are built that way. Of course your reputation here can stand it, though."

"I guess it can!" But Uncle Henry knew that it could not. One does not do a big business in second-mortgages and chattel loans in a farming community without acquiring a certain repute for unsavory motives. A considerable number of people would joyfully believe the worst of Uncle Henry. And that astute citizen knew that a rumor of this sort would spread swiftly until it brought depositors into the Hinkle bank to withdraw their funds. He temporized.

"Look here," he proposed, his manner changing a little. "I—I don't want hard feelings in the family. All I'm after is to be sure that you want Ethel for herself and not her money. I want to make certain that she'll be happy with you. Now, here's my offer: you stay here with us for a little while—a week or two or three, maybe—and give me a chance to see how you get on. The minute I'm satisfied, I'll turn her property over to her without a word. I'll leave it to you if that ain't fair."

Sinton thought quickly. He was forced to admit that it was more than fair, from Uncle Henry's point of view. But to spend a week or more in the Hinkle homestead on terms of matri-

monial intimacy—! It would be a situation not wholly pleasing to Ethel, he felt sure. He had already seen enough of the Hinkle régime to realize that the customs of the household were decidedly free from any taint of metropolitan artificiality. For a moment he thought of rejecting the proposal, but two influences deterred him. To refuse would be to confirm every half-formed suspicion on the part of this shrewd old man, and so nullify the object of the masquerade; and a sudden distaste for parting abruptly from Ethel completed the argument for the affirmative.

"It is fair," he conceded. "I'll be glad to stay on here until you're satisfied, sir; and, though I think Ethel will probably regret interrupting her wedding-journey, I feel sure she'll be willing, too."

"Good!" Uncle Henry sighed with relief. "Then, that's all settled. I'll just call up the house and tell Martha to fix up the front room for you. It's the bride's room, you know—all the girls have had it when they came home from their honeymoons."

Room! And for a stay of weeks! Sinton wondered what Ethel would say when she knew. As for himself, he was surprised to discover how easily he reconciled himself to the prospect.

"This is terrible!" Ethel glanced about the room desperately. She had contrived to conceal her feelings through the evening, after Uncle Henry's triumphant announcement at the supper-table; but Sinton had detected her perturbation easily enough, and had found, in the glance which she turned toward him again and again, a certain dawning of distrust, if not of fear.

"It can't be helped," he said calmly, slipping the bolt in the door and drawing her toward the window, that their whispered conversation might not be overheard outside the room. "If I'd offered any objection, he'd have made you

fight for your money through every court. This was positively the only way to satisfy him. And, after all, it's not impossible, you know. We were on pretty thin ice, anyway—this doesn't complicate the situation very much."

She flashed an angry look at him. "Not very much!" she repeated hotly, under her breath. "How can we occupy one room for weeks and weeks, and not 'complicate the situation'? It's impossible—I won't go on with it! I'll tell them the whole story and make them put you out! I thought you were a gentleman!"

He flushed, but refused to lose his temper. "I try to be," he said quietly. "Don't leap at conclusions, please. It's embarrassing for you, I know, but it's better than being made a laughing-stock for the whole town, isn't it? Better than continuing to be treated as a pitiful spinster, unfit to handle your own money? Better than—"

"Oh, you're hateful!" she sobbed, suddenly giving way to tears. "How could you put me in such a position? Either way I'm disgraced. There's no escape!"

"There has been no escape from that danger since the moment you ran away," he told her. "It will only make things vastly worse to confess the deception now. Your only chance is to bluff this thing through with me. I thought it all out before I agreed to it, you may be sure."

She shook the tears from her eyes and faced him proudly, defiantly.

"Yes, that's true. I'll be disgraced forever if I tell. Nobody will believe anything but the worst of me. But I'll know better. I'll know that I've done nothing wrong. And I'd rather have that knowledge than gain protection from scandal at the price of knowing that I have—have done something of which to be—to be ashamed."

He was very patient. "My dear girl, there's no question of being ashamed or of wrong-doing," he said. "If we hap-

pen to occupy the same room, it doesn't require us to be sinners unless we choose, does it? I've tried to protect you throughout this affair, and I'm not going to change my course now—you may be quite sure of that."

She stared at him. Then her eyes wandered about the room desperately, as if seeking an escape from the hopeless situation. "But—but—but," she stammered helplessly, "you can't—you can't possibly stay here—"

He smiled. "Why not? I've often spent weeks at a time in native huts where the whole family ate and slept in the same room. I don't see the difference, except that this room is considerably larger and happens to be equipped with a comfortable couch on which I shall sleep vastly better than I used to on the clay floor of the native *chozo*. I know it's a bit difficult for you—you've been brought up to confuse appearances with facts—but you'll find it's not so bad. Come—you've trusted me pretty far already; trust me a little farther."

She studied him. What she read in his frank eyes seemed to reassure her. Her own ceased to be wide with fright and gradually brightened. "You—you don't think I'm—I'm a bad woman, then?" she asked softly. "You don't imagine that because I ran away to get married and then ran away from the man, I'm—I'm the kind of girl that doesn't care—"

He laughed outright at her earnestness, but there was a touch of sympathy and admiration in his mirth. "My dear child, I don't think anything about it—I *know* what you are. And it's because I do know it that I'm trying so hard to shield you from the consequences of your recklessness. You can't fancy that this sort of thing is exactly pleasant for me, can you?"

"Isn't it?" She surveyed him in patient surprise. "I—I thought all men would—" She flushed under his swiftly-changing gaze and could not finish her

sentence. He was silent for a moment before he answered, his voice almost tender.

"Your ideas are partially sound," he said. "All men—including me—are instinctively brutes. A cad would revel in this situation, because his instincts and his intentions would agreeably coincide. A gentleman—and you remember that I endeavor to be one so far as in me lies—a gentleman must strangle those same brute instincts by sheer force of will. It's not exactly pleasant for me."

She was instantly penitent. "Forgive me—I didn't understand. I thought that either you didn't intend to—to strangle those—those instincts, or else you didn't find me worth getting excited about. I see how you feel now, and I'm sorry, and more grateful than I can tell you."

He turned his back on her abruptly. It dawned upon him suddenly that she was vastly more alluring than he had thought; that as she stood there, her face flushed with her emotions, her eyes innocent and admiring, the artless admission that it mattered to her to know that he did not find her unalluring still on her lips, the temptation to fling scruples to the winds and sweep her into his arms was all but overpowering. He foresaw a difficult fortnight before their enterprise should succeed.

"We'll have to get used to the idea of using this room together," he said tonelessly, after a pause. "Can you—manage without the lamp? It will be easier if we can make the darkness serve as a wall."

"Of course." But there was a touch of regret in her voice as she assented. He quickly extinguished the light and crossed to the window, so that she might see him, silhouetted vaguely against the dim illumination which penetrated the shade from the street-lamps outside. Standing there in the gloom, he could hear the faint whisper of fabrics as she made ready for the night, the sound of her brush as she arranged her hair, the

soft thud of her pumps on the rug. He clenched his hands fiercely. It was going to be worse than his apprehensions had painted it—this fortnight of pretense.

"Here—here are some blankets." He heard the fall of a bare foot close behind him as the words came timidly to his ears, and turned to accept the burden. Their hands touched as he took it, and a sharp, electric thrill sped along his taut nerves at the accidental contact. He caught her own indrawn gasp and knew that she shared, to an extent, the tension which held him rigid as though with a paralysis of all his muscles.

"Thanks," he said hoarsely. "Good night."

"Good night." He heard her patter across the room to her bed and then the involuntary gasp as she slipped between the cold linen sheets. For a long time he continued to stand at the window, holding his bundle of blankets in his arms and struggling with the impulses which most sharply produce the nice distinction between a man and a brute. Then, removing his outer clothing, lest its appearance suffer from nocturnal usage, he wrapped the blankets about him and flung himself down on the couch, to lie awake until the gray light of the morning came through the eastern windows. Only then did he venture so much as a glance toward the sleeping girl.

She was utterly adorable in the artless innocence of sleep, her dark hair framing the oval of her face against the background of pillows, one rounded arm lying above the coverlet, her cheek resting on the palm of the other hand. It came upon him, in that moment of understanding, that this was the one woman of his life, the one woman who had made it unthinkable that there should be another in the wide world for him. And in the same instant he knew that, for all the empty formality of it, she would not be his so long as even the emptiest of formalities bound her to the

scoundrel she had technically married. When she woke he had gone, to face the clumsy witticisms of Uncle Henry, another early riser, concerning the bad taste of bridegrooms whose thoughts turned ungallantly toward the buckwheat cakes of breakfast.

"I wish you'd fix things up so as to stay right here in Deptford, Ed. Why, the wagon works would be a regular mint if you'd just take charge! I never thought there was a chance of selling the Hinkle Cart abroad till you up and proved it. Eight thousand dollars' worth of 'em in two weeks! Think of it!"

Uncle Henry Hinkle looked up from the sheaf of export orders to beam approval on his newest nephew. He was not in the habit of praising without more than due cause. Sinton had earned the approval, and more. It had been a relief to plunge into the task of enlightening his supposititious brothers-in-law on certain simple mysteries of export during his forced sojourn in Deptford, and luck had favored him. A huge commission house in New York had discovered in the Hinkle Cart exactly what its foreign clients needed, and Uncle Henry was already deep in plans for the speedy enlargement of the factory which was one of the several family enterprises.

"I wish I could," said Sinton, "but it's quite impossible, I'm afraid. I've got too much to do elsewhere." He made the excuse mechanically, but its falsity almost amused him. Except for his "wages" from Ethel—which he was firmly resolved not to accept—he would leave Deptford penniless and jobless, to resume the struggle for sustenance with only a new trouble to reward his efforts in the girl's behalf. For the knowledge which had come to him in that first night had deepened as the days went by and more wakeful nights of vain longing followed on their heels. It had become an endless pain merely to see the girl as she went about the old house at

her resumed housewifely duties, to hear the voice which had become so strangely musical in his ears, to meet the eyes which glanced at him ever and again with something of his own desire mirrored in their depths. And the nights were nightmares—endless hours of struggle against his surging love for her, broken by intervals of sleep in which she haunted his dreams.

"Well, I suppose that's so," Uncle Henry was saying regretfully. "Couldn't hardly expect a business-man like you to tie himself down in a town like Deptford. If it would do any good, I'd offer you a third interest in the works to stay on and run 'em for us. Ethel's got a third, anyway, and I'd hang on to the other for all I'm worth, with you in control. Why don't you think it over?"

Sinton knew that a third interest in the concern would mean an income far beyond anything he might hope to earn for years to come; he knew that he could build up the sales so that the works would make him rich before he was ready to retire. But he could not reach out to grasp the opportunity which chance flung in his way. For him there was no possibility of remaining in Deptford—Ethel had put that out of the question. There could be no means of clearing up the impossible situation so that he could stay. It was inconceivable that he should go on enduring the torture of her nearness, of the mockery of marriage in which he spent the endless nights. There was no help for it; as soon as Ethel had control of her money, they must go—and separate. Sometimes he thought of that separation as a desert wanderer dreams of a cooling spring—it seemed as though anything must be preferable to the agony of denied desire. But nearly always he dreaded it even more than he dreaded the present. The thought of losing her was harder to face now than the thought of living with her, yet apart from her.

"I'll talk it over with Ethel," he said

at last. "By the way, I suppose you're satisfied as to—as to my intentions and motives, by this time?"

Uncle Henry chuckled. "I'm not saying a word about that till after you've talked it over with Ethel. Maybe I could keep you here by refusing to let her have her own way. You see her about it and let me know."

Sinton contrived to smile. For all the old man's banter, he knew the fight was won, the task accomplished. Ethel's uncle trusted him more than enough now to turn over the girl's money to her. And he might go when he chose—the torture of being near to her and yet barred from her need not endure for another day, if he so willed. He rose and left the office. For the rest of the afternoon he wandered along the bleak roads, fighting his battle with himself. He could not make up his mind to go on with the hideous farce of pretending to be married to the girl he wanted with every fibre of his being; still less could he decide to put her altogether from his life. When he came home for the supper to which Uncle Henry still clung instead of the modern institution of an evening dinner, he was still undecided. And Ethel's bridelike welcome only added to his doubt. Somehow he endured the evening. It seemed an age before Ethel bade her uncle good night and waved a hand to her husband. When they were alone together he made up his mind to speak, but he could not.

"I need the light, Edgar," she said as he would have extinguished it. "I can't fix my hair properly unless I can see."

He made no comment. His back toward her, he stared at the wall. He *would* not turn, not even when she called his name—called it in a tone which set his pulses throbbing giddily.

"Well?" His tone was almost gruff. There was a slight pause, and her voice was hurt when she spoke again:

"You—you don't care the least little bit, do you?"

He could scarcely credit his senses. She actually wanted him to care! She was actually trying to break down the wall of reserve which he had built about his love at such sore cost to himself! Poor innocent! She knew no better—she did not dream how turbulent those emotions could be once they escaped control. He must be wise for them both.

"I didn't undertake to do that, did I?" he asked flippantly. "I've kept my part of the bargain, haven't I? You can get your money whenever you want it."

There was silence behind him. He waited a long time for her answer, his nerves braced to resist the insidious influence of her hurt tone. But no word came from her. He wondered if she had heard him rightly. Suddenly her hand came before his eyes, holding a sheaf of bills.

"I've had my money for a week," she said, her voice void of emotion. "Here is what I owe you. You've earned it."

He was stunned. "A week!" he gasped. "Then, why—why didn't you tell me?"

"That doesn't matter now, does it? Take the money—it's yours."

He found himself on his feet, facing her, and in that first glimpse he forgot everything on earth except the one overwhelming thought that above all else he wanted this woman for his own, that for her he would exchange everything he hoped to own or be—even his claim to gentlemanly estate. For her he would make himself a contemptible cad, a cur, a bounder; for her he would damn his soul. His eyes drank her in as the drunkard drains his glass. Her dusky hair about her shoulders, her slender throat bare, the beauty of her intoxicated him like some subtle stimulating drug. Without conscious volition, his arms went about her, crushing her to him, his lips raining eager kisses on her hair, her eyes, her yielding, receptive lips.

"And I thought you didn't care!" The

words were almost reverent, for all the smile upon the lips that spoke them—the lips that seemed made for kisses. He laughed—the mad, desperate laugh of the man who has fought his battle against himself and lost.

“So you kept still about the money to find out, eh? You wanted to see if I wouldn’t—*care*, before you let me go! Well, you’ve found out! You’ve discovered that I’m only human, after all—that all my fine talk about being able to behave like a gentleman was nothing but talk! And what’s to be the end of it all? This can’t go on! We can’t stay on here, pretending to be married! Your husband is sure to turn up—”

He broke off to stare at her in blank surprise. She was laughing—laughing like a roguish child! “What—what’s the matter?”

“You warned me not to jump at conclusions once,” she said happily. “Take your own medicine, dear. I never told you that I was married! You assumed it, and I let you think so, but I’m not—unless this masquerade of ours has mar-

ried me to you. I meant to marry that horrible man, but the moment I saw him I knew I couldn’t. I ran away from him ten minutes after I met him. But I’d burned my bridges. I—I couldn’t go back without a husband after the letter I’d left behind me. And some blessed accident of chance brought me you!”

He was speechless. He could only hold her fast, trying to believe that this impossible thing had actually happened to him, that he was not to lose her, after all, that she was truly his. Against his shoulder she whispered softly:

“We can run off somewhere and be married quietly, you know. I suppose it would be better. Isn’t it queer, though? All my life I’ve thought it was the ceremony that counted!” She laughed a little. “And now it seems as though it really doesn’t matter a bit. I—I know, down in my heart, that I’ve been married to you for weeks!”

He found his tongue at last. “Weeks!” he repeated scornfully. “From before the beginning, dear! And until after the end!”



ALIEN

By Adam Hull Shirk

YOU are the daughter of another race,
 Dark as the mantle of a desert night.
 My Saxon blood drives blushes to my face
 When round your neck my arms gleam, silver white.
 Yours is the passion of the hot simoons
 That gather all the heat of sun-baked sands;
 Beneath your close-clung kiss my spirit swoons
 And lays my heart, a snared bird, in your hands.

You hold me subject to your passion’s will—
 My lips the well to slake your fever’s fire
 As at some lost oasis Arabs fill
 Their water-skins against the desert’s ire.
 So would I hold you to the luring brink
 Of my calm northern love, nor let you roam
 Afield, for then your wild desire to drink
 My cooling kiss would make my arms your home.

RESTITUTION

By Charles Henkle

"**F**UNNY you should have called Peter Huntley a miser," commented young Phelps, forcing his way into the circle about the blazing log-fire. "Not that he isn't," he hastened to add, as one or two attempted interruption, "but it's peculiar that you should be talking of it now."

"What's the story?" asked Hoadley. The others hitched forward their chairs and gave ear.

"Nothing much. I met Huntley downtown this evening just after dark. He had just picked up a newspaper that some man had dropped, and was reading it under the glare of a corner light. He joined me, and we walked down the avenue. His clothes were threadbare—as usual.

"At the corner of Corning Avenue a woman accosted us and asked for alms. She was—oh, thirty-five maybe, but she looked sixty. A human wreck, at the very bottom rung of the ladder. She had a bundle in her arms—to fool people into thinking it was a baby. And Huntley—the miser, the dollar-squeezer"—Phelps paused for dramatic effect—"handed her a crisp, new five-dollar bill!"

Silence fell on the circle. Then Donovan laughed derisively. "You've been drinking," he asserted. "Huntley would sell his immortal soul for five dollars."

Peter Huntley finished the frugal meal prepared by himself for himself in his musty, ill-furnished bedroom. He raised the wick of the lamp slightly, begrudging even the tiny additional waste of oil, and drew from a desk-drawer six bank-books. Huntley kept his money in six banks—for safety's sake.

He smiled contentedly at the list of deposits appearing in their columns. Then he frowned.

"That five dollars might have gone in there, too," he mourned.

He lowered the light again, and placed the bank-books away affectionately, tenderly. Then he doffed his clothes and climbed into the rickety cot in the corner. And as he lay there he remembered the girl of his youth: his love for her, their elopement, their month together—and then the brutal way in which he had deserted her, without ever having gone through the formality of a marriage ceremony.

He had almost forgotten her—until to-night. The wreck to whom he had given five dollars was the girl of long ago!

"Five dollars!" He sighed wearily. Then a new thought struck him. He smiled contentedly as he turned on his side. "At last," he muttered, "I can sleep in peace. I have made restitution."



A MAN OF AFFAIRS

By Nellie Cravey Gillmore

THE girl's lips parted tragically. A dull horror gathered slowly in her wide, blue eyes. Her round, boyish face, framed in a mass of close-cropped, jet curls, whitened from throbbing throat to blue-veined temples. She leaned forward suddenly in her chair, her tense hands clasped about her trembling knees, her gaze never leaving the smug, complacent face of the man who, finishing his dissertation, sat smiling indulgently as he puffed languid spirals of smoke toward the ceiling. From time to time, he carelessly flicked the ash from his stogie, and glanced appraisingly at its glowing tip. At last he resumed:

"Now, there's not a bit of use of your flying off the track like this, Carmena. You're no infant, or ingénue. You're not even 'young and inexperienced,' as the writer-folk put it. You're twenty-seven, and you have been on the stage eight years. You've known life as it is in the drama, if you have not lived it personally. You—"

She halted him with a gesture of repugnance. "Those are all flimsy arguments, Dudley. Because a woman is an actress is no sign that she is not still—a woman. Because I have delineated the crucial side of life before the footlights does not signify that I have assimilated its wantonness. The fact that I have witnessed sorrow and misery in some of its blackest phases is no reason why I should be fortified against its encroachment upon my own life. I admit that I have been a fool—most women in love act the part, one way or another. I loved you, and believed in you. Until I met

you, my record was without spot or blemish. A man of the world and of affairs, you understood perfectly how to handle me. I was swept off my feet by your dominant love-making and your subtle phrases, and you found me in my trust and malleability an easy victim. That I did not meet you on the accepted grounds of a vulgar liaison, you, who are a past master in the art of *amours*, know, and you also know that in no word or deed did you indicate to me your belief in my knowledge of the true character of your intentions. On the contrary you spoke of our 'future,' of children, of—of all the things one would associate with an honorable life, and under the spell of my love for you I gave all—and you took all. Had I never made the slip, how would the affair have terminated, I wonder! As it is—and if the love you profess is genuine—does the fact of our error exonerate either of us from our obligations?"

Berrington flung his cigar into the grate and fitted his long, curving fingers together, tip by tip. A show of *sang-froid* was essential to render his words effective. He shrugged.

"Obligations?" He laughed, as though in relish of a huge joke. "My dear young lady, as regards the relations of men and women, that word has long since skidded from our vocabulary. Your sex has demonstrated its ability, through its desire, to stand side by side, shoulder to shoulder, with ours. The responsibility is mutual. If we're to be good sports, we must take a chance. To prove our ginger, we must be game losers—eh?"

Despite the rein she had upon herself, Carmena's lips trembled.

"Then, it was only a gamble—with marked cards?" she said slowly, a harsh note creeping into her voice. "You never really—cared?"

"Cared? Of course I did—and I do. I'm quite fond of you, you little Irish rose! But I'm not a marrying man. Believe me, the yoke of matrimony is iron and wormwood combined; the marriage-couch is the death-bed of romance. Why spoil our happiness by continued references to the prosaic, the impossible?"

The girl fell back in her chair, her hands outspread upon the great, flat arms, the flickering glare of the pink and yellow fire falling mockingly upon her still, set features. There were no tears, no sighs; only a dead coldness, realization freezing to despair.

Berrington stretched himself, smiled, reached over, and laid a soft, sinuous hand on her knee. "Come, come, little girl! Away with dull care! The baby Delft up there says half-past seven. I've tickets in my pocket for 'The Blue Bird,' and the show begins at eight-thirty. Get into your things and—"

But Carmena flung off his touch with a gesture of loathing, and sat upright, stiffening of a sudden from the diminutive tips of her bronze slippers to the crown of her shining curls. Her words came with a brittle snap, absolutely devoid of their old mellowness, their erstwhile tenderness and appeal.

"It is all over, *all over*, do you understand? I can't go on this way. I *won't*. I see my mistake in all its naked hideousness. The time to recoup has come. I'm going to begin right now. I'm going to blot this week out of my life forever—erase every memory—and start again with a clean slate. If, as you say, it is all a game, then I shall play straight from now on. It's the only way to win in the long run. You can't get away with cheating always."

Berrington's brows went up, and some of the florid color faded from his face. He gazed at her curiously, with a touch of apprehension. The affair was but seven days old, and satiety had not yet begun its process of conversion. He was fond of the girl, and the prospect of losing her so soon affected him disagreeably. He rose and went to the back of her chair, letting his hands slip down till they encircled her velvet chin.

"Carmena," he pleaded, "don't you love me? How can you be so merciless? Does the past count for nothing? Are you going to leave me like this?"

A wild little laugh broke from her lips. She jerked herself out of his reach, rose, and faced him. Her eyes were luminous with suppressed fire; crimson blazed in her cheeks.

"If my love means so much to you," she said passionately, "there is a way for you to keep it. The past, as you put it, has its place, without a doubt; but the future has a bigger one. It is in the future we must live. But for my own part, I intend that that living shall be right. I shall willingly, gladly, forget every horrible thing you have said if, as a man of honor, you wish to help me retrieve—"

"Poppycock, Carmena! If I'd listened to all such twaddle that's been dished out to me, I'd have Brigham Young skinned alive. I told you I was not a marrying man. I tried that once, and I got an overdose. Prunella obligingly divorced me, convinced herself of the truth of my arguments: that matrimony was the crucifixion of sentiment. Afterwards she died, leaving a fair young daughter whom I have wisely kept penned up in a convent in Switzerland these past ten years. If I were a 'man of honor,' the type you designate, I should have proceeded immediately to make Carlotta and Helen and Mazie and the whole endless string of them my wives in turn. Some of them were sensible—like myself—and we parted amic-

ably; others, not so sensible, are, I presume, still engaged in devising schemes for my destruction as promised, or have discreetly gone on to other—things. While I love, I love deeply and exclusively. But it were far better to part from dear ones with sweet recollections than to hang on only to witness the inevitable corrosion of our ideals and feel the disintegration of cherished illusions. Therefore, loveliest of women, let us separate while the charm of our affection is fresh and beautiful. The desolation will be hard to bear; but it could not be so cruel as the disillusion which would certainly follow if we acted otherwise."

Carmena stood by the mantel, the pink flesh of her bare arm pressed against the sharp edge. A contemptuous little smile twisted her lips, scarlet as peonies.

"If you are finished," she observed coolly, "I must ask you for about two minutes in which to settle a little business proposition. May I proceed?"

Berrington bowed and dropped easily into his chair.

Carmena crossed the floor, a silken swish of rose-colored draperies making music about her, and paused before a small, rosewood *escritoire*. She turned the key and took from a compartment a neatly-bound packet. This she placed in Berrington's hands.

"You will find there an amount sufficient to cover my expenses for the past week. Most of the jewels you have given me are in the bank. I will get them to-morrow, and, together with what I have here, forward them to you at once. Now you may go."

Berrington opened his lips by way of protest, but his furtive eyes caught the glitter in hers, and he compromised on a rather stupid little nod. He got up and straightened his tie before the mantel mirror. Carmena went into the ante-room and returned with his fur coat and green Alpine. He took them from

her in silence, with an awkwardness that was new to him. He stole surreptitious glances toward her, but they told him nothing. She seemed as passive, as immobile, as stone. Only her eyes hinted emotion, and that was indefinable.

He drew on his coat and buttoned it up. Hat in hand, he walked toward the door. On the threshold he turned.

"Good-by," he said.

"Good-by," she answered.

The months that followed were none too savory ones for Dudley Berrington, man of affairs. Business took a discouraging slump. Some of his investments proved worthless. He suffered an acute attack of inflammatory rheumatism, and the long hours of confinement told upon his nerves. His dissipations had weakened his powers of resistance, and he brooded.

Furthermore, he missed Carmena. The little actress had made more of a dent in his life than was usually the case with his *affaires de cœur*. He admitted the fact reluctantly, though he explained it on the ground that their relations had ended almost as soon as they had begun. He had enjoyed only a taste of this last *amour*, whereas, as a rule, he was accustomed to glut himself upon the fruit of his desires before tossing away the empty rind. He had neither seen nor heard of her since the night of their parting. And he wondered—many things.

To add to the stress, a letter came from Switzerland, informing him of his daughter's graduation in June, following which, according to previous arrangement, she would leave for America. A nunnish girl of eighteen! What in the world would he do with her? She would, of course, have to come to her father's home to live—there was no alternative; but such a contingency filled Berrington with forebodings. It meant that there would have to be a complete change in his mode of living; a giving-

up of his fast friends, and the renunciation of most of the pleasures with which he had filled his life.

As the weeks went on, he experienced greater and greater depression and apprehension. When the day of her arrival rolled around, it was only by a tremendous effort of the will, grown flabby from lack of exercise, that he screwed himself up to face the ordeal. There was one thing, at least, to be thankful for: for the first time in twenty years he was free from feminine entanglement. Since Carmena had gone so abruptly out of his life, no other woman had entered it. That, however, was merely accidental, or the result of absorbing conditions. His solitary estate was bound to be only temporary; life devoid of the stimulus of a fair companion would be as flat as a long-opened bottle of champagne. Yet how could he manage with Isabel in the house to question his goings and comings, perhaps to make unlimited demands upon his time and attention, and to be unconsciously the censor of his very morals?

One glance at her unsophisticated face spelt the obliteration of all his dreams, rang the death-knell of his last hope. She flung her arms about his neck as she stepped from the gang-plank and kissed him in the effusive way she had imbibed from her French associates.

"Why—why, you're so *young*, Father dear!" she exclaimed. His unexpected youthfulness obsessed her, and she recurred to the topic after they had reached the house and were seated before the drawing-room fire to await dinner. "Why, I always thought of you as an old, old man," she said, her round eyes traveling over him in innocent wonderment. "I had no idea! And such a good-looking daddy, too; so fine and straight, with little tufts of white at the temples, so like the charming *padre*!"

Berrington flushed under her praise; her frank admiration pleased him, although her naïveté sent a frightened

chill down his spine. If she were less candid, not so ingenuous, how much easier it would be to handle her!

"I'm no end delighted you're so pleased, my dear. I—I was uneasy lest you'd be disappointed here, cut off from your companions and shut up in this great old house with only the servants. My time is—er—very much taken up with my affairs, and I fear you'll be lonely—"

"Never that in all these lovely surroundings!" she cut in enthusiastically, a bewitching little foreign accent in her speech. "I shall find plenty to be busy at. And my father's friends—they must be mine—yes?" She perched on his knee and smiled merrily with her bright gray eyes into his sober gray ones.

"Certainly, certainly; we shall find you plenty of friends, my child. It wouldn't do at all for you to be dull. And sometimes we'll attend the theatre, the opera—"

Isabel clapped her hands in glee. "Glorious!" she cried. "I'm just crazy for the opera. I've been only twice in my life. But now—!" Her eyes gave an ecstatic upward roll as panoramic visions of what was to come flashed luridly before her mental vision, and she fell to singing a gay little Parisian air, fiddling the while with the buttons on her father's coat or playing with the curls that clustered about his ears. Every little while she interrupted herself to chirp delightedly over some fresh discovery her eager eyes fastened upon: the beautiful tinted and frescoed walls, so unlike the drab ones of the convent; the wonderful old paintings that garnished them; the king's ransom in rugs that covered the polished floors; the exquisite bric-à-brac.

Berrington began to breathe more easily. She was an enthusiast; it would be a simple matter to provide her with interests that would engross her attention and thus allow him his accustomed freedom.

Dinner was presently announced, and they got through their meal without a hitch. Isabel rhapsodized over the cuisine, praised the rare china, and had her first taste of wine. The last brought a sparkle to her eyes and carnations to her cheeks. Berrington reflected what an exceedingly pretty girl she was. He was conscious of a stir of fatherly pride.

There was nothing of her mother about the girl, except, perhaps, her *petite* figure. Her features and her coloring and her vivacity were all Berrington. She was witty and demure by turns. Prunella had been neither—just practical and sober. Isabel's father heaved a sigh of relief; how accommodating his wife had been to remove herself from their lives! A woman like her would have cramped the child's development, stunted her mental growth, destroyed her youthful exuberance. Curiously enough, before the end of the first day, and in direct contradiction of his former feelings, Berrington found himself taking a deep interest in his stranger-daughter and formulating plans for her future.

As the days came and went, his interest increased. Her companionship, while it lacked the *verve* and sparkle of the "other kind," was distinctly refreshing. She came out wonderfully, under his painstaking tutelage. He was most careful in the selection of the guests he invited to their home, and he saw to it that she lacked for nothing in the way of entertainment (of the right kind), spending-money, and a wardrobe of costliness and elegance. They became close friends.

But there were times when the conventionality palled upon Berrington. The diet of decent living was wholesome enough, he mused inwardly, but what he wanted was an occasional dash of tabasco to fire his jaded pulses. He sighed for the white lights and the gay cabaret. He pined for the clinging arms of fair women, their sentient glances, their provocative lips. His longing took

the form of obsession, and he began to absent himself oftener and for longer intervals from home. He framed ready lies, which were unquestioningly believed by his gullible daughter.

And Isabel, left much to herself, did not want for excitement. She had a *penchant* for making friends, and she possessed a spirit of adventure and the Berrington temperament. She began to meet persons outside the list of those prescribed by her father. She went on madcap expeditions, and enjoyed thrilling escapades; and she kept her mouth shut. Finally, she fell in love. Knowing that her father would never consent to her marrying an actor, she made her plans to elope.

And so, one night, returning late from a supper at one of the wilder semi-Bohemian restaurants, Berrington was greeted by the maid with the tidings of his daughter's disappearance. She had left no note, no explanation. She was just—gone. Her room was in disorder, the bed untouched. There could be no thought of foul play; there was every indication of prearranged departure.

Berrington collapsed.

Detectives were set to work on the case, and advertisements inserted in all the papers.

The morning's post brought a letter. Propped up in bed, his face haggard and colorless, Berrington broke the seal with shaking fingers. The handwriting was familiar, but for a moment he could not place it, although, as he read on, realization forced its way gradually to his dull brain.

Wednesday evening.

Thinking that perhaps you would be interested to learn the whereabouts of your daughter, I am dropping you these few lines to let you know. She eloped a few hours ago with my brother. They took passage on the *Platonie*, for Liverpool. I brought them together. I met your daughter one afternoon in the green-room, after a *matinée*. She fell for Bertie at once; and, recalling what you have said about love and happiness and all those things, I did all I could to help along their romance.

No doubt you will be pleased to learn that there was no marriage ceremony—this according to your code of ethics. Like yourself, Bertie is not a "marrying man," and Isabel, like yourself, is sport enough to take a chance. Will you join me in wishing them good luck?
Carmena.

The paper fluttered from Berrington's nerveless hands to the floor. He buried his face in the bed-covering and cried like a baby.

A week passed. Berrington, the skeleton of his former self, had been helped out of bed to a chair by the window. He sat there gazing mechanically out at the sun-baked pavements and the flowers on the lawn, drooping and wilting in the sultry, midsummer sun. His breathing was labored, and his hands rested, limp and cold, on his knees. His sunken eyes were tense with the only real agony he had ever known.

Suddenly there came a tentative rap on his apartment door. He called a weak "Come in," and the footman entered with a card.

Berrington accepted it absently and glanced at the name.

MISS CARMENA AYLWARD

"Let her come up," he said eagerly. A faint dash of red showed beneath the pallor of his cheeks; his eyes brightened. Perhaps she had news for him! Anything were better than this anguish of waiting and hoping; he *did* hope, though, after all, what was there to hope for?

He held out a trembling hand as she came into the room; but Carmena either did not or would not see it. She pulled up a chair and sat facing him, an exultant light gleaming in her blue eyes. She smiled grimly.

"So you have suffered!" she remarked.

"You don't need my word for it, Carmena; you have only to look at me."

A gleam of cruelty, not unmixed with

pity, crossed the woman's face. She sank back in her chair and began to draw off her gloves, her eyes going past him now to the glimpse of sky that showed through the open window. Her lips relaxed into a smile. Still she did not speak.

Berrington stared at her miserably. "Why did you come here? What have you to tell me?" he demanded at last.

"I came to ascertain for myself just what the result has been, and to tell you the truth," she replied, answering both of his questions in an absolutely calm voice.

The transitory color fled from his face. "Then, for God's sake, don't delay! Don't you see I'm in *hell*? Has anything—happened?"

Carmena made a little disdainful gesture, and her lips tightened. She looked at him intently for a moment, then began quietly to speak:

"I shall begin at the beginning. Naturally, I had some curiosity to meet your daughter, *your* daughter," she reiterated significantly. "I wanted to see what sort of creature it was who owed her being to a—a person like you. She was pointed out to me on the street one day. Afterwards I saw her in a box at the theatre where I was playing. She came there regularly for weeks to see me; you see, I was quick to sense the impression I'd made. Later, when she visited the green-room, I was glad to make her acquaintance. Our—friendship—ripened quickly.

"It was not long before I discovered she was the sentimental sort, full of temperament, and as reckless as—well, let us say, as yourself. I saw where she was headed, and so I hit upon a scheme. I began to make mad love to her. *She thought I was a man*—I had been playing the part of an Irish sailor-boy. The others helped along the joke. The affair progressed furiously. I left no art, no wile, unemployed to win her, body and soul. She responded with all your

own subtleties, Dudley—a natural inheritance, I suppose. But all the while, I could tell she was as innocent as a lamb. If it hadn't been I, it would have been some other 'man'—a real one. She was ripe for the occasion. And she would have gone straight to perdition at a lover's bidding.

"Oh, I played my cards well, I assure you, with all the art and finesse of the skilled gambler. I had been taught the rules of the game, and I knew the winning hands. I wove every fascination I could devise about her till I had her in my toils. I told her finally that there was an insurmountable barrier to our marriage, but asked her if she cared enough to give herself to me without the tie. She said she did. And the elopement was planned.

"I had made arrangements to have a wireless sent to me aboard the ship just after it had left the harbor, recalling me on important business. I explained to Isabel that I was compelled to leave her, but that I would follow on the next steamer. I assured her that her return to New York with me would spell disaster to all our hopes. I caught the pilot-boat back, and—"

Berrington was quivering like an aspen. His face was still pale to grayness, but the tense lines had left it, giving place to an expression of unutterable relief. When he spoke his voice was hoarse and tremulous.

"Thank God!" he said. "And you did all this—why, Carmena? Because you loved me—or because you hated me?"

"Neither. I did it to save her from my own tragic fate—and to teach you a lesson. I wished you to suffer all the pangs of retribution for your sins, without the innocent being injured to accomplish it. I believe I have succeeded; and that in so doing I have also saved many another innocent woman from your clutches. I have just one thing to thank you for, Dudley, and that is—for showing me the truth before it was too late;

for giving me the chance to snatch back my slipping womanhood before the gutter had sucked it down past recovery."

A slow flush mounted to Berrington's cheek-bones; his eyes glowed with a sudden flash, like the light of other days.

Carmena caught herself together and met his gaze impassively.

He jerked his chair forward and attempted to get possession of her hands, but she deliberately put them behind her, and resumed speaking where she had left off a moment before:

"You will, of course, take whatever steps you see fit toward bringing your daughter home. But I demand one thing, and your own common-sense will make you agree to it: she must never know of the deception. Let her believe she was tricked by her lover. It will sober her and cure her of her folly. Do you understand—and promise?"

Berrington nodded. "Yes," he said gravely; "it shall be as you say. I will do anything you ask, Carmena. You are quite wonderful to me. I always felt that there was something superior about you. I have bitterly regretted our parting, for—I have always loved you. Will you not forgive the past and be my wife?" Again he tried to take her hands, and again she moved them out of his reach.

She rose and stood looking down at him for a long minute. Then she shook her head slowly. "All that is over, Dudley. Those fires consumed me, quite—long ago. There are only ashes here now." Her hand touched above her heart for a fleeting second, then fell listlessly to her side. She smiled a trifle wistfully.

"Good-by," she said.

Berrington, a sudden accession of new strength firing him, leaped from his chair and followed her to the door.

"Carmena! For God's sake—" But the words were cut short by the shutting-to of the door. And in that instant Berrington knew that he was beaten.

Outside, the woman buried her convulsed face in her hands. A quiver racked her slender body. After all, she had cared—very deeply. But it was too late. She flung up her head and con-

jured a brave smile to the face set unflinchingly toward the future.

She had pledged herself to a lifework of uplift for the grief-stricken and the fallen; and she meant to stick.



THE LOVE-ROOST

By Thomas Grant Springer

ON the benches in the park after dark,
 Where the city swains and misses
 With hand-holdings and with kisses
 Do their mooning and their spooning in the park.

In the corner 'neath the palm's fantastic shade
 You may often think you see a lonely maid;
 Do not linger for romance,
 Beat it while you have a chance—
 It's a date some other burly fellow made.

For the shopgirl and the drayman
 Have not notions like the layman,
 And convention does not stand in Cupid's way;
 For the arc-light is the moon
 Where the city lovers spoon
 And pluck feathers from Love's wing where'er they may.



LOVE should not be too lenient: the love that endures is the love that always questions, often forgives, and sometimes forgets.



SMITHIA MIRABILIS

By Richard Irving Carson

"YES, mister, they all do," said Doctor Leal, and Smith looked down into the plaza. "From the Governor down," added the Doctor, smiling.

Smith gazed for some minutes with the eager interest that afflicts strangers in Portuguese West Coast towns. The saturnine men in spotless white suits, the muscular native porters, the brightly clad women ranging in color from—well, not quite white, to ebony—it was so new.

All of Smith's training and his mother's puritan blood surged for an instant to the front.

"No," said he shortly.

"Well—but won't you see her, anyway?"

The other hesitated. Then thoughts of the girl in England who had jilted him at her mother's word—and perhaps of other things—flew across his mind. And he was young, and he had been ill, and he didn't drink, and it was—Africa. And, besides, he was determined to be reckless and to play the part expected of him.

"All right," he acquiesced, with a sort of shamefaced and hard little laugh.

The Doctor threw open the door behind him and motioned Smith to enter.

"What—is she here?" the surprised man gasped.

"Why, yes," returned the other, a mischievous smile on his face.

There was no hope for it now, and Smith entered the room.

The afternoon was as hot and luxurious as it can be only in West Africa, and Joaquina, tired of the long wait, had improved the time by indulging in a

siesta. As the door opened, letting a flood of light into the room, she half rose from the bed, her embroidered *panno*, or shoulder robe, falling from her. With wide eyes heavy with sleep, she gazed at the tall man before her, for a moment unconscious of her bare breasts and wondrous arms. Then with a tiny laugh, and a shrug of shoulders as perfect as Clytie's, she gathered her cloth under her armpits and stayed it above her bosom with the deft half-knot that she had learned in childhood from her mother. She then stood up and looked at him proudly, her face and neck dully flushed, as if conscious (of what was the fact) that through her father the blood of duchesses flowed in her veins.

The Doctor was standing behind Smith.

"As I was saying—" he resumed in his slow voice.

"She shall go with me," interrupted Smith thickly. He was not playing a part now.

The other smiled again.

"*Está bem,*" he murmured to himself with a little sigh—whether of satisfaction or regret, it is impossible to say. Perhaps memories of the hundreds of young men arriving on the coast (how many of them now lying in the white cemetery north of the town!), to whom, during twenty years, he had given similar advice, crossed his mind. Perhaps he did not even believe in the advice, but—well, one must live; and doctors who gave different advice rarely stayed their year out. So he merely looked at Smith with the air of one who has just

delivered himself of a valuable bit of disinterested counsel.

The other man seemed to hesitate again. His blood and traditions still questioned; but with another glance at Joaquina, who, no darker than a southern Spaniard, was still standing by the bed with the sleep not yet out of her eyes, his cheeks grew hot, and he said nervously:

"All right, Doctor; you arrange it. I have seen her. When can I start?"

"Oh, you might be off any time now; the fever will not return," answered the other, rising to go. "*Adeus, mister; boa viagem.*"

"Good-by," answered Smith, shaking the proffered hand.

The next day he was lying in a *tepoia*, listening to the patter of his carriers' feet on the path as they swung along. He was *en route* for the interior, and in his caravan went Joaquina.

Stanisland Smith was the naturalist of the Portuguese government in the West African province of Angola. An account of how he chanced to be occupying this position would be too long to include here, but such names as Welwitsch, Burnay, Blandy, Lepierre, and Newton in that part of the world occur oftener in connection with achievements implying energy and ability than do the ancient Portuguese patronyms of Silva, Oliveira, Santos, Sousa, and what not. Suffice it to say that, although a foreigner, Smith was ambitious—first in love (which to him meant the wooing of the Honorable Miss Clare, the second daughter of the late—well, it is not necessary to enter into details here either, farther than to state that the name is one of the oldest in the United Kingdom, and that Miss Clare's mother, the dowager, was horribly scandalized when she learned that a democratic American dared to lift his eyes even to her second daughter).

"God bless us!" exclaimed her ladyship. "I suppose it is all part of the

heathen age we live in—any person thinks he is as good as a duke nowadays. Society is undone. Thank Heaven I shall not live long to see such anarchy! I forbid you to see him again, Clare. I must give orders for his name to be left off the lists of both the hall and the castle. How could Welsmouth have been so careless as to introduce him?"

So the two ladies wrote letters, Miss Clare dutifully conveying her mother's wishes to Smith, and the dowager her own to Lord Welsmouth, who smiled a wry smile and wrote for Smith to call on him, during which call he, as president of the society which is the arbiter and rewarder of scientific endeavor among Anglo-Saxons, proposed an arrangement (eagerly accepted by Smith) that led to the events recorded in the beginning of this narrative.

Once in Ngolo, the point farthest in the interior of the colony, Smith worked more like a fiend than a man; and at the end of his first year he had communications from the secretary of the society, reprints, clippings, a worthless decoration from the Portuguese government, and a personal letter from Lord Welsmouth that made him almost happy for the moment. He (and Joaquina) also had—little Florinda.

Little Florinda with blue eyes and Smith's mother's own bonny flaxen hair! His commission expired at the end of two years, but the government was glad to renew it; and little Florinda grew and played about the pleasant bungalow near the fort, where Smith lived and made his collections and wrote his reports.

One day she came running to him with a flower in her hand.

"See, Tan-Tan" (her queer African reduplication of his lisped name, Stan, which she always applied to him), she demanded. He looked into her merry eyes, and, drawing her to his knee, kissed her. "Look at my flower," she insisted. "I calls it my toad flower."

The man looked languidly at the plant the little girl held toward him. Even a year ago he would have been all keenness and interest over such a discovery. For his wife, exact knowledge of the group to which it evidently belonged assured him that it represented a new genus and family, and probably demanded a revision of the accepted doctrines regarding the relationships of its natural order. Yet even while his practised eye told him so much, he turned listlessly from the specimen as Joaquina entered and resumed by the window her usual task of lace-making. She made lace every day and sold it—against the time when Smith should go home, or she grow old. It is the usual custom in West Africa. From time to time, as her work permitted, she turned her deep eyes to Smith's face and smiled the slow smile of a satisfied southern woman.

It was the old story. Ambition was dead. Only when he turned to look at little Florinda, still standing by his knee, did his face light, and even that had an afterlook of pain.

"Oh, oh," shouted the child with delight, "a soldier man is coming from the fort! Maybe the Senhor Major is sending me another doll."

Not knowing why, Smith sprang up and seized the mail package from the man. He tore open an envelope. The words blurred before his eyes, and he sat gazing at the sheet of paper in his hand, dully seeking to understand the words that seemed to evade him: "Poor Mama is dead. . . . Lord Welsmouth, whom you know, is my guardian. . . . He has consented to my writing you. . . . Oh, Stan, forgive me! I am so lonely. . . ." These and other sentences were trying to reach his heart, now almost as dead as the paper upon which they were written.

The other letters were mostly from various *savants* in Paris, Berlin, and London. One was from his mother. He locked this last in his desk unread.

"Tan-Tan," whispered little Florinda, almost crying, "will there *never* be anything for me?"

Smith looked at her sadly. "No," he said, at length.

The child threw her arms about him and sobbed, and at last the man wept also. Joaquina looked from her lace at them with a gently perplexed gaze.

Finally little Florinda went out, and after a time returned with many more of the strange flowers.

"I brought them so you would not cry any more, Tan-Tan," she said, as she laid them on his table.

Weeks went by as Smith worked on the new specimens. It was the best work of his life, because he dared think of nothing else. When the work was sent off, and the time drew near to hear from the Society concerning it, he fell into the habit of walking down to the fort every morning to see if the mail had arrived. He had never bothered about its irregular arrival before. One morning he was surprised to find the Major talking bad French to a well set-up American.

"*Boulez-vous du café, Monsior?*" he was asking, as Smith came up to the veranda.

"*Si vous—*" began the other, and then jumped up, almost upsetting the little table.

"Why, Stan Smith, you rascal!" he yelled delightedly.

Smith looked at him steadily. Then he said in an emotionless voice:

"Winslow."

"Right you are again, Hamlet," laughed the other boisterously. "You seem to have forgotten how to smile, old man."

"Yes," answered Smith.

"Climate, my dear boy, climate," grinned the newcomer, sitting down again. "However, I'll chirk you up in no time. I've just come up from the coast. You know I'm head of this survey party for the new railroad."

Smith sipped his coffee and said nothing. Winslow rattled on:

"Never dreamed of seeing you, though. Do you know we've never met since we left college? Say, but I'm glad to see you. Knew you were somewhere in West Africa, but this is unexpected luck! By the way, I met some friends of yours in London recently. The honorable Miss—"

"Yes?" Smith leaned across the table.

The other did not notice. "She's just married," he went on.

"Who? Clare?" demanded Smith, with darkened eyes.

"Why, yes, I believe that's her name. Didn't you—" began Winslow, and then, glancing at Smith, stopped suddenly.

"Why, old man, what's the matter?" he asked.

Smith rose and strode towards his house.

"It was all for her," he said over and over to himself.

The Major and his companion finished their coffee in uneasy silence. A shot echoed from the hillside. Both men rose to their feet.

"*Ou est—?*" began the American, but paused.

Little Florinda ran screaming into the enclosure.

"Tan-Tan!" she gasped. "Come!"

Winslow took the child's hand and led her sobbing up the road.

He found Joaquina weeping by the bed, and little Florinda wildly joined her cries. The big, strong man led them very gently from the room. At the door he met a black soldier who saluted and handed him a package of letters. He reentered the room and did the work that was his to do. Then he glanced about the room. On the table was a note. It was addressed to him.

The money in the dispatch-box is for Joaquina [it read]. Send my scientific papers to Lord Welsmouth—others to my mother. Read and answer the incoming letters, and ask the Major to forward to Lord W. those coming later.

Winslow opened the packet and conscientiously began to read the letters. Most of them again were from scientific authorities on the subjects that the dead man had studied so well. Finally he came to the following:

My dear Smith:

Your specimens and reports are at hand, and have been presented to the Society. I may tell you at once that yours is the most important discovery of the year. You have been made a fellow, and your paper appears *in extenso* in the Transactions with one change which I took the liberty of making. The generic name *Welsmouthia*, which you so kindly proposed in my honor, has been recently used by Latour of Paris for a species of mollusc, so I have proposed the term *Smithia mirabilis* in place of your *Welsmouthia mirabilis*.

The scientific papers are full of your epoch-making observation, and you have been elected Professor by the Board of Regents of the new university. I have accepted for you contingent upon your approval.

Clare, whose mother died recently and whose sister is now married, is now my ward, and we shall be glad to welcome you at my town house as soon as you can get here.

Hoping to see you in the course of a few weeks, I am

Sincerely your friend,
Welsmouth.

"Poor Smith!" he said to himself, choking. "And it was I who told him that Miss Clare was married!"

Then he opened the last letter and read slowly, as his eyes were dimmed:

Dear Stan:

Lord Welsmouth has just told me of your discovery, and that it assures your career. He says you may be in London by the last of next month. Oh, Stan, I am so proud of you! Won't you come to me?

Clare.

Winslow thought a long time.

"This will take some lying," he said finally.

Joaquina and little Florinda were in the Loanda cemetery, by Smith's grave.

It had cost Joaquina all the proceeds of her lace-making and the contents of the dispatch-box to have him brought from Ngolo to the coast and buried near her home. Doctor Leal was guiding a party of English people to the same

place. Among them was a handsome old gentleman whom the Doctor addressed as Senhor Visconde, and a beautiful lady, now with tears on her face, whom the old gentleman called Clare. The ladies drew their skirts away from Joaquina and her child. One of them, who had fair hair streaked with silver, glanced pityingly at little Florinda, and said emphatically to the Doctor, who was very pale:

"I am sure that my son's life out here was an example to all."

Lord Welsmouth nodded approval.

"Who are they?" whispered the child to her mother.

"They are the *Ba-Inglesi*," says Joaquina. "All his countrymen come to see his grave. He was a very wise man."

Little Florinda was delighted with the

new stone that the great learned Society had sent out and had set up over his grave. She recognized the bas-relief of her toad flower over the two initials. She asked her mother what the words underneath it were.

Joaquina stared at the letters.

FLORE GUINENSIS INVESTIGATORUM
PRINCEPS

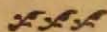
But they meant nothing to her.

"Hush," she said in her native Kimbundu tongue. "I cannot read."

"Does it say Tan-Tan?" persisted the child.

"I think so."

"It is Tan-Tan," said little Florinda softly, content that she had solved the problem.



ENVY

By Tom Carter

HAPPY fabrics, lucky laces,
You may deck the fairest graces,
Nestle in the sweetest places
At your ease.

You are pressed, oh, lucky laces,
To the snuggest warmest spaces;
You may kiss such winsome faces
When you please.

Coming down to special cases,
How I envy you, you laces,
That may hold in close embraces
Eloise!



THOROUGHLY FEMININE!

By Octavus Roy Cohen

MRS. CHESTER CARROLL was filled, surfeited, satiated, with fiction. As she laid aside the flaringly-covered copy of the latest "best seller," she reclined luxuriously on her softly cushioned *chaise longue* and heaved a deep sigh.

Mrs. Chester Carroll allowed her mind to review the plot of the story she had just read—it was the same pill as of old, with a sugar coating of a new taste. In chapter one the heroine was depicted as being on the brink of ruin—moral ruin. In chapter two she slipped one foot over the edge. From the commencement of chapter three until the end of chapter thirty-two she hung there teetering. In chapter thirty-three she decided that virtue wasn't worth the fight and prepared to fling herself into the ever-ready villain's arms. In chapter thirty-four she does it—but the hero comes along at the psychological moment with the belated offer of marriage, and they leave for Palm Beach in his new yacht.

She had known it would be like that even before she opened the book. Somehow, the timeworn plot never grew dull for her. She loved to fight the heroine's fight with her, to share the strenuous delights of the battle against the husky villain's wiles, to—I blush to admit it—to turn page after page in the hope that some one of the heroines would yield—and the hero fail to play his part of virtue-saver.

That was Corinne Carroll's chiefest disappointment. The virtue of the "best seller" heroines was too iron-clad. It heated to the fusing-point, and then refused to fuse. Eventually it became a

mania with her, this search for a heroine of qualities more human than they of cloth covers.

And gradually the desires of her search had transmuted themselves into the very fibre of her being. Without strict analysis of her own emotions, she determined that as authors would not make their heroines act as she wished them to, she would prove that it might be done.

Horrors! The conclusion is readily drawn. Mrs. Corinne Carroll was an unmoral woman! Terrifying! But let it go at that, for it is the truth, the strict truth, and nothing but the truth.

It is almost a waste of words to explain that Mrs. Corinne Carroll was the legal spouse of a very rich man who sat daily on the Stock Exchange and was in the way of affording many luxuries which he did not have—and the many which he did have. And also that Chester Carroll neglected his wife shamefully in his mad rush after dollars to add to his already countless horde. And also that there was a *tertium quid!*

It was this third person, the second man, the family friend, that put the idea in Corinne's head. In all her pet novels it was the family friend who essayed the wrecking of the home. And always the procedure was the same. The husband, money-mad, succeeded in throwing wife and friend together until propinquity got in its villainous work—only to be thwarted by a latent awakening of the husband's love for frail wife. The friend always fell in love with the wife, despite his better nature; the wife with the friend because hers was a temperamental nature which craved love.

But in vaguely determining to carry the thing through to a highly-colored conclusion—with nary a thought to the drab dusk to follow—Corinne faced facts as facts; and the facts she faced are those which are either handled in the epilogue of a novel, or else are not handled at all. And these were the facts.

First: Joe Manning, the all-important family friend, was not in love with her. Furthermore, he was a true friend to Chester Carroll, and harbored no home-wrecking ambitions.

Second: Joe Manning acted suspiciously as though he thought pretty well of another and less attached female, against whom it was rumored he had directed love-thoughts leading eventually to the altar.

Third: Mrs. Corinne Carroll knew that one solution of the difficulty would be denied her in the event that her transgression should be discovered by the irate husband—the husband is always irate—and that is that he should never come in at the wrong-right time and find her embroidering pink and blue garments of lilliputian proportions.

But she also fairly marshaled her facts on the other side of the picture. They loomed up about this way:

First: Joe Manning was one hundred per cent. man, which means that he was fifty per cent. angel and fifty per cent. devil. He was big, strong, handsome, and intensely virile.

Second: she was thoroughly feminine, of no little beauty, and with a figure that artist friends of the family had discreetly raved over, and which brought glitters to the eyes of many of them. Also, by reason of the tabloid instructions absorbed from her fiction diet, she was thoroughly adept in the weak points of masculine man.

Third: although the husbands in fiction always suspected, her husband never would. He wasn't that kind, and he'd never believe that she was.

Fourth: she was inexpressibly bored, and sick and tired of convention.

Fifth: even if she succeeded in her little plan, she would be safe; she not being of a hysterical nature herself, and Joe Manning being a gentleman and notoriously close-mouthed.

And so, with thoughts of the future as vague as the suggestion of a cloud on an early-morning horizon, she—to use the vernacular—went to it.

And once in it, she kept at it. She dined alone with Joe Manning, and sought him on every possible occasion. She practised with all the art at her command the various and sundry little tricks which her favorite authors always made use of. She studied those things which interested him and spoke learnedly of them, thereby showing a flattering interest in him and his work. She touched him whenever possible, thereby helping along the good work which Pater Propinquity always does.

She let it be known by look, word, and action that she was infatuated with him. And in due course of time she saw that she was winning her battle; for there was an unmistakable gleam in his eyes as he watched her when they were alone, a heaving of the chest and a nervous clasping of his big, strong hands, which were readable as the printed page of one of her pet books. And just about that time the last vague suggestion of fear which had lodged persistently in Mrs. Chester Carroll's mind was routed. Propinquity had cut with a double-edged sword: in brief, she was glad that she had done what she had; and insanity had usurped cold reason.

Her psychical capitulation was principally due to the fact that Joe Manning's surrender had not come without a struggle. With amazing lack of ego, he had for a long time refused to credit the evidence of his senses—the evidence which told him that his friend's wife loved him. But once he surrendered, he did so unconditionally.

Joe Manning was no fool; and he knew Corinne. He knew her well enough to read the signs, and he realized that her love for him was the passion of an adult, awakened woman. He knew what it meant; and by that time he had reached the point where he didn't care.

And the climax came one night when they had been to the theatre together. Chester Carroll was in Chicago. Corinne, her bosom rising and falling with a knowledge that *the* time had arrived, invited Joe Manning to her private sitting-room at midnight. She flung her evening wrap across a lounge, thereby disclosing a wealth of perfect, ivory-tinted flesh. Her attitude was one of surrender, of eagerness for capture; her every gesture inviting, alluring, tantalizing.

And Joe Manning forgot that this was the wife of his best friend, he forgot the ethics of manhood, he forgot everything save that she had aroused his most powerful feelings and that she was his for the asking. His voice was choked and hoarse as he spoke, after staring at her for full a minute in speechless wonder.

"Corinne," he gasped, "you—are—*exquisite!*"

Her being thrilled at the words, at the timbre of his voice.

"You think so?"

"Think so! Good God! You are the most—" His big fists clenched, and the perspiration stood out in little beads on his forehead.

She advanced slowly toward him, and paused close to him, her perfect bosom

rising and falling tumultuously. The very passion of her permeated the room. Chester Carroll was forgotten.

"Corinne!" Joe's cry was hoarse, desperate, reckless.

Imperceptibly she swayed toward him. His huge arms closed convulsively about her. He pulled her to him with a herculean display of brute strength. His hot face bent to hers and forced it back. He rained burning kisses on her parted lips.

For a second she lay passive. Then she writhed and tore loose with a sudden accession of unnatural strength.

She stood erect and quivering. Then her hand flashed out against his cheek stingingly.

"You—you—*beast!*" she sibilated. "You *beast!*"

He stared at her, suddenly deathly cold. His jaw sagged.

"Go!" she panted. "And never let me see your face again! Go!"

Slowly, wonderingly, he made his way out of her private sitting-room. His world had become chaos. Life had become stark—appallingly stark.

The front door slammed as he left. In her room, Corinne Carroll—Mrs. Chester Carroll—furiously brushed her lips where his had so feverishly pressed. Then she collapsed into a little sobbing heap on the floor.

"How dared he!" she moaned, with the heart-wrung fervor of outraged virtue. "How *dared* he! The *beast!*"

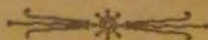
Which proves, probably, that fiction is neither more nor less strange than truth!



JEALOUSY is the needed dash of bitters in the cocktail of love.



WHERE others' ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to confess.



A RETURN TO EDEN

An Idyll in One Act

By Hilliard Booth

SCENE:—*A sloping hill, by the side of a swimming-pool. A grassy bank runs down to the water, and willows and oaks form a protecting background. On the right of the bank sprawls upon his back an athlete, his dark skin glistening with the water from which he has just emerged, as he stretches his untrammelled body gratefully in the warm sunshine. On the left, in a similar attitude, lies his friend, a slightly younger man, lithe and graceful—a figure of Arcadia rather than Eden. In the centre, between the two, reclines a country youth, stripped, as the others, for the pool, and gazing into it as he lies upon his stomach, his elbows on the ground, his chin on his hands. His sturdy strength suggests brute force rather than conscious power. As the curtain is raised, he speaks.*

THE YOKEL

I told you it was a great pool, didn't I?

THE ATHLETE

I haven't enjoyed a swim so much since I was a boy. That was a great suggestion of yours, Ed, to come into the country for the afternoon.

THE POET

Don't call me "Ed." I have put aside my identity with my clothes.

THE ATHLETE

Narcissus, then.

THE POET

That is better. You might be Hercules.

THE ATHLETE (*laughing*)

And our friend here?

THE POET

The Satyr who has led us to the pool; but no, we are ourselves and have returned into the Garden, that is best.

THE ATHLETE

And to think we have to go back to the city to-night!

THE POET

Do we?

THE YOKEL

I only wish that I was going back with you.

THE ATHLETE

Exchange this for the town?

THE YOKEL

This? What's this?

THE POET (*luxuriously*)

Eden.

THE YOKEL

Huh?

THE ATHLETE

A place where two garments constitute respectability, if not snobbishness; a spot where such idyllic interludes are possible.

THE POET (*softly*)

The twilight before Eve entered in.

THE YOKEL

I don't think this is much. I've heard you've got marble tanks to swim in in the city.

THE ATHLETE

Don't!

THE POET

They have no such perfect aftermaths.

THE ATHLETE

We might try it some day in the Park,
Ed.

THE POET

Don't be friyolous. Inspiration is in
the air!

THE ATHLETE

I'm not. A place for sun-baths is an
idea which the Park Commissioners
ought to consider; fenced off to avoid
consternation among the nurse-maids
and policemen—the fence painted blue
to offset ministerial objection.

THE POET

Such contact with nature would vital-
ize many a sapped soul, it is true.

THE ATHLETE

It would strengthen, encourage, put
new life into a man.

THE POET

But the city is the Wilderness.

THE ATHLETE (*with a sigh*)

Paradise now—and in a few hours
starched shirts, long-tailed coats, and—
oh, Lord!

THE YOKEL

What's the matter with them?

THE POET

They were not with us in the womb.

THE YOKEL

Well, I'm not really dressed till I get
a boiled shirt and a stand-up collar on.

THE ATHLETE (*with a gesture of repug-
nance*)

Don't mention the red necktie.

THE YOKEL

What?

THE ATHLETE (*sitting up*)

Haven't you any more respect for the
play of your muscles, the flexibility of
your shoulders, the freedom of your
limbs?

THE YOKEL (*laughing*)

Say, you're funny!

THE ATHLETE (*falling back again*)

He has eaten of the apple.

THE POET

Would that the leaf were still in style!

THE ATHLETE

It would be too décolleté at present,

but fashion, like history, repeats itself,
—the trend is favorable for its early re-
vival. For this evening, however, I am
sure it would annoy Mrs.—

THE POET (*sharply*)

The twilight before Eve entered in!

THE ATHLETE

Very well. It is genuinely pleasant
to be sufficient unto oneself—even
though the shades of night are bound to
fall.

THE YOKEL

Say, what's the matter with a red neck-
tie?

THE ATHLETE

Nothing, nothing; it would be ador-
able if one didn't have to wear anything
else.

THE YOKEL

You must want to get into a daffy-
house.

THE ATHLETE

I want to absorb the strength that is
in the air and in the earth. Clothes are
a non-conductor.

THE YOKEL

You're looking pretty trim as it is.

THE ATHLETE

Thank you.

THE YOKEL

That is, for a city guy.

THE ATHLETE

Oh!

THE YOKEL

If you'd stay here and do ploughing
and haying and the rest of the chores,
you'd get real husky.

THE POET (*dreamily, his eyes closed*)

Eastward in Eden He planted a Gar-
den, and therein He put the man whom
He had formed.

THE ATHLETE

That's the way you got—husky?

THE YOKEL

Sure.

THE ATHLETE

That's all very well, but the chores I
do—in the gymnasium—train as well as
harden the muscles. You ought to make
a gymnasium of the country.

THE YOKEL (*laughing*)

Oh, I guess I'm able to take care of myself as it is.

THE ATHLETE

But you don't make the most of your opportunity. The country was intended for the enjoyment of exercise, and you use it only as a workshop.

THE YOKEL

I'm not much for artificial gymnastics.

THE ATHLETE (*sitting up*)

There is nothing artificial about gymnastics except the gymnasium. The majority of men have to put up with parallel-bars, cinder-tracks, chest-weights, and marble-lined tanks because they can't have the apparatus of Nature—the trees, the fields, the hills, the pools, the gymnasium of the Creator, which was intended to jump, to run, to swim, to train in, and which you use for nothing but chores. No, my friend, you have the right environment, but the wrong idea.

THE YOKEL

Well, I can lick any one in the village.

THE ATHLETE

That is because they have all neglected their gymnasium.

THE YOKEL

And keep their shirts on.

THE ATHLETE (*falling back*)

Exactly.

THE YOKEL

And I guess that's the God-fearing way.

THE ATHLETE

Which Adam instituted when he stripped the fig-tree.

THE YOKEL

If you'd like to try a fall—

THE ATHLETE

In the solarium?

THE YOKEL

Huh?

THE ATHLETE (*as the Poet speaks*)

'Sh!

THE POET (*barely audibly*)

Dreams, ye are mine—jewels divine
Encircling my soul.

THE ATHLETE

Be generous with your jewels, Ed, if they are genuine.

THE POET (*without opening his eyes*)

Genuine here, but in the Wilderness—paste!

THE ATHLETE

What were you dreaming?

THE POET

What I dream still—that this is the Garden, in truth, that we are alone in the world, that this is the beginning. On all sides of us there is nothing but beauty, in every sensation nothing but delight, in every breath full satisfaction of body and soul. We may wander at will as we are, and feel only gladness in the warm sunshine, joy in the wood-scented air, meet only the invigorating embrace of the newborn earth. We will never know pain or suffering—they are without being; and the poison-filled form of Worry is as yet a meaningless word. Life is at its most pure, its most fresh, its most divine poise. Dreams are realities; realities, dreams; the two are one, and the one is (*sitting up and slapping his arm*)—a mosquito!

THE ATHLETE

The serpent in modern guise.

THE POET

Tempting us to what?

THE ATHLETE

Profanity. Continue—I was just beginning to doze.

THE POET (*sinking back*)

No, the spell is broken.

THE YOKEL (*thoughtfully*)

Say, I wouldn't try walking back as you are, if I was you.

THE ATHLETE

Count your ribs, man, count your ribs,—they are still intact.

THE YOKEL

Huh?

THE POET

This is a world without women.

THE ATHLETE (*as the Yokel stares blankly*)

Can't you imagine it?

THE YOKEL.

No, sir; I can't.

THE ATHLETE.

And you, Ed? Would the beauty, the delight, of the world be lasting without Eve.

THE POET.

Yes. For, having met her in the Wilderness, I could sing of her eyebrows and be content.

THE ATHLETE.

Egoist!

THE POET.

Which means poet—and you?

THE ATHLETE.

Well, if I *hadn't* been introduced in the Wilderness—

THE POET.

Think of afternoon-teas, domestic infelicity, and millinery!

THE ATHLETE.

You're right—I'd be content. Only, I should have to forget the vision of her being.

THE POET.

And I should have to remember it,—as novel in . . .

THE ATHLETE.

Conversation between us would soon die, then.

THE YOKEL.

Look a' here, what'd be the use of living if there wasn't any women?

THE ATHLETE.

The cradle again!

THE YOKEL.

What?

THE POET.

Woman was a secondary thought—a divine one, it is true, but not an essential.

THE YOKEL.

Well, if there wasn't any women, who'd take care of the house and do the washing—

THE ATHLETE.

And bake the pies?

THE POET.

And darn the socks?

THE YOKEL.

Yes, that's what I'd like to know.

THE ATHLETE.

There wouldn't be any socks, there wouldn't be any pies, there wouldn't be any washing, and there wouldn't be any house!

THE YOKEL.

Then, I'm glad there is women!

THE ATHLETE.

Item: Justification of woman's existence is established in the great pie-belt.

THE POET.

Granting woman an existence, can't you conceive a higher purpose for her than that of housewife?

THE YOKEL.

That's what a woman is made for—to keep a man's house.

THE POET.

No, she was born to be his inspiration, not his slave.

THE ATHLETE.

And man has been the slave of his inspiration ever since. It's all a question of definition, Ed—the pulse is the seat of inspiration hetherabouts.

THE YOKEL. (*with a grin*)

Oh, I see what you mean. I didn't know you was talking about *that* kind of women.

THE POET.

Not are we.

THE ATHLETE.

Not will we.

THE YOKEL.

Why, the last time I was in the city—

THE ATHLETE.

That will do.

THE YOKEL. (*muttering*)

Well, you asked me.

THE POET.

Eve herself would have been content to remain a vision, I think—

THE ATHLETE.

Could she have foreseen the sock—yes.

THE POET.

And the yodels.

THE ATHLETE.

That's settled, then. Eden without Eve, and a world without women!

THE POET

Peace everlasting!

THE ATHLETE

Adam has come into his own again.

THE POET

Let the birds sing and all the earth rejoice.

THE YOKEL

Give up the girls? I guess not. I know one that'd—

THE ATHLETE

Never mind about that.

THE YOKEL

Well, I guess I've got a right to my opinion.

THE POET

Not in Eden.

THE YOKEL

Eden nothing! I was born and brought up in this place, and it ain't Eden. I ought to know.

THE ATHLETE

You ought to, but you don't.

THE POET

The signboard has stared you in the face constantly, and you have never recognized it.

THE YOKEL

The city for me, that's all.

THE ATHLETE

A beast in the Wilderness!

THE YOKEL

Don't want me to talk about girls, eh?

THE POET

It would be an anachronism.

THE YOKEL (*suspiciously*)

Huh?

THE ATHLETE

Here we have the serpent, Ed.

THE YOKEL (*springing up*)

Call me a snake?

THE ATHLETE (*sitting up*)

Certainly—the original.

THE YOKEL

Take it back, or—

THE ATHLETE (*springing to his feet*)

Try a fall with you? Gladly.

THE YOKEL

And no women in the world, eh? I'll teach you a thing or two.

THE ATHLETE

Now we shall settle that question of gymnastics and strength.

THE YOKEL

Darn' quick! (*He throws his arms about the Athlete and attempts to throw him.*)

THE POET (*to the Athlete*)

Good thoughts are strength-giving. You have the advantage of him there.

(*The Athlete, grasping the Yokel about the waist, withstands the attack, and the two wrestle back and forth on the bank above the water, while the Poet looks on with admiration. The strength of the Yokel is evidently superior, but is largely useless before the trained muscles of the Athlete. A moment, and the Athlete, with a quick swing of the practised wrestler, lifts the Yokel from the ground and throws him into the middle of the pool, where he lands with a great splash.*)

THE ATHLETE

There—cool off!

THE POET

Prettily done.

THE ATHLETE (*turning into the grove at rear*)

Come, we're due in town; we've got to leave Eden.

THE POET (*rising regretfully*)

Driven out by the flaming sword of Civilization. (*He accompanies the Athlete to where their clothes lie.*)

THE YOKEL (*from the pool, spluttering*)

You've been turned down by your girls, both of you—that's what's the matter with you!

CURTAIN



DREAMS

By E. M. Loeb

THE man came unto the seer and said:

"This was my dream: I wandered alone in a desert. Weak and worn with thirst I was—aye, on the point of death. And then, behold! I saw before me an oasis. I saw the green of palm-trees and the glitter of water in the sunlight. On my knees I groveled and crawled, but when I reached the spot where I thought to have seen it, lo! it had vanished! Then I fell senseless on the torturing sand."

The seer pondered long. Then he spoke:

"Go and dream again, for I cannot yet decipher."

The second day the man came once more unto the seer and said:

"Last night this was my dream: In a dark, damp cell I lived, miserable, starved in body and in mind. But outside my window the sun shone and life flourished free. And just beyond the bars there grew a rose, red as blood and sweet-scented as spring. One day I no longer was content to have this rose as companion, but longed to hold it in my hands. So I thrust my arm through the bars and plucked the flower. For an instant I was completely happy! The rose was mine—mine alone. But not for long! For that same day the rose faded. The petals fell off, the sweet scent departed forever, and it was winter in the prison."

The seer gazed at him compassionately.

"The riddle is no longer a riddle," he said, "and your days of happiness are numbered. But return and dream once more."

The third day the man returned for the last time.

"This time," he said, "I dreamed of the fields, the fresh winds, the scent of many flowers, and the singing of magic-voiced birds. Light-hearted I spent my days in this paradise. But one day a beautiful bird, whose voice far surpassed the nightingale's, came down from the sky and sang for me. She sang of friendship and love, of the joys of heaven, and of the union of souls, more wonderful than heaven. I was overcome with rapture, and asked the bird to stay forever. She consented, on condition that I should leave Eden, and have all my joy in her alone. And so I contrived a cage for her, fashioned in gold and embellished with diamonds. In it I placed the bird, and left with her for barren regions. Here I dwelt in a paradise in the wilderness for many a week. Gradually the song of the nightingale lost in brilliancy, until the time came when her notes were unbearable. Then in a fury—for I had sacrificed all for this creature—I reached through the bars and clutched the nightingale in my fist; and, lo! it was but a sparrow. So I wrung her neck and ground her body under my heel."

When the man had finished, the seer groaned deeply.

"Oh, wretched mortal," he said, "within a week thou shalt be afflicted with—a wife!"

But the man departed rejoicing!



THE TRUTH OF IT

By Arthur Crispin, Jr.

CHRISTINE was poor, proud, pretty—and proper. She clerked in the Busy Bee Dry-Goods Emporium on Elm Street, two doors south of Main, for six dollars a week, and was subjected to no temptations or insults. Hollytown, home of Christine, wasn't that kind of place.

Christine had always been proud, pretty, and proper, but it was only in the last year or so that the wolf had howled voraciously about her door. It was regrettable, to say the least, that Christine's father had allowed his life-insurance policy to lapse, but the stark fact remains that he had erred in that manner, and Christine paid the final instalment of the undertaker's bill from the proceeds of several weekly envelopes received for laboring at the Busy Bee Dry-Goods Emporium of Elm Street, two doors south of Main.

Had Hollytown been more of a metropolis, Christine's social status would have changed with the depletion of her personal means, but Hollytown was Hollytown, and Christine was Christine; and so even the proprietor of the Busy Bee, whose wife harbored social aspirations, did not dare to call her by her given name. To him she had always been "Miss Collins," and "Miss Collins" she was destined to remain.

Of course, there's a man in the story, and, to be still more conventional, the man was the banker's son. It is always the banker's son who falls in love with the pretty heroine. Some day there'll be a small town where the bankers are bachelors—or are otherwise childless—and then contemporary fiction will have un-

dergone a distinct step in the right direction. But Hollytown boasted the Hollytown National Bank, and the Hollytown National Bank boasted Harrison Pitt as its president, and Harrison Pitt boasted Harrison Pitt junior as his son. And there you are! Facts are facts—however conventional.

Harrison Pitt junior was a model young man from the top of his ultra-correct hat to the tips of his narrow shoes. He had lived a conventional life through school, college, and the first six months of a business career, during which time he had learned to pump an adding-machine with commendable skill.

Harrison wore Christine's picture in his watch, and she wore his likeness in her locket. At times when neither was working and Pitt *père* was not using their shiny new "Complex four," Harrison junior and Christine might have been seen bowling along at a discreet twenty miles an hour. Occasionally, as they passed through sparsely-settled sections, the car's speed would be reduced to eight or ten miles an hour, and Harrison would drive with one hand, allowing the other the luxury of pressing Christine's supple and readily yielding waist. Nor did she seem to mind his fervid caresses. Christine considered herself engaged to Harrison, so no question of propriety entered her mind.

Like all small-town engagements, it was a secret. Of course Harrison senior knew of it, but he and his wife looked upon it as a joke, a boyish love-affair—puppy-love or whatever it is called. He knew, and he knew that the young couple knew, that it would be at

least two years before Harrison junior could support a wife; and he realized that his son was not of the stamp to rush into a hasty marriage. As for the young man himself, he was well content merely to be engaged.

But on this day—of course, all stories must open on a specific day—Christine responded to his occasional kisses with less fire than usual, and Harrison looked hurt.

"S matter, honey?" he asked lightly.

"It will be two years or so before we can be married, won't it?" she asked abruptly.

"Why, yes. I s'pose so. What of it?"

"I can't continue to slave my life away at six a week at the Busy Bee."

"But it won't be for long—"

"Two years is a long time, Harry. I'm going to quit it."

"Quit it? Why? How?"

"I'm going to New York."

A super-centimetre shell could have created no greater havoc. Harrison Pitt junior's mind groped blindly with the situation thus flung at his head, and the best he could do was to nod with all the grace of an imbecile.

"T-t-to New York?" he stammered.

"Yes." Christine's cheeks were beautified by a high color, but her even, white teeth were set firmly, and her little fists were clenched under the lap-robe—it being a bit cool that day and lap-robos comfortable.

"But—Christine—for what?"

"To work."

"You're working here."

"At six dollars a week. It costs me that much to eat and rent a roof to cover my head. I need clothes and many other things which six dollars a week won't buy."

"You can get a raise."

"I can't. And if I could, it would be but a dollar a week. It isn't that I think I'm worth so much more than that . . . but I'm going to New York. I have the promise of a position there."

"A position?" There was a gleam of hope in Harrison's eyes. "What sort of position?"

"Do you remember that handsome woman who was in town last week? The tall blonde who stayed at the Carson House?"

The very proper eyes of the young man opened wider. Very well indeed did he remember the flamboyant creature of whom Christine spoke.

"Yes."

"She was a traveling saleswoman for the Phoenix Ladies' Ready-to-Wear house. She sold the Busy Bee some stuff, and that's where I met her."

"And it was through *her* that you received this offer?"

"Exactly."

"With the Phoenix Company?"

"Yes."

"What sort of position is it?"

"I'm to go there at twelve dollars a week to start with, as—a model." Very discreetly Christine smiled. She had carefully calculated her words to produce an untoward effect; and they did.

"*Model!*" The word of horror rolled fearfully from Harrison Pitt's tongue. He had read a bit himself, and while his ideas of models were hazy—as applied to the cloak and suit trade—he had an idea they spent most of their time in extreme negligée, stretched luxuriously on tiger-rugs, a Turkish cigarette in one hand and a glass of champagne in the other.

"A *model!*" he repeated.

"A *cloak-model*, Harry. I see you have the wrong idea. I shall wear all my clothes—and cloaks over. . . ."

"But—but—" His wits were still busy with the picture the word "model" had conjured.

"The blonde woman says I am a perfect thirty-six," Christine continued in a business-like tone.

"A perfect thirty-six," he murmured absently, and this time Christine flushed.

Then they talked the afternoon away,

Harrison advancing strenuous protest after strenuous protest, all of which the girl swept aside with a celerity which betokened careful forethought. That night she mentioned to one or two other persons in Hollytown that she thought of going to New York, and by the next morning she was the cynosure of all eyes.

It was her uncle-in-law, a portly gentleman of dignified demeanor and deaconish whiskers, who cornered her that night after the closing of the Busy Bee Dry-Goods Emporium's doors. And for a half-hour, without so much as a pause for breath, this gentleman held forth on the dangers of the big city.

Christine turned a willing ear to his exhortations. She admitted that she knew New York was populated by two million five hundred thousand masculine devils who waylaid girls on each and every corner with patented and unpatented plans leading to their ruin, and that she realized that good-looking misses must be ever on the alert; but she put the proposition straight to her benevolent uncle-in-law.

"I can't live decently on the money I earn here, so what am I to do?"

He reneged a bit on that. There was no offer of additional coin to defray life's necessities. And when she remained firm in her determination to risk the pitfalls of Gotham, he waddled away, shaking his pudgy features and muttering dire prophecies.

In truth, Christine was nervous herself. She was no fool, and she had seen such plays as "Help Wanted." She realized that the straight and narrow path in New York was bounded on both sides by rose-bowers, champagne, millionaires, taxicabs, hot birds, broiled lobsters, and Houses of Bondage. But, she reasoned, other girls had lived through it unsullied, and there was no reason why she might not.

Between the announcement of her determination, and the day when the puffy

little engine snorted its disgust at any female of the species fool enough to leave the innocuous desuetude of Hollytown for the hurly-burly of New York—and thereupon carried her flying toward that iniquitous city—Christine was beset by hordes of friends, world-wise and world-ignorant, who regaled her with multicolored accounts of the dangers which awaited her, and prescribed the latest approved methods of getting around them. They furnished a verbal Baedeker of the city's evils; and when Christine lay back in the stuffy, red-velvet-covered seat in the day-coach as the train pulled out of the tiny depot for New York, she felt a thoroughly feminine desire to cry, and to back out at this thirteenth hour, and only her pride prevented.

Ten hours later the train was in New York, and Christine summoned her energies and moved her cramped muscles. She stepped on to the concrete platform, mounted innumerable stairs, and gazed awe-stricken at the tremendous dome of the Pennsylvania Station. Thereupon she timidly pursued her way to Seventh Avenue, eying every man askance and fearing attack with each step. She re-read the letter of directions written her by the blonde woman who had secured her the position, and in due course of time came to the dingy, red-brick-front boarding-house on West Twenty-third Street.

There, gentle reader—I caught you smiling that time! You are now prepared to peruse the story of her life in this house of impropriety to which she has been lured, a tale of knockout drops and the rest of the white-slave formula. So was Christine. But you—and she—will be disappointed.

The house was run by a broad-bosomed, healthily-hipped Mrs. Patrick O'Malley, and was painfully respectable. Its clientele of boarders consisted of several shopgirls, two laundry-clerks, a salesman of cigars, and a dancing-mis-

tress. Save for the fact that the salesman of cigars was inclined to be flirtatious in an entirely harmless way, no temptation strayed within the portals of the house—as a single meal told Christine, and she breathed more easily in the knowledge that here, at least, she might find sanctuary. In fact, she had occasion to pink a little when Mrs. O'Malley informed her in a motherly but none-the-less positive manner that her boarders were ladies and gentlemen, and that when they ceased to come within that classification they would be cordially invited to leave.

The next morning Christine presented herself at the Phoenix Company's Sixth Avenue store, where she was met by the effusive and perfumed blonde lady and introduced to the store-manager, a pursy little man who eyed that which made Christine a perfect thirty-six in a critical and wholly professional manner, and the little country girl was duly installed as a model. Under the direction of a certain Miss Yvonne Riley, she learned her new duties readily, and within three days had settled into a rut of routine.

Two months passed, during which a trip to Coney Island and an ensuing case of indigestion furnished the only real excitement. The flirtatious cigar salesman had been her companion; and he hadn't tried to hug her even when they shot the chutes and roller-coasted together, at which, I shamefacedly admit, Christine was a mite disappointed. Nor in all that time had the pursy manager told her that he was unhappily married and desired a soul-mate. In brief, she found New York dull, and she was terribly lonely.

And then, at the end of the two months, she met her first millionaire, and once more girded on her steel armor—figuratively speaking.

The millionaire in question, one Thaddeus Spencer, entered the Phoenix one day with a handsomely-gowned, regal woman. He assisted her in the selection

of several garments, his taste proving suspiciously expert. Christine was their model, and in the course of business the pursy manager, who knew Mr. Spencer and was as obsequious as his millions demanded, introduced him to Christine. He also introduced the woman, and Christine had her first distinct surprise. The woman was not the man's wife, nor did she occupy any equivocal position. She was his sister.

And eventually the millionaire left, but he was back the next day, and the next, and the next, and then the salesladies did start the ball of gossip whirling. There wasn't a doubt of it: as Miss Yvonne Riley put it, he had "fell for Christine, an' fell hard!"

With a realization of that fact as a fact there came to Christine an almost unholy joy. Here, at least, was opportunity for that zest of danger which she had secretly craved. But the innate propriety of her, the inherent small-town narrowness, the inborn sense of caution, prompted her to refuse his first dinner invitation. Whereupon he smiled slightly, and the next day his sister appeared and invited Christine to go for a motor-ride over the Hudson Boulevard in Jersey the following Sunday. Mrs. Grundy having been satisfied, Christine accepted, and the following Sunday was a day of joy.

Less than a week later she dined at Churchill's with Mr. Thaddeus Spencer—unchaperoned.

Of course, she wasn't blind to his intentions. She knew well that millionaires didn't run after cloak-models with offers of marriage. But by this time she felt almost painfully able to guard her virtue, and her little trips with him became semi-weekly occurrences. As for Mr. Spencer, he conducted himself as befitted a millionaire and a gentleman; but Christine knew full well that the clouds were gathering, and that sooner or later the storm would break. And then back to her existence of loneliness

and her twelve dollars a week to spend, with no excitement—now that the flirtatious salesman had suddenly married a manicure who lived down the street, and had left the boarding-house.

Then it was that the Phoenix Company went to the wall, and Christine was out of a job at a time when jobs were scarcer than the proverbial hen's teeth.

But Christine was still in the ring. She withdrew from a department-store savings-bank the little money that she had saved, and valiantly trudged the rounds of the stores, applying for a job. Invariably they either told her that there was no opening, or else they took her name and said they'd notify her if a vacancy occurred. But no job. Nor did any sleek proprietor attempt to kiss her, or tell her that she was worth more than ten dollars a week, and offer to show her how to make fifty or a hundred.

So it was that eventually, through the machinations—or assistance, call it what you will—of the original blonde lady who had—to use Hollytown's phrase—"lured her to the city," Christine secured a job in the chorus of "The Golden Ring." Her salary was fixed at eighteen dollars a week, and she proved an apt pupil. She opened with the show in Paterson, and stayed with it during its New York run.

"The Golden Ring" was three degrees removed from a leg-show. It boasted co-stars, and book and lyrics by well-known perpetrators of revivers for tired business men. Its comedy lines were good, and it drew the crowd. For a while.

And during that time Christine had her initial experience with a stage-door Johnny. She had her *only* experience with a stage-door Johnny. She and two other pulchritudinous chorus-ladies were met at the stage-entrance by three evening-dressed, silk-hatted young dandies, each boasting an automobile. They bowed and stepped forward simulta-

neously. One of them linked an arm confidently through Christine's.

"Hullo!" he greeted. "How about a bit of supper?"

Christine's body tensed. Here was Danger—with a capital "D"; here was the ravening wolf who preyed on women. Her arm dropped, and she faced him, her outward calm giving the lie to the inward seething.

"You've made a mistake," she remarked icily.

The young man stepped back and bowed courteously.

"Pardon me," he said suavely. "My fault." And Christine walked home unmolested.

Nor was she troubled after that. Possibly her reputation for virtue spread. At any rate, save for an occasional wink, no other stage-door Johnny made any advances to her. And, although she did not analyze her feelings, she felt slightly disappointed about it all.

During all this time Mr. Thaddeus Spencer continued his attack on her citadel. He was gentlemanly and circumspect, but she did not misunderstand. She knew that he was what they called, in the parlance of the city, "a wise one." No bungling of such a delicate job by him!

So things went for the four months' run of "The Golden Ring." Then the show closed for the season, and Christine, now well dressed, and with some money saved from week to week, and thoroughly confident that her virtue was as safe as though it had been placed under lock and key in a bank-vault, determined to return to Hollytown. There, at least, she would get away from the fictionized fetidness of the city, with its ever-ready pitfalls and dangers.

The night before her departure she motored and dined with Thaddeus Spencer. That is, she dined first and then she motored.

It was as they were traversing a particularly dark and silent stretch of road

that he turned to her and she realized with a thrill, half of fear and half of a not undelightful anticipation, that at last his full purpose was to be disclosed. His voice was thick and hoarse, and he closed one hot hand over hers before she could draw back. She chilled in every fibre of her being—as the novelists put it—and jerked away.

"You forget yourself, Mr. Spencer!" she snapped.

And then he apologized humbly, turned his car, sped it downtown, and left her at her boarding-house.

That night she pondered many things, and chief among them was the manner in which Thaddeus Spencer had proven true to fiction by his dastardly attempt on her—that's the way she characterized it, at any rate—and she thought of the return to the quaint, puritanical, church-going little town which was her home, and of Harrison Pitt junior, the banker's son. And the next evening she was back in Hollytown.

She registered at the Carson House, Hollytown's single hostelry. The night-clerk winked at her, and she flamed with indignation. Her uncle-in-law met her that evening and eyed her in a manner that brought a flush to her cheeks.

"You've disgraced the family," he flamed, "by becomin' a common chorus-girl!"

Next morning she dropped in at the Busy Bee Dry-Goods Emporium, on Elm Street, two doors south of Main. The female clerks eyed her metropolitan attire with open admiration and allowed that the life of a chorus-girl must be grand and exciting. They called her "Christine." The little proprietor bustled forward and invited her into his private office. She went, to talk of old times, and he told her a joke with a double-meaning. Then his wife came in and forbade him to have further confab with "that hussy"!

At four o'clock that afternoon Christine telephoned Harrison Pitt junior at

the bank. He said he'd come for her in the family car at five. His voice radiated a patent tremble.

He called. They drove into the country. Once out of the town, he slipped an arm around her waist, and she allowed it. He kissed her—and then she pulled away, suddenly and sharply. The kiss was not the kiss she had expected from him. It was an insult. She notified him brusquely that their engagement was at an end.

"Of course it is," he returned a bit nastily. "D'you think I'd marry a chorus-girl? I suppose you have friends back in the city."

She didn't answer, but that night she returned to New York, the mecca of evil-doers, the concentration of lures and insults and pitfalls. And she telephoned Thaddeus Spencer that she was back.

He broke a business engagement and came for her in his high-powered roadster. They were silent until they had passed Grant's Tomb on Riverside. And then she turned to him with a direct question.

"The last time we drove up this way together," said she, "you took my hand. You had acted peculiarly all evening. What was it you wanted of me?"

His eyes popped wide open.

"I—I—wanted to marry you!" he gasped.

She gasped, too, but retained control of herself.

"You still wish to?"

"Yes. I—I—love you!"

The girl looked at the man beside her, and then at the stark skyline of the city. She shifted her gaze across the Hudson and looked in the general direction of puritanical Hollytown. Then she slipped her hand into his and nestled close.

"I didn't realize it before," she said softly, "but I love you, too!"

And so, to wind up the story in the proper and conventional manner, they were married and lived happily ever afterwards.

CONFESSIONS OF A FASHION- ABLE PRACTITIONER

Anonymous

I—THE GREEN ORCHID

SOMEWHERE in my memory there lingers the vague recollection of a quotation to the effect that the family doctor is father confessor first, priest afterward. I don't know when it was said or by whom; but it comes perilously near to the truth.

"Professional ethics" seals more secrets than the confessional; and in his capacity of healer of sick bodies the physician is frequently called upon to minister to sick souls—to say nothing of the opportunities that come to him to observe family skeletons.

I am aware that to open the door of the closet may be regarded as a violation of those same professional ethics of which I speak; but there is no possibility that any of my *dramatis personæ* could ever be connected with those who actually played the rôles in life. I am confident that I have provided them with disguises sufficient to insure against recognition; and chief among these must be my own anonymity.

When I graduated from one of the big Eastern universities, the choice of a profession was open to me. I chose medicine, for two reasons: because I was genuinely enthusiastic over it, and because I wanted to study human nature.

With the attainment of my degree and the completion of my hospital work, came the question where to settle. Not desiring to emulate the prophet of Biblical fame, and numberless other individuals of no fame whatever, I decided against my birthplace and in favor of a

neighboring city, which, for the sake of convenience, I shall call Cinnapolis—although that is not its name.

There was never any doubt of my success. My people were well off, well connected, and favorably known all through the vicinity. I had a good establishment, plenty of money, and—a reputation as an auction-player. Almost before I realized it, I found myself in possession of a large and growing practice.

My patients were all wealthy—most of them belonged to the class which is spoken of as the "idle rich"—and their ailments were largely imaginary, putting no great tax on my powers. It is astonishing how many and how varied can be the complaints of a woman who has nothing with which to occupy her mind, or a man whose sole business in life is to kill time.

Being presentable in appearance, well born, decently bred, and unmarried, I was immediately received on a footing of friendly equality in most of the houses where my professional services were required; and having, as I have mentioned, a keen interest in human nature, I gradually acquired a store of knowledge concerning those whose names appeared in the society columns of the Cinnapolis papers that, if revealed, would have shaken the social structure to its foundations.

But I kept my eyes and ears open and my mouth shut; and I continued to dance with *débutantes*, matrons, and dowagers, and play cards with their brothers, husbands, and lovers o' nights,

while prescribing for them more or less harmless cures during office-hours and professional calls, for the results incident to their pursuit of pleasure. They religiously took my medicine and—infrequently—my advice. They even paid my outrageous charges without a murmur. If one wishes to keep up with the fashion, one must be willing to pay the price; and in Cinnapolis I was the fashion. No family laying the slightest claim to standing would have even remotely considered being indisposed without sending for me. To summon another physician would have been a sign of financial disability. A fashion is—a fashion.

But there was one woman who sedulously refrained from following the general example. Her husband belonged to one of the oldest families in the city, and her father was enormously wealthy, the president of the largest bank in Cinnapolis and a director in most of the others, as well as a power in local and state politics; thus Mary Hermon could afford to do as she chose. She did not choose my services.

"Why, there's nothing ever the matter with me!" she declared gaily one evening, when one of her friends laughingly inquired why she persisted in sticking to a stodgy old practitioner when there was a younger and much more attractive one at hand.

"I never need a doctor," said Mary Hermon.

And the next day the bay team of old Doctor Banks switched their long tails before the door of the big Hermon house for an hour. It was not to see Mrs. Hermon, however, that Banks had been summoned. Her husband had been taken suddenly and alarmingly ill.

"Rotten sense, Jim Hermon's got," Banks informed me disgustedly, when I chanced to meet him a few days later. "He will drink, and it lays him up every time. Ever since he came back from that Central American place, alcohol in

any form is so much poison to him. He's all right—until some one asks him to take a drink, and then he cuts loose. I've warned him time and again, but I might as well save my breath. One of these fine days, he'll take a glass too much, and then—!" Banks lifted his fat hands upward and pursed his lips.

"Why not speak to his wife?" I suggested.

"Oh, I leave the women to you; you like to talk to 'em," said he, and shuffled away.

I was always glad to talk to Mary Hermon. Of all the women in the smart set of Cinnapolis she interested me most. Perhaps a year or two under thirty, rather small and slight, with big, dark eyes and a great quantity of blue-black hair, she was, on occasion, the most beautiful woman I had ever seen. There were other times when she appeared almost plain; and a surreptitious study revealed to me the fact that her beauty depended entirely on her expression, and, further, that her expression depended solely upon the presence or absence of her husband.

She was very quiet; she talked little, and I had never heard her laugh aloud. But the heat of a fire does not depend on the height of the flames, and the most intense natures are often those hidden beneath the most placid surfaces. Mary Hermon loved her husband with a passion that amounted almost to idolatry. When he was with her, her face was illumined with an animation that made her wonderful; without him, she was an unlighted lamp.

There was nothing particularly remarkable about Hermon that I could see to inspire such a love. He was tall and fair; his shoulders stooped slightly, and he had a tendency to stoutness—a tendency that would assert itself emphatically later on in life.

Personally, I disliked him. There had been some ugly stories afloat regarding his habits before his marriage, and, al-

though he was supposed to have steadied down, I had my doubts. A man doesn't run after one woman for years, marry another, and then risk his life to please the vanity of the first one if he is prepared to settle down quietly in double harness.

Besides, if there were any truth in the stories of his conduct on his first exploring expedition (he had gone to Central America at the behest of a group of archaeologists who set great store by him), his wife was to be pitied—quite as much as the native women, of his treatment of whom even the most hardened among his companions spoke with loathing. He certainly had ability in his own line; but few women are interested in prehistoric ruins, and Mary Hermon was not one of the few. She was vitally alive, a veritable little flame of intensity. She had been deeply in love with Hermon for years before her marriage to him—the whole time, indeed, that he had pursued another woman.

That woman was Orchid Parry. The name Orchid suited her perfectly. She was an exotic of the most pronounced type. No one seemed to know very much about her antecedents; but she appeared to have unlimited money at command, and the house that she occupied, with an Englishwoman who acted as companion and chaperon, was, though small, one of the most exquisitely furnished and appointed in Cinnapolis. I know, for I have been in it.

She went everywhere, knew every one. The women hated her—and invited her to their houses—possibly at the command or behest of the men, who were her slaves. She might have married a dozen times had she desired, but she remained single and let half the males of the city singe their wings.

Of all those who had desired and sought to win her, Jim Hermon had been the most dogged in his pursuit. Bets had been laid at the Calabash Club, three to one against his success. Jim had fam-

ily, but little money—and orchids are expensive. It was conceded that she had refused him finally, and that when he returned from his year in Central America he would turn his attention elsewhere. He did—to Mary Rice. Inside of three months from his reappearance in the city they were married.

It was publicly supposed that Hermon had accomplished nothing, brought back nothing from his trip save a lightened pocketbook and an impaired digestion. The group of scientists who had sent him out promptly severed all connection with him, and it was said that there had been a stormy time between them.

But there was a far more important reason for this step on their part than Hermon's mere failure to attain the object of the expedition. The inside facts in the case were hushed up, but it was not long before it came to my knowledge that Hermon *had* brought something back with him—a new and extraordinary orchid, sea-green in color and in shape not unlike a bat with outspread wings.

This treasure-trove he had calmly appropriated, claiming ownership by right of discovery. His colleagues, on their part, claimed it because they had financed the expedition and he was technically in their employ; but, possession being nine points of the law, they were unable to make good their claim. There was no suit brought; Hermon was simply dropped and blacklisted.

I believe it was a severe blow to him; at least, it deprived him of any further opportunities to distinguish himself in his work, in which he had begun to make an enviable name for himself. It also deprived him of his income.

Remained, then, only the priceless new orchid—and Orchid Parry wore one of the strange blossoms when she attended the smart wedding of Hermon and Mary Rice. Thereafter she never appeared in public without one or more fastened at her breast.

Slim and lithe and sinuous, with hair

the color of dull gold and eyes as narrow and pointed as those of an Oriental, she was a remarkable-looking woman. Her evening gowns, cut daringly low to show the perfection of white neck and shoulders, were invariably of green, pale gleaming, exactly the shade of the irises of her slanting eyes. She was easily the most conspicuous figure in Cinnapolis society. And always amid the froth of lace at her breast nestled a sea-green orchid, like some smooth, bat-winged moth of mystery.

Then, abruptly, she ceased to wear it; and three weeks later Jim Hermon departed again for Central America. He was gone four months. When he returned he sent a large package to the house of Orchid Parry, but he did not himself go near the house or her. He had been some two months at home when he experienced the attack of which Banks had spoken to me—and Orchid Parry was wearing her exotic blossoms again.

So far as I was concerned, there was no particular puzzle about the affair. It resolved itself into the following factors:

Jim Hermon had lost his head over Orchid Parry. He had presented to her the parasitic plant which he had found on his first exploratory expedition, and had gotten himself in bad odor with his colleagues as a result. Evidently the orchid had been insufficient price for the lady, and Hermon had married Mary Rice, either in a fit of pique or because of her immense fortune. I thought the probabilities were in favor of the latter hypothesis.

Unquestionably aware of her husband's feeling for Orchid Parry—all Cinnapolis knew of it—Mary Hermon had set herself to work to win his love for herself. If he did not really respond, at least he made a respectable showing. Then Miss Parry had taken a hand in the game again. The absence of the orchid from her costume argued that the plant—or plants—had died, and she

had induced Hermon to go in search of another.

So much was clear to me. The only question in my mind was, what did Hermon expect to receive from the lady as a reward for his perilous trip? It would not be in money—for the green orchid was priceless. Connoisseurs had offered fabulous sums for a root, but Miss Parry had laughed at the idea of selling it. So far as I had been able to find out, no one had so much as seen it growing. She would permit no one to touch the blooms, and burned them when they faded. That was just the sort of thing that appealed to her. She liked mysteries and enigmas—they were the breath of life to her. She was one herself.

I could not readily account for the fact that gossip had failed to link Hermon with the orchid. His foggy explanation that he had made his second trip for the purpose of finding the ruins he had failed to locate on his first was no explanation at all, since he had been shut out from scientific circles.

Yet it was accepted readily enough, possibly because, as I have before mentioned, he was supposed to have settled down since his marriage, and because he carefully kept out of Orchid Parry's way. But that there was a little curiosity current became evident to me one evening when I was attending a dance at Mrs. Palmerston's. I had greeted my hostess and was standing beside a bank of palms which screened an alcove formed by the immense bow-windows, when young Joe Wheeler touched me on the arm.

"I say, Doctor," said he, "don't you suppose there's some connection between Jim Hermon and the green orchid?"

"Certainly not," I said promptly. "Not the slightest chance of it." I had an excellent reason for lying: Mary Hermon was standing within two feet of me, concealed from Wheeler's view by the spreading branches of the palms.

"Oh," he said, "the idea just occurred

to me, that's all. I saw them together, and he looked as if he wanted to eat her up." He moved away, and an instant later I found myself looking into Mary Hermon's stormy eyes.

"Thank you, Doctor," she said. "It isn't every one who would have missed such a chance to roll the ball of scandal along."

There was no use pretending to misunderstand.

"I could see nothing to be gained, Mrs. Hermon," I said. "And, besides, that's all in the past."

"Is it?" She made a gesture with her fan, and I followed the direction of her gaze.

Through a break in the crowd I could see the lithe, sinuous figure of Orchid Parry, and by her side was Jim Hermon. They were standing by an onyx table which supported a huge silver punch-bowl, and Hermon, who had apparently just handed a glass to his companion, was raising one to his own lips.

"Oh! He mustn't!" I heard the woman beside me exclaim. "He mustn't!" She made an agitated movement forward, then stopped, and the mother-o'-pearl sticks of her fan snapped in her fingers. For Orchid Parry's hand was suddenly raised and laid on Jim Hermon's wrist. He set his glass down untasted, and they moved away from the bowl. Then the crowd closed in and hid them from view.

I glanced down at Mary Hermon. Her head was thrust a little forward, and her upper lip was drawn back from her white teeth. The flame of the poinsettias at her breast was as nothing to that in her eyes. She looked like a small, vicious animal, at bay and ready to spring. Every muscle was taut, and she was quivering from head to foot.

"Look here, Mrs. Hermon," I said, "this won't do. Relax—relax. You keep up this sort of thing and you'll snap. The human organism can stand just so much, and no more."

She seemed not to have heard me. "She sha'n't have him! She sha'n't have him!" she was whispering over and over again to herself, beating one savage little hand against her thigh the while. Then abruptly she left me, edging along the wall in the direction which her husband and Orchid Parry had taken.

My attention was no longer on Mrs. Palmerston's dance and her guests. I was far more concerned with the drama of human interest that was being played before me. I crossed the hall, ascended the stairs, and made my way to a room at the back of the house which Palmerston called his den. It was a splendid apartment, done in magnificent tooled leather, with great English club-chairs and deep couches scattered about. There was no one there. The lights were lowered; I found the switch and put them out. I wanted to think.

Either my diagnosis was radically wrong, or Mary Hermon was on the verge of a complete mental collapse. She was wrought up to a dangerous pitch, and her condition was critical because of her habitual repression. It is only the confined explosive that is dangerous.

Orchid Parry's action in restraining Hermon from drinking the punch had shown clearly that she knew he was under instructions to touch nothing alcoholic. Was it this or the intimacy of the gesture with which she had laid her hand on his that had set the match to the tow of his wife's jealousy?

"Why," I asked myself, "can't she leave him alone? He's been trying to break loose; why doesn't she let him go?"

The question was one that practically answered itself; but even while I was considering that curious mental twist possessed by some women—the dog-in-the-manager, spider-and-fly, cat-and-mouse combination that absolutely refuses to loose a victim—I thought I heard a sound as of a door opening behind me. An instant later I decided that

it must have come from the hall, for the doorway was darkened by two figures, a man and a woman. The light from the electrolier shone on the high-piled, dull gold hair of Orchid Parry, and flashed from the necklace of aquamarines about her throat.

"There's no one here, Orchid." It was Hermon's voice. "Come in."

"We'll be missed," she demurred, but there was no reluctance in her manner as she followed him a few steps into the room. I was about to rise and make my presence known when he turned and grasped her hands roughly.

"When?" he demanded hoarsely. "When?"

"Jim—I—"

"You've put me off long enough. I asked you—when?" His voice was thick and ragged.

She did not answer.

"Are you going to ask for more time?" Holding both of her hands in one of his, he put the other under her chin and turned her face to the light.

Orchid Parry was not a beautiful woman. She was too bizarre, too spectacular, for real beauty, but in that moment her face was transfigured. Whatever motives had actuated her in the past, when she had cajoled, flouted, and tormented this man, she was now ready to yield to him. Blinded by the strength of his own desire, he could not read what was as plain as print to me.

"Answer me!" he commanded.

"No, Jim." Her voice was as softly seductive as the arms she twined about his neck. "I—I'm not going to ask for any more time."

"Then—?" His set face was within an inch of hers.

"To-morrow night," she breathed.

With a muffled cry, he caught her to him.

Sheer, stark passion is not a pretty sight to see. I looked away. And then, all at once, I made out another figure in the gloom. No need to wonder who it

was. She was leaning forward, and her face was contorted into a tortured mask.

"Jim, we must go back. We'll be missed." Orchid Parry had freed herself from Hermon's embrace and was adjusting the crumpled laces of her gown. The green orchid fell to the floor at his feet. He picked it up, tore off one of the wing-like petals, and thrust it into his breast-pocket.

She uttered a little cry of protest.

"Jim! I told you it was the last one!"

"Well, shall I go and get you another? The first plant cost me my business integrity; the second nearly cost me my life. Do you want me to try again?" He was brutally ironical.

She shook her head.

"I want nothing now—but you," she murmured.

"And that English nuisance?" he asked her, while she fastened the maimed blossom in its place.

"I'll send her away, Jim. There'll be no one there—no one but just us two!" She turned toward the door, flashing him a swift, seductive smile. He bent forward and laid his lips on her bare shoulder.

"God!" he said. "The years you've wasted, Orchid!"

I looked at the spot where Mary Hermon had been standing. She was not there; she was not in the room. And though there was a door behind me, it was closed. Had my imagination played me a trick? It seemed so, yet I could have sworn that I had seen her there, watching the revolting spectacle of her husband's mad passion for another woman.

I met her on the stairs twenty minutes later, and she smiled at me pleasantly, placidly. Almost I decided that I must have been mistaken in supposing that she had followed her husband and Orchid Parry. The two were standing together in the hall below. She looked down at them with an expression that was quite apathetic. There was no ani-

mation in her face, and I thought I had never seen her look so nearly plain.

I spent an interested half-hour the next day piecing out the psychology of my drama and fitting the sections together. They formed the inevitable triangle, but a rather unusual aspect of it.

Orchid Parry had never had the slightest use for Jim Hermon—except the perverted pleasure a woman of her type derives from tormenting a man—until he ceased to importune her. She had amused herself at his expense; she had ruined his career and sent him out to risk his life, simply that her morbid vanity might be gratified, that she might have a unique specimen of her name-flower. She had unquestionably promised to give him herself as a reward for the Hesperian apples, as typified by the green orchid, and then coolly defaulted payment. Now, when there was no longer any question of payment, when he had voluntarily raised the siege, the citadel was ready to surrender. Once he had been valueless. Now, quite unreasonably, after the manner of her kind, she wanted him; and she would take him just as ruthlessly as she had cast him aside.

But what of his wife? That was the thought that kept recurring to me all day. When, on driving past the station, I saw the "English nuisance" boarding a train, and knew that Orchid had sent her away, the thought obtruded itself more insistently than ever. What of Mary Hermon?

If she had really been behind me in Palmerston's room the previous night, would she stand tamely by and allow her husband to go to Orchid Parry? If I had read her aright, she would not. Yet, after all, what could she do? She might prevent his going that night, but there were other nights. She might leave him; it would suit him perfectly. She might drag the other woman's name through the mire of scandal; but the other woman would have Jim Hermon.

He was an unscrupulous cad, a libertine—and worse; but there is no accounting for a woman's love. If Hermon had been true to his wife, it was simply because Orchid Parry would have none of him; yet here was his wife burning herself out with a fierce passion for the man who didn't want her, and who was himself consumed with desire for some one else.

My sympathy was all for the wife; perhaps because I liked her, while I detested Hermon and distrusted Orchid Parry; and perhaps because, in spite of her fragility, there was nothing craven or cowardly about Mary Hermon. That which was hers, she would fight to keep; and, somehow, I had a feeling that she would keep it. I hoped she would—utterly worthless though it seemed to me.

It must have been about ten o'clock that night when the telephone-bell in my study rang. It was a private telephone, unlisted, and not more than a dozen people knew the number. The regular telephone was downstairs in the office of my assistant, with an extension connected with his bedroom on the third floor.

I was tired, and disinclined for professional or other conversation. For a moment I debated whether or not to answer the call. Then I stretched out my hand for the instrument.

"Hello!" It was a woman's voice, with just a trace of French accent. "Is that you, Doctor?"

"Yes," I said. "Who is it?"

"This is Mrs. Hermon's maid speaking. Mrs. Hermon—Mrs. James Hermon—would be greatly obliged if you could come down at once."

In less than fifteen minutes I was shown into Mary Hermon's room.

She was lying on a couch, piled high with gorgeous pillows. The masses of her hair fell in a blue-black cascade over her shoulders and across the folds of her rose-colored robe.

"My head hurts so, Doctor," she said plaintively. "Can't you help me?"

"I can try," I said, and drew up a chair beside the couch. Her pulse was fast and very uneven; there was a good deal of color in her usually pale cheeks, and the pupils of her eyes were dilated so that they almost covered the iris. She had a temperature of 102°. No wonder her head ached! The collapse I had foreseen had come. Perhaps—if it were not too late—Orchid Parry's net might be broken. I felt a grim satisfaction at the thought.

"Where's Mr. Hermon?" I asked.

She gave a little sigh.

"Am I as sick as all that? Well—Jim's in his library. At least, he said he was going to be busy this evening, looking up some references. I haven't seen him since luncheon. Shall I send Annette for him?"

"No, I'll go," I said. "I want to speak to him. Tell Annette to get you to bed. I'll be back again in a few minutes." I rose to my feet and pocketed my thermometer. As I did so, I caught the odor of her breath. It fairly reeked of brandy. Most certainly she had been drinking—a good deal; yet I happened to know that she loathed liquor in any form and never touched it.

Poor child! Certainly she had borne her trouble bravely. Had she been driven to seek that will-o'-the-wisp—forgetfulness? She looked so frail and girlish, lying back among the silken pillows, that I felt a sudden surge of anger against her husband, and against Orchid Parry.

I did not expect to find him in the house. Doubtless he had already gone to keep his tryst, but there was a possibility of his being still in his study. I went down the long hall to the room at the end, knocked, and, receiving no answer, turned the knob. The room was brightly lighted. I stepped within.

"Mr. Hermon," I said. But Hermon did not turn. He was sitting with his back to me, beside a small table on which stood an almost empty decanter, a

siphon, and two glasses. There was something in his pose, something in the way his head lolled back against the leather cushions of his chair, that made me start hurriedly to his side.

He had been dead some time. Already *rigor mortis* was beginning to set in. There was a rim on the inside of the decanter, showing me exactly how much of the brandy had been used. It was a good deal. And alcohol was a virulent poison to Hermon.

But why, knowing this, had he drunk so freely? How had he come to forget what Banks had told him? I was puzzled for an instant; then, as a small object lying on the white rug beside the body caught my eye, a light suddenly dawned on me. This was not a case of unintentional suicide! The *two* glasses on the table, the reek of brandy on Mary Hermon's breath, the small object I had picked up from the rug—the wilted petal of a sea-green orchid, in shape not unlike the wing of a bat, and ground almost to a pulp by a woman's small, high heel—was any further evidence needed?

As I turned to leave the room, the telephone on a small stand in the corner rang musically. I answered the call.

"Hello! Is that you, Jim?" I recognized Orchid Parry's voice. "What is keeping you? Do you—"

"This is not Mr. Hermon," I interrupted. "He"—and I paused an instant before driving the blow home—"he is dead! Who is this speaking?"

A gasping cry that ended in a shriek answered me. I was conscious of a feeling of grim gratification as I replaced the instrument on the stand and went back to Mary Hermon's room. Orchid Parry would pay now—but not in the coin she had expected!

Annette had put her mistress to bed, and was awaiting instructions. I sent her to telephone to Banks, asking him to come up at once. Then I went to the side of the bed and looked down at Mary Hermon.

"Why did you do it?" I asked quietly.

She did not speak, but the color ebbed swiftly from her cheeks, and her eyes seemed to grow larger and blacker in her small, white face.

"You were with him," I accused her. "You knew brandy was so much poison to him—and you persuaded him to drink with you. Why did you do it?"

For a full minute she did not answer. Then:

"You were there last night," she said. "You heard, you—*saw!* He was going to her—to-night. You know it. I couldn't keep him—to myself—any—other—way."

"Do you realize," I asked her, "what you have done?"

She nodded.

"I've killed him—yes, I realize it. I did it on purpose. I wanted to. He was mine, wasn't he?"

"His life was not yours to take," I said sternly. "You committed murder!"

"Does it matter what you call it?" she asked wearily. "I shouldn't have done it, only—I had to. I told him I'd followed him last night, and heard what he was going to do. I begged him not to go. He laughed at me. He said he'd go if he had to crawl on his hands and knees. He meant it. Then I told him I hadn't understood that he cared so much; that if he really loved her I wouldn't stand in his way. Oh, no!"

She laughed, a quiet, mirthless laugh that sent a chill over me.

"I told him to go—that I wished him good luck and happiness." Again that laugh. "Then I suggested that we have a last drink together, because I was going away in the morning, and wouldn't trouble him any more. He was so glad that I was going to be so easily disposed of he forgot all about what Doctor Banks had told him. Funny, wasn't it? I filled his glass, and he patted me on the shoulder and said I was a good little scout, and he was sorry he'd treated me badly. And then—we drank."

In spite of myself, I shuddered.

"Jim never could stop at one drink," she went on, in her slow, drawing voice. "He had several. And then—he just put his head back—and died. He died. My Jim died. And I came in here and sent for you. Will you call that woman up, please, and tell her that Jim isn't coming, because he's dead? I'd like her to know that she'll never get him now. He's still mine. And I took that green flower-thing she gave him out of his pocket and trampled on it. I didn't want anything of hers to touch him. Tell her that too, please."

Of a sudden, her voice changed; the light went out from her eyes. They looked like two burned-out coals in the gray of her convulsed face.

"I loved him," she said, in a dreadful, dry whisper. "I loved him—and I killed him. He's dead. He'll never hold me in his arms any more—never kiss me. Jim's dead. But he was mine—all mine. She never had him. He didn't want me—he wanted her. But—I kept him. He was never hers—do you understand?—never—never—*never!*" Her voice mounted in shrill crescendo as she raised herself on her elbows.

"She tried to take him away from me. She's a devil, a smooth, slimy devil, like that horrible plant he gave her—a devil with green eyes that stare and stare. . . . But he's dead, and he'll never hold her in his arms as he held me—he'll never be to her what he was to me. Oh, Jim . . . Jim . . . Jim . . ." Her tense muscles suddenly relaxed, and she sank weakly back among the pillows.

"I never thought you'd know," she whispered faintly. "I never thought any one would know. But—I had to do it. I—loved him." Her eyes closed, and she lay there, white and still.

No, Mary Hermon did not die, although for weeks she hovered between life and death, and her sanity hung in the balance. I see her sometimes, a frail little slip of a woman, with big, dark

eyes and a mass of blue-black hair, framing a pale, plain face. She seldom smiles and never laughs.

Doctor Banks confirmed my diagnosis that Hermon had died from the effects of alcoholic poisoning, and the autopsy, which the family thought advisable, vindicated our combined opinions. Banks

was so sure of himself that he even ventured the statement that Hermon was in the habit of drinking alone—a statement borne out by the fact that only one glass was found beside the body. You see, I had removed the other. Mary Hermon was not going to suffer any more if I could prevent it.



LONGING

By David Cory

THE road that leads to Yesterday
 I would not tread again—
 The roses all they had their thorns,
 And ecstasy its pain.

I would not cross the well-worn bridge
 That spanned the silver stream,
 Nor watch the pallid crescent moon
 Within its waters gleam.

I would not hear the vesper bells
 Proclaim the hour for prayer,
 Nor smell the lilac's fragrant breath
 Upon the evening air.

I could not wait to hear the gate
 Click down the dusky lane—
 But I would die to feel your lips
 Upon my mouth again.



THE RISK

By Cosmo Hamilton

I

"HAVE you seen the passenger-list? Is there anybody we know on board?"

Tracy's young brother turned round from a close examination of the wardrobe in their stateroom on the boat-deck.

"I vote we don't look at the passenger-list," he said. "It relieves the monotony of liner-life to run unexpectedly against people. Don't you think so, old boy?"

"Righto!" agreed Rowan. He unpacked his razors and arranged them with a touch of neatness on the shelf under the looking-glass.

"There's one angel on board, anyway," said Harry. "She came on only just in time. Blue eyes, golden hair, and oh, my dear chap, such a kissable mouth! She was with her father—at least, I suppose he was her father; and how a coarse-grained, apoplectic brute like that could be responsible for such an absolute darling is the eighth wonder of the world."

The elder Tracy gave one of his quiet chuckles. "Well," he said, "you're not going to have a dull passage at any rate—what?"

Harry showed a line of strong white teeth. "So long as you don't butt in, I may stand half a chance. I really am awfully keen about this girl. She's exactly my idea of how a girl should look."

"Inflammable little devil!" said Tracy.

"Why not? I can be young only once. Look here, old man: just promise me to talk politics with her father, and confine yourself to nothing more personal than a cheery good-morning to her. Will you?"

Rowan Tracy knocked the ash out of his pipe and stretched out his long legs.

"My dear chap, don't you know that these extraneous young women have no earthly interest for me? One of these days I may, with luck, introduce you suddenly to the one girl of all this earth who is going to be my wife, and then you'll be able to talk about angels with a bit more knowledge than you do at present. There's the bugle. Let's feed."

The brothers, so utterly dissimilar in appearance, so closely and delightfully united in sympathy, went arm in arm down the companionway, past the orchestra, which had begun to play a dull selection of old English airs, and found themselves rubbing shoulders with the usual hungry, heterogeneous crowd at the chief steward's table. The London officials of the steamship company had notified the *Lurania* that Mr. Rowan Tracy, M. P., was to receive special attention and a seat at the captain's table. The steward had made it so. The two brothers were conducted through a maze of tables to the place of honor. They were alone there.

"The little old captain," said Harry, consulting the elaborate menu with the eye of a specialist, "won't be down today. Tricky job getting away from the coast."

Rowan smiled indulgently at his brother's elderly seafaring nonchalance and rose suddenly to his feet. He twisted round the chair next his own, and, to Harry's combined amusement and chagrin, bowed with more than a touch of politeness to a girl who had been shown to the table by a steward.

It was the angel.

Her eyes were bluer and her hair more golden than Harry had been able to convey in his boyish colloquial outburst. From a quick glance, the elder brother saw behind the exquisite youth and the quiet shy dignity of this quite unusual girl something that made him feel queerly and unexplainably interested. It struck him that round the delicate corners of her mouth there was an expression of rather pathetic dependence, something which showed that, young as she was, she had already tasted some of the sadness of life. Among the smartly dressed women in the saloon, her slight, exquisite figure in its simple black frock stood out like a little sigh among loud laughter.

For the first time in his busy life Rowan Tracy felt self-conscious, awkward. He passed her the menu silently, and when she said "Thank you" her voice thrilled him. He caught his brother's reproachful eyes and met them steadily. He seemed to say: "You and your little promise be damned, my friend! By the grace of God, I have met my woman, and I know it. Laugh if you like. You are young, and it is the privilege of the young to forget easily. If ever this girl goes out of my life again, it will not be because I have lacked the courage to claim her!"

II

YOUNG Mrs. Kavanagh was one of those merry little souls with poisonous tongues, who invariably on board ship collect round them most of the young men under twenty-two and several over sixty. Like her numerous sisters of the same breed, she was helpless and required wrapping up and unwrapping, and some one always had to bring her broth at eleven-o'clock and tea or chocolate at four. Also, like her sisters, her ankles were neat, and out of the kindness of her heart she shared the fact with others. On the fifth day out she

was lying in her deck-chair on the sunny side of the deck, and to give her atmosphere and the impression of what she euphoniously called "cul-ture"—she had been one of the belles of Chicago—she was carrying a little library composed of Hewlett, Shaw, Ibsen, and Nietzsche, not one of which could she read to save her life.

Rowan Tracy walked by. His hand was holding the arm of Leila Brandon—the angel. If any of his fellow-members of the House of Parliament had seen him at that moment, they would have been obliged to stare into his face to recognize their rather stern friend. He looked ten years younger and like a man who had found the Eldorado of his dreams.

The man in the striped white flannel trousers, who characteristically forgot to hold his stomach in his chest, looked after them with what is called, and hideously called, the knowing smile.

"Quick work," he said. "I wonder what effect an American wife will have upon English politics?"

The pear-shaped man, whose chin broke like waves into his collar, guffawed.

"If a man married every girl whose arm he held on board ship," he said, "most of us would have harems. I've crossed fifty-nine times. Ha! ha!"

Then Mrs. Kavanagh with the sweetest of smiles: "Marry? Do English members of Parliament marry *those* things?"

"Those things?" The boy who was sitting at her feet looked up. The words had brought a flush to his face. "I've asked Miss Brandon to meet my sister. I think she's a ripping girl," he said deliberately.

The little woman from Chicago shrugged her shoulders.

"The longer I live," she said, "the more painfully obvious it becomes that if a woman wishes to be interesting to men, she must not be good. This Miss

Brandon of yours, boy dear, is not only looked upon as a Madonna by most of you men, but she has absolutely captured our Mr. Tracy, the 'star turn.' Do any of you happen to know—please bear in mind that I'm no scandalmonger—that the fair Leila Brandon is at this moment keeping house for a neighbor of mine, the notoriously unfastidious Mr. Maxwell McDonough?"

"Oh, no!" cried the boy.

"Oh, yes," said the little woman, reveling in the effects of her bomb; "and if you don't believe me go and look in the stateroom next to hers. Everybody in Chicago has been talking about their liaison for months. They say that McDonough, who is a patron of the drama, found her in a stock company and made her, for the moment, the leading lady of his heart and home."

Disentangling herself from the close folds of her steamer-rug so expertly as to display an expensively embroidered pair of stockings, Mrs. Kavanagh looked round at the faces of her audience and gave a hard little laugh.

"Of course, I've scandalized you good people," she said, "and doubtless you are calling me a cat, but I consider it to be the *duty* of a good woman to warn her friends against the vultures of society."

Some one who had apparently been sleeping in a deck-chair within range of the woman's staccato voice rose abruptly and cast at her a look so full of disgust and nausea that a rush of blood dulled for a moment the rouge upon her cheeks. As he strode off with square, uncompromising shoulders, the boy who still sat, though uncomfortably, at Mrs. Kavanagh's feet, recognized Harry Tracy and gave a little whistle through his lips.

Rowan Tracy still held her arm. They were leaning on the rail above the steerage-deck. Beneath them sprawled the ungainly, untidy flotsam and jetsam of European civilization who

expected to find the streets of America paved with gold.

Tracy's usually sympathetic eyes were concentrated upon the wistful flower-face of the girl who unconsciously nestled against his shoulder. The poor devils beneath him, whose disillusionment hourly was growing nearer, might have been miles away.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"Canada," he said. "Will you come?"

A startled, disappointed look came into the girl's eyes.

"What do you mean?" she said. Was he too, then, like all the others?

"I've been looking for you always, looking and looking. And all the while I've been saving up for you, saving everything for you—soul and body and heart. Do you think you could find enough in me to give me all I need in return? By all, I mean *your* soul and body and heart. Will you marry me, and walk through the rest of my life so closely by my side that we shall be able to hear each other's heart beat?"

A sort of trembling seized the girl. She stood inarticulate, but her eyes were filled with a rush of things—thankfulness, gratitude, joy, and, oddly enough, surprise.

And then he said: "Can't you find anything to say?"

She put up her face. It was the action of a child. She seemed to be alone with this man in a world which up to that moment had been peopled with enemies and ugly with sin.

With a sort of inward cry, he took her lips and so opened the floodgates of her heart.

"Thank God for you!" she said. "Thank God! I'd given you up ages ago. And when I came on board this ship I prayed that I might have the strength to choose a dark night and a quiet hour and slip down into a deep, peaceful grave. Life has been almost too much for me. I was at the end of my tether. Your great, strong arm held

me back. I have belonged to you, soul and body and heart, not for five days—these blessed five days—but always, so that I seem to have forgotten everything that has gone before.”

“Darling, darling,” he said, “forget everything except that I love you. When can you marry me?”

She clutched his arm desperately.

“Soon, oh, soon!” she cried. “If you love me well enough never to remember—never to think of me except as you have known me—marry me at once. Take me from this ship, and never let me out of your sight again. I love you! I love you! You shall never regret it. I swear that. I will serve you and walk at your side. You shall shape me—make me anything you like. Tell me you’re not afraid of the risk!”

The girl spoke as though she were pleading for her life.

Tracy took her in his arms and kissed her mouth. What did *he* care who saw? He had found his mate.

“Risk? There is no risk? I love you. You as I know you. You as you are.”

Tracy turned as he felt a sharp, warning hand upon his arm, and met the eyes of his brother. In them was a look that he had never seen before.

“What are you doing!” Harry’s voice was harsh.

“Beginning to live,” said Tracy triumphantly. “Leila is going to marry me.”

III

LEILA held out her hand to Harry. She liked this boy. His frank, clean admiration was very refreshing, very good. It was also very different from the sort of admiration to which she had been subjected. To her astonishment and consternation, her hand was ignored. What poison had this boy been injected with, or, worse still, had he heard the truth, in her case the deadliest of all poisons? Happiness is like the statue of Isis, whose veil no mortal ever raised.

“Can I speak to you alone, Rowan?” said Harry. “It’s very urgent.”

“Of course, my dear fellow. What’s your trouble?”

He took Leila, put her into her deck-chair, made her comfortable, kissed her lips, whispered an excuse, and ran his arm through his brother’s.

“Your cabin,” said the boy grimly.

Neither of them was aware that they were followed by Leila Brandon, who, with a fatalistic dread of impending evil, stood outside the window of the state-room, listening.

Rowan loaded his pipe, and as he did so he hummed the finale of the last act of “Faust.”

Harry had never been known to beat about the bush. Now, facing his brother, he came to the point at once.

“I wish to God, Ro, something had happened to prevent your sailing!” he began abruptly, and paused at the stare with which his exclamation was received.

“Do you? I don’t. What do you mean?” Rowan put the question quickly. Already a nameless dread was forming in his mind.

“What I say. I’m awfully sorry, old man. You and I are pals as well as brothers. I’d rather break my arm than hurt you. But it’s got to be done, and it’s up to me to do it.”

The unusual emotion in the boy’s voice made Rowan look sharply at him.

“Hurt me?” he said. “How? I don’t know anything that could hurt me now.”

“Well, old man, it’s about the girl—Miss Brandon. I heard things, and refused to believe them. When I saw that you were really hard hit, I watched and listened. To-day I went a step further. I made inquiries. You must chuck her at once, without any bones at all.”

“I’ll see you damned first! And, further than that, I’ll trouble you to leave Miss Brandon’s name out of this discussion.”

Harry stiffened. He had never been

spoken to in this way by his brother. But for the great love that existed between them and his desire to prevent Rowan's life from being, as he thought, utterly ruined, he would have let things slide. As it was, he persisted with all the pluck for which he was famous at his college.

"The worst of it is," he said, "Miss Brandon's name isn't the only one that must come into this discussion. It's bracketed with that of a low brute called Maxwell McDonough, a notorious woman-hunter—the blatant cad whom I have heard bragging in the smoking-room about his successes. In fact, the man we thought at first was Leila Brandon's father, and who has kept to his cabin half drunk all the trip, is the man who is keeping her."

Rowan got up slowly. His fist was clenched, and his lips were set.

"No," cried Harry; "before you hit me you've got to listen. I'm not telling you the gossip of the ship. I'm talking facts. I've had the whole story verified by the purser. If you don't believe me, go and find out for yourself. Good God, man, think of you, *you* with all you mean to the country and all you have to do for the country, taking back a wife who has been the plaything of any man who could pay enough! It's unthinkable."

Rowan's arm was held back by a slim white hand, and Leila Brandon stood between the two brothers.

"Don't strike him," she said quietly. "What he says is true."

"I don't believe it. I'll never believe it." Tracy's voice shook.

"You must believe it. You said you loved me, and you asked me to be your wife. I love you. I have never loved any one else. Never, I swear it! I was afraid to run the risk of losing you by telling you what every one else seems to know. Now you shall have the truth, and then do anything you like with me. Make me your mistress or throw me aside."

The two brothers watched the pale girl as she stood up before them to be judged. There was a terrible simplicity, ghastly dignity, in every line of her slight young figure. She stood with her hands clasped, like a little girl who had to confess some misdemeanor to her guardians. The elder brother's face was drawn and white, and there was nothing of triumph on the face of the younger one. The regular pulse of the ship went on steadily, and the sun flooded the little stateroom and made it seem sarcastically cheerful. The steady pendulum swing of the clean towels on the rack emphasized the rigid self-control of the three people whose nerves were at breaking-point.

"When I was sixteen my father died." The girl's voice came in a sort of recitative. "His love was the only thing that made my childhood happy. For years after he died my home was unbearable, and I longed to get away. My mother was a cold, unresponsive woman, and all the love she had was given to my sister, who loathed the sight of me because I was pretty and she wasn't. I was superfluous, unneeded. I was a constant source of irritation to them both. Nothing that I did was right. Every little action was criticised.

"I was watched and suspected because I was young and full of the joy of life. There wasn't much joy in life in our little, hide-bound town. I was horribly dissatisfied and lonely. The four walls of what wasn't a home to me became every day more and more like the bars of a cage. The only time I was happy was when I was reading stories of love and excitement by the light of one flickering candle at night in my bedroom, and even this, harmless as it now seems, was stopped by Hetty, who said I was steeping my mind in false and harmful things. I can't begin to tell you how this sister hurt me and warped my nature, and drove me to make plans for an escape. Anything, even work in a store, seemed

better, more full of promise, than the same deadly monotonous round of small duties and hideous quarrels that seemed to chip little pieces off my soul. . . . One dull, wet morning I put my few small treasures in a cheap suit-case and sneaked away like a whipped dog. With a dragged feather in my hat, and the mud of the town I hoped I should never see again on my skirt, I bought a ticket for Boston. Tucked away in my purse I had a small advertisement of a well-known clothing-house requiring young girls as cloak-models. I checked my suit-case at the big, strange station and asked my way eagerly to the store which was to make me independent of my sister's tyranny. I waited timidly among almost a hundred other girls until my turn came for examination. Examination!—think of it, by a little, dirty man with trespassing fingers. Uh! I turned out to be a 'perfect thirty-six,' but that was not enough to get me the job. There was something else required, but even the thought of going back to Laneville was not enough to drive me to that. I hurried out of the store into the air. I suppose I was crying—disillusionment had come so soon. I was just going back to the station when one of my would-be fellow-models touched me on the arm. She was not a 'perfect thirty-six,' and as a last resource was going to apply to the manager of a No. 2 Musical Comedy Company for chorus work. . . . We toured three-night stands and 'smalls' until the company was stranded near Chicago. With the few dollars we had saved, we went to that bleak city, and there we remained hungry and idle until a fairy-prince—that's what my little friend Daisy called him—put us both into a stock company which he had organized. He did not want gratitude. He wanted me. I refused to give him what he wanted even after I was told

that my services were no longer required. But hunger and loneliness have been responsible for many of the poor women who come out after dark with the bats. . . . He has been very kind to me in his own coarse way, but he took good care that I should never escape. He heaped flashy things upon me, but he never gave me money. In the few hours that he left me alone, how often I wished that I might have been contented with dull monotony and daily duty and an honest bed! I dared not look forward. I was even afraid of looking beyond my waking hours, but do you suppose, either of you, that in the prayers I cried out at night I didn't beg that some day soon—and it would have to be soon—I might meet a man who would understand, and forgive because he understood, and would lift me up again out of this gutter? . . . You came, and I thought that you were the man. Was I wrong? Have I expected the impossible? Tell me, is the risk too great?"

Her voice broke, but she maintained a curious dignity that is only acquired by those who have served a hard apprenticeship to life.

Without any hesitation, Rowan Tracy took her in his arms.

"I have been working theoretically for many years," he said. "Give me the chance of doing something practical. Make a man of me. Let me wipe out the memory of all these hideous things. You and I began our lives on the *Lurania*. Nothing but death shall separate us now. I love you."

With a look of awe and complete sympathy, Harry slipped quietly out. As he closed the door softly behind him, a little, glad cry rang through the cabin, went up like a dove to Heaven, and settled on the soft shoulder of the Madonna, Mother of Women.



FIRE OF THE SNOW

By Evelyn Campbell

IN the North, where the long winter holds the sun in leash until the pulse of spring thrills through its reluctant veins, and the belated summer breaks forth to burn and die in the grasp of the pursuing frost, passion comes swiftly to life in the hearts of men and maids, and, full born, demands its fruition. The stars are very close to the everlasting snow up there.

Such a love brought Big Jean and beautiful Blanche-Marie, trembling with the newness of their emotions, before the parish priest, almost before Romance had time to lift its shy head.

There were those who looked dubiously at the bridegroom and thought of the hearts that had lain at the bride's feet, to be played with for a little while and forgotten. Then, looking once more and seeing the great, graceful length of the man, his face which had the clear-cut lines of the Indian, with the soft, dark eyes of the Provençal, and knowing that among the men of the village he had always been a leader, they doubted no longer. Here was one, indeed, to hold the fancy of a flighty maid.

Yet before the wedding-ring had grown cold upon her finger, there was Blanche-Marie upon the doorsteps of her friend Melanie, with sighs and complaints upon her lips. Life, it seemed, had grown dull already in the cabin where Big Jean's mother had been happy, asking nothing but a full trap and a hot fire for her man at the end of the day, and enough clear spring water and white sand to keep shining her copper vessels brought from France. And to such a fate was to be condemned

Blanche-Marie, who since she could walk had chased the butterflies of life. Melanie, who had been one of the most dubious of the wedding guests, gave comfort with admonition.

"But it is that you are wedded now, *ma chérie*," she said. "To stand about the fountain or to dally at the trader's would be unseemly in Madame Laroux, although I admit it was but amusing in Blanche-Marie. There are the coppers and the bead-work."

"It is the coppers that I hate!" flashed Blanche-Marie. "And the bead-work! I have no Indian blood."

These were words leveled directly at Jean Laroux, though he was never to hear them. Blanche-Marie was a bit of Parisian pavement, transplanted, Heaven knows how or why, to this eagle's nest amidst the snows. Her beauty was of the kind before which men are as helpless as leaves before the wind. She charmed without effort because she was created for charm, and hearts that thrilled once never ceased to quicken for her.

"And he say before marriage," she went on sullenly, "that I upon the pedestal should sit, while he worshiped—so!"

"And is that fitting," questioned Melanie, scandalized, "that you should be so revered? *Hélas*, what would you? A man courts that he may marry. He weds that he may have one to cook his dinner."

"And he upbraid me," finished Blanche-Marie with the sullenness of a spoiled child, "if even one little bean, he burn."

The new-born summer was glowing

like the heart of a rose when Red Angus Mackenzie came over the long trail with his wiry little horses and rough cart, to buy supplies at the trader's. He had stood about for two or three days in his silent way, taking no part in the village life, when Blanche-Marie saw him first. The other men whom she had known all her life were for passing on with quick salutations when they encountered her. They were of no mind for the battery of her dark eyes when Big Jean was there for a background, so in the stranger she saw the possibility of a fleeting amusement; for she was sadly distraught, even before three months of wedded life.

She sighed prodigiously, drawing her water at the common well, when he stood within earshot, and was rewarded when he took the rope from her hand and with a twist of the wrist filled her jug to overflowing. She looked from under her silky lashes, a look that had never failed its mark, but the stranger's eyes met her own, cold and unmoved.

"*Ciel!*" murmured Blanche-Marie, astonished. "Is it that the man is the devil? Such eyes! Such a redness!"

For Angus Mackenzie was of a different race and a different blood. He was a red Scot. His cheeks were criss-crossed with tiny veins painted there by the icy fingers of the frost, and his beard hung across his breast like a flame. To Blanche-Marie, wearied of her dark-skinned countryman and the colorless snows, he was like a sun-god.

It was in keeping with his taciturn nature that he made no inquiries nor tried to seek her out. He was of those men for whom woman is a closed book, to be opened by one hand alone. Still, unknown to her, his eyes followed her until her scarlet skirt and shining black head disappeared in her own doorway.

At their next meeting Blanche-Marie, piqued, gave him a tantalizing smile to match the invitation in her eyes, and this time he responded by walking a little way at her side. In her naive delight

at once more having a cavalier, she brought forth all her pretty ways.

It is not to be supposed that such a slackening of the reins of conventionality could be overlooked in a settlement where rigid virtue is the watchword of every door. Blanche-Marie at once felt the chill winds of disapproval blow across her path, but what cared she so long as Jean took his fish-lines and went his way every morning, to return at night far too sleep-drugged to listen to heedless gossip. A girl was not a vegetable!

But at last there came a night when the soup was as water, the fish burned in the pan, and the beans of the salt of brine. Big Jean, who was weary, cursed. Because Blanche-Marie was a small thing and cowered before him, he did not strike her, but for the first time he went away and left her in the cabin with the lonely night.

And Red Angus traveled north at moonrise. She knew, because they had spoken together that day. Swiftly she threw the red shawl about her burning face, and, looking with fury at the littered table and the smoking lamp, went forth to find him.

He was at the stable where his little horses were sheltered, fastening the last buckles on the harness and tying the last rope. All at once she knew that she loved him, and he was going. She was weeping in his arms, her tear-wet face raised to his. And his arms were like cold steel that would never unlock and his breast like an iron shield, strong to defend. With the first kiss he claimed her.

"You are mine!" he said savagely. "Mine! You go north with me tonight!"

"Yes, yes!" cried Blanche-Marie hurriedly. "I could never leave you now. I pray the good God there are no copper kettles there in the North."

Not understanding, but with quick hands, he made place for her in the cart among the boxes and bags, and, fearing

no man, drove boldly forth from the village.

Their departure was not unnoticed. Some one ran to the inn, where Big Jean, drinking smoky Scotch with old cronies, received the news with oaths that came from the unfed depths of his great frame.

"But he has—what you say?—picked a lemon," he said. "For me, I will choose again and this time, by gar! a woman who can make *pot-au-feu*."

So that there was no pursuit, and sun-up found Red Angus and his pack-train well on their way.

When he looked at Blanche-Marie he found her asleep. With her smooth, flushed cheek against a rough sack and her hands curled like little leaves, she looked like a fair child. It was hard to believe that she was a woman who had made her second choice. A terrible tenderness rose in his heart, a swelling that threatened to burst his iron breast. She was so little, so weak.

The love between them was a wonderful thing, as were the days that wound through forests and wide ways and the nights under the stars. Blanche-Marie never asked where they were going—there was too much love: in the day too much sunshine and gay laughter, and at night too much weariness.

But at last the journey came to an end. The cabin awaited them, a shack built by a lonely man for his own occupancy, crouched between two great firs, the tallest for many miles around. Blanche-Marie said nothing; she remembered the embroidery frame and the coppers, and looked anxiously around as she entered.

But in Angus Mackenzie's cabin there was no sign of another woman's affluence or industry. Everything was of the plainest and most primitive—a man's world. Blanche-Marie sighed with relief, even as her lover, who had allowed her to touch her hand to no task, made her comfortable with the best the place afforded.

She had learned that he was a prospector. There was a claim in the valley that promised riches. He sat at her feet in the moonlight and opened his heart to her in the way of silent men. By and by they would go down to the States—there was much to be had there—and after that, Europe, London, Paris. Blanche-Marie clapped her hands at that, but when he spoke, in a different tone, of the Scotch Highlands, she looked blank and shivered.

"I know nothing of it," she said plaintively. "Why should we leave Paris if we are happy there?"

When they had lived in the cabin between the two firs for ten fairy days, he told her one morning that he must go on a long journey to the next nearest trading - post—Blanche-Marie's village being the nearest. There was clothing to buy for her, and comforts for the cabin, which his eyes, grown tender in her service, could see were lacking. It was too far and too rough a way for her to travel; even the cart must be left behind.

She consented without demur. The time had been when she would have shrieked with terror at thought of the loneliness, and of the dogs, half wolf, that lay about the door. Now she even caressed an ear of Picard, the leader, who stood near. The love that wrapped her about was shield enough for any danger, and the adoration in her lover's eyes dwarfed the light of any other glance. But still she wept when he started, and hung about his neck.

"Is it that you would leave me here to die?" she sobbed. "Well, then, go! It will not be long."

Red Angus, who knew nothing of women's vagaries, and who was near to weeping himself, comforted her.

"I go only to buy you pretty things," he laughed. "My sweetheart cannot do with one gown. She shall have the best that can be found, and a chain for her neck, too."

He was away for weeks. One of the horses went lame, and there were various other mishaps, but when he returned there were bundles piled high upon each pony's back, and the bag of gold-dust he had carried with him lay in the trader's strong-box.

Blanche-Marie sat in the doorway. Her unbound hair lay in blue-black masses over her shoulders. Some of it even trailed upon the doorstep where she sat. She took no notice of his coming, because her face was buried in her hands and she was weeping, not tempestuously, as was her way, but with long, hard sobs that shook her frail body.

Red Angus swept her into his arms.

"I am here, sweetheart!" he cried, his own voice trembling.

But she, drawing back, betrayed a face so changed, so pale and sad, that his emotion was altered to amazement. It was as though the golden light of a window had suddenly been extinguished by a black north wind.

"What is it?" he cried fearfully. "Tell me, girl: has harm come to you?"

She echoed his words drearily. "Harm? Yes, the worst." Then, seeing how stunned he was, she went on: "Not to me alone. To all of us."

"You must tell me," he said, speaking in a tone strange to her.

And Blanche-Marie whispered fearfully: "There is to be a child."

Still he did not comprehend. "A child! That is no great matter—no cause for weeping, at least."

"His child," she whispered again.

His face changed at that. She did not see, because her own was hidden, and she was weeping again, this time against the doorpost. There was a silence.

"What of it?" cried Red Angus at last. "It is your child, and it shall be mine."

But the days passed into weeks, and the weeks into months, and still Blanche-Marie wept.

The long winter closed in upon them. There were days that were nights with the falling snow, and the two sat before their fire watching the wonderful thing die that had been between them. For Blanche-Marie had grown to shudder at his touch and to turn her face away.

He loved her even more. There was no more talk of Paris or gay doings there. Not much talk of anything. She would sit braiding her long hair or twisting it into rings, staring into the fire with eyes that had grown large and piteous. He cared for her as though she had been a child. He did not mind her petulancies or her tears, save that they saddened him. There was no longer a vestige of the playfulness of love between them; at the first repulse he had withdrawn his heart that had lain in her hands.

When the time arrived that he must go again to the trader's for supplies, he had the first hint of the cause of the change in her. He asked what present he could bring that would please her, since most of the pretty gowns he had bought on the last trip yet lay in their wrappings. And Blanche-Marie answered timidly, tremulously:

"I—I should like a copper kettle."

But it was in the illimitable dreariness of the late winter, when the two were housed together during endless days, that she could bear the burden of her secret thoughts no longer; or perhaps it was that she had grown weaker.

"It is the tie between us, him and me," she explained piteously. "It cannot break. The babe, he calls for his father."

So Red Angus knew at last. He pondered the question long and deeply when Blanche-Marie lay asleep, or seeming to sleep, in the bunk, with her face turned to the wall. There was reserve between them no longer. Her grief broke down all barriers. Day and night the plaint from her lips was the same: "I want my husband! I want him!"

One morning very early he wakened her from her fitful rest. He was leaning over her, dressed for the open. Out of doors there was the whining of the dogs and the patter of paws.

"Listen, Blanche-Marie," he said sternly, because his heart was like lead in his breast. She looked at him in sudden fear; his face was black in the smoky light.

"Listen," he said again. "I am going away. It will be days before I return. If it was later, I could not leave you, but I will stop at the Indian village and send a woman to you. Do you understand? You are safe; there is plenty of wood and food. You can care for yourself for a little while."

She asked no questions, but lay inert upon her bed. He bent over her again.

"Will you kiss me, Blanche-Marie?"

But she threw her arm across her face with a cry, and when she looked again he was gone. She could hear his voice calling to the dogs as they started with a burst of speed upon the long trail.

The sky lay like a snow-smothered blanket against the gray, frozen earth. The dogs, strong from rest and much fat caribou, bounded blithely forward, making good headway even over the unbroken trail. Red Angus ran with the team, partly to keep his blood from freezing, and partly to numb the pain that surged in his breast. There would be more snow. It was in the air. When he made camp that night, it was in a blinding, white world.

But to him the white smother presented no difficulty that he could not overcome. There was that within him which defied the storm and danger. Urging the struggling team on, he never waited for the blizzard to cease, or even abate, but, hardly giving the tired beasts time for food and the necessary rest, he pressed on his way. And on the seventh day he came in sight of the village which he had last seen on the night that he had taken Blanche-Marie from her home.

Had the spirit of some well-laid dead risen to defy them, the loungers in the trader's store could not have been more astounded than at the apparition of Red Angus' black and swollen face among them. With one accord, they drew apart and left him to face Big Jean, who leaned against a counter, his face swollen also, though not with the frost. Among the people of the village there had been a murmuring when Jean Laroux had allowed another to steal his wife away and had raised no hand to reclaim her or to avenge himself. There is always the grudging respect for bravery in men's hearts, and Angus Mackenzie, by coming alone among them, claimed what the other had forfeited.

But there are other ways than in loud talk and acts of vengeance that a man may seek reparation. Big Jean, whom no one understood, faced the man who had despoiled him, and they who saw his face shivered and drew back—all but Red Angus.

"I have come for you," he said, looking the other straight in the face. "We start at once."

Big Jean laughed, a terrible thing to hear.

"You wish me to witness your happiness—so?" he mocked. "Or is it that Madame grows lonely among the snows?"

"Do not call her name," warned Mackenzie steadily. "There is no time to waste. I will explain"—he looked around at the circle of faces—"but not here."

He walked to the door, and Jean Laroux involuntarily followed; but, reaching there, he stopped, and the curses in his throat strangled him.

"She wants to come back! Blood of my fathers! I would not take her back if she came crawling on her knees! The insolence!"

They were outside, upon the hard-trampled snow that was as smooth as an arena. Some of the onlookers had fol-

lowed them; others crowded in the open door. Red Angus stepped close to the other man's side.

"She will never come back . . . but she wants you. A child is coming . . . your child."

"God of my fathers!" Laroux staggered, then cried furiously: "You would foist this upon me? Go back—go back to that creature who sent you!"

"She did not send me," said Mackenzie, calmly as before, "her eyes alone asked; her lips seldom spoke. But she is sick, and she wants you. You must come."

And then suddenly they were fighting. A ring of rough, excited faces were around them; the dogs too—old Picard with a buried snarl in his throat. Big Jean in his wolfskin parka, a huge, almost grotesque figure, dwarfed the shorter man, who wore close mackinaws, and seemed slender in comparison. But in a moment it was to be seen that the men were evenly matched. It was like a battle of the caribous. There was the straining of great muscles, the breathing from bursting lungs, and then the blood. It splashed the faces of both, and froze as it burst from the bruised skin. There was a hoarse cry from Big Jean. A glittering knife flew from his hand and landed a dozen feet away in a mound of snow, where it buried itself to the hilt and remained, the handle erect as though it might have been slicing a huge wedding-cake.

"Now will you come?" said Angus Mackenzie, bending his enemy backward until the bones in his spine cracked. It was over. The sledge waited, and with the half-dead body of Laroux bundled upon it, Mackenzie mushed out of the village, as unafraid as when he had entered it. But the dogs grumbled among themselves. They had sensed the warm litter, and the meat, and the village dogs who cowered away before them.

If at the beginning of the journey the cold had bit into the vitals of Mackenzie

and his team, on the way back it took their bodies into its terrible hands and searched cruelly for the hearts that kept them quick.

And there was the added weight of Big Jean, who lay half stupefied, unable to walk from the pain that remained from the pressure of the knee in his back. On account of this he rode until it was seen that the dogs had much to do to keep the sledge moving. Their feet were bleeding, their hearts breaking. Then he rose and staggered behind, while Red Angus, slow to fatigue, trotted ever ahead to break trail for the straining dogs.

Days and nights merged into each other unnoticed. There was no rest but what must be taken from exhaustion. The team, none too well matched at the start, began to give up, finally to die. One by one they were left along the trail, small sacrifices, instantly to be buried beneath the wall of snow that ever drifted before the undying wind.

At length there was left only old Picard, the savage, whose ears Blanche-Marie had often caressed. When that happened the two who hated each other so fiercely were forced into speech.

"You shall hear why I came for you," said Red Angus, behind the wind-shield where the three lay together, gnawing frozen meat. "It is because at such a time a woman must have her way. The time is near. When it is over she shall take her choice. I have heard that they wish for things that are contrary to all reason: therefore, if she wishes for you after what has happened, she shall have you until her mind is clear again."

"She asked for me?" mumbled Big Jean in his throat.

"She asked for . . . a copper kettle," said Red Angus simply.

After awhile there was a great sob from the breast of Laroux. Picard, startled, looked around with red, snow-blinded eyes.

The three were harnessed to the

sledge, Red Angus in front. Soon they must take the meager packs upon their backs. But before this was done Big Jean hesitated and crumpled down in the snow. His feet were frozen.

There was a long delay while the other man worked over him, rubbing his limbs with snow, beating him back to life. When they could go on again, there was only one man to bear the burden. The strength of Laroux was as water.

"We must not die," Red Angus would say a hundred times a day. "Her time is near."

And in the terrible days of torture and in the nights as terrible, there was no sound but that of Big Jean's sobs.

An hour came at last when they knew for the first time in many weary hours the difference between day and night. So long they had struggled in the gray, semi-darkness of the blizzard that when the miracle came upon them they were dazzled by its wonder. The pall of gray was suddenly pierced by a gleam of soft brilliancy that bathed the desolate world in a flood of color. The northern sun was setting. There was nothing to be seen but its red-gold glory and the immeasurable spaces, snow-covered. What had been a world of despair became a place of beauty. What was almost peace came into the hearts of the two who knew such bitterness.

Between the snow-bowed firs the cabin lay buried to its chimney. In the smother who could see whether there were smoke or not? The firs bent sadly down.

A path was made some way to the door. Old Picard, who had made no lament when he left his wife and sons scattered along the trail for crows to feed upon next spring, sat upon his haunches and howled, short wolf-howls, to the sky. . . .

When the door lay open before them, they saw at first nothing but the gleam of the meager fire, and, crouching before it, the old Indian woman, who

turned an ancient face of aloof disdain towards their entrance.

Mackenzie, who led the way, called through cracked lips: "I have come, girl, and I have brought him;" but there was no answer save the sounds that had been with them before.

"*Marie, mon enfant!*" cried Big Jean, broken.

There was a signal of life from the bunk beyond the hearth. Blanche-Marie lay there veiled in her long, black hair, and the two who loved her could look at nothing but her eyes, which were filled with an indescribable light, the soft brilliance of a hundred candles burned before a sacred altar.

She lifted a transparent arm in a glad gesture of welcome.

"Ah, look!" she cried in a thread-like voice. "You must behold her, Jean, the little one. I am so happy that you are here to see her."

In some way—for his feet were helpless things—Laroux dragged himself nearer. From the foot of the bunk he looked upon her with incredulous eyes, and she, unconscious of his emotions, moved the heavy blanket with proud, feeble hands.

"You do not look," she accused, with childish petulance, "and I have waited for you so long . . ."

The ancient Indian woman stirred the fire, which sent forth but a feeble flame, for there was little fuel. Her face was like a seamed and withered mask, concealing the wisdom of all the centuries, and though her bent shoulders refused with scornful negation a share of the alien white man's burden, it is certain that she heard and understood all that passed.

Blanche-Marie raised the infant that lay against her breast in slender, trembling arms. She spoke to Jean, her husband, in poignant renunciation:

"It is for you. It is all I have to give—my child, ours. Ah, take her! . . . And when I give her to you, I am giv-

ing my soul—the soul of her you loved. Ah, you do not know! For months I have dreamed of this moment . . . when you would come to me; when I could take my heart from my breast and lay it at your feet. . . . I dreamed that perhaps you might forgive me then! We are made that way, we women. It is that we must pay the price of love somehow, somehow. And with me, it is my little one that I give back to you so gladly . . . Now I can see why the good mothers watch over their own so tenderly. . . . I should not wish that she should grow to be like me—poor Blanche-Marie.”

“But you, I will take you also,” said Jean Laroux, choking, the child in his arms. “All shall be forgotten . . .”

He leaned over her, and for a moment the three were blended indissolubly together; then he drew away fearfully, for the light died dully in her eyes, and her arms slipped from their fragile hold. He was awestricken, but he held the child jealously in a close, warm embrace.

Angus Mackenzie stood apart by the window, from which he could see the leaden sky, filmed magically over by the caprice of winter. It had begun to snow fitfully, and the wind was rising among the majestic fir-trees. Their long, leaden plumes waved mournfully. In all the lonesome out-of-doors there was no gleam of the red western glow that had lighted his way home, and within, the fire on the hearth died, unkept, into ashes.



WHO?

By Grace Crane Smith

OH, who will take a walk with me,
 A walk by the stormy sea?
 The mists sweep in with the smell of salt
 And blow across the lea;
 The breakers boom as the foamy spray
 Dashes toward the sky.
 Oh, who will take a walk with me
 And watch the storm ride high?
 The green of the waves has turned to gray
 With streaks of black 'neath the foam,
 Yet out on that heaving sea there are
 Hearts that are far from home.
 And full is the tide, but fuller my heart,
 And I yearn like the raging sea
 To hold to my heaving breast a heart
 Who will joy in the storm with me!

A LOOK BEFORE LEAPING

By Roger Hartman

“**H**ERE’S a rather good bit—figure stuff, for a change.”

Morgan Leonard set the canvas on his easel with an air of indifference which failed to cloak the pride he obviously felt in the painting. To affect to take his work lightly was a favorite pose with him, and accounted perhaps for the number of his friends who were willing to serve as spectators at impromptu exhibitions in his studio. They never felt it necessary to manifest the awed enthusiasm with which a majority of wealthy amateurs expect their performances to be greeted. With Leonard setting the example of half-disdainful tolerance, it was more than enough to favor the painting with a brief glance and grunt a patronizing “Pretty good, old chap!” One did not have to listen to Leonard describing the good points of each picture in puzzlingly technical terms, one did not need to pretend to understand what he meant by “depth,” accompanied always, in amateur circles, by a circular swipe along an imaginary canvas with an out-turned thumb; or by “atmosphere,” illustrated with a wave of both hands; or by any number of other temperamental words and gestures. Morgan Leonard might dabble with colors and brushes and palette-knives, like any poor skate who had to do it to live, but he did not let it monopolize his time or his conversation. He still loafed about his clubs and played a good hand at auction or poker; he could be enlisted readily in projects for motor-trips or discreet dinner-parties; he might have artistic tendencies, but he was nevertheless a regular fellow, and

as such found his friends tolerant of his weakness for daubing himself up like a house-painter in his moments of leisure from the important business of killing time.

Moreover, Morgan Leonard had found his puttering with paint a potent factor in making the acquaintance of a number of well-favored young women who, without being too obviously complaisant to attract a gentleman of sophisticated tastes, were, on the other hand, not too tiresomely prim to prove entertaining. His models more than justified his hobby to those of his friends who were on terms of sufficient intimacy with him to share in his pleasant little studio parties. It wasn’t hard to put up with an occasional exhibit of Morgan’s beloved daubs in return for participation in those informally delightful affairs. And the models, thanks to a certain discrimination on Leonard’s part, were truly above the average in looks, conversation, tastes, and—let us say, discretion. For a young gentleman of abundant finances and invisible occupations, who has long since exhausted the amusement possibilities of the stage-doors, it is undeniably refreshing to gain entrée to that twilight zone where art rubs elbows with the Philistine, and morals and proprieties and conventions begin to merge into the easy code of near-Bohemia. Morgan was deservedly popular with his friends, and his studio was a haven of blessed refuge for a choice few of them.

Livingston Schuyler Van Duyck, gazing at Morgan’s latest masterpieces through the blue haze of cigarette-smoke,

was, however, beginning to be bored. Old Morgan had begun to display signs of straying after strange gods of art, and a series of cubic portrayals of carrots, cab-drivers, and corkscrews, all looking very much alike to Mr. Van Duyck's untutored eye, had led that art-critic to wonder whether, after all, Morgan might not be a person to avoid in the future. He rubbed his chin reflectively as he stared at a chaotic depiction of what Leonard assured him had been, in life, a loaf of bread, and meditated vaguely upon an excuse for canceling that tentative engagement for dinner at the club. He was disappointed in Morgan. But at the words "figure stuff" he brightened perceptibly. He had been sufficiently initiated into the parlance of the craft to understand that this phrase meant something more interesting than futuristic carrots in lemon and aquamarine. He leaned forward as the "figure stuff" slid on the easel. Then his somewhat pudgy figure straightened and grew rigid with attention; his rather weak mouth opened to vacuity; his round, pale eyes glittered and widened.

"Gad, old top, but that's ripping, I say! *Positively!* That's what I call top-hole, really!"

Leonard dissembled his gratification at this obviously sincere tribute.

"Oh, it's all right, in its way, of course. But it's nothing but photography. I only painted the model—a camera would have done it just as well."

"It's great," asserted Mr. Van Duyck admiringly. "How you do it I can't see. It's a gift, that's what, old top. A gift—what?"

"Oh, I don't know. It's plugging away does most of it. If I had time to go into the thing seriously, I might do something worth while, of course, but—"

"I tell you it's a gift. Now, I never could pick 'em out like that! I see pictures of peaches like that in the papers, and I read about 'em in books, but I

never run across 'em anywhere in the flesh. But *you* could shut your eyes and walk a block in Hoboken, by Gad, and come back with a queen, a dream! It's a gift, Morgie, old scout—*positively!*" And Mr. Van Duyck resumed his reverent inspection of the "figure stuff," quite unconscious that he had grievously wounded his friend's self-esteem. No artist—not even an excruciatingly wealthy young man who confines his artistry to Tuesdays and Fridays—likes to discover that a tribute to his talent is meant to refer to his ability at discovering charming young women not averse to posing in what is flippantly but vividly described as "the altogether."

"Oh, the model!" Morgie's voice was pained. "Yes, she's a looker, but I can't give her much outside of that. New one—wandered in the other day, and I saw her possibilities just like that. Funny how a fellow's eye gets trained so as to spot a good model in the first sec, isn't it?"

"She's a dream—*positively!*" murmured the rapt and inattentive art-critic. "Who is she? When do I meet her?"

The discouraged painter shrugged his shoulders, reflecting that, after all, Livy was indubitably atrophied above his ample neck, and that his judgment was wholly negligible in matters concerning true art. He turned to a mahogany stand and fumbled with a number of printed cards until he found one written in pencil.

"Miriam St. Clair," he read aloud wearily. "River, twelve-three-four-nine. No address. It's up to you, Livy, if you want to cultivate her. I can't give her a thing except looks. She's a prune, honestly."

Mr. Van Duyck busied himself with a pocket-pad and gold-pencil, grinning sagely. He was absolutely "on" to Morgie's little game. He didn't blame old Morgie for wanting to monopolize a dream like this—and, whatever his failings as a connoisseur of art, Mr. Van

Duyck was undeniably versed in the accurate appraisal of feminine attractions. If Morgie wouldn't fix it up for him, he would play a lone hand. It was better, anyway. A four-cornered party was often a nuisance to an earnest young man. Two would be more workable and less expensive.

He studied the painting anew. It was the sadly conventional "figure stuff" of the amateur, remarkable rather for frankness than for any quality or originality or expression, and Morgie, while a fair workman, was far from being a genius of even the lowest order. He had painted the girl facing the observer, in the alluring garb of sinless Eden, and, paradox though the words appear, the absence of covering covered a multitude of artistic sins. To Mr. Van Duyck's approving eye, the picture was a masterpiece, but his tribute was for the sculptress, Nature, rather than for the portraitist. Never in his life had Mr. Van Duyck been so utterly fascinated by the feminine figure. He was excusable, indeed, for the model whose form had been photographically portrayed by Morgie's brush was a poem in pink, velvety skin, soft, adorable curves, and long, slender lines so graceful that not even Morgie's faulty technique had been able to disguise their loveliness. The face was pretty, and a little odd, the mouth perhaps a shade too firm for beauty, the lips thin and expressive of a certain resolution, the eyes just a trifle indicative of an excessively calculating spirit. But it was a face, none the less, which one would recognize easily; not distinctive in any single feature, but markedly so in the *ensemble*. And, although Livingston Schuyler Van Duyck impressed that countenance upon his memory and amiably approved of it, it was not the face which fascinated him, but the figure—the wonderful, alluring bit of rose and ivory moulded by the cunning hand of Nature for the utter enslavement of the manly eye. He

could not tear his gaze away from it. He gloated over it until Morgan's patience was badly strained, and when that slightly vexed artist finally insisted upon ending the private view took his breath away by proposing to buy the canvas.

It was a great moment for Morgan Leonard, so great that he forgot and forgave Livy for his Philistine comment and figuratively fell on his neck. A man may be never so proud of his amateur standing in outward pose, but show him a chance to secure actual coin of the realm in exchange for his creations, and he will turn professional in the twinkling of a diamond shirt-stud. Praise is sometimes eloquent, but money continues to speak more convincingly than the most emphatic of mere words. And Morgie Leonard, who found it really a trial to invest his surplus income, accepted Livy's check for two hundred dollars with exactly the same flutter of excited nerves as the hungriest hobo-hemian of Greenwich Village would have taken it. He had sold a picture! He was a member in good standing of the Artists' Union, Local No. Nought! He was a member of the guild, a blood-brother to the profession! He had arrived! He had no intention of surrendering that check in return for a mere sheaf of paper money—not he! As long as he lived, it would repose in a frame over his dresser, to greet him each morning with the assurance that he was an actual artist and no mere dilettante. He permitted Livy to break their dinner-date without a protest. He wanted to be alone to gloat over that evidence of his professional status. He even helped Livy surround the canvas with protective wrappings, and refrained from wonder at the knowledge that Mr. Van Duyck actually intended to bemean himself by carrying it to his rooms in person. He was uplifted, above himself.

And Mr. Van Duyck, holding the precious parcel tenderly on his rather

plump knees, was driven swiftly to his own abode, wearing a smile of deep and complete self-satisfaction. He set the painting up on his cellaret and devoted a blissful half-hour to the contemplation of its glory, remote from all unsympathetic observation. It intoxicated him as no vintage wine had ever succeeded in doing; it made him wonderfully, superbly drunk with the sheer loveliness it had caught and held in reflection from the original masterpiece of Nature. With a long, rapturous sigh of content, and another of anticipation, Mr. Van Duyck drew forth his pocket-pad and took up the receiver of his telephone.

"River, twelve-three-four-nine," he sighed into the unappreciative ear of the operator. And as he waited for the connection his smile widened until it seemed in danger of reaching the edges of his countenance and falling off into space. A slightly acid voice answered him at last.

"Miss St. Clair?" he asked. The voice admitted its identity. "This is Livingston Schuyler Van Duyck speaking. Mr. Morgan Leonard was good enough to give me your name and number. I wonder whether you could spare me a few minutes this afternoon or this evening—to discuss business, of course."

"Why, yes, I think so. Could you come at eight this evening?" The voice was perceptibly less acid, and Mr. Van Duyck's grin succeeded in reaching the extreme limits of his plump cheeks. Most assuredly he could. And the address? The voice gave it, with a touch of hesitation, and it followed the telephone number into Mr. Van Duyck's little book. He reluctantly permitted the interview to terminate. Precipitation, he had long since learned, was prone to involve more vexatious delays than caution. He would see her in a few hours, and then—well, leave that to Livingston Schuyler Van Duyck.

But, as quite a number of our best poets have set forth, life is a tissue of

uncertainties and disappointments, and not even people of irreproachable family are immune from this annoying feature of existence. Mr. Van Duyck, arriving at seven fifty-nine at a discouragingly respectable-looking apartment-house in the bourgeois district to the north of the park, was ushered into a living-room which fairly exuded respectability. It was impossible to conceive of the occupant thereof as other than a straitlaced and illiberal-minded observer of all the conventions and more than the ordinary number of proprieties. Mr. Van Duyck, as the reader may have gathered, was not noteworthy for clairvoyance, but even he was unable to avoid the impression of uninviting virtue which fairly oozed from the furniture of the room in which he found himself. His heart sank several inches as its influence pervaded his senses.

And Miss St. Clair herself, though instantly recognizable as the original of the masterpiece at present safely locked in Mr. Van Duyck's clothes-press, confirmed at first glance the evidence of her *milieu*. She was as obviously respectable as a pair of black-silk mitts, or chin-whiskers, or stewed prunes, or red-flannel underwear. In her face, her eyes, her voice, her manner, and, above all, in her dress, she proclaimed stern, uncompromising, conscious virtue as aggressively as a militant asserting her undying antagonism toward dish-washing. Mr. Van Duyck was not easily discouraged in matters of this nature, but even his valiant spirit quailed as he faced the object of his new-born adoration. But his resolution did not waver in the least. The sight of her, the sustaining knowledge that he actually stood in the presence of divinity, within sound of her voice, within touch of her hand, only confirmed him in his reprehensible intentions.

"You wished me to pose for you, Mr. Van Duyck?" Her voice was a little acid, thought the infatuated art-connois-

seur, but voices, after all, are matters of unimportant detail to the true devotee of beauty. And the fact that she pronounced his exalted patronymic phonetically as Van *Doo-yuk* did not afflict him, either. Culture is not to be expected of a woman whose form, like Helen's, would have set nations at each other's throat.

"—er—that is—" he stammered, regretting that he had not prepared a convincing fiction as to his errand. But the lady did not wait for him to flounder to his finish.

"I'm very partic'ler about who I pose for," she informed him. "Can you give me refer'nces to prove that you're a proper person for a young girl to pose for? Of course I always bring my aunt anyway, but, as I said, I'm extra partic'ler."

Mr. Van Duyck's iron resolution wavered under this assault, but the memory of that picture came back to him in time to freshen his courage. His eyes wandered wistfully over the lady's unalluring costume, apparently purchased at one of the "Mammoth Emporiums" which advertise such outfits at \$3.98, and refer to the process as "wholesale murder of stupendous values." It was decidedly too large for her, and its somewhat extreme cut caused it to bulge and sag in a number of unexpected places. Mr. Van Duyck's artistic impulses yearned impellingly to do away with its monstrous libel upon the pure, sheer beauty which it concealed.

"I can give you any number of references," he said smoothly. "The Right Reverend Augustus Bellflower, for instance; Mrs. G. Richern Blazes, Mrs. Pinfeather, and so on. I can satisfy you in that respect, you may be sure."

"I suppose they're all right," said the lady doubtfully. "I'll see if my aunt knows any of 'em." She left the room, to return after a moment, escorting a grim-visaged maiden lady of an obvious fifty-year vintage, who surveyed the ar-

dent worshiper of beauty through steel-rimmed spectacles with eyes which suggested gimlets. He squirmed under their inspection.

"He looks dissipated," said the older lady, after some moments of study, "but it may be only full-bloodedness. I suppose it's all right, if you think you can trust him."

Mr. Van Duyck was gratified. He proceeded to seat himself and discussed at some length the painting he had in mind. An instinctive caution prevented him from revealing in the presence of Miss St. Clair's chaperon the fact that he was interested exclusively in "figure stuff." He was inclined to believe that she would not approve.

When, after listening to his conversation for an interminable time, the older lady departed to some inner shrine, he ventured to be more daring. He suggested that, as future collaborators, a certain degree of acquaintance was desirable, and proposed that the object of his devotion accompany him for a brief excursion in his waiting motor.

After debating this matter at some length, Miss St. Clair, to his intense gratification, consented. She donned a hat which he found peculiarly unbecoming and a pair of red-fleece-lined overshoes which she referred to as "artics," by way of preparation for the joyous adventure. He began to wonder whether, after all, he had not set himself a hopeless task. He was already beginning to plan the purchase of certain paraphernalia of art before the lady's arrival to pose, instinctively aware that it would otherwise be difficult to convince her of his purely disinterested motives.

In the car, however, the beautiful model unbent appreciably. She permitted him to hold her hand for several blissful moments before she rebuked his presumption with a stinging slap on his wrist; she allowed him to escort her to a quiet restaurant where she partook discreetly of mineral-water and a sand-

wich; she even accepted a number of more or less daring compliments without displeasure. And when Mr. Van Duyck left her at last, in the gloom of the corridor before her apartment door, she actually suffered him to print an ardent kiss upon her lips before, with a shrill squeak of dismay, she slipped behind the door and barred it in his face. He was, on the whole, well content with his first evening's progress.

In his rooms he spent an exceedingly pleasant half-hour of meditative reflection before the masterpiece of Mr. Morgie Leonard. It stimulated his imagination wonderfully. He was thrilled to think that he was actually on his way toward a pleasurable intimacy with the original of that poem of line and color. His dreams were roseate, and he rose with a strengthened purpose, in pursuance of which he made haste to communicate with Miss St. Clair over the telephone and secure her reluctant consent to a morning drive through the Westchester hills in search of good landscape settings for the picture for which he intended to pose her. He was exceedingly proud of this device—it afforded numberless possibilities without the annoyance of buying easels and palettes and brushes and colors. Perhaps he would be able to get along without them altogether.

It thrilled him to discover that the night had evidently softened the heart of beauty toward him. The smile with which Miss St. Clair welcomed him was utterly free of acidity, and her cheeks were pleasantly pink. He thought her eyes strangely bright, but she persistently evaded his glance, as though suddenly self-conscious under it. Her aunt was mercifully in retirement.

He thrilled under the realization of his progress as he drove north to the open country. Beside him the girl, bundled in robes which concealed her curiously unattractive raiment to some extent, was as silent as he. Not until

they had left the city behind them and were speeding through the pleasantly sheltered wood-ways of the country did they begin to talk in earnest. And then, with a note of indulgent reproof in her tone, Miss St. Clair startled him horribly.

"That was a terrible story you told last night," she said. "The idea of you being an artist! Aren't you *awful!*"

"Eh? What? How did you guess?" He was relieved, after the first shock, to realize that she evidently did not hold his fraud against him.

"Oh, I telephoned around this morning," she said airily. "You might fool some people, but not me. I'm right on the job all the time."

He laughed. "You don't mind, do you?" he said tenderly. "I saw that picture of you in good old Morgie Leonard's rooms, and I fell in love with you on first sight. Clean knocked me out—positively. Couldn't rest till I'd met you."

"It's wonderful," she agreed introspectively. "It took me just the same way. The minute I laid eyes on you, something inside me said: 'This for you, little girl!' and I knew I was a goner. Love's queer, ain't it?"

"Rummiest thing in the world, sweetness," said Mr. Van Duyck. He stopped the car in the shelter of a friendly curve and demonstrated the exquisite rumness of love by means of a number of kisses, which the fair Miriam accepted and returned with unconcealed satisfaction. This pleasing process was subsequently repeated at frequent intervals, and with each repetition the enslavement of Mr. Van Duyck became more abject. He closed his eyes on each occasion, and his memory instantly summoned before them the mystically alluring picture which reposed in the privacy of his wardrobe. He did not see the living woman in his arms, but the counterfeit presentment of her which had first stirred his slightly shopworn emotions.

And, so intricate is the association of ideas with facts, each time that he kissed the flesh-and-blood girl he seemed to be kissing the paint-and-canvas vision of delight. He was intensely intoxicated by the hypnosis of associated thoughts. By the time they stopped for luncheon he had reached the stage in which he was pathetically pleading with Miss St. Clair to dispense with feminine foible and set forth with him at once upon the adventurous pathway of romance. He phrased these pleadings in the argot of his class, artfully euphemistic, but intelligible, beyond any doubt, to the gratified object of his passion.

She held him at arm's length during their luncheon, and for a time thereafter, as they continued their search for landscape beauties amid the Westchester hills, but he could see that she was gradually yielding, and his pulses throbbed at the thought. He redoubled his efforts. At last, when they had turned and were sweeping back toward the city, she abandoned her resistance.

"I give up," she sighed, laying her head, with its peculiar triumph of millinery, on his shoulder. "It doesn't seem proper, but I can't say no any more. I'd ought to make you wait a while, but—I just can't help myself. You can make me do anything you want, Livy dearest."

He checked the car and indulged in a number of superfluous kisses. His hands were shaking with triumphant excitement. He was a wonder with women—no possible doubt of that! Wouldn't old Morgie be surprised if he knew! And Morgie had actually referred to this vision of delight as a prune! A fine artist!

"Hurry up and drive back to town," she said. "If you're set on to-night, we've got to hustle. There's no time to lose."

"Why?" He had intended to avoid Manhattan for the present. She sighed impatiently.

"Ain't that just like a man! You drive back, Livy Van Doo-yuk, this minute! I might have guessed I'd have to do the thinking for us both!"

He obeyed, deep under the spell of his imaginary vision of her. For some reason, she wished to go back to New York. Well, New York, after all, was an ideal spot for romances such as this. She was right—the country was always dangerous. The city would be best. And as he drove he sank steadily into a yet more abject state of subjection. He was so wholly in the grip of his anticipations that when he received instructions to drive downtown he did not argue an instant. Not until they reached City Hall did he question her motives. Then, as he stopped in obedience to her orders and followed her to the pavement, he ventured to inquire what was the object of this maneuver.

"Why, silly, we got to get a license, haven't we?" she said.

Mr. Van Duyck's head spun for a giddy instant. A license! She expected him to marry her! He glanced at her timidly. Something in her eyes forbade him to speak his thoughts. He realized that not only did his courage fail before the task of suggesting that they dispense with this tiresome formality, but also shrank from denying her obvious desire to proceed at once with the matter. He was afraid to tell her that he had entertained a quite different idea. It required more nerve than Livy Van Duyck possessed to make such a confession, with those eyes fixed upon him. And, besides, he was still under the spell of his emotions. In the light of his visions of unspeakable bliss, the matter of marriage seemed, after all, an unimportant incident, scarcely worth arguing over. He yielded without too obvious reluctance to her guiding grasp of his arm, and presently found himself answering a number of impertinent questions addressed to him by an interested clerk beyond a wicket. There was also

some nuisance of signing his proud aggregation of names, and then, with Miriam clinging to his arm, a brief transition to another smoke-laden room where a paunchy person with pendent mustache, and a large ruby adorning his finger, asked more questions and duly pronounced them man and wife.

He was vaguely concerned about this as he drove back to his familiar section of town with his suddenly-acquired spouse beaming from the seat beside him. It impressed him with a sense of dismay, to reflect that this was bound to be a rather permanent affair. But the thought of the picture in his wardrobe sustained him nobly. After all, Morgie Leonard was nothing but a dabbler in art. He could not possibly do full justice to any subject. Why, when the poor chap tried to paint a carrot, even, he had to explain the result to keep his friends from taking it for a ship at sea or an explosion in the subway! There wasn't a chance that he had done justice to Miriam—not a chance! And if she should be more wonderful than Morgie's crude painting—! Mr. Van Duyck drew a deep breath. He was afraid he might not be able to survive the wonder of it.

He took her to his apartment. The door-man stared as they entered, and stared harder than ever when Livy explained that the lady was his lawful wife. The elevator-boy was even more interested. But Mr. Van Duyck, with the memory of that painting still before his mental vision, paid no heed. *They* saw only her clothes; *he* saw— And again he expanded his lungs at the thought of it.

Once inside the apartment, with the door fast-barred, he paused and surveyed his wife with a certain hesitancy. Never having experimented with matrimony, he was at a loss as to the proper procedure under the distracting circumstances. A happy thought flashed upon him.

"You know that picture old Morgie

made of you?" he said, grinning. She nodded. "Well, I bought it!"

"You did? Where is it?"

"In my room. Want to see it?"

"I should say I did! Just think of it! I didn't know you were so crazy about me as all that!"

Throbbing with excitement, he led the way into his bedroom, unlocked the door of his clothes-press, and drew out the portentous painting. She was a little apprehensive at her surroundings, he thought, as he turned toward her with the picture held so that she could not see it. Well, the picture would talk. He had a great head, *positively*. He turned the picture toward her suddenly.

She gasped. Then she squeaked—there is no other word to describe the sound which escaped her parted lips. Instantly, however, these closed firmly, in a thin, straight line of disapproval, the lady's rather prominent chin obtruded more prominently than ever, and with it elevated at an angle of at least forty-five degrees she stalked out of the bedroom.

"Livy Van Doo-yuk," she called imperatively, "put down that disgusting thing this minute and come here!"

Dumbly, his mind dazed, the benedict obeyed. She surveyed him with strong disfavor as he stood before her.

"How dare you have such a thing in your rooms?" she demanded. "You burn it right straight up—this minute."

"But—but, hang it all, Miriam, you posed for it—it's you, isn't it? What's wrong with my having my wife's picture—"

"Your wife's picture indeed! Do you thing for a minute I'd let anybody paint me like that? I should say not! Why, it isn't decent!"

He stared at her vacantly.

"Then, didn't you pose for it? It looks like you—"

"Me? Look like that? Much you know about it! *I only posed for the face!*"

ALIAS MRS. JESSOP*

A Four-Part Story—Part III

By Blair Hall

IX

JANET found the first-class compartment empty. She was glad that her journey to London would not be rendered still less endurable by the necessity of chatting with some acquaintance. Her thoughts, after her sleepless night, were more company than she desired: the memory of Anthony Jessop's disillusioned eyes, which had tortured her through the wakeful hours of darkness, was still with her; the thought of Kenneth's pitiful bewilderment when the mother he had learned to adore should suddenly revert to the mother he had learned to distrust and fear accused her as though the cruelty were her own instead of the blind chance of merciless fate. She closed her eyes and leaned back against the cushions in a desperate effort to think her way out of the dilemma into which her benevolent deceit had led her. And it was because of this absorption that she failed to witness the tardy arrival of the Honorable Muriel Grahame, or to observe that this eleventh-hour passenger passed her own compartment and recognized her through the glass. She thus reached London in complete ignorance of the fact that the Honorable Muriel arrived by the same train; she gave her destination to the taxi-driver without noticing that Miss Grahame, just behind her, must have overheard the address of Lillian's flat.

Lillian, still asleep when Janet came into her over-decorated bedroom, lifted luxuriously lazy arms and yawned with animal frankness as she woke.

"Well, Jan, I've come to rescue you

at last," she drawled in a voice still heavy with sleep. "I suppose you're wild at me for having stayed so long, but I couldn't help it."

"What have you done with Mr. Denison?" demanded Janet bluntly. Lillian laughed—a short, ugly, mirthless sound.

"Oh, Walter turned out to be a worse bore than Anthony. He has the most absurd notions about propriety—wants his wife to be something a cut better than Mrs. Cæsar. I couldn't stand him another week if my life depended on it."

"So you've left him?" Janet's tone hardened.

"It comes to that, but he doesn't know it yet," said her cousin, thrusting her bare feet out of bed and feeling about for her slippers with them, too languid to take the pains of first looking to see where they were. "I didn't burn the bridges, exactly—I let him think I was coming to England on business for a fortnight or so. But I've not the least idea of ever going back to him again, so make your mind quite easy about the future. I'm going to settle down as Mrs. Anthony Jessop and behave myself sedately forever and ever. It's time I gave up my little vacations. I've learned my lesson, Jan."

"Do you know that Anthony has come home?" Janet's voice did not waver as she spoke, but it needed all her self-control to keep it firm and even. Lillian dropped the stocking she held and stared at her cousin. Janet explained quickly.

"A pretty mess," commented Lillian acidly, when she had finished. "I must

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say, Jan, I think you've taken a lot on yourself. It wasn't in the bargain that you should change my highly satisfactory domestic relations. Now I'll have the same tiresome quarrels with Anthony until he has the good sense to pack up and get out again. What a nuisance!"

Janet controlled her angry disgust with an effort, and came to her cousin's side. "Lillian, I want you to be good to Anthony," she said quietly. "He's a fine, clean, straight man, who loves you and deserves to be happy. He's crippled and weak and ill; he's not fit to wander about the world any more. Won't you try to make him—content with his home?"

Lillian stared. A slow light dawned in her eyes, and her lips twisted into a hateful smile. "So that's it, eh?" she mused, in a tone which brought the hot blood to Janet's cheek. "The arctic Anthony and gentle Jane have been hitting it off, eh? How sweet! It's evidently just as well that I decided to drop Walter and come back. How long has this been going on? How far has it gone?"

"Don't be insulting, Lillian." Janet gripped her self-control desperately. "There's—there's absolutely nothing between Anthony and me except a deep and well-deserved respect for him on my part and a well-earned gratitude on his—for careful, successful nursing through a dangerous illness." A sudden idea came to her. "If there *were* anything more," she added in a different tone, "you are scarcely in a position to complain!"

"Don't be so touchy," said Lillian quickly. "I didn't mean anything. I know you pretty well, Jan. It's all right now—I'm going home. I've learned my lesson, and I shan't play with matches any more. I'll be decent to Anthony, too. I *have* been a pig to him, I admit. But it's all over now—I've reformed. I'll go down this very afternoon."

"And Mr. Dennison?" suggested Janet, her heart sinking in spite of herself. "What about him?"

"Oh, he won't care," said Lillian lightly. "He was ready enough to let me go. He'll be glad to be rid of me, if I'm any judge. And if he does cut up rough, what can he do? What is there to connect me with Mrs. Anthony Jessop? The only woman he knows is Janet Forde. It all fits in beautifully."

"Except that Janet Forde happens to be my name," objected Janet. "And if I go back to the States to earn my living, it's more than probable that he will trace me and believe himself married to me. Has that phase of the matter suggested itself to you?"

Lillian laughed heartily. "How splendid! Don't you see how beautifully it all fits in? You step down as Mrs. Jessop, and I step into your place. I step down as Mrs. Dennison, and you become *her*—it's as easy as easy!"

"Lillian!" Janet's voice was stern. The irrepressible Lillian felt its icy reproof through her mirth, and her face sobered quickly.

"Don't be stuffy, Jan. I only meant that if Walter wants to know what's become of his wife, it's you he'll trace, not me. And of course you don't have to have anything to do with him unless you choose. You can divorce him, or let him divorce you, if you like, or you can collect an allowance from him if you'd rather do that. Pretty soft, I should say! None of the trials of matrimony, and all of the privileges!"

For a moment Janet was about to rebel. It was on her lips to refuse point-blank to fall in with her cousin's plans, to assert her intention of continuing in her present position and defying Lillian to oust her from it. Strategically, all the advantage lay with her: Lillian invited the unromantic interest of the British penal code if she declared herself; she faced not only the opprobrium of the divorce courts, but the practical certainty of a term in prison. Her lips were sealed. If Janet chose to cling to the name which she wore, her cousin was

practically powerless to disturb her. But, as if she read the thought, Lillian voiced the vital weakness of Janet's position.

"Of course, I know you can make it unpleasant for me if you like," she admitted lightly. "But don't forget that I can make it almost as unpleasant for you. For four months you've been living in my house, with my husband, as his wife. What are people going to think and say about that, Miss Puritan Innocence? Why, the case is interesting enough to be table-talk on two continents for weeks! It'll drive the war news off the front page!"

Janet realized that despite the strength of her legal position she was powerless against Lillian, once the latter chose to risk the consequences of her recklessness. For Lillian cared only for herself; the effect of her deeds upon the other actors in the drama was of less than no concern to her; she was utterly careless of the fact that her father would be humbled to the dust, that Anthony Jessop and his little son would be marked for life with a scandal which would not down, that Walter Dennison would suffer almost as deeply as she, that Janet would be branded as a conscienceless and degraded sinner, as guilty as the guilty woman herself; while to Janet all these considerations were far more potent than the possible effect of disclosure upon her own fortunes. She might face disgrace and scandal for herself, but she could not, would not, bring it upon others as innocent of ill intent as she. The only safe course was that which Lillian coolly proposed. Unhappy as her return would inevitably make Anthony and Kenneth, it was preferable to what must eventually happen if she invited the unmasking which would take the world into the plot. Janet surrendered without offering battle.

"Very well," she said. "I'll try to tell you everything that's happened while I've been at Monks Grace, so that you

can manage to avoid suspicion when you go down. I—I took the precaution to quarrel with Anthony last night, as soon as I'd finished talking with you on the telephone, and he'll be prepared to find you vastly different from the woman he's known for the past few weeks. I—"

The telephone-bell tinkled. Lillian, half-dressed, shuffled across the room to answer it. Janet saw her face brighten suddenly.

"Oh, good morning! How nice of you to ring me up! . . . What, again? . . . Oh, I am so sorry, but it's quite impossible. . . . I'd love to, but simply must leave town this afternoon. . . . No, of course not. He's in the States, but . . . Well, hold the line a moment, and I'll see what can be done.

"Jan, a—afriend of mine wants me to dine with him this evening, and I—I want to go. It will be my last chance for years and years to enjoy myself, and I—I can't stand the idea of burying myself alive down there in Kent without this one last fling. Will you stay here to-night and let me go down to-morrow? You can wire them that you're with me, you know."

Janet thought swiftly, desperately. Every instinct urged her to postpone the moment of final rupture with the life she had come to love; every instant of delay was so much gained, so much chance for the reprieve or pardon for which she despairingly hoped. Too, every hour added between the time of her departure from Kent and the arrival of Lillian to take her place made the possibility of discovery more remote. They were wonderfully alike in physical appearance, in gesture, in voice, in manner, but there were still enough differences to make the change all but obvious should an insufficient interval elapse to dim the perceptions of those who stayed behind in Kent. She assented reluctantly, so far as outward seeming indicated her attitude, but inwardly she was fiercely glad of the delay, fiercely hopeful that some-

thing might yet intervene to change Lillian's resolve. Her cousin kissed her enthusiastically and skipped almost girlishly back to the telephone.

"I can manage it!" she cried musically into the transmitter. "I really shouldn't, but I will. . . . Yes, at eight. . . . Oh, you think so, do you? Well, don't set your heart on it. . . . At eight, then. Good-by!"

The words were innocent enough, but the coquetry of Lillian's tone seemed to Janet to shriek a secondary meaning. It reminded her of the women she had known in the lower levels of her profession—the women who used the stage as a convenient stepping-stone to the profitable practice of an art which is older than the drama by some thousands of years. And it was to this woman, fresh from an evening with the kind of man to whom women speak in that unmistakably eloquent tone, to whom she was surrendering her place, her hard-won friendships, her loved home, her servants, her foster-son, and, yes—she used the word defiantly, challengingly, in her thought—her *husband!*

Lillian returned after dawn, to quiet Janet's fears lest some accident had overtaken her, but also to arouse her suspicions of something almost as serious. For she had plainly passed a hilarious evening, if nothing worse. Her eyes were bright and her cheeks flushed beneath the powder and rouge. She laughed too much and too loudly to please Janet, and refused to explain where she had spent the intervening hours, beyond repeating, under questioning, as she undressed in the careless fashion which Janet remembered so well, that London had livened up amazingly since she had left it, and that she intended to see a little more of its new activities before burying herself in Kent.

She was even less communicative when she awakened, well into the afternoon, cross and nervous and pale. She snapped at her cousin at the first sign of

expostulation, and flatly refused to consider setting out at once for Monks Grace. She had already accepted an invitation for the evening, she declared, and nothing would move her from her determination to keep it. One argument which she advanced in defense of this position had weight with Janet. She pointed out that the longer the lapse of time between Janet's disappearance and Lillian's arrival to resume her place, the less probability would there be that the people at Monks Grace would suspect the truth. The longer the opportunity given them to forget minor details of appearance, the safer the second substitution must be. Realizing this, Janet was the more reconciled to her cousin's change in plan, though when Lillian returned for the second time, well after dawn, and in an even more obviously excited condition, her fears were aroused again. It seemed impossible that this reckless, selfish, sharp-tongued woman would fit into the life at Monks Grace without forcing Anthony and the servants to realize that more than a mere change in mood had taken place in the mistress of the manor. She compromised with her misgivings by sending daily wires to Anthony and Kenneth, although she knew that this very mark of affection would increase the danger of the second exchange of identities.

X.

"How good of you to come, Anthony!"

The Honorable Muriel Grahame surveyed with eyes which revealed an approval unwontedly frank the tall, lean figure in faultless evening dress. Not even the stick on which he leaned with a suggestion of bodily weakness could lessen the distinction of Anthony Jessop's physique and manner. Crippled he might be, but the defect served only to accent the lithe strength of the figure. The pallor of the face, and the lines which suffering had graven on it, but heightened the essential power of the features.

"You sent for me in such fashion that I could not fail to come," he answered quietly. "What is this mysterious affair which concerns"—there was the briefest instant of hesitation before he completed the question with a half-defiant ring in his tone—"my wife?"

Muriel Grahame's eyes contracted ever so slightly at the final words, but her smile did not change.

"I will take you to her," she promised cryptically. "Your eyes will tell you better than your ears how much she—needs you. Have you dined?"

He bowed impatiently. "But Lillian—"

"A little patience, my friend. You will see her shortly. Aren't you the least bit pleased to see me, Anthony?"

He recovered his self-possession instantly. "You are good to me, Muriel," he said affectionately. "I beg your pardon for displaying my anxiety so obviously. I—Lillian—"

"What has come over you, Anthony?" Her eyes studied him curiously. "You have been married nearly a decade, I believe, and rumor does not describe you as exactly an ardent husband. Whence and why this sudden concern about the charming lady who married you after so many years of—let us say—milder interest?" She watched his eyes darken, and her manner changed abruptly. "Come, Anthony, be frank with me—we can afford to abandon pretense with each other, can we not? I know the truth about your marriage as well as you know how bitterly I have repented the folly by which I made that marriage possible. I know that the girl you married made life a hell for you till you left her, and continued to amuse herself rather hectically afterwards. Why should you behave like a love-struck schoolboy over her now?"

He seemed to hesitate between resentment and confidence. Then his face cleared, and he leaned toward her. "You always were a brick, Muriel. I'll be frank with you. I hated my wife for

seven years or more; I hated her when she brought me home; I distrusted her while she nursed me; I refused to let myself believe that she had changed. But she must have changed—enormously. The boy worships her; there isn't a servant in the house who isn't her devoted slave; the Vicar and his wife adore her, and she's fast friends with the county, from Lady Ann down. In spite of myself, I couldn't help seeing all that while I lay there like a trapped rat, with nothing to do but watch and think. Confound it all, Muriel, women do change—you've changed yourself. And I was sure Lillian had—"

"Was?" She repeated the word significantly. He flushed.

"Night before last I doubted again. Her manner was what it had been in the bad old days; for a few hours I hated her more than ever. But it wouldn't quite do—you see, I've had too much evidence against it in these months. And it's come over me since that I mistook a momentary lapse for something permanent; that I let one minute of reversion outweigh weeks and months of reform—that I didn't stand by when she needed me most. Your wire made me sure of it."

"And if it should be a momentary lapse, and nothing more, Anthony? Would you—would you feel the same toward her as you did before?"

His eyes blazed suddenly. "I'd feel ever so much more!" he declared. "I loved her when she was nothing but a silly child; I hated her when she developed into a selfish, weak-moraled, stubbornly reckless woman; I'd love her more than ever if I found that she actually has managed to remake herself—triumphed over her weakness and made herself the woman she's seemed to be these last months. That would mean—"

"You're abject, I perceive," she cut in, with an ill-concealed sneer in her voice. "I'm glad I yielded to temptation and sent for you. You need a friend,

Anthony. I felt it, and I was right. Come!"

She led the way from the room without waiting for his answer. He followed her, his face puzzled, his mind grappling vainly with this new riddle. What had Muriel to do with his perplexities? What brought her back into his life to clear or further muddle the troubled waters? Her car waited at the door, and they drove in silence for a time. Then she suddenly turned to him.

"Anthony!" she breathed. The dim light of the street-lamps accentuated the beauty of her face, the flawless perfection of the features, the pale damask of cheek and throat, gleaming against the collar of sable fur. The subtle music of her voice thrilled him in spite of his anxiety, and a faint, remote hint of the barely perceptible scent which clung to her woke a reminiscent stirring of the old passion for her. She leaned very close, the softness of her shoulder against his arm, her eyes looking straight into his. "Anthony," she whispered again, "I can't bear it any longer! Isn't there any of the old love left? Don't you care—have you quite forgotten?"

He ruled his impulses with an effort which stiffened his muscles tensely, so that she felt the sudden contraction of his sinews through the intervening folds of cloth and fur. But he did not venture on speech.

"I'm quite shameless, dear," she said softly, tears shining in her eyes now, and her voice tremulous with half-repressed self-pity. "I sent you away when I was a silly, proud child. I've spent my life being sorry for it, and I can't let you go again for want of a word of truth. You loved me, Anthony—and men like you love only once. This other woman—"

"We are going to her?" He interrupted quickly, hoping to check the confession, but she paid no heed.

"She cares nothing for you—less than nothing. You have allowed a little kindness to blind you. Because she nursed

you as she would have nursed a suffering animal, you think she loves you. Because you are weak and ill and grateful, you believe you care for her. Open your eyes, dear, and look at the truth at last. Let her go—and let us take up life where we both left off living! I—I love you so, Anthony!"

In spite of himself, he was moved. First loves are subtly strong in strong men like Anthony Jessop, and this woman had stirred a passionate devotion in him which had left deep scars upon his soul where the wounds had healed. Old memories crowded maddeningly back upon him—memories of moments when the touch of her hand had been enough to bring his heart into his throat, when the sound of her voice, the sight of her pale loveliness, the faint hint of the same scent that was in his nostrils now, had lifted him into a fool's paradise of blind delight. Every fibre of his physical being cried out for her as she leaned toward him; his arms ached with their impulse to sweep her roughly into their embrace. But his will refused to abdicate its empire, though his voice shook as he spoke its bidding:

"Don't, Muriel—it's too late for this. Please—it hurts me to have you—"

"It's not too late—it's never too late to make amends for mistakes! I'm taking you to a place where the scales will fall from your eyes forever, dear. When you have seen for yourself what I have seen, when you know this woman for what she is and will be always, will you—will you take me back into your heart and try to love me again?"

Her lips were very near his; the magic of her thrilled him as it had when life and love were young and wonderful. Lillian seemed suddenly vastly remote, utterly insignificant. All that mattered was that Muriel loved him, wanted him again, that she was here, beside him, calling his soul to his lips with all the mysterious allure of her beautiful body and her thrilling voice. He kissed her, almost

savagely, and felt her shoulders relax as his arms clasped them close; felt, for one giddy instant, the fierce joy of the man who conquers and yields at once. But even in the first madness of the caress something within him rose and cursed his weakness and his folly. He found himself holding her helplessly, as a bachelor holds a baby, afraid to release her and yet absurdly ill at ease, foolishly eager to be relieved of the burden. He could have cried aloud in his relief when the car stopped suddenly and broke the tension for them both.

"This is the place," she whispered, her hands busy with her hair in the instinctive concern of the woman for her appearance which not even the high peaks or low abysses of emotion can quite conquer. He glanced out at a dark, unwelcoming house—a huge, dim shape in the poorly-lighted street. The driver opened the door of the limousine, and Anthony helped his guide to descend, curiosity overcoming, for the moment, the self-detestation to which he was prey. She issued a low command to the servant and led the way up a short flight of steps to the door, tapping several times on its slightly shabby panels. It swung open, and they stood in the darkness of an antechamber. He heard a faint click, and blinked as the glare of an electric dark-lantern flashed into his eyes. "It's quite all right," he heard Muriel whisper, and the beam of light flashed toward her. Evidently she was a satisfactory sponsor, for the light vanished, an inner door opened and let them into a rather shabby, nondescript hall, where a feeble light overhead revealed nothing more exciting than a flight of stairs, a chair or two, and a keen-eyed manservant, who took Anthony's coat and hat and stood aside for them to pass.

Muriel turned to him and proffered a bit of black silk, which he accepted mechanically, glancing at it curiously and wondering what it meant. With a gasp of surprise, he saw that she had already

adjusted a similar mask over her face. "What does it all mean?" he demanded.

"Put on your mask and you shall see. Have you never heard of a supper-club?" She spoke impatiently. "Don't hesitate—it's quite the usual thing to go masked at this place, and you mustn't be recognized."

He obeyed, and followed her along the hall to a closed door. She opened it and stepped into a room beyond. Over her shoulder he caught sight of a crowded dancing-floor, flanked by tables at which men and women, many of them masked, sat looking on, talking, drinking. An attendant guided them to a table in a distant corner, and Anthony seated himself to gaze about him in frank curiosity. He had heard sinister whispers of these places, these private rooms which did not heed the closing hour when more public resorts put out their lights and closed their shutters. He had thought of them as mysteriously evil dens where wickedness unnamable flourished behind barred doors, where the very atmosphere was instinct with subtler vices than those which flaunted themselves frankly in less exclusive places. And he was a little disappointed in his first glimpse. Except for the secrecy of their entrance, the darkened windows which faced the street, it might have been a dining-and-dancing-room in any one of a hundred public resorts. He glanced at Muriel as if to voice this impression, but she was not looking at him; through the slits of her mask he could follow her gaze to another corner of the room, where a man and a woman, innocent of mask, leaned toward each other in obvious absorption, oblivious to what went on about them. The woman's shoulders were toward Anthony; her dress was extreme and daring, revealing her back almost to the waist-line; he could see one hand toying with a tiny glass of some greenish liquid. As he looked, the horror of the place seemed to break suddenly in upon his

consciousness; it ceased to be merely a resort where the city's gayer and more reckless souls might indulge in the franker, coarser pleasures denied them by the rules of more staid places of entertainment, and became the insidiously ugly thing of which he had heard stray whispers. The music, which he had scarcely heeded, assumed a sinister note, a vaguely vicious rhythm which impacted unpleasantly on his ears. The figures of the dancers suddenly became significant, their masked faces subtly suggestive of vague, unknown vice. The air was touched with a faint scent which he identified as the acrid breath of hashish. Against the overpowering perfume of the exotic blooms with which the tables were decorated—orchids, most of them—this distant suggestion of the Asiatic drug seemed doubly insidious. He was conscious of a queer shudder of half-fearful disgust; he seemed to be looking on at some horrid rite of satanism against which not even his sophistication was proof.

"There is the worst man in London," came Muriel's whisper. "The man in the farther corner, facing us. Study him if you care to know the power of evil to write itself in human features."

He stared at the man intently, admitting that Muriel's description seemed justified by the deliberate iniquity which peeped out of the face, pale, strong, handsome with a type of satanic beauty which Anthony knew must be insidiously alluring to women; cruel with a refined, intelligent, conscious cruelty; evil with the suggestion of subtle, nameless sins.

"Who is he?" he asked, without shifting his gaze from the face.

"He passes here as Monsieur Fleury," she whispered, "but the name is patently an alias. No one knows whence he came nor why, but he has built up an impregnable position in this underworld by and through his power over women, high and low. It is he who founded this club and others like it. Through the women who

come here, he has power which reaches far out into politics and business; and he uses it as evilly as one would guess from seeing him. He is not bad for gain or from weakness, but for the sheer love of evil. If there is a devil, he must be this man's counterpart. The—the woman with him is his newest conquest. Poor, pitiable fool—see her lean toward him! As if he could be touched by her little parlor-tricks of eyes and smiles and speech!"

He stared, fascinated, at the woman's gleaming shoulders and back. She had seemed to possess some mysterious power to bring home the horrors of the place to him. He heard a sharp quarrel from the table next his own—a woman sobbing under her breath and a man's low tones tense with anger. Far away he thought he caught the whir and click of roulette. He was dimly aware that from time to time people came and went through the thick hangings which hid doors leading farther into this temple of sublimated sin, and subconsciously guessed their errand to be in quest of something deeper and uglier than the evils of the dancing-room. With an effort, he forced his mind to its normal sanity.

"Why did you bring me to this little corner of hell?" he asked. "What has it all to do with—"

"Look!" Her voice cut through his speech like the sudden slashing sweep of a sword; her hand gripped his wrist with a tense, hysterical clutch which sent a thrill of half-physical pain along his nerves. He followed her glance again. Monsieur Fleury had risen, and, as the woman preceded him from the room, she turned so that for an instant Jessop saw her face. He gasped, half rising from his seat. The heavy silken hangings swayed behind them before he recovered from the first cold stupor of surprise. Where or why they had gone did not matter; the woman's face had been enough. Plainly written on its beauty lay the confession of the ugly truth. If this

were, in sooth, a temple of Sathanas, then the woman at whom he stared transfixed was high priestess of its dreadful cult. And the woman was Lillian Jessop—his wife!

He did not remember how he escaped from the suffocating atmosphere of the club. He found himself again in Muriel's car before his thoughts had settled to an ordered and continuous current. Muriel was whispering to him:

"Forgive me, Anthony, but it was the truest kindness to let you see it for yourself. I could not have told you so that you would understand; and you had to know—you had to know."

"How did you find that hideous place?" he demanded. "What brought you there?"

"That requires explanation indeed," she said quickly. "I went there because I heard that *she* was there. It is not hard to contrive an *entrée*—these different worlds overlap one another in London. I saw her there last night. I wired for you on the chance that she would come again to-night. That is all."

He was silent again, his mind in the grip of disillusion. For a few short weeks he had allowed himself to cling to the fond belief that the leopard's spots may change, that the human heart may cleanse itself, the soul of a woman struggle upward from the mire. Now he knew, knew beyond peradventure, that he had been self-deceived, that Lillian's apparent regeneration was but an interval of rest from her diversions, that Muriel was right about her. The woman at his side seemed to follow his thought. She leaned against him with a surrender wonderfully intoxicating to the man who knew her pride so well.

"Will you believe me now, Anthony?" she whispered. "Will you—"

With an oath that was half prayer rising to his lips, he took her into his arms and kissed her—kissed her on eyes and hair and throat as she lay passively in

his embrace. The car halted at her door before he came back to his senses. He would have followed her in, but she smilingly refused.

"I could not trust myself to-night, Anthony," she said softly, "no, nor you, dearest. Come to me to-morrow at three."

He came down the steps stupidly, his intoxication ebbing as swiftly as it had risen. By the time he stood on the pavement, he had realized that he had made a hideous mistake in permitting his ancient passion for Muriel to reassert itself, that he cared nothing for her, that already he had begun to hate her for her part in the tragedy of the night.

He walked back to his hotel, scarcely conscious of the pain in his injured knee. In his rooms he threw off his evening clothes, but shrank from the thought of bed. After a cold tub he dressed again, in tweeds now, and as the first glow of dawn began to break through the mirk of the eastern sky, he reached a decision. He packed his bag hastily, summoned a porter, and despatched it to the station. Paying his bill, he took a taxicab and ordered the driver to take him to the address he had thoughtfully secured from Mrs. Henderson.

He found himself in the gaudily furnished reception-room of Lillian's flat, facing the woman who, for better or worse, was his wife—the woman he was condemned to love until he died. So much, at least, his night's vigil had taught him. He could no more pluck Lillian Jessop from his heart than he could pluck the heart itself from his body.

He marveled at the sight of her. Though with his own eyes he had seen her, flushed with alcohol and perhaps still more insidious drugs, only a few hours since, in the midst of the luxuriously vicious surroundings of London's worst temple of sin, he found himself doubting the evidence of his senses and his memory as he gazed at the clear-eyed woman who faced him. She was pale,

and there was something like terror in her distended eyes, but it was incredible that she could have so completely effaced the traces of her last-night's orgy in so short a space. She was dressed in some loose, flimsy negligée affair, but it was the sole touch of the intimate in her appearance, as powerless to contradict the evidence of her face and eyes as if a marble statue were to be garbed in a silken matinée.

"What is it, Anthony?" she asked. He thought her voice strange, and ascribed it to fright and guilt.

"You need not trouble to act a part with me," he said curtly. "I saw you last night. I know what brings you to London. We may dispense with pretense. I have come to bring you home to Monks Grace. Dress as quickly as you can. There is a train at eight fifteen."

He saw a swift light flash in her eyes, an involuntary softening curve the corners of her mouth, as though the prospect tempted her, and an illogical hope stirred within him.

"I—I can't go quite so soon, Anthony," she said. "I—I must wait here until my—my cousin, Mrs. Dennison, comes home. If you will come back at noon, I will go with you. But please go now and let me dress and pack."

He laughed again, a harsh, unlovely sound. "I'll wait here, thanks," he said. "I don't care to trust you out of my sight again, Lillian. You see, you happen to bear my name, and I've become a little sensitive about it lately. Dress and pack now. I can give you better than an hour, and still catch the train."

Janet stared at him in sudden panic. If Lillian should come in while he was here! She must get rid of him at any cost before his wife arrived to unmask them both—even at the cost of going with him. And she realized with a pang at her heart that nothing on earth seemed so utterly desirable as that—every longing, every instinct, every impulse, shrieked at her to seize her chance.

After all, under the circumstances, would it not be best for them all for her to return to Kent with Anthony, leaving Lillian to plumb the pleasures of London as long as she chose? Was there any other course open to her? Could she—

"Very well," she said, aloud. "I shall need only a few moments. Wait here, please—or no—perhaps you had best come with me."

"I fully intended to do so," he said meaningly. "I shall not trust you out of my sight until I have you safe at Monks Grace."

She flushed hotly, and went into a tiny sleeping-room opening off the larger apartment. Jessop followed her. Without a word, she set about packing her bag, and he, standing in the doorway, looked on in silence. When she had finished she turned to him, a touch of color glowing in her cheeks.

"I must—dress now," she said quietly. "Would you mind shutting that door until I have finished?"

He came into the room and closed the door behind him without a word. She hesitated, her flush deepening, and then, as if with a sudden resolution, turned away. He watched her as she loosened the fastening of her matinée, his eyes smouldering. She slipped the filmy garment from her shoulders, and in spite of himself he felt the thrall of her beauty strong upon him. In the intimacy of her disarray, she seemed suddenly so utterly desirable that not even the memory of the night's revelation sufficed to quiet the fierce impulse which surged up within him at the sight of her, the sheer, semi-translucent garment she wore accenting the charm of the slender grace of her figure, the rufescent damask skin of arm and throat and breast. She slipped swiftly into her traveling suit, her fingers schooled by hundreds of quick costume changes in tiny dressing-rooms to sure, deft service, despite the stress of emotions which seemed to paralyze her thought.

When she had finished she faced him. "I must write a note," she said. "I can't go without a word to—to my cousin."

"Very well," he agreed curtly; "but be quick about it—and make it plain that you are not returning—ever!"

She scribbled a hurried explanation to Lillian while he waited, knowing that her cousin would be quick to fill in the blanks which her haste made inevitable. And she drew a deep breath of relief when the cab puffed away from the door. At least, they had escaped detection for the moment. Whatever might happen hereafter, it could not be as utterly dreadful as facing Anthony Jessop in the presence of his wife whose place she had occupied for months! He did not speak during the journey, and she found plenty of time to wonder what it had been that he had seen, what had worked this sudden and startling change in him. But she dared not ask, and he offered no hint, not even when, in the privacy of the library at Monks Grace, he curtly issued his ultimatum.

"We need not enter into details," he said, with an impersonal coldness in his voice which hurt her like a physical blow. "I might divorce you, to be sure, but I do not choose to court publicity for myself; and, though I can divorce my wife, there is no way in which my son can divorce his mother. You have amply proven your unfitness for any liberty of action. You will stay here—a prisoner in fact if not in name—and you will behave as decorously as you have shown yourself capable of behaving during these past few months. If you disobey, I shall take steps far less to your liking. That is all."

XI

SHE wrote more fully to Lillian that afternoon, unconsciously exaggerating the unpleasantness of her own position in her desperate desire to confirm that irresponsible person in her tentative decision to abandon the idea of returning to her rightful place. She knew better

than to beg Lillian to stay away, her instinctive estimate of her cousin's character warning her that this would be the surest way of persuading her to take the first train for Monks Grace. Instead, she urged upon her the duty of instantly forsaking the primrose paths of nocturnal London for the thorny ways of righteousness, and took pains to base her appeal upon highly moral grounds. She knew that the very sight of the word duty would impress her cousin unpleasantly; she was quite certain that her letter would incline that pleasure-mad woman to steer as wide a course as possible from that of her husband and his acquaintances.

Lillian justified this confidence admirably. The return post brought a characteristic scrawl from her, flatly refusing to consider leaving London at present, suggesting instead that as long as Janet had foolishly allowed herself to be dragged back there, she might stay as long as she liked to let Jessop domineer over her. She, Lillian, was enjoying herself far too much to think of burying herself in the country, especially now that Anthony had set himself up as a family despot.

The letter both comforted and alarmed Janet. Although she had no guess as yet as to the details, she knew that in some fashion Anthony's path had crossed Lillian's in the vexed maze of London night life, and that which had happened once might easily happen again. The knowledge that her cousin was in England, only a few miles away from her own secluded retreat, disturbed her, disquieted her. She wished that some miracle might recall her to the States, and vaguely considered the advisability of writing anonymously to Walter Dennison, suggesting that he look out for his errant spouse. She rejected the idea as likely to prove ineffective at best, and in any case an unworthy, rather dishonorable expedient. And she comforted herself with the reflection that it

was easily probable that Anthony, believing his wife to be safe under his own roof, would not repeat the London wanderings which had so nearly revealed the secret to him.

In this hope, at least, she resumed her interrupted life with very little change except for her relations with Jessop. She continued her work in connection with the charitable and religious organizations, her intimacy with Lady Ann, now a frequent visitor at Monks Grace, her busy round of duties in her home and among her hereditary retainers of the estate, and her intense devotion to Kenneth, all as though nothing had risen to disturb the even tenor of her ways. With Anthony, she was on terms of distant politeness not wholly unlike those which had characterized their earlier relations. Indeed, so brief had been their interlude of intimacy that not even the servants observed any radical change in the status of affairs at Monks Grace. She saw little of him except at dinner, when he took pains to conduct a sufficiently friendly conversation to satisfy Jubble's alert ears. For the rest, he was steadily more absorbed in the management of the place, or in the military and political activities of the neighborhood, his swiftly improving health making it possible for him to spend most of his waking hours out of doors.

The days slipped by without excitement. Gradually Janet lost her anxiety except for a lingering wish that Lillian would recross the Atlantic and leave her insecure position less perilous. It seemed impossible, surrounded as she was by every evidence of acceptance on the part of the household and the community, that anything could again disturb the peaceful atmosphere of her refuge. She did not easily reconcile herself to the look in Anthony's eyes, and his sedulous avoidance of her hurt her afresh each time she observed it. She admitted frankly to herself that she loved him, even though her puritanic

conscience reproved her for the thought as for a deadly sin, and it cut her cruelly to read in his glance a cold dislike which was almost loathing. But she was reasonable enough to realize that, for all its unpleasantness, this attitude on his part spelt safety for them both from the sentiment toward which they had unconsciously strayed. She knew fairly well how near she had been to surrender when Lillian's telephone-message had brought her to her senses, and realized with a kind of gratitude to that unwitting instrument of Providence how much worse matters would have been had that message delayed another hour or two. It hurt her that the man she loved should scorn and distrust her, but it was easier to bear than to have him love her.

Only once did he return to the subject of her London sojourn. It was when the news arrived that the two sons of the Earl of Wycke had perished in an ill-fated attack on the Turkish positions at the Dardanelles, and that only the feeble age of the old Earl stood between Anthony and the title. He brought her the word as she wrote busily in her own little study, and her reception of the tidings seemed to soften him.

"Oh, the poor Earl!" she cried. "How terrible for him!"

He hesitated a moment. "You'll be a countess after all, you know," he suggested, after a pause. "I suppose that makes all this sort of thing worth while, eh?" He waved a hand as if to include the house and all its homely duties in the gesture. She flashed quickly.

"Please don't, Anthony," she said quietly. "Whatever I've done, I've given you no right to accuse me of that meanness. Give—give the devil his due, please."

He bit his lip. "You're quite right," he said quickly. "I beg your pardon. And I'd like to add that I'm not unappreciative of the way you've accepted the situation here since—since your return. I—I rather expected you to sulk and

fret. I realize how vastly different it is from—from your corner of London, and I'm genuinely grateful to you for the way you've played the game, Lillian."

She hesitated. The truth rose unbidden to her lips; she longed to throw herself on his mercy, to tell him the heart of the riddle, to enlighten him once for all as to her character and her motives. The thought of letting him continue to misjudge her so cruelly seemed unendurable. But her innate good sense prevailed. She compromised.

"You needn't thank me," she said quietly. "It's strange, I know, but when I'm here I seem to be a different person. I couldn't act otherwise than I do if I tried. It's not pretense on my part—it's as natural as breathing. I wonder if you can understand that?"

"I'll try," he said shortly. "I—I thought you'd be more excited about this news of mine."

"I'm terribly sorry for the Earl," she repeated. "As for the rest of it, I—I wish it were somebody else. I like it here—I don't want to change this for anything else."

He stared at her, his eyebrows arching. "And you used to rail at me because I'd married you under false pretenses!" he said drily. "You used to say that you'd expected to be a countess at once or—"

"Anthony," she interrupted steadily, "I've said and done many things for which I am heartily sorry. Can't we keep on the fresh page instead of going back to the blotted ones? It does no good to either of us to open the old wounds."

He flushed. "I apologize once more. You see, Lillian, you're such a riddle to me that I forget my manners in my itch to find the answer. Looking at you now, hearing you speak, knowing as I do how you spend your time, it seems incredible that you can be the same woman who—"

"I'm not the same woman," she said bluntly, with a strange joy in uttering

the simple truth for once, even though in her next breath she meant to renew the falsehood. "There are many personalities in every one of us. The one in me which does the things you see me doing here isn't the one who—who hurt you, Anthony. Try to believe that—it will help you to understand."

He seemed to soften toward her after this interview, although still on his guard against the appeal of her better self to which he had yielded to his cost. They sometimes spent an hour or two of an evening in the library, chatting pleasantly enough over the affairs of the estate or the community. Now and again when their paths chanced to coincide he rode in her car or took her in his. Several times they dined at neighboring houses, and insensibly approached their old harmony in their going and returning drives. He found himself curiously proud of her after these occasions, taking a strange pleasure in her quiet, restrained dignity of bearing, in her clear, jewel-like beauty, her faultless taste in dress, the charm of her voice and the good-humored wit of her conversation. They were fast approaching their former footing of friendliness when his old suspicions were awakened by a new development.

Janet had long since mastered the intricacies of her cousin's signature. Her check had been honored from the beginning, principally, perhaps, because they reached her bankers bearing endorsements which made suspicion on their part absurd, but she had patiently perfected her imitation until it was almost exactly the hurried scrawl which Lillian used. She felt safe now in withdrawing her savings from the Chicago bank and depositing them to her credit as Lillian Jessop in the London banking-house. She did not know why she did this, except that it gave her a feeling of greater security to have her funds where she could reach them quickly. She had never used all of the allowance which

Anthony's solicitors placed to her credit quarterly, and, according to her check-book, she had nearly seven thousand pounds on deposit—six thousand of which represented the accumulated payments of Michael Forde to his wayward niece. She was stunned, therefore, to receive a letter from the bank advising her that her account was overdrawn by some fifty pounds and requesting a remittance to cover the deficit. At first she assumed that it was nothing more serious than a clerical error, but an exchange of letters quickly proved that hope groundless. Her money was spent—every penny of it! And except for a few small drafts of her own, every penny of it had been drawn in cash by her cousin.

This was bad enough. Her next quarter's allowance would not fall due for six weeks; there were a number of household accounts to be paid, and that overdraft of fifty-odd pounds to be met at once, but, to make matters infinitely worse, a letter from Lillian calmly admitted the theft and demanded an instant remittance under penalty of exposure to Jessop! There was nothing for it save an appeal to Anthony for an advance against next quarter, and, to Janet's intense relief, he not only granted the sum she asked, but doubled it.

"I owe you something," he said affably, as he blotted the check. "This isn't the allowance at all—it's a little token of appreciative gratitude from me for the way you've played the game."

She thanked him breathlessly, and hurried to post the check to her bankers. She wrote to Lillian, promising funds at once, but wisely refraining from sending a check with the letter. It was just as well that her cousin should continue to regard the account as exhausted for the present. Instead, on her next trip to the village, she cashed a check and sent the proceeds to Lillian in notes. But it was useless; she had counted too confidently on her cousin's habit of taking things for

granted. A week later another communication from her bankers demanded the repayment of a second overdraft! Lillian had been quicker than she had thought!

She dared not go to Anthony again; she was at her wits' end when it occurred to her to cable Michael Forde. Twelve hours after her message had been filed she had her answer.

Two thousand pounds to your credit by cable to-day positively no more this year stop extravagance Forde.

She could have wept with relief, despite her sorrow in the discovery that Lillian had already exhausted Michael Forde's generosity and injured, if not destroyed, his new conception of the daughter he adored. Wiser now, she wired her bankers to repay the overdraft and forward the remaining funds to her in the form of a draft. She wrote Lillian that her account with them had been closed and warned her against further attempts to draw against either them or her father. For the moment, she felt secure. It added to her peace of mind to learn that Anthony had been summoned in haste to Wycke, to spend two days or more with the broken old man whose heir he had become. He had hardly set out on his journey north, however, when a frantic telegram from Lillian demanded her instant presence in London. She pondered for an hour before she yielded. Then, with a hastily-packed bag, she caught the express.

She found her cousin desperately in need of money, utterly proof against persuasion, expostulation, and reasoning alike, intent only upon securing a supply of hard cash. Nothing else would serve, and she must have it instantly. Against her better judgment Janet agreed to furnish a further advance. She had brought with her the draft which represented her uncle's gift, and by dint of haste reached the bank which had drawn it before closing hour, securing a new draft for a sum smaller

by five hundred pounds, and the balance in notes, which she turned over to Lillian, making it as plain as she could to her sullen, defiant cousin that no more funds would be forthcoming until the next quarter-day, and that the amount available then would be strictly limited. They parted coldly, Janet thoroughly disgusted, Lillian resentful and sulky. Janet attended to a number of accumulated errands, dined at a quiet hotel, and returned to Monks Grace by the late train. Some hours later Lillian saw her last counter follow its predecessors into the croupier's clutches, and replenished her store by writing a check for Monsieur Jacques Fleury, known to his acquaintances as the worst man in London. The slip of paper cost Monsieur Fleury five hundred guineas, but he smiled amiably when the Suburban and Oriental Bank informed him that, though genuine, it was worthless. Worthless! It was remarkable how dull-witted bankers could be!

XII

"MR. JACQUES FLEURY."

Janet's brows arched as she glanced at the card. "Did he mention his errand, Jubble?" she inquired.

"He said you would be expecting him, ma'am."

"I'll see him," decided Janet, remembering that Lady Ann had spoken of referring a French Red Cross agent to her, and concluding that this was he. She entered the reception-room with an expression of cordial welcome which faded instantly as she faced her caller. Total stranger as the man was, there was that in his eyes, in the thin, cruel lips, the smile which was almost a sneer, which repelled her instinctively.

"You wished to see me, Monsieur?" she asked coldly, as the man did not speak.

"On business of a delicate and private nature, Madame." He bowed low. Janet motioned Jubble to go, instinctively

making sure that she was within reach of the bell. Fleury waited until the sound of Jubble's padded step had died away, and then, with a catlike stealth, sprang to the door and glanced to each side along the corridor. Janet stared blankly as he turned.

"You were foolish to dream that you could escape me," he said softly, coming toward her. "And here, where of all places I should seek you first! I forgive you the injury to my devoted heart, but not the slight to my intelligence."

"You are making some absurd mistake, Monsieur," said Janet, her heart pounding at her throat, but her manner, thanks to the long habit of the stage, calmly cold. "You speak as if you were acquainted with me, despite the fact that I have never seen you before. If you have business with Mrs. Anthony Jessop, be good enough to state it at once; if not—" She reached for the bell. He checked her quickly with a gesture which she obeyed by instinct.

"There is no mistake, unless you ring that bell," he said, his lips drawing back from his gleaming, predatory teeth in a mirthless smile. "It is the first time that I have met Mrs. Anthony Jessop, but am I not fairly familiar to—shall we say, Mrs. Dennison? It would be indiscreet to summon servants to hear that which I have come to say to—Mrs. Jessop."

Janet managed to smile. "If you know Mrs. Dennison," she said, "your mistake is easy to pardon. She is my cousin, and resembles me very closely indeed. But Mrs. Dennison is in London."

"Was in London," he amended. "Permit me to say that the resemblance is remarkable, Madame. Yes, extraordinary! Mrs. Dennison is not here, then?"

"Monsieur," said Janet icily, "your manner displeases me. I think this interview has gone quite far enough." Again she stretched out her hand to ring, and again he checked her with the same oddly imperative gesture.

"Let us have done with fencing, Janet," he said sharply. "You are mad to imagine that I could be deceived by a trick so transparent. It annoys me that you should so underrate my intelligence. Be good enough to drop your foolish pose. The time has come for us to understand each other plainly."

"I assure you that you are in error, Monsieur. I cannot listen to a conversation intended for another. If you will not leave me—"

His eyes hardened. "Janet, you are doing a very dangerous thing. You are annoying me after I have warned you. I do not warn twice. You evidently realize the precarious position in which you stand, or you would not have tried to escape me by leaving London and coming here. Let me make it clear to you that it is my intention to utilize that position—and my fortunate knowledge of it—to the utmost. If you have been under the illusion that my attitude toward you was dictated by any—tenderness, disabuse your mind of it at once. I have cultivated you deliberately in order to make you useful to me. Am I quite plain?"

"Quite. And now, since you refuse to heed my requests for your leaving, I am obliged to—" Again Janet's hand hovered over the bell, to abandon its intent in obedience to the quick gesture. His eyes glinted dangerously.

"Enough! You want the servants even less than I do. I know it—you know it. Listen to me carefully. I hold your check for five hundred guineas—a check which you knew to be worthless when you gave it—in return for cash."

"You are in error," persisted Janet, though with a cold thrill at her heart. "If Mrs. Dennison gave you a check—as I imagine she did—"

"A check signed Lillian Forde Jessop, remember!" he interrupted, his mirthless, menacing smile reappearing.

"Then, I can account for the non-payment. The check is one drawn prior

to the removal of my account, which—which I believed to have been destroyed. I—I will cash it for you, if that is what brings you."

"You have not enough money to buy that check from me, Janet—nor will you have when you are the Countess of Wycke. But since you insist upon your foolish fiction of resemblance, let me tell you at once that I saw you write the check! You thought yourself unobserved, but you were not! And the check which Mrs. Dennison signed with Mrs. Jessop's name is declared by Mrs. Jessop's bankers to be genuine. Let us be frank with each other, please."

Janet's brain reeled. For the moment her self-command left her. Panic clutched icily at her heart. Monsieur Jacques Fleury observed her pallor with that same vulpine gleam of teeth which passed as a smile.

"Mrs. Dennison and Mrs. Jessop having been proved to be one and the same person, and the proof thereof in the form of that check and of several rather indiscreet notes in the same peculiar script, let us proceed."

"Leave this house!" Janet's numbed faculties could suggest no better response. The worst man in London shook his head, almost sadly.

"Janet, why will you compel me to be brutal with you?" he reproved her. "Do you not realize what this means to me—to me who have seen the entry on the register at St. George's—the signature in your admitted and proved hand, showing beyond question that while you were still Anthony Jessop's lawful wife you married Walter Dennison?" He paused, watching her terror with keen appreciation. "This means, dear lady, that whenever I choose to communicate with the police you will find yourself facing a charge of bigamy—a charge on which you will indubitably be convicted."

"You—you wouldn't!" It was the only reply she could find. He smiled again.

"Of course not—unless you persist in your folly of opposing my wishes. I have little to gain from bringing you to public shame and a prison sentence—except the moral effect which such a catastrophe would exert upon certain other indiscreet ladies who are sometimes so ill-advised as to be refractory. I should take such a step with the most extreme reluctance."

"Then, what do you want?" She was afraid of him now, almost as terrified as she would have been had she known him for the merciless scoundrel he was.

"To-day—nothing. Eventually a great deal. As the Countess of Wycke, your friendship will be of value to me in many ways. You will invite me to your home—introduce me to your acquaintances—assist me in making this unassailable position of substantial value as I may direct. This visit is purely one of admonition. I wished you to understand at once where you stood—to punish you a little for thinking so poorly of my intelligence as to try to run away from me."

"Lillian!" Anthony Jessop's voice broke in upon the half-stupor which possessed her, like an accusing cry of conscience. She turned to see him, pale, tense, standing at the door of the little writing-room. Fleury, who must have been no less startled than she by the sudden advent of her husband, showed no sign of embarrassment. He bowed and glanced at her as if to await her presentation.

"Anthony—this man—this man—" She could find no words. She only knew that all her heart cried out for the protection and championship which she had a wife's right to except from this cold, stern Englishman, and her instinct brought her blindly to him. He disengaged himself from her impulsive clasp, thrusting her swiftly, though not without a certain chivalrous gentleness, to one side, so that he might the better confront her persecutor.

"Mr. Fleury, I believe." His voice was toneless. Fleury bowed low.

"It is an honor indeed to discover that I am known to Mr. Jessop," he said.

"The word sounds strange on the lips of a blackmailer," said Anthony calmly. "I heard enough of your conversation to my wife to place you accurately. You have chosen a trade which, to offset its dirt, has a certain element of safety. I fancy you consider that you are safe even now."

"That is my impression." Fleury took the insult without a quiver, though his eyes flickered with a sudden gleam at the one ugly word. Jessop laughed.

"Fleury—if that is your name—you were never more mistaken in your pestilent career—except once. The single exception concerns a rather more serious mistake than your present error, however. You would probably shriek unpleasantly in the dock. It is that which persuades me to the folly of giving you forty-eight hours to leave the country. I should suggest that you avoid—shall we say?—Paris, Fleury. That is all. You may go." He rang the bell.

The worst man in London wavered. He opened his lips to speak, thought better of it, and bowed instead. A measure of his normal poise returned to him with the gesture.

"Threatened men live long, I believe," he remarked suavely, "especially when the threat is founded upon what our American friends call bluff. But I intrude upon an affecting domesticity. A thousand pardons. *Au revoir*, Madame."

He made a noiseless exit before the inscrutable Jubble. Jessop surveyed Janet in silence. She could not collect her wits. A vast desire to justify herself in those cold, searching eyes obsessed her.

"It's all a frightful mistake, Anthony," she cried. "You *must* believe in me. Whatever I've done, that man has no place or part in my life! I never saw

him until I found him here just now. I—"

"You forget that I brought you home from London because I objected to finding you at probably the worst den in the city with that man," he said. "I've driven him off, for the moment, by the wildest kind of blind bluff, but he isn't beaten. Lies will only make matters worse. I suggest that you tell me the truth by way of variety, Lillian. Is it true that you married some one else

while I was away, as he said he could prove? Let me know the worst at once, please. And I hope you realize the truth would be advisable just now."

Her lips were framing her denial when Jubble appeared at the doorway. She took the card from his salver mechanically, and the room swam as she read the name it bore. Anthony caught her as she swayed, and took the card from her hand. He read it aloud:

Walter Dennison!

(The fourth and concluding part of this story will be published in the Second March Number, on sale February 18.)



THE ROSE O' SHAME

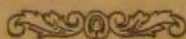
By Dick R. Walker

PAIN'T your cheeks with the rose o' shame;
 'Tis the flower men buy with the reddest gold.
 And wanton, harlot, and courtezan,
 Have flaunted its bloom since the world began—
 O rose o' shame as the centuries old!

'Tis the flower that bloomed 'neath the Eden-tree,
 With the knowledge and passion that came to man.
 Where once in your cheeks bloomed the lily-flower,
 Now the rose o' shame knows a sultry hour,
 O rose o' shame since the world began!



THERE are lots of hard falls but the man who falls over the big bluff he himself put up, gets the hardest fall of all.



"CHASTE LUCY" OR CHASING THE CHASER

FROM the avalanche of jingles which descended upon our defenseless heads, we are inclined to think that an anxious world has been awaiting "Chaste Lucy's" advent to display its poetic fervor in four-line effusions. Hundreds, thousands, mil—no, not millions, though we almost said it. We instinctively think of millions when we contemplate the stack of mail, but truth compels us to refrain, at least for another few days. Then, no doubt, "millions" will be correct.

At any rate, there was quite enough to show us that "Chaste Lucy" had met with instant popularity, and to enable us to select the following offerings from among those submitted.

Some of our readers expressed disappointment because we did not publish any jingles in the Second February Issue, but as that issue went to press before the day of publication of the first issue in which the announcement of the contest was made, naturally we had no jingles to publish, so we are sure that you will understand, and we hope you will enjoy the following:

This is modest, even if unhygienic.

PERHAPS A VACUUM-CLEANER

*Lucy never wanders from
The straight and narrow path.
She even keeps on all her clothes
Whene'er she takes a bath!*

Now, what d'ye think of that? Or this?

THERE ARE OTHERS

*Lucy is so good, so pure,
So virtuous, forsooth,
There are folks say she hesitates
To tell the naked truth!*

Clear case for the S. P. C. A.

WE SUSPECT THE COW

*Lucy is so pure, so good,
She really can't endure
To take a simple drink of milk
If she thinks it impure!*

Saves dusting—though on second thought,
there're other ways of raising the dust.

FLUFFY RUFFLES

*Lucy is so good, so pure,
Immodesty her plagues.
Why, even all her furniture
Has panties on its legs!*

Oh, tut, tut!
 RECOMMENDED FOR THE WIN
 TER GARDEN ALSO
*Lucy's so chaste, in winter-time
 Smoked glass her eyesight dims,
 So she'll not have to gaze upon
 The trees with naked limbs!*

Remember, if you don't like these, we didn't write 'em.

HOW ABOUT WHEN SHE DRAWS
 IT OFF?

*Lucy is so good, so pure,
 She's never bold or shocking.
 She even closes tight her eyes
 When she draws on her stocking!*

Well, we don't admire 'em either—for women.

AN UNPAID-FOR ADVERTISE-
 MENT

*Lucy is so good, so pure,
 From wickedness she flees.
 Her room must be quite dark before
 She'll don her B. V. D.'s!*

Bowwow! Every dog must have its day.

GOING TO THE DOGS

*To a dog-show once did Lucy go—
 Her recklessness she rued.
 A hairless dog from Mexico
 Did shock much—'twas nude!*

Can't help wondering if he'd ever want to.
 HE'S A SHAMELESS LITTLE BEG-
 GAR

*Lucy's so chaste, if Cupid bold
 Should undertake to spear her,
 He'd have to put on lots of clothes
 Before he could get near her!*

Well, we don't blame her. Still, with the high cost of living—

SHE WOULDN'T MARRY ONE,
 EITHER

*Lucy is so pure, so good
 (To tell this we are glad),
 She will not even eat an egg
 If she thinks it is bad!*

There are ten choice gems from the inspired pens of some of our readers. In the next issue we shall furnish more if we are able to dig our way out from the horde that threatens to overwhelm us (after our experience in digging through these envelopes, we will be invaluable in the Sapper and Miner Corps if the United States goes to war—the trench-diggers will have nothing on us).

Oh, but here is something we want to tell you. We do not wish any one to think that we are ridiculing purity or chastity. We respect and reverence both. The "Chaste Lucy" whose characteristics are celebrated in rhyme is representative merely of false modesty, of hypocritical virtue. We've no patience with such traits. There was a time when the fact that ladies had legs was carefully concealed. Those were the days when a pale complexion, a bird-like appetite, and an ability to faint on the slightest provocation were admired attributes of womanhood. But the girl of to-day is different. She can ride, row, swim, play golf and tennis; she is healthy, full-blooded, vigorous. And she is just as innocent, even if far less ignorant.



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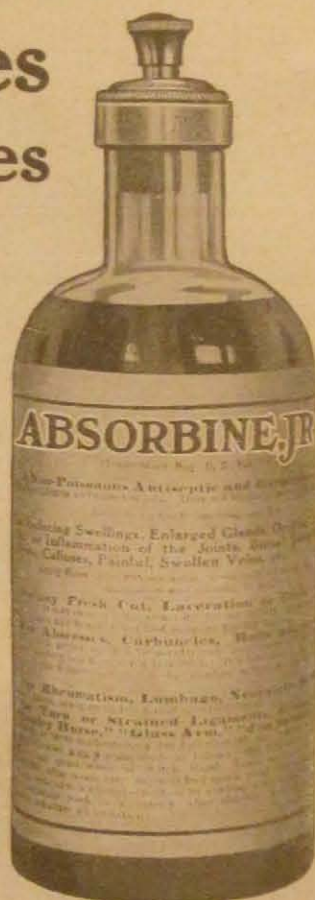
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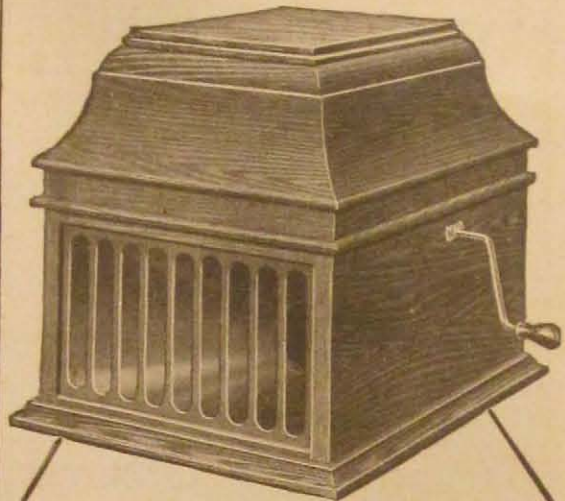
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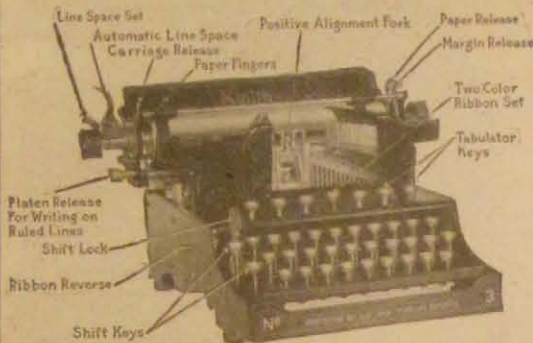
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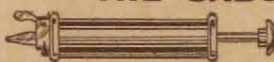
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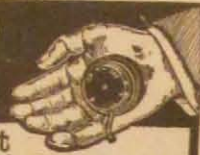
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So Lucy was unchased!



Can YOU write
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If you can, the

SNAPPY STORIES JINGLE CONTEST

The Judges

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HERFORD,**

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and writer.

**ELLIS
PARKER
BUTLER,**

whose book
"Pigs Is Pigs"
made him a
leader of American humor, and

**CHARLES
HANSON
TOWNE,**

the well-known
poet and editor,
will be the
judges.

will interest you, for it offers 68 cash
and other prizes for

FOUR-LINE JINGLES ABOUT CHASTE LUCY

\$100 for the best Jingle

\$50 for the second best

\$25 for the third best

\$10 for each of the five next best

\$5 for each of the ten next best

Each of the **fifty** next best will receive a year's subscription to the Twice-a-Month "Snappy Stories," the regular price of which is three dollars.

68 PRIZES IN ALL

and in addition every issue of "Snappy Stories" published while the contest is running will contain a number of the best jingles received, for each of which \$1.00 will be paid, this payment being separate and distinct from the prizes, and in no way influencing the awards.

The contest is declared open on the 4th day of January, and it will close April 4th. All six issues of "Snappy Stories" published during that time will contain these conditions. All jingles mailed by that date, as indicated by the postmark on the outside envelope, will be eligible for prizes. The awards will be made thereafter as soon as possible.

No verses will be returned, so don't enclose stamps for that purpose.

No employee of The New Fiction Publishing Company will be eligible to compete.

The Conditions

1. Jingles must all be about the same character, Lucy, extolling her virtues in some humorous way.

2. They must be of four lines, similar in metre to the sample given.

3. Each jingle must be written or typed on the outside of an envelope, inside of which must be placed a slip of paper on which is written the name and address of the contestant. The envelope must be sealed, and it will not be opened until the judges have rendered their decisions.

4. More than one jingle may be written on an envelope, if desired.

5. All jingles submitted must be addressed Contest Editor, Snappy Stories, 35-37 West 39th Street, New York City.

6. You may send in as many verses as you like, and a contestant sending in more than one verse is entitled to as many prizes as his verses can win for him. Until after the decisions are made the judges will positively not know whether a writer is represented more than once or not.

7. You may change the form of the first line if you care to; and while it is not necessary to put a title to each verse, a clever title may be a deciding factor in the awarding of a prize.

In the event of the judges' being unable to decide as to which of two or more contestants is entitled to a prize, owing to their jingles' being of equal merit, a prize of the full amount will be awarded to each of these contestants.

Why don't you try for a prize? You should be able to write a four-line jingle similar to the one at the top of the page. Try anyway. There is no entrance fee, and you don't even have to be a subscriber. And tell your friends.

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