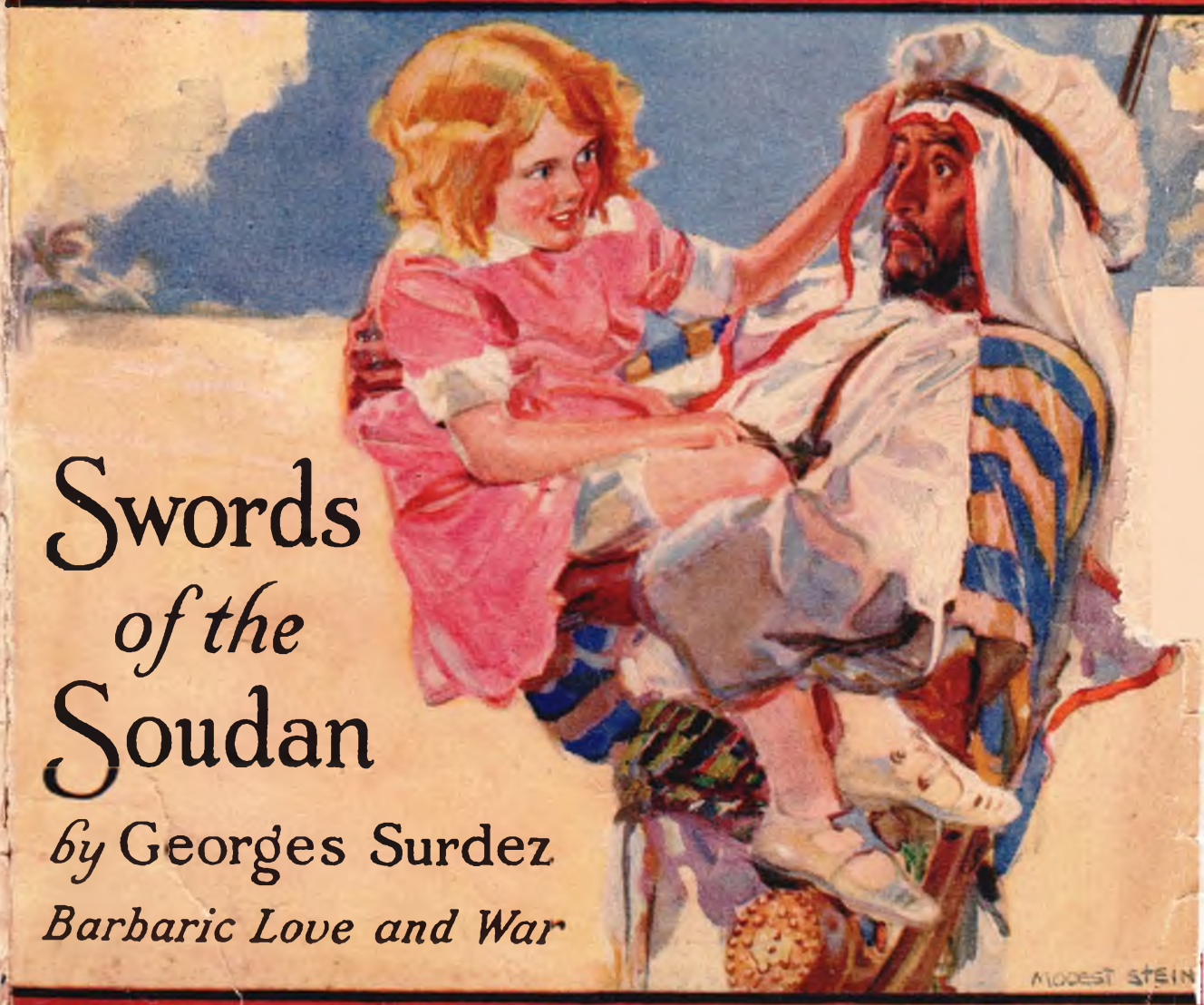
ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY JANUARY 27, 1923

ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY



Swords of the Soudan

by Georges Surdez

Barbaric Love and War

10¢ PER COPY JANUARY 27 BY THE YEAR $4.00

A Dollar will put Yourself in Her Place

NO MATTER who you are or where you live; no matter what your circumstances may be or how little or how much you spend on clothes, I think I can make it all a little pleasanter, easier and more satisfactory in the future.

Whatever dreams of stylish clothes you may have, here is an opportunity to make your dream come true. However much you have ever admired some woman of your acquaintance for the clothes she wears, here is an opportunity for you without trouble or bother or extra expense to put yourself in her place.

One Example Among Thousands

On this page I show you a perfectly lovely little model in one of the season's newest fashions, exquisitely tailored in all-wool Poiret Twill. It is a gem of a style. And as you examine it on the *fashion* figure you may wonder how you would look in her place. I'd love to actually put you in her place without promise or obligation, without expense or risk of any sort to you.

Pin a Dollar to the Coupon

For just one dollar with your request, I'll send you this dress, postage prepaid, in your proper size, to examine as carefully as you please, to try on to your heart's content. The dollar that you send me brings the dress delivered to your home without one further penny's outlay, without the bother of any C. O. D., without even a thought of money until you decide you want it and to keep it.

Take All Spring and Summer To Pay

If you find you would rather return it, do so without question. I'll refund your dollar at once. I'll also pay the return express. Money is the last thing you really need to worry about, because if you are delighted, you can pay balance of my bargain price almost as you please. I want you to spread the cost over all this Spring and Summer, taking a full six months, paying little by little in small sums, evenly divided, coming a month apart.

My whole business is conducted in exactly the same manner as this one example.

A Postal Card Brings My Free Style Book

This advertisement is intended simply as an example of my styles, my prices, my credit and my terms. My newest Style Book shows thousands of beautiful fashions, wonderfully complete departments in all lines of women's wear, as well as for the boys, little girls, misses and infants. It is by far the finest and biggest book I have ever issued. It is nearly double the size of former seasons.

All Selections Sent Prepaid on Approval

With it, for a dollar or two, you can make every dress dream come true. Everything will be sent you postage prepaid on approval. There will never be any embarrassment or red tape. I always allow a full half year to pay.

This being my greatest book, I anticipate a much larger demand than ever before, so please ask for your copy early. A plain letter or a postalcard is enough.

HERE ARE A FEW DEPARTMENTS:

Aprons	Wraps	Hair Goods	Shoes
Baby Needs	Coats	Kimonas	Skirts
Bathrobes	Corsets	Lingerie	Suits
Bloomers	Dresses	Millinery	Sweaters
Children's and Boys' Wear	Furs	Raincoats	Underwear
	Gloves	Petticoats	Waists
	Hosiery		

All Wool Poiret Twill Dress

The fabric is all wool Poiret Twill exceptionally tailored. It is set off with an all a round Bertha collar of dainty lace. Elbow length bell sleeves have attractive knife pleated cuffs. A distinctive all around narrow self material belt, falling in streamers in front, is ornamented with fancy metal buttons. Side panels, pleated to match cuffs, drop loosely from the belt at sides to below the hem of skirt. Yoke underlining of good grade satin finish cotton that wears excellently. Dress closes at sides with snap fasteners. **Color: Navy Blue only.** Sizes: Misses 14, 16, 18 and 20 years and Womens' 34 to 44 bust measure.

E5C10 $1 with coupon, $2 monthly. **$13.85**

MARTHA LANE ADAMS CO.
3941 Mosprat Street, CHICAGO, ILL.

Martha Lane Adams Co.
3941 Mosprat Street, Chicago, Ill.

I enclose $1. Send me on approval, postage prepaid, **All Wool Poiret Twill Dress, No. E5C10.** Size..... If I am not delighted with the dress, I can return it and get my $1 back. Otherwise I will pay easy terms, $2 monthly until total price, $13.85, is paid.

Name.....

Address.....

City..... *State*.....

Also send me your Latest Free Style Book

You Might Call It Luck

If Only One Man Had Jumped to Such Amazing Earnings

-but Hundreds Have Done It!

WHEN a man steps from a $50 a month job as a farmhand to a position that paid him $1,000 the very first month—was it luck?

When another man leaves a job on the Capitol Police Force at a salary of less than $1,000 a year and then in six weeks earns $1,800—is that luck?

Probably the friends of Charles Berry of Winterset, Iowa, and of J. P. Overstreet of Denison, Texas—the two men mentioned above—call them lucky. But then there is F. Wynn of Portland, Ore., an ex-service man who earned $554.37 in one week—and George W. Kearns of Oklahoma City, whose earnings went from $60 a month to $524 in two weeks. And C. W. Campbell of Greensburg, Pa., who quit a clerking job on the railroad to earn $1,562 in thirty days.

"Last week my earnings amounted to $554.37; this week will go over $400" —F. Wynn, Portland, Ore.

There is nothing exceptional about these men. They live in all parts of the country—they had been engaged in all kinds of work. Many had been clerks, bookkeepers, mechanics. Some had already achieved successful places in the business world.

No Limit to the Opportunities

And then in one swift stroke, they found themselves making more money than they had ever dreamed possible. The grind of routine work—the constant struggle to obtain even a slight increase in earnings—the discouraging drudgery of blind alley jobs—all this was left behind for careers of immediate and brilliant success. And great as are their earnings to-day, they are looking forward to increasing them constantly—in fact, there is no limit to the amounts they may earn—only their own efforts can determine that.

"I had never earned more than $60 a month. Last week I cleared $306 and this week $218." —Geo. W. Kearns, Oklahoma City.

The remarkably quick success of these men sounds like luck—the sheerest kind of luck. But of course it cannot be that—not when hundreds have found the way to such amazing good fortune—*all through the same method.* There must be a definite, practical, workable plan behind their sudden jumps to big earnings.

The Back-Bone of Business

And there is. In the first place they discovered a vital fact about business. They discovered that the big money is in the Selling end of business. Salesmen are the very life blood of any concern—upon them depends the amount of profits made.

And for the men who are in the "Star" class—who are Masters of Salesmanship—there is practically no limit to their earnings.

And that is how the men whose pictures you see and hundreds of others like them, found the way to their present magnificent incomes. *They all are Master Salesmen now!*

New Way to Enter This Field

Yet previously they had no idea of becoming Salesmen—many didn't even think it possible to do so. But they learned of an amazingly easy way by which any man can quickly become a Master Salesman—and in his spare time at home!

Secrets Only Master Salesmen Know

"The very first month I earned $1,000. I was formerly a farmhand." —Charles Berry, Winterset, Iowa.

Salesmanship is not a natural gift—it is an art and science that is open to any man. There are fundamental rules and principles that anyone can put into practice—there are Secrets of Selling that put any man who knows them into the "Star" class.

The proof of this is in the wonderful success achieved by men who, without any previous Selling experience, have suddenly become Master Salesmen thru the National Salesmen's Training Association. Step by step—in their spare time at home—they were taken through every phase of Salesmanship. Every underlying principle of sales strategy was made as simple as A-B-C. Thru the National Demonstration Method every form of Sales problem is solved.

"After ten years in the railway mail service I decided to make a change . . . My earnings during the last thirty days were more than $1,000." —W. Hartle, Chicago, Ill.

Startling Proof Sent Free

Whether or not you have ever thought of becoming a Salesman, you should examine the facts about the tremendous possibilities for big earnings in this fascinating field. Read the extraordinary stories of others and see how easily you can do what they are doing. The PROOF is so overwhelming that it may mean the turning point in your life, as it has in so many others. Simply mail the coupon below. It will bring you by mail the whole wonderful story, and in addition a great Book "Modern Salesmanship" and full particulars about the remarkable system of Salesmanship Training and Free Employment Service of the N. S. T. A.

Right now—tear off the coupon and mail it to-day. It costs you nothing to do this—it obligates you in no way.

National Salesmen's Training Association

Dept. 2-A-2 CHICAGO, ILL.

NATIONAL SALESMEN'S TRAINING ASSOCIATION
Dept. 2-A-2, Chicago, Ill.

Please mail me Free Proof that I can become a Master Salesman and qualify for a big money position. Also send your illustrated Book "Modern Salesmanship" and particulars of membership in your association and its Free Employment Service. This is all free of cost or obligation.

Name.....

Address.....

City.....State.....

Age.....Occupation.....

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOL. CXLVIII — CONTENTS FOR JANUARY 27, 1923 — NUMBER 6

FIVE CONTINUED STORIES

NOVELETTE AND SHORT STORIES

MISCELLANEOUS AND POETRY

BIGGEST NOVEL OF THE YEAR BEGINS NEXT WEEK

FRANK L. PACKARD'S

THE FOUR STRAGGLERS

This six-part serial of Nemesis on the trail of the king of confidence men strikes the same high, clear note of genius that made Mr. Packard's "Miracle Man" the marvel of the written word, the stage and the screen.

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

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

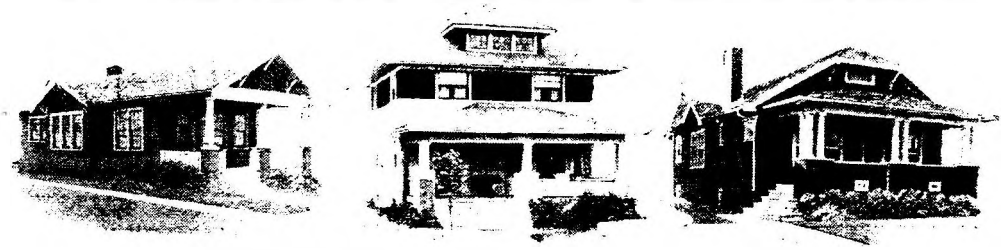
Single copies, 10 cents. By the year, $4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; $6.00 to Canada, and $7.00 to Foreign Countries. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Currency should not be sent unless registered

PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY.

Entered as second class matter July 15, 1920, at the Post-Office at New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879

M2

SIX-ROOM HOUSE FREE!



ARGOSY READERS

Stop Paying Rent Now!

Just imagine now for a moment that one of these beautiful six-room Sunshine Homes was yours, located right in your own town or on your own farm, a neat picket fence around it, flowers growing in well-arranged beds, rose bushes climbing the lattice at the porch ends, sending their fragrance into your nice, cool bedrooms. Picture this in your mind and then you will have a picture of what I want to do for you. This offer is so liberal it is hard to believe, but it is true—every word is true. You can get one of these homes FREE if you will rush your name and address on coupon below and do as I say.

I Will Even Buy a Lot for You!

Perhaps you do not own a lot—don't allow this to prevent your sending in your name and address. I'll take care of everything. I'll arrange to buy a lot for you in your own town and you can arrange to have the house built on the lot. Buy the lot in your neighborhood, or in a suitable neighborhood, allowing you to select the site—you will be proud of this home. I will be proud of it, for it will be a monument of advertising for my business. That is where I get my reward and that is why I make this most marvelous of offers—for the advertising it will give my business.

Free Yourself from the Landlord's Clutches

Surely you have longed for the day to come when you could cease paying rent to a landlord and call your home your own. It does not matter to me whether you already own a home, send your name in anyway. You could rent it to some good family and have a certain income—an independent income, or perhaps after it is built, you would like it so well you would move into it and rent out your old home.

Costs Nothing to Investigate

You risk nothing. You are under no obligations when you send me your name and address. All you need do is to rush me the coupon below now. Do it at once before you lay this magazine aside.

When I Say Free I Mean Free

This is perhaps the most liberal offer ever appearing in this magazine. I mean every word I say. Be prompt. Rush your name and address quick.

Act Quick!

C. E. MOORE, President,
Home Builders Club, Dept. 103, Batavia, Illinois.

Please send me, absolutely free, full particulars and plans and colored picture of the 6-Room House you will give away. I risk nothing.

Name.....

Town.....

Street.....

State.....

Classified Advertising

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

Classified Advertising Rates in the Munsey Magazines:

	Line Rate	
Munsey's Magazine	$1.50	Combination Line Rate $4.00 Less 2% cash discount
Argosy-Allstory Weekly	2.50	

Minimum space four lines.

March 3rd Argosy-Allstory Forms Close February 3rd

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

CLOTHING SALESMEN—to solicit orders for all wool made to measure suits at retail price of $29.50—no more—no less. No trouble for a hustler to make $50 to $100 a week and more. The fabric assortment is the very best, and includes a big variety of virgin wool worsteds, cassimeres, flannels and serges—fine quality cloth, guaranteed to wear and give lasting satisfaction. Our sales plan is a winner and our remarkable values win permanent customers. Reliable men please write, stating territory. J. B. SIMPSON, INC., Dept. 457, 831 W. Adams St., Chicago.

WE START YOU WITHOUT A DOLLAR. Soaps, Extracts, Perfumes, Toilet Goods. Experience unnecessary. Carnation Co., Dept. 200, St. Louis, Mo.

BIG PROFITS WITH EXCLUSIVE TERRITORY—$50 to $100 WEEKLY EASY. MORE HAS BEEN MADE REPEATEDLY IN ONE DAY'S WORK. WONDERFUL INVENTION DELIGHTS HOUSEHOLDERS. Automatic hot and cold water bath outfit without plumbing; only $7.50. Eager buyers everywhere. Send no money. Terms. Write today. ALLEN MANUFACTURING CO., 688 Allen Bldg., Toledo, Ohio.

AGENTS—CLEAN UP $100 WEEKLY WITH "NIFTY NINE", weekly average 100 sales—dollar profit each. 30—40 sales daily frequently made; demonstrating outfit cinches order. 30 other coin-coaxers, all daily necessities. Postal brings our unique plans. DAVIS PRODUCTS COMPANY, Dept. 58, Chicago.

AGENTS—Our Soap and Toilet Article Plan is a wonder. Get our Free Sample Case Offer. Ho-Ro-Co, 137 Locust, St. Louis, Mo.

27,000 RECORDS GUARANTEED WITH ONE EVERPLAY PHONOGRAPH NEEDLE; new, different; cannot injure records; $10.00 daily easy. Free sample to workers. EVERPLAY, Desk 112, McClurg Bldg., Chicago.

WE START YOU in business, furnishing everything. Men and women, $30.00 to $100.00 weekly operating our "New System Specialty Candy Factories" anywhere. Opportunity lifetime; booklet free. W. Hillyer Ragsdale, Drawer 93, East Orange, N. J.

AGENTS—C. T. A. prices reduced again. Suits $18.00, made to order, any size or style. Orders easy to get. Big profits. Sample outfit free. Write Chicago Tailors Ass'n, World's largest tailors, Dept. 179, Station C, Chicago.

WE PAY $200 monthly salary, furnish rig and expenses to introduce our guaranteed poultry and stock powders. BIGLER COMPANY, X-506, Springfield, Illinois.

AGENTS—Try Our Road to Success. Fifty million buyers ready for our protection against loss by accident or sickness. We teach you how to close quickly, and guarantee steady income from beginning. Write for special proposition and astonishing earning possibilities. R. B. Lindley 196 Market St., Newark, N. J.

Housewives Buy Harper's Invention on sight. New business. No competition. Ten-Use Set is combination of ten indispensable household necessities. $7.50 to $20.00 a day easily. Write for Free trial offer. Harper Brush Works, 107 A Street, Fairfield, Iowa.

AUTHORS—MANUSCRIPTS

FREE TO WRITERS—a wonderful little book of money making hints, suggestions, ideas; the A B C of successful Story and Movie-Play writing. Absolutely free. Send for your copy now! Just address Authors' Press, Dept. 19, Auburn, N. Y.

STORIES, POEMS, PLAYS, ETC., ARE WANTED for publication. Good ideas bring big money. Submit Mss., or write Literary Bureau, 110, Hannibal, Mo.

MAKE MONEY writing short stories, newspaper articles, poems, etc., in spare time. Big pay. Details free. Address Editor, Writers' Press Association, Los Angeles, Cal.

MICHIGAN FARM LANDS FOR SALE

GOOD FARM LANDS! NEAR THRIVING CITY IN LOWER MICH. 20, 40, 80 AC. TRACTS; only $10 to $50 down, bal. long time. Write today for big free booklet giving full information. SWIGART LAND CO., Y-1245 First National Bank Bldg., Chicago.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

WANTED: TAILORING SALESMEN—Make Big Money from the very start—opportunity of your lifetime to get into your own business. We are the largest made-to-measure tailoring house in the country, furnishing elaborate sample equipments, including 500 all wool fabrics, and guarantee absolute satisfaction—perfect fit, best workmanship, or no sale. Write for line and all accessories to be sent free. Earn from $75.00 to $200.00 per week. State whether or not you have experience in taking orders for men's made-to-measure clothes. A. W. DALEY, Sales Manager, Lock Box 483, Chicago, Ill.

BIG MONEY AND FAST SALES. EVERY OWNER BUYS GOLD INITIALS for his auto. You charge $1.50, make $1.35. Ten orders daily easy. Write for particulars and free samples. American Monogram Co., Dept. 54, East Orange, N. J.

TAILORING AGENTS WANTED. Earn $5.00 to $15.00 Profit on each order. We offer all wool Suits at $17.50, fit and construction absolutely guaranteed. Write today for new Spring travelling swatch line showing 250 samples and fashions. JAY ROSE & CO., 411 S. Wells St., Chicago, Ill.

$10 WORTH OF FINEST TOILET SOAPS, perfumes, toilet waters, spices, etc., absolutely free to agents on our refund plan. Lacassian Co., Dept. 614, St. Louis, Mo.

TAILORING SALESMEN MAKE $75 A WEEK SELLING OUR STRICTLY ALL-WOOL MADE-TO-MEASURE SUITS AT $26.50. YOU COLLECT PROFITS IN ADVANCE AND KEEP THEM. WE SUPPLY FINEST SELLING OUTFIT IN AMERICA. MANY EXCLUSIVE MONEY-MAKING FEATURES. Tailoring, raincoat, and side-line men, part or full time, get in touch with us immediately. GOODWEAR CHICAGO, INC., 844 W. Adams St., Dept. 218, Chicago, Ill.

AGENTS: SELL FULL LINE OF GUARANTEED HOSIERY for men, women and children. Must wear 12 months or replaced free. All styles, colors and finest line of silk hose. Often take orders for dozen pair in one family. Write for sample outfit. THOMAS MFG. CO., Class 407, Dayton, Ohio.

AGENTS—$15 A DAY—EASY. QUICK SALES—FREE AUTO—BIG WEEKLY BONUS—$1.50 premium Free to every customer. Simply show our Beautiful, 7 piece, Solid Aluminum Handle Cutlery Set. Appeals instantly. We deliver and collect. Pay daily. NEW ERA MFG. CO., 803 Madison St., Dept. 20-Q, Chicago.

LARGE SHIRT MANUFACTURER wants Agents to sell complete line of shirts direct to wearer. Exclusive patterns. Big values. Free samples. Madison Mills, 503 Broadway, New York.

$13.45 FOR A STYLISH MADE-TO-YOUR-MEASURE 3-PIECE SUIT—regular $25.00 value. We are making this bargain offer to prove our remarkable values in tailoring. Write for our big sample outfit showing how agents make $35.00 to $40.00 extra every week taking orders for high-grade tailoring. WASHINGTON TAILORING CO., Dept. A-304, Chicago.

MOTION PICTURE PLAYS

EXCHANGE PLOTS FOR $$—Photoplay ideas accepted any form; revised, typed, published, copyrighted. Sold. Advice free. UNIVERSAL SCENARIO CORP., 918 Western Mutual Life Bldg., Los Angeles.

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

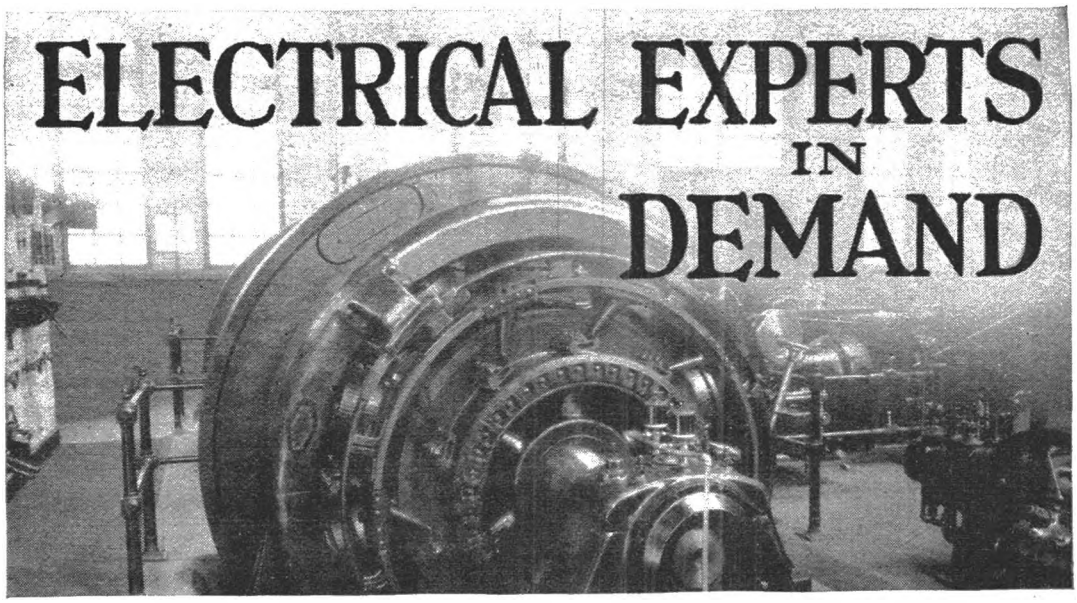
SONG POEMS WANTED

WRITE THE WORDS FOR A SONG. We compose music. Our Chief of Staff wrote many big song-hits. Submit your song-poem to us at once. NEW YORK MELODY CORP., 403 Fitzgerald Building, New York.

TRADE SCHOOLS

EARN $10 TO $15.00 PER DAY. Learn Sign Painting, Auto Painting, Decorating, Paperhanging, Graining, Marbling—Send for Free Catalogue. CHICAGO PAINTING SCHOOL, 152 West Austin Ave., Chicago.

Classified Advertising continued on page 6.



Good Positions Await Trained Men

Salaries of $12 to $30 a day not unusual

THE Electrical field needs men. It needs them badly. Hardly a week or a month passes but what some new use for electricity is discovered. And each new use means new positions—*better positions!*—for men who have trained themselves as experts in this wonderfully fascinating work.

The recent growth of Radio is simply an example of the progress that is yet to be made. No work offers greater opportunity to the man of an inventive turn of mind than Electricity. Salaries of $12 to $30 a day are not unusual.

Best of all, you can study Electricity in your own home in spare time, without losing a day or a dollar from your present work. The International Correspondence Schools will teach you everything you need to know, just as it has been teaching other men in just your circumstances for more than 30 years. There is no doubt about the ability of the I. C. S. to help you.

Thomas A. Edison says:—"I have watched the progress of the International Correspondence Schools almost from the very beginning. To me their rapid growth is easily understood, because I realize the practical value that is back of them and know something too of the success attained by many ambitious men throughout the country who have taken their courses."

And Dr. Charles P. Steinmetz, the "electrical wizard" of the General Electric Co., says:—"I am familiar with the textbooks and method of instruction used by the International Correspondence Schools in their courses in Electrical Engineering, and I also know of a number of young men who have taken these courses with great benefit. I believe that any young man who is interested in electricity but who cannot find an opportunity to go through an engineering college, if he will apply himself to one of these courses will find it a practical and economical way to acquire a knowledge of the profession."

Just mark and mail the coupon printed below and full information about Electrical Engineering, Electric Lighting, Electric Wiring, Electric Railways, Radio or any other work of your choice will come to you by return mail. Today—not Tomorrow—is the day to make that all-important start toward success.

— — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — TEAR OUT HERE — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — —

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS, BOX 2175-C, SCRANTON, PA.

Without cost or obligation on my part, please tell me how I can qualify for the position or in the subject *before* which I have marked an X in the list below:

☐ Electrical Engineering	☐ Civil Engineer	☐ Business Management	☐ Salesmanship
☐ Electric Lighting and Rwys.	☐ Surveying and Mapping	☐ Industrial Management	☐ Advertising
☐ Electric Wiring	☐ Mine Foreman or Engineer	☐ Traffic Management	☐ Stenography and Typing
☐ Radio	☐ Marine Engineer	☐ Business Law	☐ Teacher
☐ Mechanical Engineer	☐ Architect	☐ Banking and Banking Law	☐ Civil Service
☐ Mechanical Draftsman	☐ Blue Print Reading	☐ Accountancy (including C.P.A.)	☐ Railway Mail Clerk
☐ Machine Shop Practice	☐ Contractor and Builder	☐ Nicholson Cost Accounting	☐ Common School Subjects
☐ Railroad Positions	☐ Architectural Draftsman	☐ Bookkeeping	☐ High School Subjects
☐ Automobile Work	☐ Structural Engineer	☐ Business English	☐ Illustrating
☐ Gas Engine Operating	☐ Chemistry ☐ Pharmacy	☐ Business Spanish	☐ French

Name.....Street Address.....

City.....State.....Occupation.....

Persons residing in Canada should send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada.

Classified Advertising continued from page 4.

HELP WANTED

HELP WANTED—MALE

HELP WANTED—GENERAL

PATENT ATTORNEYS

PATENTS AND INVENTIONS

WANTED TO BUY

AG

No More Untrained Men Wanted !!

EVERYBODY knew Talbot, and liked him. Even the Senior Vice-President missed him when he was let out. When the General Manager was asked to explain why Talbot was fired, he said: "Sure, Talbot was a good fellow—a real fellow, but, HE DIDN'T SEEM TO GROW WITH HIS JOB."

Think of it! Talbot a failure at 28 — just the age when he should have been ready for success! He should have prepared for the future. The man that stepped into his shoes KNEW HOW to handle that job. It's another example of the untrained man trying—and FAILING—to make good.

Are You Trained to Fill a Bigger Job?

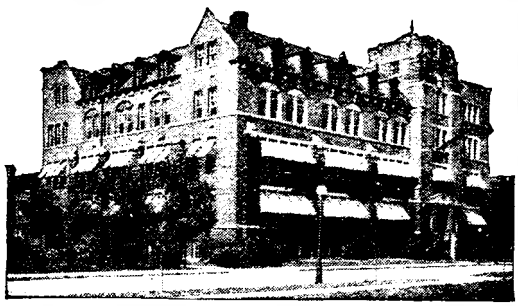
The untrained man is "out of luck" in the business world today. Unless you fit yourself for some one big-pay job, you are going to find yourself out of the running at 28. Don't be satisfied with a routine job. There are lines of men waiting to punch the time-clock. It's the $5,000—$15,000 men who are hard to get. Big business pays big money for training.

Others Have Won Success—Why Not You?

There is only one way to win success—go after it. It has been the privilege of the American School—since 1897—to point the way to big salaried positions for thousands and thousands of people. What do you LIKE to do? Look over the list of vocations in the coupon below. Check the one or two that appeal to you and mail it to us. This will not obligate you in any way — but it WILL put you in touch with a real position, a real training, a big-salaried future. Our free book, profusely illustrated, will give you concrete information as to our aid to thousands of others. Don't wait until it is too late. Let us help you—your future life and happiness rests entirely on your job. Let us advise you how you can develop easily, quickly into a high-salaried executive. Don't send any money. Mail the coupon now—TODAY.

AMERICAN SCHOOL

Dept. B-15. Drexel Ave. & 58th St., Chicago, U. S. A.



The American School, chartered as an Educational Institution in 1897

American School

Dept. B-15, Drexel Ave. and 58th St., Chicago

Send me full information on the subject checked and how you will help me win success.

.....Architect	.....Lawyer
.....Building Contractor	.....Machine Shop Practice
.....Automobile Engineer	.....Photoplay Writer
.....Automobile Repairman	.....Mechanical Engineer
.....Civil Engineer	.....Shop Superintendent
.....Structural Engineer	.....Employment Manager
.....Business Manager	.....Steam Engineer
.....Cert. Public Accountant	.....Foremanship
.....Accountant and Auditor	.....Sanitary Engineer
.....Bookkeeper	.....Surveyor (and Mapping)
.....Draftsman and Designer	.....Telephone Engineer
.....Electrical Engineer	.....Telegraph Engineer
.....Electric Light and Power	.....High School Graduate
.....General Education	.....Fire Insurance Expert
.....Vocational Guidance	.....Wireless Radio
.....Business Law	.....Undecided

Name .....

Address .....

Pay Nothing

An amazing new offer—wear this GENUINE DIAMOND for a week at our expense—absolutely no risk to you—deposit nothing—READ EVERY WORD OF THIS OFFER:

Send No Money
Pay No C.O.D.
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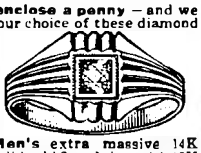
Just send the coupon below — **do not enclose a penny** — and we will send you on approval at our expense your choice of these diamond rings. The ring illustrated above is the most beautiful hand engraved solid gold ladies' ring you ever saw, set with a fine, large, genuine blue-white diamond. **Pay nothing when it arrives.** Merely accept the ring and wear it for a week, at our expense. After a week decide. If you return the ring, that ends the matter. **You have risked nothing.** But if you keep the ring, send us only $3.75 a month until you have paid the amazingly low price of $38.75 for this regular $50 value. The ring is an elaborate pierced model in solid 14K green gold with hand engraved white gold top. A striking new model. The diamond is a beauty—extra brilliant, blue white, perfectly cut—a remarkably big value.



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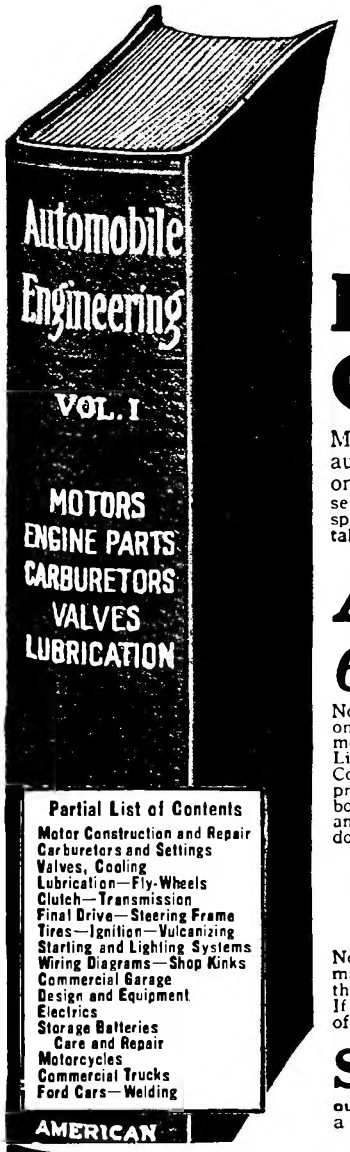

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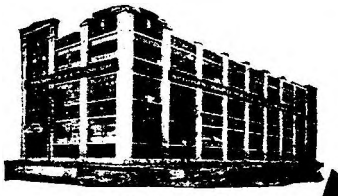

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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY
WEEKLY

VOL. CXLVIII SATURDAY, JANUARY 27, 1923 NUMBER 6

Swords of the Soudan

By GEORGES SURDEZ

CHAPTER I.

AN ORDER FROM THE GOVERNOR.

LIEUTENANT RAYMOND LARTAL folded the letter he had been reading, with the precision often given to unimportant details when the mind is disturbed. Absent-mindedly he looked out of the window at the esplanade shimmering in the torrid sun.

Small houses inclosed by a ten foot defensive wall, barracks and stables built around a water hole, and perhaps a score of straggling palm trees—this was Fort Chanzy. Lost in the Great Sahara, between In Salah and the Argan Oasis, the outpost was as diminutive on the surface of the desolate plain as the tiny dot which marks it on the map.

Rays of blazing sunlight converged from all points of the horizon. The deep blue sky glowed as though a canopy of molten lead covered the universe. The heat had driven even the natives to shelter. The palm trees drooped their long leaves, as sleepy as the Spahis who snored in the guard room.

The sentry at the gate paced leisurely back and forth, a vivid patch of red and blue, the bayonet glinting in brief flashes

with his turning. The lizards alone showed energy, scurrying about in short, swift dashes after the drowsy sand insects. From the pole on the watch tower the tricolor hung limply, stirred at times by an imperceptible puff of wind as though trying in vain to awaken.

Lieutenant Lartal's boot soles crunched on the sandy soil, startlingly loud in the thick silence, as he made his way toward his own quarters. The little villa appeared to have grown there, so completely did the whitewashed walls harmonize with the buffs and browns of the sand. On the shaded, cool veranda he found his little child, asleep in her low chair—and his wife, Celeste, reading. The delicate blonde woman was in strange contrast with the raw, elemental atmosphere of the French Sahara Outpost.

She looked up and smiled when he entered, but after a closer inspection of his face seemed to know that he had brought no good news. A silence fell between them, the silence of premonition.

"A runner came from the next post," he at last announced, waiting for her question, fearing to hurt her. His departure, brief as it might prove, would add to the loneliness of her life, and he loved her.

She did not speak.

"It is an order from the governor."

"You must go away—" She stated a fact, not a question, and spoke in a whisper as if afraid of the words.

"Nothing dangerous," he assured her. "A sheik, Bou Bokeur, has been pillaging the In Salah caravans and I have orders to stop him. The governor hints it would be best for me to hurry."

"There will be fighting—"

"Bou Bokeur will be too wise to stand against my Spahis. But if he does—" Lartal broke off. His voice had become hard.

"You may be wounded—killed—"

"Nonsense! Bullets won't pick me out—because I'm married to you!" He laughed, torn between the joy of starting on his first raid and the displeasure at the thought of distressing his wife. "You will have Sergeant Desmarchi, who drinks too much absinth, true, but is an experienced Colonial, and fifty Spahis."

"But I will worry about you!"

"Silly—you must expect me to take these trips. There's no help for it—orders."

"Won't you get transferred back to France, Raymond? Something dreadful will happen to us if we stay!"

He freed himself from her touch and moved to the window.

"I thought that question had been threshed out to a finish. To succeed in the army a man must go to the colonies. I could not endure to vegetate in a French garrison, teaching recruits to distinguish between their shoes and their belt buckles. It would take fifteen years to obtain promotion and then I'd be too old and moss-grown to be able to command—"

"There are other things in life. Why must you become a general?"

"Runs in the family. My father was one. And tradition is needed if the individual is to keep up the standard and avoid the invasion of commercialism. My father conquered Annam. His words are quoted as a classic: 'They are six thousand, we are three hundred; the odds are even.' There is something noble in those words—the spirit of old France."

"Of the France that left her dead on forty battlefields through Europe and the colonies," Celeste put in, vehemently.

"And gave France her power, her fame, her prosperity!"

Lartal controlled his impulse to accuse her of lack of understanding, to point out that her people were traders and knew only of counting houses and material profits.

"You yourself have told me how your mother spent nights weeping and praying during your father's campaigns," Celeste went on. "In making France great, he tortured her."

Lartal took her in his arms and kissed her softly.

"Forgive me," he begged. "But you married a soldier and you must make the best of it, little wife—"

"Forgive me, too. I don't understand you, always."

"You should not have insisted on coming out here with me—"

"How could I let you come alone when

I loved you so and you would be so lonely! Considering that I did insist I'll make the best of it, dear. I won't grumble. Only I do hope Bou Bokeur hurries away."

Raymond Lartal could not restrain his smile.

CHAPTER II.

THE TRAPPER IS TRAPPED.

HIS prayer finished, Bou Bokeur arose. The wind was rising, the cold wind that blows over the dune country when night falls. It caressed his bare arms and caused his powerful muscles to ripple with a sense of physical well being.

He contemplated the nearer waves of the rolling sand that sweep across the third of a continent, and looked up at the icy glint of the stars, scintillating like diamonds in the dark blue of the twilight sky—the brief twilight of the desert. Within him surged the love of the open, the pride of being an Arab, a free man who scorned to live in the mud shelters of the infidel.

The moon was rising in a thin crescent, the emblem of Islam.

Bou Bokeur was a brigand, a member of the Ouled-Riad tribe of Algeria. He had grown to manhood in the comparative civilization of the French colony. Then, fired by recitals of the old men recalling the war against the Roumis, he had led an insurrection in the Oran Province. When the French forces scattered his small band, he sought refuge in the Arab's shelter, the great Sahara.

His vigorous personality did not permit him to remain subordinate, and soon he was sheik over a motley band gathered from the outcasts of the border tribes—Algerians, Moroccans, even the wild Moslems from Abyssinia. Out of the desert he appeared at unexpected intervals, raided a caravan, and disappeared as if swallowed by the great outspreading sand and sky.

The forces sent against him he defeated. Many a stray troop of Spahis had seen his horsemen appear over the horizon and fought against them their last battle.

His energy was boundless, his name known from the edge of Tripoli to the upper fringe of the Soudan. The mere fact of having belonged to his band was a certificate of courage among the people of the Oases. The Algerian Government now had gathered enough troops to cause him to shift activities to the south.

From the animal line came a babble of noise as the camels and horses were made ready for the business at hand. A scout had brought to Bou Bokeur a stray member of a caravan.

Under pressure he told where the main outfit would spend the night. In exchange for the information, Bou Bokeur had spared his life, ordered his camel restituted, and offered him a membership in the band—which he accepted.

Bou Bokeur mounted his horse and took the lead. In a few minutes the wind-blown sand would cover all traces of the camp. Nothing would remain to indicate where he had spent the night.

Several hours passed before they came in sight of the oasis where the caravan was said to encamp. True enough, there were the horses and the camels—a rich prize. Bou Bokeur turned in the saddle and gave an order. The Arabs formed into line. Another signal from their leader and they charged at top speed, burnoose flying in the moonlight.

When within three hundred yards, a solid volley rang out from the caravan. Bullets crashed into the on-rushing brigands, emptying saddles by the score.

"We are betrayed!" the Arabs shouted.

In vain Bou Bokeur tried to gather them to the attack. The unexpected resistance had temporarily broken their spirit.

A bugle sounded from the crest of a dune and another volley poured in. The raiders were caught between two fires.

There could be no mistaking the newcomers.

The Spahis rolled down the dunes in a cloud of sand, their blades gleaming.

In the emergency the band had gathered about Bou Bokeur, and when the shock came the surprised party was in solid formation. In the interchange of blows the short scimitars and daggers of the desert men were of little avail against the long cavalry sabers; the unwieldly carbines no

match for the revolvers. The French drove through the mass of Arabs as a chisel through stone, chipping off a man here and there until the whole split suddenly and fell to pieces.

Bou Bokeur was forced to flee, but not before he had given a good account of himself.

His superlative agility and horsemanship carried him out of the melée. His arm paralyzed from a saber blow, with his knees he guided his horse away and broke through the mass of fighting men. A Spahi recognized him and screamed:

"Bou Bokeur! Bou Bokeur!"

The brigand chief laughed, feeling secure in the superiority of his mount. The sand seemed to unwind under the flying hoofs, each step sending up a tiny geyser of sand and thudding dully.

The gash on his shoulder was deep and the blood steadily soaked through his cloak. His head reeled as the motion of the horse made the pain more acute. He had the impression of riding many miles through immense stretches of moon-lit sand, crossing dune after dune.

An echoing patter of hoofs brought him around in the saddle, amazed. Not fifty yards away, another horseman, a French officer, was in pursuit.

Bou Bokeur leaned forward and urged his mount to greater speed. And yet the hoof beats behind rattled closer and closer. A shot and Bou Bokeur was thrown forward into the sand.

Dazed, he looked up. The white mount of the French officer was in front of him.

"What a horse—" thought the Arab.

Then he caught a glimpse of the rider's face, lips drawn back from the teeth, the eyes mad with the lust to kill.

Bou Bokeur surrendered.

The next night he saw the stars light up one by one—through the window of a cell. Fires flared in the soldiers' stoves, a thin haze arose from the cooking pots and the smell of boiled meat and rice came to him. Bugles sounded a change of sentries and silence again reigned.

The confinement appalled Bou Bokeur. To be able to see the desert only through a narrow slit crossed by iron bars made him feel as if strength were ebbing from his body. The sense of helplessness when he grasped the bars and watched the purplish night shadows appear over the desert, culminated in a dry sob, deep within, that seemed to tear at his vitals.

Once a sheik, he now was a prisoner of the French, a beaten man. And he had been trapped into captivity by a stratagem so simple a child of ten would have seen through it.

The window faced east, toward Mecca, and Bou Bokeur was a true believer. Surely Allah would be merciful and make the lieutenant understand that an Arab could never live indoors, away from the desert.

A tumult of angry thoughts possessed him as he caught sight of a sentry pacing the wall.

Those black men were afraid of his people, afraid of the desert. They were fitted to be slaves. Even while he regarded them with disfavor, his cell door opened and a black sergeant entered.

He respectfully informed the prisoner that Lieutenant Lartal wished to see him. Unhurriedly, with the gravity becoming a chief, Bou Bokeur took his place in the center of a file of *Tirailleurs*—French native infantry. The sergeant kept time and the native soldiers moved forward with a cadence that beat its way into Bou Bokeur's consciousness.

"One, two— One, two—"

He bent his will not to follow the rhythm of the steps, to retain his own stately stride. He would not concede to these blacks that he considered himself in their power. No man could say that he had seen Bou Bokeur frightened or nervous.

The sergeant came to a halt in front of the commander's office. Within the room a kerosene lamp, suspended from the ceiling, illuminated a circle of which a table strewn with maps and papers was the center.

Lartal, in red vest and baggy blue trousers, soft tan leather boots, gold lace on sleeve and collar, made a striking picture. The shadows on his face shifted, the buttons glittered in tiny gold flashes, with every concentric movement of the light.

Bou Bokeur showed no embarrassment, but bore himself as a desert man should. He saluted him gravely in the Arab manner.

The lieutenant ordered the black soldiers to leave. The sergeant stepped back to the door, grounded his piece and became motionless, blending with the color scheme in the dimly lighted room, appearing to be carved from the partition behind him.

"Do you speak French?" Lartal asked.

"Yes—"

"Your name is Bou Bokeur?"

The sheik assented with a gesture.

"You admit your identity?"

"All men know me in the desert," Bou Bokeur answered.

"I shall send you to Laghoua in the morning."

"And why? I might as well die here."

"As long as you were not killed in actual battle, I cannot take the law into my own hands," the lieutenant declared. "You must be tried."

"The result will be the same."

"Not likely. There are men in France who do not understand the desert and they would protest if you were to be executed—humanitarians, they are called."

"Yet, they will be afraid to free me."

"They will put you in prison for a few years and then may pardon you."

"To come back to the desert?"

"No. But they will let you go to Syria or Egypt. They allowed the great chief, Abdel-Kader, to end his days in Damas, among the Moslems—"

"I would rather die than leave the desert forever."

"I, too, think it would be simpler to shoot you—but I cannot." He shuffled the papers on the table and made as though to close the interview.

"I would die in prison—" declared Bou Bokeur. "The Arab sickens indoors."

"Consumption—I know."

The Arab bent close. "Lieutenant, I have never asked mercy, but I do now. Kill me to-night. I will give you the reasons you may ask."

Lartal crushed the stub of the cigarette in the tray. There was a long silence broken only by the distant padding of the sentries' bare feet. The Arab pressed his advantage. He felt that his captor would understand.

"Would you choose prison in preference to death?" he asked.

"No," the lieutenant answered.

"Death, to me, would be merciful; it would but hasten the end a few months. I would die a man and not a spiritless nothing—"

"But you are a bandit—a thief," the lieutenant accused.

"So are you—" Bou Bokeur replied.

"How so?"

"I rob caravans. You steal the desert away from the Arabs, and you have taken the land from the black people. There is only one difference between you and me. I steal for myself. You steal for your people—bigger things."

Lartal agreed to himself that the man spoke truth; that is, if facts were considered from the bandit standpoint.

"The French steal for the French—Bou Bokeur for Bou Bokeur," the sheik continued to emphasize.

"Will you promise—if freedom is granted you—to keep the French laws?" Lartal asked suddenly.

The Arab concealed his surprise and was silent for some moments.

"I will!" he answered slowly. "I promise to keep the law."

"Good. I will keep you here while I write to the governor. He has long wanted a man like you to protect caravans from robbers."

"And the bandits I take—what becomes of their booty?" The Arab did not cloak facts under high-sounding words.

"Perhaps—perhaps—" Lartal replied, evasively.

After Bou Bokeur left, Lartal sat before the table in deep thought. In freeing him thus he had only followed the orders delivered to him from his governor. There would be no native army now in northern Africa were it not for this system of winning over the blacks and Arabs.

And yet Bou Bokeur did not seem to be the type to shift allegiance. He might have the Mohammedan sense of honor with regard to a promise, but in his heart of hearts he was the desert man.

Although Lartal had obeyed orders, he was vaguely disturbed.

CHAPTER III.

DEATH TO THE UNBELIEVER!

THE following week Lieutenant Lartal received word that the fanatic El Mokrani had made his appearance on the desert border. His command was numerous, consisting of blacks and Arabs, and among them were many Chambaas, the pirates of the desert.

El Mokrani had dreamed a great thing, to reconquer the lands taken by the French. The impossibility of this he could not see, blinded as he was by a fervid belief in the greatness of his race.

His arrival was sudden and the alarm spread as swiftly. A French column, sent against him, passed Fort Chanzy on the way southeast. A week later a remnant of its forces reappeared, seeking refuge within the walls.

El Mokrani had surprised the expedition and cut it to pieces. The survivors reported his riders already within a few miles of the oasis.

Lieutenant Lartal gave orders to close the gates, placed his field gun to the best advantage, and sent a messenger to the nearest post, to be relayed to In Salah.

That night a lone horseman topped the dunes and approached close to the walls. The garrison watched him curiously from the ramparts.

He turned his horse about and fled with an ironic shout after first throwing a bundle into the fort. The bundle contained the head of Lartal's courier. That was El Mokrani's gage of battle.

Twenty minutes later, over the horizon, against the back drop of the sky and the last rays of the sinking sun, a horde of horsemen swept forward. Swinging clear by a half mile they formed a loop about the fort.

The red sky was a menace, a presage of carnage. Bou Bokeur, standing beside Lartal, contemplated the array of forces, computed the number.

"Three days—" he said shortly.

The sun had dropped from sight, leaving a glow of russet that edged with gold the small clouds circling the horizon, this vapor seeming to be the last breath of the slain rising in a mist from the earth. The violet shadows of evening darkened into purple, shifted to gray, and finally merged into intense black, as though the hand of an invisible giant had wiped away the last vestige of glow. The first sigh of the night wind came, and the stars appeared as if switched on by the same agency that extinguished the light. These lofty beacons were mirrored in the calm surface of a tiny pool of water guarded by palm trees.

The second day had passed.

In the barracks of Fort Chanzy a stir rippled along the long rows of wounded as the heat of the day dwindled. A haze of tiny flies weaved about; larger blue ones alighted heavily upon the edges of the wounds, clustering in swarms.

Laid out on the esplanade were the dead, the faces covered, the stiffened limbs ludicrously manikinlike. Behind the walls were the survivors, a handful. Dying, dead, and those who would die.

For two nights and days the little fort had been repulsing the waves of Arabs that undermined resistance bit by bit. The tired Spahis and *Tirailleurs*, and even Lartal himself, knew that to-night would see the end.

With only fifty men left what could he do against three thousand? Neighboring tribes, once thought to be friendly, had joined El Mokrani, and each hour brought reënforcements to swell his forces.

The French flag hung limply from the mast, torn by many bullets, unable to float, it seemed, in this atmosphere of defeat and death. From the crest of the wall a Spahi fell with a soft, slithering sound as if a sack of wheat had been dropped.

On the carriage of the field piece, the shrapnel of which had long since been exhausted, sat Bou Bokeur, passive, calm. Lartal stepped to his side and placed a hand on his shoulder. Bou Bokeur indicated the buildings filled with the wounded, the long lines of dead by the water hole, and nodded.

"What about *madame?*" the Arab questioned.

"What can I do?"

"Take a camel, a fast mehari, and escape—"

"I cannot leave my men."

"You cannot save them. The place will fall before morning."

"My duty is clear—I remain."

The tone was final, but remorse brought from him a groan. He had permitted his wife and child to come to him in the desert and they would die.

"You saved me from prison—" Bou Bokeur was saying.

Lartal did not contradict.

"I can take your wife and daughter away—to the French."

"I've been thinking about that," Lartal admitted. "It's the only way."

He indicated to Bou Bokeur that he wished him to follow. They found Celeste on the veranda, Suzanne in her arms. The little girl was asleep.

"I have arranged for you and Suzanne to leave," Lartal announced as casually as he could.

"Leave?"

"Bou Bokeur will take you through—" Within him throbbed the anguish of the coming parting, but he kept his face set.

"Without you?" she asked in weak tones.

"Don't be stubbornly sentimental. The column from In Salah will be here soon."

"Then why do you send me away?"

"It's getting too risky with the bullets raining everywhere."

"I want to stay with you."

"But think of Suzanne! It's dark out. The Arabs will not notice you in the turmoil. They won't suspect that any one would risk the open. Bou Bokeur knows the desert like a book. You'll be safe in two hours." He turned to the Arab. "Get the mehari," he ordered. "And meet me at the gate."

"I must take a horse, too—a fast horse—" Bou Bokeur demurred.

"Ali is the best in the fort—take him."

After Bou Bokeur left Celeste did not renew her argument, but questioned her husband about what she should carry. She obeyed wordlessly, even hurriedly, when he suggested that time was passing.

At the gate Bou Bokeur waited for them. Lartal kissed his wife, knowing it would be for the last time, then held Suzanne for an instant before lifting her up to Bou Bokeur, who was already mounted.

"Take good care of them, Bou Bokeur!"

"I will—"

Ali nuzzled the lieutenant's shoulder. Lartal held his head close and whispered. The beast whinnied softly, as if he understood. The darkness hid the tears running down the officer's cheeks.

"Be brave, Celeste!" He made as if to lift her to the kneeling camel.

"I can't leave you—I can't—"

"You must."

"Let me see you once more."

He drew her into the shelter of the wall and struck a match. The yellow flare showed his grimy face, the muscles of his jaw working as he strove for courage.

"Poor boy! You're so hot and dirty—" she crooned.

The match went out.

"Come, dear—you must go!" he urged.

"I can't—I can't—" she whispered hoarsely, and clung to him.

He was torn between his desire to keep her to the end and his duty toward her and Suzanne.

"Don't send me away, please—"

The sound of approaching horsemen could be heard. The Arabs were drawing closer under cover of the dark.

"They'll be here soon," Bou Bokeur warned.

But Celeste clung to her husband tightly.

"Another minute and it will be too late!" the sheik continued, excitedly.

And then when Celeste did not move, he wheeled Ali and was off like the wind.

"Suzanne!" the mother cried.

"She'll be all right—" the lieutenant tried to reassure her.

He was almost thankful to the Arab for settling the dilemma. He never could have found the courage to send the child alone.

The mehari arose awkwardly and walked away. Bou Bokeur had merged into the darkness.

Realizing the danger of surprise, the lieutenant ordered the gate swung shut. Then he took Celeste in his arms.

"I would have suffered more knowing

you were dead than I shall in dying with you," she said; "Suzanne will go back to my people and I—you see, I can't stand separation. I'm not a soldier's wife."

"You're better than that," he replied. "You're a soldier."

She grew limp in his arms and when he whispered her name she did not answer. The strain had been too much. Lifting her and holding her close, he went to his own quarters, where his attempts completely to revive her were futile. She was half unconscious when he left to return to the wall.

And not a moment too soon did he arrive. The enemy had appeared on the wall itself, the dwindling garrison being too small to man every point. A fierce hand-to-hand combat took place.

Well back from the turmoil, revolver in hand, Lartal picked off the more dangerous of the Arabs, coolly, deliberately. The invaders were slain, and the garrison found another breathing spell.

Then the gate itself was blown in with a bag of gunpowder applied and fired in the dark. El Mokrani's forces poured in—to find confronting them a high barricade of furniture, barrels and packing cases, defended by grinning black demons, with bloody rags around their heads, led by a fiend of an infidel in a stained uniform.

Lartal, back of the barricade, harangued his men with sturdy words, told them to hold on, that help was coming. He knew that they knew that he was lying. Yet they grinned and nodded.

From one spot to another Lartal moved in the gusts of bullets, thirst swelling his tongue, acrid powder smoke burning his eyes and nostrils. His men were falling everywhere.

By midnight the walls were carried, and fighting was from house to house. The lieutenant succeeded in carrying his wife to the barracks, a two-story building adjoining the stables of the Spahis. There the defenders gathered.

The last stand was made on the top floor, Lartal having ordered the stairs hacked away. Attempts to place ladders against the walls were defeated, but the Arabs gained the roof of the stable and kept up a constant sniping at the windows.

The bullets whined into the low room, rained on the tiles, and cracked the whitewash on the wall in star-shaped designs, but the *Tirailleurs* were undismayed, their eyes gleaming with the primitive emotion of fighting. The click of gun breeches snapping shut, the spiteful, shattering discharge, the pattering of empty shells on the floor, the moans from the wounded, the howling mob outside—all formed a desperate test of soldierly quality.

From window to window the lieutenant went, cheering the men with a pat on the shoulder or a brief word. With powder and empty ration tins he constructed rude bombs that at first created panic among the assailants. But they, too, learned the trick and retaliated, the heavy slugs tearing among the wounded. The smoke was asphyxiating in its density.

Arabs gained the windows. A brief struggle and they found footing in the room. Bayonets came into play, and bodies were thrown out.

The floor was slippery with blood, strewn with empty shells, and might at any time fall, weighted down as it was with the trampling of many men. The esplanade was a vast shambles, a slaughter-house of men.

Lartal was at the verge of madness. He forgot his identity, and felt naught but the urge to hold on, to fight, to kill.

His wife, in a daze, was calling for Suzanne.

CHAPTER IV.

A SINGLE SHOT.

EL MOKRANI was not a typical Arab. His eyes were blue, his hair blond—a strange coloring indeed among the Moslems. He was taller than the average, and combined a heavy, muscular frame with the agility of a panther. His childhood, spent in the mountains of Kabylia, had perhaps given him the unusual physique.

Outside of his tent a fire burned, lighting up the interior with a ruddy glow. He rested upon a sofa that was covered with a rich cloth. He wore a jacket of gold-spangled velvet, the rest of his garments being pure

white except the broad scarf of silk about his waist which shimmered in the half light.

From the direction of the fort came the rattle of musketry and the shouts of the fighting men. Even at this distance he could smell the powder smoke.

El Mokrani was disturbed. He had lost men in hundreds. Had it not been that a check in his career at this time would destroy all hope for a complete revolution in Algeria, he would have abandoned the attempt to take the fort. He himself, a bullet through his thigh, had been forced to relinquish the task to Bou Maza, a sheik of recognized skill in attack.

A runner suddenly appeared at the tent flap, and, struggling for breath, begged permission to enter. El Mokrani ordered him to rest, not unkindly, and waited for the message.

It was this in brief: Three squadrons of Chasseurs d' Afrique had left In Salah, followed by a full regiment of troops of the line. They should arrive at the fort before dawn. The runner, a desert man, had covered one hundred and fifty miles in twenty hours, semicircling the line of march to avoid the scouts that the column sent out.

El Mokrani complimented him, then called for El Mazari, Agga of the Chambaas. The old chief, with one hand bandaged, looked grave and worried.

"The Roumis are coming—many of them," El Mokrani announced. "Get the women and sick away to-night. We will take the fort before morning. Give every man to the sword and leave to the column only dead men to rescue."

"The French fight like devils—even the men of our race fighting with them."

"Thou knowest nothing, Agga," El Mokrani retorted. "They fight well because they have good rifles."

"But in any case many of thy men will be killed before morning," the old man returned.

"An Arab does not fear death."

"Neither does he give up his life foolishly."

"I force no man to fight. If thou and thy Chambaas fear the French, go—"

"We still serve thee, Emir. We will watch thy women and booty."

"And spare my real men for the fighting!" El Mokrani said sarcastically. "So be it!"

El Mokrani, left alone, fell back among his pillows, weak from loss of blood, and shaking with a sudden anger that possessed him.

He would cease fighting with men already half gained by the ways of the French, and go to the holy war waged by the Mahdi against the English, far away on the shores of the Nile. There, with the dervishes and the Senussis, he could make his name and gain the right to the title of Emir. Here, on the fringes of Algeria, his leadership was a mockery.

And while he waited for the bustle that would tell him the Chambaas were striking camp and starting the caravan on the way southeast, a eunuch entered. The black announced that a sheik, newly arrived in camp, wished to speak to the Emir. El Mokrani assented to the interview.

Bou Bokeur entered, carrying Suzanne in his arms.

After the usual ceremonious greeting the sheik sat down, the child beside him. She watched the Emir with curious eyes, unafraid. When he saw that she was white with the black hair and dark eyes worthy of an houri, he smiled.

Her laughter tinkled out and she climbed down and went to him. He stroked her hair. Having discovered his spurs, she knelt and spun the rowels.

"They are nice, but I like my father's better," she declared.

She spoke in Arabic, and El Mokrani questioned her: "Who taught thee my tongue?"

"Thy tongue!" The tone was scornful. "All men here speak thy tongue. Thou thinkest thou art a lion?"

El Mokrani laughed aloud, but the child was not disconcerted.

"I speak with the little sons and daughters of my father's Spahis. They are Arabs."

"No, they're not," El Mokrani teased.

The little girl stamped her foot. "All men know that Spahis are Arabs!" she cried. "If thou say they are not, then I shall not like thee."

El Mokrani bowed to her gravely. "Thou art right," he murmured, and turned to Bou Bokeur. "Thy name?"

"Bou Bokeur."

"I know the name."

"I have come to seek shelter with thee."

"I was told thou hast been defeated on the desert by a Roumi—"

"I was wounded—and my horse had the colic."

El Mokrani sneered. "Woman's talk. How didst thou beg the Frenchman to let thee go, O well-known sheik?"

"I gave my promise to help the French."

"Thou didst, pig—"

"The Koran says one may lie to save one's head—and my head was in play."

"True, the Koran says that," El Mokrani mused.

"The Frenchman is new to the country and knows nothing but what others tell," Bou Bokeur went on. "But he is punished for his ignorance. I have brought thee his daughter. Thou canst gain the fort by holding her as hostage."

"The lion does not stoop to tricks," retorted El Mokrani. "I shall get the fort in fair fight."

"As thou wilt."

"And thou? What wilt thou have for thy trouble?"

"I have his horse—a beautiful beast."

"Which does not suffer from colic," the Emir pointed out dryly.

Suzanne was frightened now and began to cry. El Mokrani endeavored to soothe her.

"The Frenchman saved thee from prison?" he asked suddenly.

Bou Bokeur started, and assented with a gesture.

"And thou repayeth him so?"

"He is an infidel—"

"And thou art a Mohammedan. Ingratitude is a great sin."

El Mokrani made a sign. Negro eunuchs appeared as if by magic and seized Bou Bokeur before he had time to draw a weapon.

The sheik's courage did not desert him. His attitude was as fearless, as defiant, as ever.

"Sin deserving of death," El Mokrani went on. "Thou art unfortunate to have come to me, for thou hitherto hast stolen the women destined to be mine from the caravans, and I have sworn thy death—and I keep my promise."

Suzanne, not understanding, looked on with wide eyes. El Mokrani waved his hand, followed by a sharp sweeping motion. The chief of the eunuchs, whose tongue had been severed, nodded. Bou Bokeur was led from the room.

And then the Emir, forgetful of the battle raging at the fort, of the approaching French column, became absorbed in teaching the small white woman-child the correct way to pronounce his name. Her tears had dried on her cheeks. Although she at first questioned him about her mother and father, El Mokrani soon led her into a narration of her childish games.

Their laughter surprised the guards outside, accustomed to the screams of women.

Lartal regained comparative sanity with the first rays of the rising sun.

Then the last living sergeant came in and exhibited an empty cartridge pouch. Not more than ten shots could be gathered after searching the dead.

The lieutenant had but one revolver cartridge. This he inserted in the grimy chamber and returned the gun to the holster. His wife was watching him, and he nodded briefly. The next assault would be the last.

They had not long to wait. Ladders had been prepared and were borne by vigorous arms. The defenders rushed to the windows. There was a brief encounter, and the Arabs fell back.

But the first attack had been a blind. The enemy had gained the roof of the stable and thrown a ladder across. They now poured into the barracks at the other end of the building.

The supreme moment had come. Celeste read his thoughts and tried to smile. But the barrel wavered and pointed to the floor.

"I can't—I can't," he moaned.

"I will."

"Not yet. Wait until I'm dead."

"But I want to go first—to be waiting for you."

"Celeste—" He knelt beside her. The revolver on her lap stared at him like the eye of a malignant living thing. "Do one thing more for me, dear. Be braver than I—wait until I fall—Celeste."

She held him close. In spite of her haggard face, she was beautiful. Her eyes were wonderfully sweet—so sweet they hurt him.

"I will," she whispered. "Suzanne will be safe. We do not die altogether. She's a little of both you and me."

He kissed her and arose. A struggle raged in the far corner. He did not look back. His face became livid as he picked up an ax and made his way toward the fighting.

His wild appearance threw the Arabs into a panic. They retreated to the stable roof. He followed. They went down on the esplanade. He followed. Having caught up with the stragglers, his ax swung—and cut.

Celeste was watching now from the window. He must keep in sight so that she would know.

His ax swung, and spun, and landed. Swords hacked at his arms, cut into his head. Spears dug at him. Still he stood, feet wide apart, wielding the shining ax head on which gathered shreds of scalps.

The faces of the Arabs seemed to float into clearness from a red mist. He was mad, he realized. Perhaps that was why he was allowed to live. Arabs are superstitious with regard to the insane.

In the unreal struggle he found himself thinking as though his brain were detached from his body. It was the blood trickling into his eyes that caused the red mist.

Through his delirium he heard the sound of a bugle, faint, far away.

They were coming—the Chasseurs d' Afrique! Celeste was watching him from the window. She may not have heard the bugle—and she could not see them coming. He must keep on his feet or she would die.

A sword struck him across the head. His knees gave. His bones seemed to bend under the weight of his body. Other blows fell upon him. He braced his feet. Weakness gripped him again. And the French were nearer.

Everything went black, and he slipped down to the blood-stained sand. Before he drifted off into unconsciousness he heard a single shot.

CHAPTER V.

OUT OF THE PAST.

THE town of Bammako stands like a watchman on the fringe of the southwest Sahara. The palm trees, lining the streets, are baked to the color of the sand, their leaves covered with a fine, yellowish dust. Bambara natives stroll the streets, paying no heed to the white men in their midst. Forgotten, indeed, is the great Samory war. The course of evolution moves swiftly in the land of the blacks, and things that happen to-day are ancient history tomorrow.

The day's heat had dwindled and the café was crowded with the white population, traders, government employees and army officers. On a stage erected at one end of the hall a painted lady of uncertain years, recently imported from Europe, sang subtle songs in a high-pitched voice.

A group of Arabs sipped gravely at their tiny cups of coffee, picturesque in loose cloaks and baggy trousers. The clicking of glasses, the odor of warm beer, and the fresh smell of absinth, recalled that here was Africa, new and raw. The traders went after pleasure as hard as they went after money, the army officers attacked the array of drinks as they would a band of plundering Touaregs.

From without came barbaric music. With every crescendo of sound, the shouts and squeals, coming from a native party in a house across the street, rose higher. The black Mohammedans did not take the forbidding of wine as seriously as the Arab.

"Here comes the Phenomenon!" suddenly exclaimed Captain Ferat to his brother officers.

Pierre Damier made his way through the rows of tables. Tall, well built, his face bronzed by the sun of the tropics, the lieutenant did not look his twenty-five years. His escapades in the various posts had

brought him the nickname. A reckless daring that partook more of a love of excitement than courage, was easily discerned in all of his gestures.

The red ribbon on his breast indicated that he had already some achievement to his name. He had won the Legion of Honor by attacking a band of Touaregs with but six Spahis, putting them to flight and taking their chief prisoner. This he had accomplished with the same felicity, without strain, just sheer confidence in his luck.

"Where have you been?" the captain inquired.

"Across the way—"

"What's all the noise about?"

"Abdoubas, the trader, is marrying another wife—quite a ceremony, too."

"Is the bride pretty?" the captain wondered.

"Yes. Just a girl, perhaps fourteen, at the most."

"They marry young among Arabs," Captain Ferat remarked.

"Pardon me—" Colonel Lartal put in. "But you can't call these people Arabs in the proper sense of the word. The Moslems here are the southern branch of the Berbers mixed with the native blacks."

The captain was stung. "Oh, I know quite well the real Arabs live in Algeria and Morocco—but it's customary to refer to all Mohammedans as Arabs—"

"A great mistake," Lartal went on. "It's an insult to the Berber."

The colonel went back to his absinth.

Raymond Lartal was depressed. But a depression that has lasted ten years is more or less habitual, and so the officers grouped about the table saw nothing extraordinary in his behavior.

The years had not been kind to the one-time commander of Fort Chanzy. There was more than a tinge of gray in his hair, and the clean-shaven jaws bore two lines, indelibly engraved, from the corners of the nose to the chin. But he was still the soldier, with square shoulders and no weakening of the body.

The scars that ran down his cheek and disappeared in his collar changed his expression but little. The neatly starched white uniform, the decorations on his left breast, the five stripes on his sleeve, and the obedience of the men at the table, were the reward for ten yars of continuous hardship.

He had not married again and was very severe with young officers who spoke of bringing their wives to the colony. His story was well known and often referred to as an excuse for his martinet inclinations and his erratic behavior.

He had won in the fight for his life at Fort Chanzy, afterward lying a long time on a narrow cot in the heat of the day and the cold of the night. It was four months before he was on his feet in condition to leave for France. To the surprise of all he had refused to take the steamer in Algiers and declared that he would spend his leave of one year in Africa.

This was the beginning of a long search. He scoured Algiers and Oran, even went to Morocco, from Tangier to Mogador. Everywhere he inquired for the Arab, Bou Bokeur. Even the former brigand's own tribe, the Ouled-Riad, had no news from him.

The military outposts on the fringe of the desert, from Laghoua to In Salah, had heard nothing of Suzanne. She and her guardian had melted into space that night. In desperation he had gone to Tripoli, roamed the oasis, escorted by Turkish cavalry, entered the *douars* of a dozen tribes—all to no avail.

Promoted to the rank of captain, he was put in command of a mission to explore the dune region in the waste of Mauretania and northern Senegal. His name had become familiar to the desert. Even the Touaregs, in far-off Ahaggar, knew him—knew of the reward he offered for the finding of his daughter.

When he won his fourth stripe in the spectacular campaign in northern Dahomey the papers published his story and adventurous men disappeared into the desert to win the reward. Some came back, some did not, but all had failed.

The broadcast knowledge had but deepened the sorrow in the sensitive mind of the soldier. He now refused to speak about anything concerning his private affairs. Even the mention of Fort Chanzy gave rise to unpleasant incidents.

Although white officers cursed their luck when transferred to his division, the native troops worshiped him. He was as a father to the blacks, had even been reproached for allowing them to carry on the war of plunder handed down by their forefathers—then he finally was reprimanded from France.

His cruelty to the Arabs and ruthless punishment of the slightest uprising had led to protest from the home press and sympathy had turned from him. His actions in the Soussous campaign in High Guinea, when his opponents were black, had been in marked contrast. He had resorted to kindness and accomplished much.

In all his ten years of service he had never returned home. He was a fearless, efficient officer who obtained results, and as such was valuable to the government.

One of the officers at the table, seeing his colonel's brows come together, quickly turned the subject with: "How did you come to see the bride, Damier? I thought the natives were more careful of Frenchmen?"

"Abdoubas is proud of her—that's why—a little departure from the rules, but he had already sinned in drinking alcohol, so—"

An amused laugh followed from the circle of listeners.

"Oh, Phenomenon, you'll roam about his *serail* now, eh?" Captain Ferat questioned.

Damier shrugged his shoulders. There was evidently something of more importance on his mind. Presently he found the courage to speak, to approach the colonel, as no other man at the table would have dared.

"Colonel Lartal—you've been looking for an Arab named Bou Bokeur, I believe."

"I was—" Lartal had schooled himself against showing signs of excitement, and now was quite composed.

"A native—in that party over there—mentioned his name—"

"There are many by that name."

"But this fellow—an Ouled-Riad—thought it might be worth looking into."

Lartal got up. The others stood, also.

"Bring that man to my office in half an hour, Lieutenant Damier."

"He is outside. I thought you might wish to see him."

"In half an hour," the colonel repeated, and turned and left the café, his spurs ringing on the cement floor, his back as stiff as a ramrod.

As his footsteps died away on the pavement Captain Ferat turned to the others. "Here's where Phenomenon gets sent back to France!"

"To a garrison where you will flirt with the keeper of a corner restaurant to save on meals—" remarked another.

"Why?" Damier asked.

"Oh, innocent child!" laughed the captain. "Don't you think we see through the joke to get the colonel all stirred up. How much did you pay that native?"

"I wouldn't torture the old man," Damier returned seriously.

"I wouldn't put anything by you, my boy, since you handed me the 'news' that I was the father of twins—two years after my departure!"

All joined in the laughter.

Pierre Damier shrugged his shoulders, arose from the table and left. On the terrace, by the artificial pine trees, he found the native waiting.

The sudden word that Bou Bokeur might be found had lifted Lartal out of his usual calm. His cold reserve had been on the point of melting. In his eagerness he had almost given way to curiosity in the café. And, indeed, he could not have been blamed. For word to come out of the past at this time when he had given up all hope! But, it had always been the same.

At one time, when about to leave for France, already on the steamer in Dakar, a messenger had come aboard bearing a letter from the convent of St. Louis, telling him that a native had brought in a white girl. He had immediately canceled his passage and journeyed to St. Louis, only to find disappointment.

He crossed, now, to the maps on the wall, gazed at the wide spaces comprising the desert. The proverbial needle in the haystack—a human being in the vast expanse.

He spanned with his open hand the distance between Fort Chanzy and Bamako. Not far, on the map, twelve hundred miles or more. But between was the desert, hard-

er to cross than any sea, known only to the roaming Touaregs and Chambaas and the Zangaras of high Niger.

Colonel Lartal realized that he had come to the belief that Suzanne was dead—for the comfort of his own mind. Yes, he was selfish. First his career, then his peace of mind. He had sacrificed his wife to the first, his daughter to the second. A soldier, he!

The orderly interrupted his brooding.

"Lieutenant Damier is without."

"Send him in."

Damier entered, followed by the native. With a deep salaam, the Arab took a seat in front of the colonel's desk. Damier hesitated.

"You may remain if you wish, Damier," the colonel said.

Damier sat down and lit a cigarette.

"Thou bringest news of Bou Bokeur?" Lartal questioned in Arabic. His wandering had given him a knowledge of the difficult tongue.

"I bring word of ten years ago."

"Where is Bou Bokeur?"

"As he was then—with the prophet."

"Dead!"

"Yes."

Lartal tried to conceal his disappointment. "Tell me thy tale and I shall pay thee."

"I was a man of Bou Bokeur's. There was great fighting and much plunder. But after he was taken—"

"It was I and my Spahis."

"Oh, it was thee! It was a good thought—that caravan. Many of us were killed."

"Go on!" the colonel exclaimed impatiently.

"We fled toward the east, fearful lest we were not yet safe. Then we turned and came back—and had a hard time, for we had only horses and the oases were guarded. Even the people of our creed hated us, for we stole from them, too—they being allied to the infidel. We found our comrades one by one, some alive, some dead, in the desert. El Mokrani was besieging the fort, but we did not join him—"

"And why?"

"He would have compelled us to fight and there was no booty in it. His men fight for glory and not for plunder. And the wives of the Spahis are neither beautiful nor young—so, we saved ourselves for better things—"

Lartal nodded. He recognized Bou Bokeur's philosophy.

"Three days passed. Then soldiers from In Salah came. El Mokrani fled. Of the Chambaas who watched their camels, we killed many and took their beasts with all their burdens. El Mokrani could do nothing, for if he stopped for us the Roumis would catch him. It was good fun—"

"Come to the point," urged Lartal. "What about Bou Bokeur?"

"Be patient. This is a tale well told. I and two others mounted meharis of the best, loaded with beautiful things. As we made our way toward Laghoua—where no one knew us and we could dispose of our goods—the day before arriving, when the mountains could already be seen to the northward, we hailed a camel man. He came close and we recognized a Chambaa.

"We were three, he was one. We had good rifles, he a poor one. When he was dead we shared his belongings. The saddle, the rifle, the camel. I being chief, took the latter, and a black bag he was carrying.

"The others gathered to see my fortune. I untied the strings. A head rolled out, about three days cut—Bou Bokeur."

"Art thou sure?" Lartal questioned.

"I had lived with the sheik for years. The French had a price on the head. The Chambaa was going to collect it. We buried the head because it was more seemly. The others made up my loss by sharing their parts with me."

"Art thou still a bandit?"

"No. There are more blows than profit in the business. I am trading with my brother, Abdoubas."

"Here is some money for you. Go in peace."

After the Arab had left Lartal briefly explained to Damier, who declared impulsively:

"If I can ever help you, colonel—I will—outside all military business, you know."

Lartal, so long accustomed to constraint, was touched. "If I ever need any one I'll think of you. In the meantime, no more

visits to native brides. They might prove dangerous."

"Very well, colonel."

Damier went out.

Left alone, Lartal abandoned restraint. His officers would have been shocked could they have seen the tears on his cheeks. When the colonel gave way he did so completely. The orderly regarded him with large, liquid brown eyes of sympathetic understanding.

"*M'sieur*—" he ventured. "Do you want a drink?"

The colonel did not answer, and the black man left, to return almost immediately with a glass filled with absinth, which he placed on the table.

"*Voila!*"

"Thank you, D'nafa. You're a good boy."

"I like you past all *toubabs*," the native returned.

"Don't tell others what you see here, eh?"

"No, mon colonel."

"Good—" Lartal concluded. "I'll always keep you with me."

The orderly turned on his heel, with the precision of the drill, and went back to his post by the door.

Lartal, in a mood of depression, passed to the window and looked out. Over the cobbles of the road leading to the artillery barracks passed negroes, Berbers and Arabs. Negresses flirted with the *tirailleurs* off duty, in a coy, squealing manner. The wind from the desert swept in particles of sand that covered everything with dust and dried the mouth and nostrils.

The rice pots were boiling, reminding the colonel of the first evening at Fort Chanzy. He recalled Celeste and her grimace of dismay when he described the incongruous meats the natives placed in the stew.

How she disliked Africa! She had a presentiment that it would rob her of her happiness. And, although he had loved the country then, he hated it in his turn now.

Perhaps it were better that Celeste had died. How she would have suffered over Suzanne! A father's love is never as deep and intense as a mother's. Yet he could not imagine how any one could have suffered more than he.

He still thought of Suzanne as the little black-haired girl who played with the Spahis' children, prattling in the dialect of the desert. She had been a few months over four years old when she left with Bou Bokeur.

Ten years had passed. If she were alive she would already resemble her mother—would have become quite grown up—a woman—

The glass he held in his hand crashed to the floor, breaking and spilling the sugary liquid.

At fourteen, Arabs marry their women!

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

SATISFIED

IF one there be to walk with me
When day is at an end;
A kindred soul to talk with me:
A loving, kindly friend—

I care not, though each part of me
Be torn with daily strife.
The love within the heart of me
Is all I ask of life.

Harry Varley.

The Missing Mondays

By HOMER EON FLINT

Author of "The Emancipatrix," "The Devolutionist," etc.

A NOVELETTE IN TWO PARTS—PART II.

CHAPTER X.

THREE!

GOING downstairs afterward, Ross automatically turned toward the door of Shirley's den. But she did not follow. Instead, in a peculiar, hesitating manner, she said:

"I—I would rather not work until this afternoon, to-day. I want to take a little —a little walk."

She seemed in a great hurry to get away. Ross could not forbear watching her depart, wondering why had not taken one of the cars. She disappeared around a bend in the road, not far from the little weather-beaten house of an elderly couple named Douglas.

She returned well within her hour and immediately went up to her room. When she came down, she was in blithe spirits; whatever had been on her mind was now off it.

Lunch over, she announced that she was ready for the den. Ross replied that he'd be there in a moment or so; and while he lingered on the piazza with his cigar, Aurelia came up and said something that puzzled him.

"Where do you suppose," with a nod of her fine head toward Shirley's retreating form, "she went this morning?"

"I haven't the slightest idea."

"Neither have I. But I can't help guessing."

And with a strange look at him, together with a boyish dig in the ribs, Aurelia quietly went away.

Ross put the thought aside for the time, and went into the den. Shirley was all ready. Also, she gave him a searching look as though trying to guess his thoughts. But

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for January 20.

she spoke only about "Something for Nothing."

"This next chapter has the subhead, 'Invention,'" she said. "And here are your father's notes. What do you make of them?"

Ross quickly caught their drift.

"It's an explanation of everything from water-color art to the inventing of a steam-shovel," he answered. "Dad doesn't believe that 'necessity is the mother of invention.' He holds that the word invention covers all creative work, all original composition of any sort, and that it is due purely and simply to the operation of his favorite law."

"Doesn't he make any exceptions at all?"

"Only in the case of music composers. He doesn't mention poets. Presumably he considers that even a poet is actuated by a desire to gain certain effects without paying the standard price for them."

"Considering some poetry I have seen," observed Shirley, "I would say that the author certainly got something for nothing, if he were really paid."

"That isn't the idea," smiled Ross. "Dad says that an inventor of a machine is simply a chap who is too exaltedly lazy to do the work by hand. And the creator of a novel, for instance—the originator of a new fiction idea, let us say—is simply a man who is too indolent to get out and tell his ideas by word of mouth to the people; hence, he resorts to the easier and more widespread medium of fiction."

"And does he consider all artists to be governed by the same rules and regulations?"

"Yes, to dad, a portrait painter is a chap who will not go to the trouble of painting his subject in five thousand different poses, in order to catch every individual expression, but tries to combine in the one picture a composite of all those expressions. He's getting something for nothing if he succeeds."

"It sounds a little far-fetched, to me."

"Same here," agreed Ross. "That is, when it comes to art; although it's true that some of the ultra-modern art looks like dad's law gone to seed. But I think he's dead right about inventors of machines and the like."

That night, after Five Hundred had grown stale, the four younger folks sat around and talked. Aunt Janet had retired early. The topic somehow swung around to fires; there had been a particularly disastrous one in San Jose a few days before.

"I'd rather die almost any other way," Spencer was saying, "than be burned to death."

"So speaketh the medical man," commented Ross, as the two girls shuddered. "I suppose you'd prefer freezing to death, even?"

"Infinitely."

"I see. You'd rather enter the next life fortified, as it were, for the worst."

But Spencer was not to be stopped. "What I was thinking about is this: Suppose Treenook should catch fire, and one of us got hurt? How would the will apply in a case like that? Would we be justified in calling help?"

Nobody could answer that. Had it not been so late they would have appealed to Robinson. In the end they came to this conclusion, as expressed by Shirley:

"Perhaps the older Mr. Blanchard expected that Mr. Spencer, being a medical man, could take care of any ordinary sickness; also, in the nature of the case, we are practically quarantined here, and a quarantine works both ways. There is no likelihood of infectious or contagious diseases. As for fires and other accidents, we are expected to use the common sense of self-interest."

At any rate Ross thought it wise to caution Phillips, with regard to locking up carefully and making sure that there was no chance of conflagration. The butler plainly regarded the admonition as a waste of Ross's breath, but he promised to use exceptional care.

"You have noticed the small hand-grenades about the house, haven't you, Mr. Ross?" he mentioned. "There is also a good chemical tank and a hundred feet of hose on a push-cart out in the garage."

"Is there? I've never noticed it."

"It's in a small compartment with a

separate door, on the side next the wall, sir. I tried the apparatus when your father first got it, and one can throw a stream clear to the roof, sir."

Somebody changed the subject. Presently Aurelia yawned. And before midnight the house was quiet.

It seemed to Ross that he had been asleep only a few minutes, when he was awakened. Rather he became only half awake; he was too drowsy to open his eyes. He listened for sounds, thinking that was what had roused him. But he heard nothing, and shortly turned over to go to sleep again.

In turning he opened his eyes a trifle. And there on the west wall of his room was a patch of bright red light, coming through the open window.

Instantly Ross sat up. By leaning forward he could look straight out. And he saw that the Douglas home was on fire.

Like a flash it occurred to him that there were only the two old people in the ramshackle house. Two old people, and perhaps still asleep! Ross bounded out of bed.

He jabbed Jawge's bell, but did not wait for the darky to respond. It would take minutes, and seconds were valuable now. He jumped into a garment or so and dashed into the corridor.

That chemical cart out in the garage! It would be just the thing. Roped to the tail of his car, he could get it there in a jiffy.

Running to the little door, he did not stop to bother about a key, but smashed a pane, reached inside and opened the lock. Out came the cart in a flash.

Without pausing he dashed to the garage door. Another swing of his coat-protected elbow, and the glass was broken. Before MacDonald, upstairs, had fully awakened, Ross had touched the self-starter of his Retz.

Not more than three minutes had elapsed, all told, before the car with the chemical in tow started roaring down the drive. The gateway was only fifty yards distant. Ross put his foot on the accelerator.

But just at this instant, as he was passing the west wing of the house, he heard a window slam shut on the second floor.

Who had done that? Both Aurelia and Shirley had rooms in that wing. Which had it been, and why?

Within ten feet of the gateway Ross threw on the brakes. The car stopped with barely room enough to clear the gates. Ross jumped out to open them.

It gave him time to think. Slowly he opened the gates and stared down the road toward the blaze.

What was the meaning of it all? He glanced up at the windows of his own room. Then he noted certain trees along the road. These trees were so spaced, it happened, that they screened most of Treenook from the conflagration; yet there was a perfectly clear view of the Douglas place from Ross's windows.

Was there any connection here? What had been the significance of Spencer's talk about fires and fire fighting, the evening before? And especially, the fact that Phillips had told him about this chemical cart?

Again, did Shirley's peculiar early morning stroll down the road have anything to do with it?

Perhaps it was all a scheme to get him to leave the premises, violate the terms of the will, and sacrifice his inheritance!

The more he thought of it, the more obvious it became. He didn't like to think of letting two old people save themselves; but it occurred to him that, if it were really a plot, then the old couple had doubtless been provided for in advance. They would not be in the house at all.

Ross remembered now that Aurelia had had little to say on the subject of fires. And Aunt Janet had been in bed. In other words, Spencer and Shirley had planned all this!

MacDonald was the first to show up. Ross simply turned the outfit over to him.

"Take your hour off now, Mac," quietly. "You may be able to save something."

He said the same to Jawge and to Meisterheim, who ran up in time to swing aboard the car. Off went the three men.

They left behind them a rapidly growing group of hastily clad inmates.

Shirley and Spencer were among the last to put in an appearance. Ross eyed them grimly. They exchanged swift glances, then

began making innocent comments about the fire.

"Could we do any good if we went?" spoke Spencer.

"No," flatly. "Besides, you'd better stay here and see to it that I don't break bounds."

Aurelia laughed; but whether the laugh was directed at Spencer or at himself Ross could not determine. He kept silence, while the group watched the already dimming glow of the fire and talked.

Well within the hour the car returned with the three fire fighters. They said that other neighbors had the situation well in hand and that the chemical was exhausted.

"Anybody hurt?" demanded Ross. "The old folks, I mean."

"No, suh," replied Jawge. "Dey wuz stayin' wif a neighbah's fo' de night, suh."

"I thought so!"

Nothing more was said. Ross went back to his room, disgusted with himself for having so nearly tripped over the ruse. Also, he was pained and discouraged to think that Shirley and his cousin could have done such a thing. He had hoped that they had become perfectly friendly with him.

However, when he awoke the next day—Sunday—he remembered that he had something else to think about. Would he sleep through Monday again? Would Phillips? Would anybody else; and if so, who would it be? And—as if that were not enough—what under the sun could possibly be causing the thing anyhow?

"It seems to me," said he to Phillips, in the presence of Spencer and Aurelia, "that we had better try to handle this affair scientifically. I intend to do as I did a week ago—impress myself by will power to awaken to-morrow morning without fail.

"But you, Phillips, had best order Jawge to awaken you. My aunt allowed you to sleep last Monday, for the sake of seeing what would come of it; she had my interests at heart, also. But this time Jawge ought to rouse you."

"Do you think it safe?" queried Spencer.

"I don't see why not. That is, provided the thing is done right. Jawge should not use any violent means; if Phillips does not awaken by ordinary gentle methods, then let him sleep on until Tuesday."

"I am willing, sir."

And so it was arranged. To the other servants especially the plan seemed extra good; but it may have been simply because—the butler being in authority over them—they rather relished the idea of his being compelled to awaken. Usually it was the other way around. But to Ross, who was now keenly on the lookout for every little clew, it seemed likely enough that the servants were banded together in the matter; he couldn't forget the strange group he had seen in the *patio*, and he wondered if Phillips's experience of last week were a part of their unknown scheme.

That night Ross retired very late; in fact, it was probably one o'clock before he fell asleep. He had experienced no nervousness; his main emotion was curiosity, to see what was going to happen, and to learn if possible the cause behind the thing.

When he awakened his first thought was that he had overslept. Instantly he concluded, not unwisely, that he had hoodwinked himself into thinking this. Wasn't it extremely probable that his second and third experiences had been self-induced, solely upon the basis of the first one? Had he grown to expect it, and thereby prime his mind to play the same trick?

He shifted to the edge of his bed and looked around. Certainly he did not feel as sleepy and loggy as on the previous occasions. Also, the angle of the sun, at the window, showed that the hour was not quite so late, by perhaps an hour. He drew a tremulous breath.

Had he awakened on Monday this time?

He felt of his beard. It puzzled him; it was not quite as long as two days' growth, and yet it was too long for one. Still, the growth of the hair on the face is rather a variable thing, after all.

He picked up his watch. The hour was between nine and ten. The timepiece was still running, but ticking very faintly. He knew that he had wound it up tight early on Sunday evening. But now it was almost run down.

He gave a sigh, half of relief and half of despair. He rang Jawge's bell. What would

he learn? Had Phillips overslept again, or had Jawge managed to awaken him? And —which of the other servants had been "next"?

Jawge hurried in. He gave Ross a worried, anxious look, then emitted a heartfelt sigh of relief.

"Tuesday again, suh," pointing to the paper. "Ah—Ah done tried tuh wake up Mistah Phillips, like yo' tol' me; tried fo'teen times, but dey was nuttin' doin' yestiday."

"Has he awakened?"

"'Bout a hour ago, suh."

"Well, did—did anybody else—"

"Yas, suh," gravely. "Mistah Spencer, suh; he done ovahslept too. He ain't awoke yit!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE FIFTH ROOM.

BY the time Ross had come downstairs Jawge was able to report that Spencer had awakened. Soon afterward the three who had skipped Monday became the center of a very quiet group.

"Whatever is the cause of this," spoke Aurelia, in a much more sober voice than was common to her, "it doesn't seem to be anything malevolent. No harm can come from it—so far as I can see, at least. That's something to be thankful for. At the same time, I'd like to know what on earth to make of it!"

"And I'd like to know," from Aunt Janet, "who's to be next? I'd simply die if it happened to me."

Of them all, Spencer showed the most worry. Perhaps he had expected that his education would enable him to deal with a thing like this. Yet, although he sent to town for a number of works, and studied them at length, he had to admit that he could locate nothing that specifically dealt with such phenomena.

"You took every precaution against being drugged?" he asked Ross and Phillips later, when the three were by themselves.

Both replied in the affirmative. Phillips had been even more suspicious than Ross of treachery.

"Well, I didn't have any hunch," went on Spencer, "but I took certain precautions Sunday night just the same. And I'll tell the world that if anything was slipped to me it was done in a manner that isn't known to the medical profession."

"We may as well drop the drug theory," said Ross. "Miss Vail's idea is the best yet—a temporary interference with the habitual functions of the subconscious mind."

"But how could that affect the three of us at one time?"

"Remember that it's Monday we've missed," replied Ross. "And this Sunday habit is as strong with one man as another; at least, in any civilized country."

"I get you. Still"—frowning—"that doesn't explain why it didn't affect some one else. Why did it come first to you, then to Phillips, and then to all three of us?"

Ross tried to explain that. "You've heard of group hypnosis, haven't you? It's the only thing that can explain religious fervor at revivals, the mob spirit, and crowd delirium generally. Well, that's as near as I can come to it. The household is in the grip of the mob spirit, with regard to this missing Monday business. It's infected, you might say, with a mental disease—a disease that's bound to spread."

"Good heavens!" gasped Phillips.

But Spencer did not hear him. He said emphatically:

"For Heaven's sake, Ross, don't talk about such a thing in front of the others! Mental disease—infectious! We'll all go bughouse! Better swing to the other extreme and hand out a line of talk about believing that the affection has come to an end."

Ross saw that this was right. "Good! The time has come for a little well-spread bull!"

And each of the three made it a point to treat his mysterious affliction with lightness, almost with flippancy, during the days that followed. Each tried to give the impression that he felt sure the "spell" had passed. Ross watched; and soon he came to believe that their "propaganda" was succeeding—at least, so far as Shirley, Aurelia and the servants were concerned. Aunt Janet alone

seemed unencouraged; perhaps she saw through the game. In fact, after a day or so the old lady began a policy of indorsing every word that either of the three men said, in an all too evident attempt to bolster her own courage.

The weather was becoming steadily warmer, with an occasional hot wave that kept everybody in the shade for hours in the middle of the day. They began the siesta habit, with the natural result that they found long evenings on their hands. Time dragged. In desperation Ross even tried to learn chess—a game he despised.

One day a peculiar thing occurred. Ross was in Shirley's den, reading over some of her manuscripts and correcting it with a big blue pencil in true editorial fashion, as he thought, when the telephone rang. Shirley picked it up.

"Yes," she spoke; then: "Yes, he's here. Just a moment."

She passed the instrument over to Ross.

"Somebody wants to speak with you."

He took up the receiver and opened his mouth. Then, just as he was about to utter "Hello," he closed his lips tight and passed the phone back to Shirley.

There was a strange glint in his eyes, and his mouth was set in hard, straight lines.

"I can't talk to any one outside," he said. "You know what the will provides."

Shirley stared at him, her cheeks reddening. She seemed to have been taken absolutely by surprise. She stammered:

"I—I—what do you—"

"Kindly ask for the party's number, and say that I will communicate with him after noon on August the twenty-seventh."

He strode out of the room.

A few seconds later Shirley sought him out. She found him at last in the extreme southeast corner of the vegetable garden, as far as he could get from the house. He was engaged in savagely jerking up weeds by the roots.

She handed him a sealed envelope.

"This is the party's phone number," she said, formally.

"Thanks."

He stuffed the envelope in his pocket and resumed his attack on the weeds. She waited, then:

"I—I am very sorry this happened, Mr. Blanchard," she said. "From your manner it is perfectly plain that you believe me to be implicated in it. You think that I tried to catch you off your guard; that I connived with some one outside, to call you up and make you break the conditions of the will. You—you believe this, don't you?"

"Of course"—destroying one particularly large weed with relish.

"Well, it so happens that you—you're wrong. I had nothing to do with it. And I wish you would believe me."

He stared at her. She was looking straight into his eyes; and he thought he read a certain appeal in hers, something he had never seen there before. What did it mean?

"I am sorry," he said, "but under the circumstances you can scarcely blame me for thinking otherwise. I took particular pains to wind up all my affairs before coming here four weeks ago; nobody of my acquaintance would spoil things for me by acting so inconsiderately. Robinson is the only other, and he—"

Ross stopped short. He cast a swift glance around.

"Where are Spencer and Aurelia?"

"They went out for their hour, a little while ago."

"Did—did you recognize the party's voice?" suddenly. "Was it man or woman?"

Shirley started to reply, then checked herself.

"I recognized the voice; yes. But if I told you that—if I answered such a question from you—it would be helping you to break the conditions, wouldn't it?"

It was true. Ross was bound to "no communications whatever, either by word of mouth" or otherwise.

He looked again at Shirley. The girl had saved him from a technical violation.

"Thank you," said he simply.

"That—that's all right," she stammered. For once she was actually embarrassed. She turned and hurried back to the house.

So she knew who had telephoned. Who was it? Spencer or Aurelia—or some one else?

And by and by Saturday came.

It saw the five investigators back in the east wing. They had decided to assault the room next to the one first explored—the one with the trapdoor. This adjacent room opened toward the morning sun, and they felt in advance that it would be brightly lighted.

So it proved. The place was almost dazzling. It was an apartment about twelve by fifteen feet in size, with two small dormers along one of the longer sides. And it was finished in the shining white enamel of the old Colonial period.

Everywhere the walls and woodwork reflected the painstaking, layer-upon-layer polish so dear to the times of Washington. It was all the whiter and brighter by contrast with the furniture, which was all of purest mahogany, slim as to lines, and elegant. However, the rug was a light buff; the edges of the floor, beyond, stained to match the furniture.

"No chance for excitement here," decided Aunt Janet. "What a delightfully simple arrangement!"

"I don't know about that," objected Spencer. "Sometimes these innocent-looking things contain some of the biggest surprises."

At which Aurelia gave Shirley an amused glance, which Ross noted with a feeling of resentment that dismayed him. However, Shirley was watching Spencer as he moved the bed away from the wall, also the dresser, in search of hidden things.

He found nothing. The room had a very prosaic little clothes closet; that was all. Under the rug the floor revealed no opening.

But Aunt Janet had been searching the dresser drawers. All but one were empty. This one contained a long, slender rod, made of steel. She passed it to Ross.

"Ha!" cried he. "All we've got to find is a place to put this!"

They searched the walls. Nowhere could they discover the slightest opening. So they turned to the floor, and finally to the ceiling.

It was there, hidden by the slightly movable rosette from which the dresser light was suspended, that Ross found the tiny round hole. Into it he thrust the rod.

From out in the hall there came a faint click. All turned and looked through the door.

Directly opposite, in the paneled side of the corridor, there appeared a tall, rectangular opening. One of the panels had slid open.

They ran and looked inside. They saw a narrow flight of stairs, winding downward. It was unlighted, nor was there any lamp fixture to be seen.

"Wait," said Ross; and hurried down to his room, to return with an electric torch, a compass, and a certain compact object which he kept in his hip pocket and said nothing about to any one.

"This corridor runs north and south," said he, referring to his compass. "Follow the leader!"

They stepped through the narrow opening into the box-like vertical well which inclosed the stairs. Spencer was in favor of closing the panel behind them, but he was overruled. They started down.

There was no light of any sort, other than that furnished by Ross's lamp. All kept a sharp lookout for windows, doors or other openings, but none appeared at any point. Down they wound. There were no landings. And soon all sense of direction was lost.

They had descended about as far as the level of the first floor when Ross stopped.

"Which way are we facing now?" he asked.

"West," guessed Shirley.

"South," from Aunt Janet.

"The compass says north," stated Ross.

They continued to wind downward, finding the steps particularly firm and solid all the way. Presently they passed the cellar level, but still the stairs continued.

"Have you been counting?" asked Ross.

"Sixty-one," said Aurelia and Shirley, in the same breath.

They descended just thirteen steps more, and the stairs came to an end, opening into a long passageway. It was wide and low, its roof scarcely high enough for a man of Ross's height to walk through erect. It stretched away as far as the light could reach.

"Seventy-four steps," mused Ross, aloud.

"They look to be average risers—about six-and-a-half inches each. What does that amount to?"

"About forty feet," announced Shirley after a moment.

"Then we're down below the level of the basement." Ross referred to the compass. "And we're headed north—straight for the outer wall, to the right of the gate."

They stepped briskly along the passage. It had a concrete floor, provided at intervals with small gratings for drainage. The walls were of brick, also the arch overhead. But there was no provision for artificial light, much less the natural variety. However, there was no lack of fresh air, although it was a mystery as to how it got there.

"Perhaps through those drainage gratings," guessed Spencer.

Mostly they said nothing. The circumstances were just a little unusual.

Presently the corridor took a slight turn to the left, at the same time coming to a flight of steps.

"The first terrace on the lawn," interrupted Ross.

The new passage took them more in the direction of the big gate. And after reaching and descending two more such short flights, each of which led to a passage with a more pronounced gateward cant, Ross said that they could expect to fetch up nowhere else.

All of a sudden he stopped short.

"For all I know," explained he, "the next step will take me out of bounds!"

They left him standing there, and went on. Inside of three yards Spencer called a halt.

"Look!" pointing up at the room. "Isn't that a way up?"

It was a square opening—perhaps two feet each way. The light revealed a shaft some ten or twelve feet high. On one wall of it there was provided a series of handrails, like the steps on the side of a box car.

"Here goes," said Spencer. He handed the light to some one, and swung himself up. In a moment he was out of sight of Ross; in another, his voice came down, muffled but triumphant:

"Hey! What do you suppose this is? It's the inside of one of those gate piers!"

He came right down. To their excited questions he replied:

"There's a sort of a slit, right under the iron cap on the pier—you can look right out into the road on the one side, and toward the house on the other."

"Isn't there a way to get out?" asked Ross, who had come up.

"None that I noticed."

"There must be!"

And Ross climbed up. Presently he called to them:

"What did I tell you? This whole iron cap, sphere and all, is hung on a hinge! Wait!" He put forth an effort, grunting a little, and there came a dull clank over his head. At the same time daylight flooded down the shaft.

He came down and reported. Plainly they had found a secret route from the house to the outer world. Both girls climbed up and had a look at it; Aunt Janet decided to forego the experience.

"What do you suppose dad was expecting—a siege?" asked Ross. He got no answer.

It was decided to close the cap and return the way they had come. It meant a stiff climb, to ascend those stairs; but it would hardly do to let the old lady accomplish it alone.

Spencer led the way. Being a lightweight, he kept a couple of yards in the lead. When they were nearly to the top he stopped short, held a finger to his lips, and halted the little procession.

"The panel has been closed!" he whispered.

He turned off the light. They stood still in total blackness and listened.

There was a sound of rapidly running but very light, footsteps. They came nearer, and stopped just above. Then there was a click and the panel silently slipped open. The footsteps scurried away.

The five stepped out into the corridor. There was no trace of the person who might have made the sounds. The explorers gazed at one another in perplexity, not unmixed with another and not so welcome an emotion.

"Wonder who it was?" said Ross.

But he thought:

"Felice."

CHAPTER XII.

THE FOURTH VICTIM.

THANKS to the optimistic policy of the three who had missed the previous Monday, Saturday passed without any noticeable depression. If the occupants of Treenook were not actually joyous, at least they were not blue.

When evening came, however, and with it the cloak of darkness, somehow every one yielded to its influence. Conversation became quieter; laughter was forced, and was soon noticeable for its absence. The next day would be Sunday, and the day after that— Everybody retired an hour earlier than usual.

Ross did not go immediately to bed. He got into his pyjamas and robe, and sat in his father's Morris chair, in the comfortable bay window, smoking for over an hour.

Presently the narcotic had its effect. He began to feel sleepy. He glanced at his watch—it was going on twelve. In a few minutes it would be Sunday, with all its weird possibilities. Would he again sleep until Tuesday? As he now felt, this was inescapable.

Such fatalism, he promptly told himself, was all wrong. He must shake off the notion. If he got to feeling that he was in the grip of a higher fate—a fate that wouldn't permit him to work out his own salvation, then he might open the way for all sorts of things to happen to him. Not only that, but he would be strengthening the inexplicable influence that was at work upon the household.

The next day, he promised himself, he would make a positively heroic effort to counteract it all. He would redouble his efforts of will. He would impress upon himself the absolute, downright necessity of awakening Monday.

He was about to remove his bathrobe when he stopped short, hearing a sound over his head. He listened, and concluded that some one was moving around in the room above. He remembered the curious trapdoor there, and the shallow pit—the pit from which Felice had taken that mysterious object while he watched from his hiding place in the clothes closet. He sat on the edge of the bed and awaited developments.

All of a sudden there sounded a scream. It was faint, but unmistakable; it came from the room overhead. It was followed by a muffled cry and a swift scurry of feet. Then silence.

What had happened? Ross did not stop to guess; he snatched his automatic pistol from a drawer and his lamp from the table, and ran for the stairs.

Within a single minute he was at the door of the room. It was closed; without hesitation he knocked loudly.

There was no response. He thought he heard something like a sob, but was not sure. He repeated the knock, and called out softly:

"Open, or I will!"

Still no response. Ross waited a second, then threw open the door.

His light revealed the room in disorder. The rug was thrown back and the trapdoor wide open. The coverlet on the bed looked as though some one had sat heavily on its edge. There was no one in sight.

Ross strode forward and threw his light down into the pit. It seemed to be empty. He turned the light elsewhere.

The door of the closet caught his eye. It was slightly ajar. He jerked it open, and—

Felice toppled out into his arms.

Ross gave an incoherent exclamation, and drew the girl toward the middle of the room. As he did so she regained consciousness.

"Oh!" she whimpered. "Eet is you, *m'sieur!* I am so—so glad! Oh—" She broke into a fit of frightened weeping, and cowered closer into his clasp.

He tried his best to soothe her. For the first time he began to think about the rest of the house; it were better all around if he could get Felice quieted and back to her own room without any one else being the wiser.

"Tell me what's the matter," he ordered. "Has any one tried to hurt you?"

"Oh," she sobbed, "eet was ze—ze—what shall I call heem?—Ze wraith, *m'sieur!* Ze wraith!"

And she pointed a shaking finger toward the pit.

Ross looked. He could see nothing. Did she mean that she had seen a ghost in there?

He placed her in a chair, told her to brace up, took the lamp and made a thorough search of the walls and bottom of the space. There seemed to be nothing at all. However, on closer examination, he made out two things, neither of them particularly significant:

There was a slight odor, as of lemons, which came from nowhere else than the pit. Also, clinging to the rough timber at the bottom, was a single strand of coarse cotton thread, of a deep red color.

Next second Felice's control gave way. She began to sob and wail again; she got to her feet and threw herself upon Ross.

"Don't—don't got 'way!" she begged, piteously. "I am—'fraid!"

"All right," he assured her. "Come on: I'll take you back to your room."

He threw an arm about her, and half helping, half lifting her, he started toward the door. Then he stopped short.

Shirley Vail was standing there.

"What is this?" she demanded, in a cold, level voice.

In a way, Ross was expecting something to happen. He was only momentarily upset. Then he gave a straightforward, concise account of what he knew.

"She belongs in her own room," he finished. "Has any one else awakened?"

"I am the only one who knows," replied she. "That is—so far."

She said nothing further, but let him draw his own conclusions. Between them they got Felice to her own room, where they left her, apparently much calmed.

"Good night," said Ross to Shirley at the head of the stairs.

She made no reply. He bit his lip, and went to his own room, rather savage at heart. The thing might look pretty black for him, in Shirley's eyes. True, she had said that she preferred to believe him; but—there is a limit to faith.

Moreover, as it turned out, the affair was not yet finished. The next morning shortly before noon Felice intercepted him as he was passing through the dining room.

There was no one else around. Felice, to make sure, tiptoed to the butler's door and to the others, before making any explanation. Then she said:

"Las' night, *m'sieur*—I am so—so gracious for ze help. I was so 'fraid! You are ver' kind!"

"That's all right," he assured her, with an uneasy glance about. "Feeling all right this morning?"

"Y-e-s," dubiously. Her voice sank, and a look of haunted anxiety came into her eyes. "*M'sieur*—ze wraith—eet is a bad o-men for me!"

"Nonsense! How so?"

"Eet is—eet is a sign! I, Felice, am to be ze nex', *sans* Mon-day!"

Ross grinned.

"You mustn't believe such stuff, Felice! In the first place, there's no such thing as a ghost; and—"

"Ah, but I see heem! Eet is true—I shall be ze nex'!"

Ross suddenly realized that, with a woman of Felice's education—or rather, her lack of one—it was useless to argue. Such an intellect could not be swayed by logic.

On the other hand, he also reflected, it was true that such simple, natural souls as hers were more open to supernatural influences than others, more advanced. Things that affected her were much more likely to be genuine, to have a real psychic value, than what a more intellectual person might experience. Could there be something in it? Ross knew a little about spiritism, and was convinced that there was somewhat more than a little in it. Had Felice seen anything out of the occult world? And was her conviction not merely a piece of fatalism, but a true bit of revelation?

He would know inside of forty-eight hours.

Sunday night he, Spencer and Phillips held a council of war. Everybody else was excluded. Ross appointed himself the chairman.

"This thing has reached the point," he announced, "when desperate measures are

justifiable. The mere fact that the affliction appears to be harmless doesn't change the matter. It's a question now, of whether a man has the right to determine his own destiny, or whether it shall be forced down his throat."

"Exactly," seconded Spencer.

Phillips coughed apologetically.

"If you will pardon me, sirs," spoke he, "may I mention my belief that we are, all of us, ordinarily the mere instruments of a Higher Power? I am just as anxious to demonstrate my individuality as any one; but if—I offer it only as a suggestion—if it should transpire that we are trying to counteract something that is meant for our own good—"

"That remains to be proven," said Ross, with decision. "If this thing works no harm, it also works no good—so far as we can see. Until we're convinced to the contrary it's our duty as free moral agents to fight it!"

Phillips gave a sigh as of relief.

"I am glad to hear you express yourself so firmly, sir. That settles it—we fight!"

"Good," responded Spencer. "Question is—how?"

"By the power of coöperative thinking," returned Ross, with quiet conviction. "We must pool our wits. It's our only hope."

"You mean, that we must agree upon some one thing, and fix our minds upon that?"

"Yes. We had better reduce it to a single sentence, with as few words as possible. I would suggest something like this:

"'I shall awaken Monday.'"

Spencer considered this. He said:

"Why not, 'Monday morning?'"

"Because it isn't important whether we awaken in the morning or afternoon; the qualification would only weaken the effect. However," on second thought, "it'll be better if we make it simply 'to-morrow' instead of 'Monday.'"

"That's an improvement," decided Spencer. "If there's anything in that psychic theory of Miss Vail's, based, as it is, upon the notion of periodicity as applied to the Sunday habit, then we ought to counteract it by periodicity in terms of daily recurrence of experience."

This seemed sound. And for a space of half an hour, the three men sat silent and undisturbed there in the library, and tried to keep their minds fixed upon the one idea as expressed in the sentence Ross had suggested.

For his own part, Ross succeeded fairly well. Only once did his attention wander, and then only for an instant. At the end of the half hour he arose with the conviction that a great deal had been accomplished.

"I'll see you in the *morning*," he smiled to Spencer and Phillips, as they parted to go to their rooms.

Such was the confidence that he had instilled within himself, he found no difficulty in going to sleep. As on the previous occasions, he had merely taken precautions against being drugged. Whether he overslept or not he could feel absolutely safe in Jawge's hands; the valet would allow nothing nor anybody to come near him, that might harm him in any way. And as for being suspected of having surreptitiously left his room, that danger was now all past, since the affliction had become so widespread.

No sooner had he opened his eyes than he saw that his experience had been repeated. There was the same dull feeling, the same sense of lateness. He hardly needed to look at his watch, to know that it was run down; nor was it really necessary to note the date lines on the papers Jawge brought with his breakfast.

He eyed the valet expectantly. Jawge stood stoop-shouldered, as though the cares of the entire world were upon his back. And he spoke to him in a voice of acute misery:

"Mistah Ross—yo' cousin and de butlah—dey bofe ovahslep' agin. Ah done tried tuh wake 'em up, off an' on, all day yestiday. Nothin' doin', suh."

"Did you try to awaken me?"

"No, suh. Yo' said not tuh, suh."

"Are Phillips and Spencer still asleep?"

"Yas, suh. Shall Ah try 'n' wake 'em up now?"

"Presently."

He waited. So did Jawge. Finally Ross spoke:

"Well? Did anybody else do it, too?"
The darky gulped.
"Maggie, suh!"

CHAPTER XIII.

FIVE.

WHEN Ross went downstairs he found that Spencer, as soon as awakened, had had to take a professional hand in Maggie's case.

"When Felice woke her up, and she realized what had happened to her," said the former medical student, "she was hysterical. I gave her a sedative. She ought to drop off again in a minute or so."

"And when she wakes up—"

"I'll have to give her more, if necessary."

But Maggie's return to consciousness was also a return to nearly normal nerves. She viewed the situation with considerable coolness.

"'Tis the fairies," declared she. "Oi might 'a' knowed ut. Th' O'Tooles o' Killarney wuz fey; lots av thim!"

No one tried to argue with her. So long as she was satisfied with the explanation and not alarmed about it, what was the difference? Besides, a better explanation was not to be had.

For Ross's part, he decided that the best cure for the trouble was to occupy his mind with other things. He and Phillips and Spencer had tried their best to counteract the influence, without any success. At best, they had managed only to shift the visitation from Felice to Maggie, and thereby remove all notion of an occult visitor. Plainly, the positive treatment did not pay.

So Ross spent no time in worrying, but tried to think up new ways to pass the time; he was continually asking for suggestions; and it was on one of these occasions that MacDonald spoke of holding an auto race.

It called for comparatively little preparation. There already existed a driveway around three sides of the house; all that was necessary was the transplanting of a few beds of flowers, on the east side, over to one of the front terraces. Three days sufficed for this and the required leveling of the ground, together with the spreading of some gravel and broken stone. The fourth day a roller was put to work and the new roadbed flattened out.

It made a very fair course, almost an eighth of a mile around and wide enough even at the narrowest point for two machines to drive abreast. The four turns were, of course, rather abrupt; no greater speed than twenty miles an hour could be expected. But there were possibilities, one of which, in the first race, included a spill for Ross which lamed him a bit for a while.

Saturday came, and with it the usual preparations for exploring another room. The five pretended that they were some medieval peasants, bent on storming the castle of their lord; they armed themselves with hoes, rakes, hand scythes and other implements wheedled from Meisterheim. Ross's right hand was in a sling; the other held a trowel. Aurelia carried a spade, also a small phial of coal oil.

"Rough-on-ghosts," she explained. "I understand that kerosene always reminds them of hell."

So they were in the proper mood when they opened the sixth door. It was located in the west wing—next to the room with the hidden windows, which were opened only when the door was closed.

As before, Ross turned the key in the lock. They conceded him the right. But, likewise as before, he stood aside for the others to enter before him.

They found the place fairly well lighted, revealing a room exactly circular in shape, and provided with a ceiling that was a perfect dome. In fact, the spot was a replica of an astronomical observatory, even down to a small equatorial telescope mounted in the center of the floor.

True, there was a neat, full-sized bed over against the southern sector; other articles of furniture were provided as well. Likewise there was a closet and a small bath. But the general resemblance to an observatory was striking.

"Wonder how it looks when it's dark," suggested Ross. He went to the window

and pulled down the shades. Then he touched the electric light switch.

Immediately the domed ceiling burst into a myriad of tiny, twinkling lights.

"Stars!" cried Shirley in delight. "Oh, isn't that lovely!"

But even as she spoke the stars slowly faded and a large, yellow moon began to glow. For perhaps a half minute its beams dwarfed those of the stars; then, in turn, it faded, and the twinklers came out again. Thus they alternated, stars and moon, about every other thirty seconds.

Spencer went to the telescope, finding it to be without objective or eyepiece, but movable so as to permit "observation" of all parts of the "sky." He declared that he could see the man in the moon, and that the gentleman was just then engaged in eating a piece of green cheese. He offered to let any one else see at a cost of one dime.

"Then you'll have to sleep here tonight," Aunt Janet sentenced him, "to make sure that your concession is safe."

Spencer said he'd enjoy it. The others were nosing about, trying to find something else remarkable. They decided that the possibilities of the place had been exhausted.

Aurelia stated that the kerosene would do for next time. She went down the corridor to the door which was to be opened the next week, and set the phial on top of the casing. "Handy when I want it," said she darkly.

The excitement over, time dragged more or less heavily. Ross's injuries were such as to permit only a certain amount of moving around. He spent much of the time indoors, the other four relieving one another in keeping him company. He became pretty good at chess.

Thus Sunday night came. It found the entire household assembled in what was to be an attempt to forestall whatever the next forty-eight hours might bring forth.

"I have an idea," said Shirley. "Suppose we assume that this visitation, whatever it is, can be explained by psychic means—by the theory I proposed in the beginning. If so, then the word 'periodicity' is the keynote.

"So I suggest that we try to destroy whatever regularity and periodicity there may be in the habits of those who are affected. That is, suppose Mr. Blanchard and Mr. Spencer exchange rooms. Neither has ever entered the other's, so far as I know. The change ought to break up any continuity in their minds; it ought to leave their brains free to follow new impressions."

It was Maggie who broke the silence that followed.

"Ye mane, fer me 'n' Misther Phillips tuh trade rooms, ma'am?"

"That's it."

"I wonder," objected Phillips in a self-deprecatory tone, "if that would be a good idea. Might not the confusion, ma'am, have just the effect you do not desire?"

But it was plain that something else was on his mind. Ross understood.

"Now, don't let the ethics of the matter bother you, Phillips. This is a peculiar situation—something that might not happen again in a thousand years. You can afford to make certain concessions. Maggie understands that this is a problem wherein questions of rank are temporarily laid aside. She will not presume upon your concession."

Phillips looked relieved. Evidently he had feared that his authority would be weakened, his dignity undermined.

"Very well, sir. It might have a good effect upon—upon it. Er—may I offer another suggestion?"

"Certainly. And the same applies to all of you," turning to the rest of the group at Phillips's back. "Don't keep mum, if you've got an idea. Just forget your positions in this house; for the time being there's no such thing as master and man here."

"What do you mean?" sharply, from Spencer.

"I mean that this thing is bigger than any of us now. It belongs in the same class with 'the common enemy.' We've got to pool our forces if we succeed in getting the best of it; and when an emergency reaches that stage, we're equals."

"So it's only a temporary—"

"Of course. Until the evil is abated. When the mystery is solved, everything goes back to normal."

The servants exchanged glances. Ross

thought he saw a shrewd light in Felice's eyes; in Maggie's, a look of perplexity. Both Meisterheim and MacDonald remained phlegmatic. Phillips's expression merely became more suave.

"We shall not forget our places, however, sir. We shall be happy to obey your orders. As for my suggestion—" He paused, then stated in a different sort of a voice:

"It is this: There are eleven of us altogether. Four have already been afflicted; there remain seven, one of whom—presumably—will become included with the four to-night.

"Now, if we could determine in advance which of the seven is most likely to—to experience it, perhaps we could take steps to prevent anything happening."

This was sound reasoning, based, however, upon a pretty large "if." How could they decide which was the most likely to succumb?

"If you were to take my judgment for it," confessed Ross, "you wouldn't get very far." He looked again at the circle of faces, and shook his head. "I don't see that there's more reason to point out one than another."

"Nor I," seconded his aunt.

Phillips alone had a definite idea, but he did not state just who he may have had in mind. Instead he proposed:

"In a case like this, if you will allow me, a guess is as good as an opinion. I say, let us each make a guess; write it down on paper like a vote; and afterward count the votes and see who is indicated by it."

They looked at one another. It seemed like a proceeding almost entirely devoid of logic; yet, in the absence of anything better, what could be said against it? Surely it beat no action at all.

Ross elected to gather and count the votes. He announced:

"Meisterheim, one; MacDonald, two; Miss Blanchard, one; Felice, two; Miss Vail, two; Jawge, two; Aurelia Rancadore, three."

Ten pairs of eyes were turned upon Aurelia. She tossed her head.

"So be it!" she defied. "I'll be glad to have the strain at an end."

And she retired in the highest of spirits.

Nothing unusual marked the process of going to bed for Ross. He found Spencer's bed very comfortable. He lay awake for a little while, his brain running over many of the queer events of the past few weeks. One by one he dismissed the topics from his mind, and resolutely buried his head in the pillow and went to sleep.

Once he dreamed. It seemed that Jawge was trying to awaken him. He felt only half asleep, yet not awakened fully enough to respond. At the same time he knew that he ought to respond; for he had ordered Jawge to change the procedure this time, and to make every attempt short of violence to rouse him, as well as the others involved.

But he sank into deeper slumber again. As to the time element, he had no note of it. Neither was he able, afterward, to recall more than one such attempt to awaken him.

However, when consciousness finally arrived, he opened his eyes to gaze into those of Jawge. The valet was shaking him by the shoulder.

"Wake up, suh! Hit—hit's Tuesday agin!"

Ross sat up and rubbed his eyes wide open. He looked around.

"What time is it, Jawge? How long have you been trying to rouse me?"

"Jes' a minit, suh, dis time. Ah ain't tried at all sence yestiday."

"How about the others?"

"Mistah Spencer an' de oder two? Jes' de same, suh; slep' all day yestiday an' ain't woke yit, 'less dey's been shook."

"Well, did Miss Aurelia—has she overslept, too?"

Jawge's face worked. Then he slowly nodded.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SEVENTH ROOM.

THERE once was a merchant, a dry-goods dealer, who suffered a small fire in his store. It did very little damage, less by flame than by smoke and water. But it nearly drove the man distracted. It was all the firemen could do to keep

him from running into the place to rescue things. He was worried half to death.

Some years later he had another fire. This time there was nothing small about it; within three minutes the place was a mass of flames. Not a spool or a pin could possibly be saved.

Well, the merchant simply stood back, hands in pocket, and watched. The thing was too much for him, and he knew it. Instead of getting excited, he was the coolest man present.

"Is it going to be a total loss?" a reporter asked him.

"Yes, and not a darned cent of insurance," cheerfully. "Ain't it *swell?*"

There seems to be something fundamental about this. When an affair ceases to be individual and specific, and becomes, as it were, wholesale—the thing takes on the aspect of a holiday. People become eager to see just how immense it's going to be. "Pile it on," seems to be the idea. "If we're going to have a fire, let's have a whopper!"

Which may and may not explain the condition of the household at Treenook, when it discovered that Aurelia and the other four had skipped Monday. Five people had had the strange experience; one more, and a majority of the exiles would be afflicted. Five out of eleven! No longer was it something to worry about; the affair had reached the wholesale stage—it was now a spectacle.

"Wonder who'll be next?" spoke Ross, grinning as he glanced around the circle. "Line forms to the right."

"I want to be next," said his aunt. "I'd like to have it over with, too!"

"Next!" cried Felice excitedly.

"Next!" chimed in nearly every other voice.

And then they laughed. No outsider would have guessed that these people were trying to solve an unprecedented mystery.

But there was one to whom the thing was no joke. It was the Scotchman, MacDonald, whose nature may have held enough of that strict Calvinism to keep him from any reaction. He may have reasoned that a calamity was a calamity, whatever the scale; and with his Scotch strength of character he stuck to the dictates of logic.

At any rate, he did not join in the laughter. He said nothing at all for a while.

Presently Shirley remarked:

"At this rate, the remaining six of us will miss our Mondays within six weeks. When that final Monday comes, it 'll find the whole house asleep. Won't that be a lark?"

Another laugh started.

MacDonald checked it.

"Provided," said he, "that no outsiders try to break into the estate that day."

This put a new face on the question. It was perfectly true, of course. However, as Ross pointed out, nobody outside of Treenook knew of the matter except Robinson; so far, the grounds had known no trespassers. Why expect them to come that one day of all days?

"Something for Nothing" went on much as usual. The book in particular received daily attention from Ross and Shirley. On her part it seemed to be a complex sort of duty; she had indicated that she owed the effort to her late employer, to the public for whom the volume was intended, and finally she owed Ross the chance to show what his head was good for.

He was animated mainly by the latter motive. This, together with the satisfaction that it gave him to do something that his father had wanted done, was added to the sheer delight of being in Shirley's presence—a delight that became more intense with each succeeding day.

"Do—do you think I am making any progress?" he finally got up courage to ask. And he looked at her in a way that made his meaning perfectly clear.

"A little," she admitted with perfect composure. "That is, so far as your mentality goes, Mr. Blanchard."

He winced. He knew this to be a dig at his morals.

"I don't know just why it is," he complained, "but everybody seems to take it for granted that I was a regular devil before I came home. Just because I got arrested a few times for breaking speed laws, and used to drink a little in the days when a man *could* drink—does that prove I'm ab-

solutely without principle? Why should it be assumed that I've got no morals at all?"

"Do you mean to say," demanded she, "that you have done nothing to be ashamed of?"

He saw that she wanted plain talk.

"If you mean, with regard to women," stated he, "then I've never done anything to be ashamed of!"

She bit her lip and her eyes narrowed as with pain.

"I wish you hadn't said that," she returned.

And immediately she attacked her typewriter in a manner that told Ross he had best say nothing further just then. He felt immensely puzzled and badly hurt.

Presently she was ready for dictation. He took up his father's notes, together with his own notations.

"Here's where dad gives me a dig," said he. "The title of this chapter is 'Property, and the Great Principle'; by which he means, of course, his theory of something for nothing.

"He contends that a great proportion of the misery of mankind is due to the miscarriage of that law. He makes several applications; but here is the point I mean:

"'The very worst example of the miscarriage of the law of something for nothing is the matter of the inheritance of money.'"

"Ah!" exclaimed Shirley. "That hits me, too!"

"Listen! 'Money inherited is usually money unearned. Generally it is a gift. However, it is not nearly as good as a gift, for the reason that the donor is dead, and the recipient feels that he can do just as he pleases with what he gets.

"'And he does. He blows it in. Nine times out of ten, inherited money is a curse to him who inherits it.

"'There are only two ways to avoid this curse,'" Ross went on to quote. "'One way is to stipulate that the heir can use only the interest and never touch the principal. It is not a good method. It makes the heir look small, and feel smaller. It stilts initiative. It only dodges the trouble.

"'The other method is to make him earn it. Let him do something to qualify for the money. Then, at least he will value it; he will not be so eager to spend at once that which has cost him something.

"'*If the evils of inheritance are to be avoided, the heirs must earn what they get.*'"

Neither Ross nor Shirley made any comment here. The application was too obvious. To the man, however, the thing was rather discomforting; for if his father had tried to be entirely just, how explain the fact that Miss Vail was to get only five thousand for having worked just as hard, earned just as much, as Ross? He fervently hoped that the contents of that curious sealed cigar case would compensate in part for the unfairness of it all.

Nothing further needs be set forth as to the events up until the opening of the seventh door. It found the five curious ones of one mind with regard to the unknown room. Surely it must have a ghost. Aurelia's phial of kerosene was the controlling motif; from dream books to cut-out black cats and pots of incense, the five were ready for anything occult.

They found the place a perfect representation of the interior of a log cabin. From the mud which filled the chinks in the wall, to the old spinning wheel in one corner, the room might have been transplanted bodily from Tennessee a hundred years before.

Everything was rustic. With the single exception of bedclothing, all was decidedly rough and ready. Instead of a porcelain lavatory, there was a tin basin, a cake of soap, a dipper and a pail for water. And a huck towel to dry one's self on.

However, there was one door in the room—a stout affair, heavily barred. At first sight it seemed merely a bluff, put there for effect. But Spencer thought not; he strode over, lifted the bars, and threw the door open. It revealed a large, black closet, and—

Erect and bristling, its head swinging slowly from side to side, its beady eyes gleaming, there stood a huge grizzly bear.

The five stood as though rooted. Some one gasped, but no one moved. They were unarmed and helpless in the face of this.

"Back out of the room," whispered Ross.

his eyes on the bear's. "One at a time—no noise—don't try to do anything else. Just sneak out!"

Aurelia was the first. Spencer followed, supporting Aunt Janet, who was too terrified to think. Then—

"Oh!" screamed Shirley.

The bear's head had stopped moving from side to side. It now stared straight ahead, motionless. The opening of that barred door had, by some simple mechanism, started the head to moving.

The bear was a stuffed one.

"I feel like a perfect fool," declared Aurelia, suddenly sitting down. "If I faint I shall deserve to be thrashed."

Immediately she fainted.

Outside of that, the "Log Cabin" had nothing of particular interest to reveal. It would have made a good place for a sportsman or other outdoor enthusiast to spend a night or so. Ross knew of several whom he intended to invite, being careful not to say anything about the bear.

As for Sunday night's conference about the coming Monday's experiences, the evening was totally devoid of gloom. The five who already had been "elected" made a joke of the matter. Nobody worried a bit.

They took a vote as on the previous occasion. Out of eleven counts, Meisterheim got one; MacDonald, two; Aunt Janet, four; Felice, one; Miss Vail, two; and Jawge, one.

"You go to Congress, aunty," said Ross, as he kissed her good night. "You say you're not sorry?"

"Not a mite," declared she. "I'm lucky!"

But there was no denying that she looked ill at ease as she went up the stairs. Shirley gazed after her.

"I wish," said she, "that I had offered to sleep with the dear old lady. It might help her."

She made a move as though to run up in pursuit, then checked herself.

Ross thought it odd. A little later he was giving instructions to Jawge.

"Don't spare any efforts to rouse me, Jawge." He was in his own room; the "trading" arrangement had seemed of no value, and they had dropped it. "Try tickling my feet. Honest, I mean it; I think it might work better than shaking me."

"Yas, suh," getting the idea. But it gave the darky no pleasure; he was too worried that something might happen for which he could be blamed. "Ef yo' says de word, suh, Ah'll frow watah in yo' face, suh."

"Not this time," shuddering. "It isn't serious enough for that, Jawge."

He went promptly to sleep. When he awoke it was to find his beard two days long, and everything else a day ahead, just as before.

"The other four, too, Jawge?"

"Yas, suh." A little pathos, and Jawge would have broken down. But he summoned courage enough to submit:

"Yo'—yo' aunt, suh, she done woke up, yestiday, jes' de same as evah. But de shofer, suh; he—he—"

"MacDonald!"

CHAPTER XV.

TWO MORE.

SOMEHOW Ross was very much upset by the information that MacDonald had succumbed. Of all people, the hard-headed Scotchman should have been last. There was something very deadly, although so erratic, about this psychic malady—a malady that could strike down men like the chauffeur, not touching the three women and one black man who remained.

Had it been any one else than MacDonald, Ross would have continued to enjoy the excitement of the thing. He would have gone on witnessing the spectacle in the spirit of the week before. MacDonald made it different.

"Ross, old kid," said Aurelia to him that afternoon, "any day you find an hour or so hanging heavy on your hands, let me know. I've got a big idea."

He turned and peered sharply at her. She was smiling boyishly, without a trace of subtleness. Seemingly she had nothing in mind of which he need be apprehensive. Lately, too, she had "behaved," to use his own expression.

He smiled in return. "I'll let you know," he promised.

The matter came to mind once or twice during the next few days. The auto races had to be postponed because of engine trouble. Before room-discovering day came around again, Ross spoke to his cousin.

"What's that idea of yours?" asked he. "I'm so bored, I'll stop at nothing short of a crime."

"Good!" muttered she, affecting a villainous mien. "Odds bodkins, but we shall make the welkin ring!"

And grasping him by the wrist she dragged him off, still limping slightly from his accident, to the "Colonial Room" on the third floor. She had brought an electric lamp. A moment later she had operated the secret mechanism which opened the panel door to the long, winding stairway.

"Do I need any weapons?" Ross wanted to know.

"Hush!" she warned him. "You might break the spell!"

They descended the long flight, presently finding themselves at the house end of the underground passage. Ross reflected, somewhat idly, that no one had seen them come to the place. And hadn't Aurelia closed the panel after them? What if something happened?

But he saw no reason to anticipate anything that he couldn't deal with. They walked side by side down the long corridor, finally reaching the aperture in the roof where the shaft rose into the hollow gate pier. Aurelia had spoken no word during the trip, pretending that there was some awful mystery afoot. But now she broke silence.

"We were so interested in this pier, when we were here last," said she, "that we didn't notice how much farther the passageway extends." She pointed to its outer extremity, lost in darkness despite the strength of the searchlight. "Where do you suppose it leads to?"

"No idea," instantly alert. "Have you explored it?"

"Several days ago."

"Alone?"

"Yeth," she lisped. "Aren't I a brave dirl? But it was worth it!"

Ross's curiosity was more than aroused. He involuntarily made a step forward, but caught himself in time.

"Out of bounds," he exclaimed.

"I know it," softly. "But it's all right with me. If you want to explore it, kid, go ahead; I'll say nothing."

He stared at her, wide-eyed. Was it a trap? He looked again, but could read nothing in her gaze save a kind of pity, seemingly unmixed with any other emotion.

"I know this prison must gall you," she murmured. "It's bad enough for me and the others, goodness knows; and we have our hour off. I'm no warden. Go ahead, boy!"

He glanced down the passage, sorely tempted. All his love of freedom surged to the surface. He wheeled upon Aurelia.

"What's there? Tell me—I can't go!"

"You can, too!" reprovingly. "I shan't tell you. If you don't want to see badly enough to look for yourself—" Then she broke off, and finished: "Won't you trust me?"

"Of course!"—hastily. "But—it isn't right, old dear; I'd have to lie, and so would you. Why—"

His manner changed. The temptation had passed. He was his better self again; and he spoke in a tone of calm conviction:

"I can't accept the offer, Aurelia. Thanks just the same."

Like a flash it happened. Aurelia snapped off the light. At the same instant she seized Ross by the shoulders and spun him about, just as the player is spun in a game of blindman's buff. He staggered.

Aurelia threw on the light again. Ross caught his balance, and steadied himself. But all sense of direction was gone; he reached out and touched the walls, blankly.

He didn't know the direction toward the house!

"Got your compass with you this time?" asked Aurelia, coolly. "I thought not. Well—see you later!"

She turned and set off down the passage. Ross, still a little dazed, started to follow; then stopped short as he realized that one step might take him out of bounds.

"Aurelia!" he called frantically.

She stopped and looked back.

"What is it?"

"Don't go away and leave me like this! I—I don't know where I am! I—I might—"

She came back. At a distance of four feet she paused. And when she spoke there was a curiously husky note in her voice, and a light in her eyes which could hardly be mistaken.

"Ross," in a low tone, "don't you see? Can't you see how much I—I want you?"

He stared, and tried to think. She had trapped him; he was at her mercy. What did she mean to—

"There's only one way you can get me to show you the way back to the house," she went on in the same tense way. "Can you guess—what is my price?"

"Good Lord!" he whispered. "Aurelia!"

She moved a little nearer. He could sense the subtle fascination of her body. She was breathing fast, and her face was flushed.

"I—you can think what you please!" she breathed fiercely. "I want you, and—I'm going to have you!"

She threw her arms about his neck. Almost instinctively he caught her to him, and held her in a single, wild embrace.

Next second came the reaction. He tore her arms from his shoulders and thrust her away.

"No!" he spat out savagely.

The spell was broken. His mind worked again. He threw up his hands; his fingers touched the square aperture in the roof, and with a heave he drew himself up into the shaft.

"Ross!" implored Aurelia down below.

But he went on, unheeding. In a moment he had opened the cap of the pier; in another, he had leaped to the ground inside the wall. Not until then did he note the pain that the effort had cost his damaged right hand.

"Thank Heaven!" he whispered; and walked very soberly up to the house.

It had been trap after trap! A wonder, that he had escaped thus far. What was there still in store?

He told himself that he must be exceedingly careful.

Room-discovering day arrived once more. The five inspected their latest find with a great deal of interest, but found nothing that smacked of mystery. The room was a novelty, that was all; it had been built in exact imitation of a Pullman car compartment. Naturally, it was a small affair; but it was complete, from the tiny bathroom to the upper berth arrangements, from the little hammock to the electric fan and the reading light. Nothing had been overlooked.

"Nice place for a drummer," commented Ross.

He decided to spend at least one night there. By leaving the window open and letting the fan play a breeze upon his face, he could get a fair impression of traveling. "Nearest I can get to an outing these days."

As for Sunday, it found the household unaltered in its attitude toward the problem. Better to face it cheerfully, and see what would come of it, anyhow. No special preparations were considered. They took a perfunctory sort of vote as to who should be next, but no one attached much importance to it, for the last vote had failed to determine anything. Meisterheim happened to get the most votes.

Ross himself was willing that Jawge should employ slightly more heroic methods in trying to rouse him on Monday. But Spencer objected. He was sure, from what he had studied, that there was grave danger in using violence under such circumstances. Shirley, too, thought that the psychic element could not be safely tampered with.

"Really, it's a case for a professional psycho-neuropath," she said. "Too bad that neither of us has ever been a hypnotist."

Ross slept in the Pullman that night. Jawge approved highly of the place; it made him feel quite at home. He made up the berth with real pleasure.

"Dey ain't nuffin' like sleepin' on a train," declared he. "Would—would yo' min', suh, ef Ah sleeps ovah heah on de couch, to-night?"

And the last thing Ross remembered was the deep sigh of pleasure that his valet gave as he stretched out.

When Ross awoke, he knew at once that the same strange experience had come once

more. He asked only one question; somehow he knew that the other five had slept over into Tuesday, and that neither he nor they had been aroused the day before. He only inquired:

"Who was it this time, Jawge?"

And the darky answered in a voice that held, at one and the same time, anguish, stupefaction and terror:

"Mistah Meiste'heim, suh; an'—an' yo' aunt, too, suh!"

CHAPTER XVI.

IN THE NINTH ROOM.

THE mystery had claimed two victims at one time! Apparently its power was growing. Whatever the strange influence, it was even more active than before.

"Well," commented Ross, in discussing the matter with the others, "we can be grateful for this much: it simply can't go much further; there's only three left to catch!"

And they who had already felt the experience, stared at Felice, Jawge and Shirley. Neither of them showed any discomfort. Indeed, Jawge, for one, seemed downright proud of the distinction of being the last male to hold out. And as for Shirley—

"I bet I'm the last!" cried she, with the queer reversion to slanginess that Ross had already noted. "Sheer strength of mentality—that's all!"

Everybody else groaned loudly.

MacDonald changed the subject, by announcing that he had the two autos once more ready for use. As things now stood, Shirley was champion of the gentler sex, Spencer, of the others. But Ross hadn't had a fair show. They decided that he and Spencer should have it out, first.

This race fell rather flat. Spencer afterwards admitted that he had had a headache. Certainly, he didn't half try; had he raced as well as on the previous occasion against MacDonald, he would have got a tie or better. Ross offered to run it again, but Spencer wouldn't accept.

As for the mysterious medal that Shirley had made, she had not yet shown it to any one.

"Look to your laurels!" she challenged Ross, in front of the others. She could be jolly enough when not alone with him. "I shall make your Retz look like a rake tomorrow!"

"Huh!" sneered he; and resting an elbow on his other hand, he stroked an imaginary mustache in true melodramatic villain style. "Remember, girl; if you lose, I shall foreclose the mortgage!" And he laughed a harsh, gloating laugh.

It was only foolery. But Shirley blushed, unaccountably enough; and Ross found that everybody was looking at him as though his nonsense was a thinly disguised proposal. And from the arctic way that Shirley treated him afterward, he concluded that he had offended, somehow.

"Say—I was only clowning," he told her, when he got a fair chance. "Sorry if I made a blunder."

"Thank you," in the chilliest of tones. After which she went on treating him in the same disapproving manner.

But it did not interfere with the race. Both contestants showed great keenness. Ross told himself and everybody else that, far from showing any mercy because of his rival's sex, he meant to give no quarter. Shirley retorted that if he "threw" the race, she would refuse the palm.

Spencer, who liked variety in the matter of starting races, popped a huge, air-filled paper bag, and they were off. As already mentioned, the nature of the course prevented any great speed; if either won by any appreciable distance, it would be due to the other going asleep at the wheel. And neither was anything but alert. They watched one another like hawks.

It was to be a mile, like the others. Neck and neck they drove for six laps; then, Ross began to draw slightly ahead. Each time that Shirley attempted to catch up the lead, Ross shaved the corners a little closer, and held it.

Shirley tried to cut across and gain a corner on him. But he would not budge; he defied her to wreck her lighter car against his. In recovering herself she lost a yard.

The seventh lap showed Ross well in the

lead. There seemed no means by which Shirley could overtake and pass him. Again she tried to gain the curve, and again she failed because of the Retz's sheer weight and Ross's determination. At the beginning of the eighth and last, she was still over a yard behind.

If only she could get abreast! At the finish, the lighter car should win, if it had an even break at the turn. But how to regain that yard?

There was only one way. She had the inside track. On the last straightway, she urged the light roadster to its limit; and as the Retz struck the turn, Shirley's machine slipped up alongside it.

There was a grinding shriek as the two cars jammed together, a scream of brakes and a great cloud of dust. Both machines skidded at the corner, and—they skidded as one!

Shirley was first to recover. Off she went with a foot the lead.

She ought to have won. In her mind, however, there lurked the devil of habit; she had always rounded that curve to the right, just ahead, therefore she must do it again just after passing the post. And she governed her speed to suit.

But it flashed upon Ross that there was no good reason why he shouldn't leave the course and take the drive straight out toward the gate, instead of going on to the turn. He opened his accelerator to the full.

The Retz erupted. It scuttled past the post with two inches to spare.

Had Ross intended to round that corner—well, he couldn't have done it, at that speed. He would have turned turtle. Instead he stopped his car half way to the gate.

And Shirley was furious. She had scratched both her car and his, in her daring attempt to win. And she felt that Ross had been unfair in leaving the course.

"No more unfair than you were, using my car as a crutch on that turn!" he retorted. "But that's all right. Let's try it again!"

But she wouldn't listen to it. She flounced up to her room, leaving him to ponder on the triple fact that she had forbidden him to lose, had been displeased when he won, and had refused to run again. What in the world was a mere man to do in the face of that?

As for the unseen medal, it remained so. Shirley destroyed it that day.

But she didn't stay miffed very long. When they were ready to explore the ninth room, she was her usual self again.

They christened this room "The Arsenal." Surely no other name fitted so well. It was quite the largest of all they had examined, being some fifteen by thirty feet in size, irregular in plan and very severely furnished. At one end was a bed and other furniture, none of it such as would appeal to a woman's fancy; at the other end, a tremendous array of firearms.

There were shotguns of every pattern, from dainty .410 caliber lightweights that a girl could shoot, to "sawed-off" pump-guns, and an automatic or two that would be perfect for water fowl. Then there were rifles, some light .22 caliber practice arms at one end of the list and the most modern of high-power, military type repeaters at the other. Finally there were two or three single-shot target pistols, several revolvers, and a number of automatic repeating pistols. For every arm, ammunition galore.

"Let's start a revolution!" suggested Spencer. "Somebody get up on a box, wave a red flag and make a speech!"

Aurelia promptly did it. She denounced everything she could think of. And they acclaimed her the first president of the new government—provided they succeeded in overthrowing the old one.

"This is one room," said Ross when good sense had returned, "which we'll have to lock up when we leave it. Not that any of the servants need be suspected; but—just to keep on the safe side."

That night the five played draw poker, a game which was more or less of a bore to either Ross and Spencer, unless the other happened to have a winning streak; in which case it wasn't exactly a bore. Neither man cared to try very hard to win, when playing with their aunt and the girls; it was too easy to pile up the chips.

But this night Shirley had a great run of luck. Invariably Aurelia and Aunt Janet would drop out after the draw and invaria-

bly Spencer and Ross would get hands good enough to worry about, yet not quite good enough. Shirley was the immense sum of fifty-five cents ahead when they quit.

"Everybody satisfied?" asked she. Her eyes were sparkling with success. "My—I never knew the old game was so much fun."

"I hope," wished Spencer, with suppressed yet fervid malice, "that you are the next to miss Monday!"

"Don't care if I am," she retorted, and ruffled his hair for him. After which she glanced at Ross in a half-ashamed fashion—an expression that was immediately succeeded, however, by one of frigid neutrality.

For no other reason than because the sun persists in rising and setting so regularly, Sunday night came once more. It found the household almost unanimous in believing that, since the last visitation had caught two instead of one, it would catch the remaining three this time. If so, all would be relieved; they wanted to see the thing finished and done with.

"Good night!" called Shirley, the first to ascend the stairs. "See you Tuesday!"

"See you Tuesday!" they all replied.

But Ross was not so sure. As he went up to his room it came to him very clearly that the mystery had either a human explanation, or a superhuman one. It was either the one or the other. And somehow a superhuman explanation didn't appeal to him. It led nowhere to assume that some undiscovered natural law was at the bottom of it all.

Some one must be responsible! But—who? The most obvious conclusion, of course, was that one of the three remaining people was the culprit; one of those not yet affected. Yet, when it came to definitely suspecting Felice, or Shirley, or Jawge—

Ross couldn't do it. Neither of them possessed the psychic power which, presumably, must account for the thing. Besides, neither of them had a motive that would explain everything, unless there were facts in his father's past of which he knew nothing. And Robinson had been sure that there were none. What could either of the three gain by such a harmless trick? Disturbing though it might be, it was more like a prank than a crime.

He slept in his own bed. He awoke with a faint recollection that some one had tried in vain to rouse him. And in one second he knew that it had come to him yet again.

He was winding his watch when Jawge answered the bell. He simply waited for the darky to speak.

"Well, suh, hit's jes' like hit was befo'; everybody dat slep' las' Monday, done slep' dis one. Couldn't git nobody to peep a eyelid."

He paused and gathered his nerve. The thing was almost too much for him.

"Hit—hit's Felice dis time, suh: jes' her. Me 'n' Miss Shirley, we wuz de only folkses awake heah all day yestiday!"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE LAST ROOM.

REMINDING himself that he had only ten days more to pass until the final Friday, Ross resolved to make the most of them. Probably he did more solid, substantial thinking during that time than ever before in his life. At any rate, he decided upon several things.

For one, he and Shirley would get that book done. For another, he would hereafter follow a definite plan of action in his life. Heretofore, he had let each day decide itself; from now on, life would possess a purpose.

He had learned a thing or two. No matter how extreme his father's notion of the value of the book's underlying principle, that principle was true to a certain extent, anyhow.

Unearned prizes are not worth while: Ross believed that his father had proved that much.

For the first time Ross grasped in all its logic and force, the proposition that a busy man is the happiest. Going to work had been only a painful duty in prospect before; now, it was forced upon him by the dictates of sanity itself. Much as he had desired a life of absolute freedom, he now desired a life of service even more.

He spoke of this to Shirley. They were at work in her den at the time.

"Well, the old gentleman has put it over

on me, Miss Vail. When I came here nine weeks ago, it was my intention—so far as I had any definite plan at all—to stay the ten weeks and then skip. I expected to go to Europe or the Orient, and leave Robinson in charge of the estate as at present.

" But that won't do. It's only recently become clear to me. I've got to get busy, instead, and try to run dad's ranches the way he ran them when he was on the active list."

" Have you any special reason for this?" Shirley's interest seemed very casual.

" Yes. From what we have uncovered in this work, I feel sure that one of the chief causes of unrest among the people of this country is ' absentee ownership.' There are too many men like myself who let some lawyer handle their affairs, men who never get in touch with their employees at all. If every capitalist was constantly on the job, always in touch with his help, there'd be far less friction, there'd be better team work all around.

" Ten weeks ago I was intending to be a lazy fool. I was going to let Robinson do it. But—not now."

A word or two as to the conclusion of the book will serve. It wound up by applying the something-for-nothing principle to morals, ending by taking a jab at the class of people who attend church once a week—behaving as they please the other six days—in the fond hope that the one hour of piety will buy a reserved seat in the clouds.

" So much for that," said Ross, when he had seen Shirley type a neat " Finis " across the bottom of the last sheet. " I honestly think dad would have been pleased with the job."

" Do you believe that he would have been equally pleased with your conduct?"

It was a bolt out of a clear sky. Ross mentally staggered. But he eyed the girl squarely and answered with a direct simplicity born of his new resolution:

" I wouldn't be ashamed to face him now. I'm going to make people proud to know me!"

She was watching his eyes as he spoke. When he finished there was a soft, warm glow in her expression, and she put out a hand, impulsively, for his.

A great hope surged within him. He caught her hand and held it tight.

" Shirley!" he stammered. " I—you know what I said when we first began this! Have—have I made good?"

For just a second she sat tense and eager, her hand in his, her eyes searching his face. Then a change came over her expression; she drew her hand away, firmly yet gently. And she rose to her feet.

He was at her side in an instant.

" Shirley," he begged, " do I have to say that—I love you? Isn't it plain enough? I'd do anything for you!"

She moved away a little and kept her face averted. She spoke in a voice filled with pain.

" There's something, Ross, that you can't possibly do—for me. That's the trouble—just that."

" What is it?" eagerly. Then, as a light dawned upon him: " Is it—is it anything serious? I tell you, nothing can make any difference to me! Nothing! You don't even have to tell me what it is!"

She wheeled, astounded. Next second her eyes were flashing with indignation.

" What! You accuse me of—of—" She stopped, too angry to go on.

He waited. Presently she said in a coldly level tone:

" You are either a wonderfully clever actor, or else you have no sense of decency whatever. Stop "—as he was about to protest his utter amazement—" don't make it worse than it is! I know what I'm saying. Wait!"

She went to the little steel safe, and took from her pocket a small key. The outer door stood ajar; the inner one she unlocked, and from a pigeonhole took a sheaf of letters.

" You recognize your own handwriting, don't you?" She took the top letter from the pack—a letter that showed much handling, as though it had been re-read many times. " This little packet contains all the messages that your father ever received from you. And this one letter, I think, speaks for itself—and for me."

She handed him the missive, replaced the packet in the safe, and turned the key. Then she left the room.

Ross knew that letter. He had written so few he would have known any one of them.

DEAR PATER:

Just a line to tell you that your only son is having the time of his young life. Met a couple of old college chums here in Butte, and we painted the town red, red, red. Oh, boy; some time! Wine, women, and song—everything! Especially the girls! You didn't know I was that bad, did you? Oh, nobody's got anything on me! I can stand all the loving any man can! Old Brigham Young was a piker; take it from me!

SULTAN ROSS.

He had the best of reasons for remembering that particular letter. He had written it while a trifle more than exuberant from absorbing too much champagne. The very next day after sending it off he recalled how he had worded it and saw that his braggadocio might be gravely misunderstood. So he had sent a telegram to intercept the letter. In the message he had made it clear that he hadn't been guilty of anything serious. He remembered that message word for word:

Don't take my letter seriously. No wild oats; just tame ones.

What had become of that telegram?

Ross set his jaw hard. He strode out, and located Shirley on the far end of the piazza.

"Did you say," demanded he, without preamble, "that you had *all* my letters and messages in that packet?"

"Yes," dully.

"You have read every one of them?"

"Naturally. I was your father's secretary. He was nearly blind. He required it of me." All in a mechanical way, as though repeating something she had rehearsed.

"Then," hotly, and thrusting the letter into her hands, "I must retract *everything* that I said to you a few moments ago!"

He wheeled, and stormed down into the garden. He was too angry to explain. Shirley looked after him in mild astonishment, then slowly reread the offending letter. Her face hardened, and she gave a cynical little smile, which would have been more impressive had there been less wistfulness in it.

But neither he nor she gave any sign of the affair while in the presence of others. They took part in things as though nothing had happened. And when the day came for the five explorers to enter the last of the rooms on the third floor there was nothing but jollity in the affair.

All five were heavily armed from the stores in "the arsenal." In addition to an assortment of firearms, Aunt Janet carried a keen bayonet between her teeth. This little touch won for her the first place; when the door was opened his aunt led the way in.

The shades were drawn. Aunt Janet walked over and raised them. And the sunlight revealed:

A bright, cheery nursery. It was all in blue and white—big enough for several children. Seemingly it had been fitted up to take care of guests with families.

But that was not all. In the foreground stood a plain, white-enameled crib. It looked to have had considerable use. Ross gave a queer exclamation and stepped forward.

Scattered about on the floor were several other things that he recognized—a certain "shoo-fly" rocking horse, a velocipede, some ten-pins, two dilapidated baseball mitts, a well-beloved pair of sidewalk skates.

Then he caught sight of something at his feet. It was the rug on the floor. He had never seen it before, but there was something about it that told an unshakable story.

From the door of the crib some one had worn a path half through the material. And —Ross knew who that some one must have been.

"Come," whispered Aunt Janet to the others. And they went out and left him standing there, the tears streaming down his face.

Nobody spoke of that room again. And they were careful when they mentioned his father's name in his presence.

Besides, there were other things to think about. The next day was Sunday. What was in store for the household?

Some were of the opinion that the unknown influence was wearing off. Only one person had been claimed last time; before,

there had been two. Apparently the crest of the "wave" was past; they could hope that the affair was over—that there would be no more visitations.

"I'm not so hopeful," confessed Ross. "It takes time for a psychic disorder to dispel. I look for it to wear off very gradually. We who have already experienced it can expect to be free of it in the course of a few weeks; probably I, who was affected first, will be first to recover."

"Then you think there'll be no further cases?" said some one.

"Maybe one more."

But who would that one be? Shirley or Jawge? The answer to this question, Ross felt, would determine a great deal. Would it not tell who was responsible for what had happened? The remaining person would be the culprit!

All in all, perhaps it were better to blame the thing to some unknown agency. Better that than to suspect either of these two. The moment the ten weeks were up he would call in the cleverest men in that field of science and spare no expense to uncover the truth.

He told Jawge to do his very best to awaken him the next day. He rather thought, from his former recollections of attempts to rouse him, that perhaps the influence would be so weakened that the effort might succeed.

Jawge took the order with pitiful eagerness. He seemed to realize that he was half suspected in the matter; he eyed Ross with such mute appeal in his face that Ross said:

"You're the last person on earth, Jawge, that I'd accuse of such a thing. Don't worry."

"T'ank yo, sir!" tremendously relieved. "Yo'—yo' don't know how hit bodders me, suh."

Nevertheless, the darky's face was full of the old misery when he bade Ross good night. It was natural enough; the valet had been nearest of all to Ross's father. He felt an intimate responsibility for everything.

Ross lay awake for some time. This was to be his last Sunday night on probation: on the following Friday the ten weeks would be up. There was no telling what might happen; he had placed his loaded pistol beneath his pillow, and perhaps its presence was keeping him awake.

Suddenly a brand-new idea came to him. With it came a sense of wonder that he had not thought of it before.

Why not deliberately stay awake that night?

It was bound to work. If he kept awake until dawn he must certainly break the bonds of this strange psychic domination. It couldn't fail!

Instantly all notion of sleep was dispelled. He leaped out of bed, dressed in full, even to tying his tie, although he did not turn on the light. Nobody knew of his decision; nobody should know of it. He would keep quiet, and when morning came—he would find out something.

But the time did not drag. Hiding his electric lamp under the bedclothing, he was able to consult his watch frequently. And the first two or three hours passed ever so much more rapidly than he had anticipated.

It was around three o'clock, with dawn only an hour or so away, that he began to feel sleepy. He did not take any chances about sitting down, but remained standing despite the protests of his ankles. From time to time he stepped out of his Oxfords and, in stocking feet, walked three or four steps to limber up. The floor was too cool to allow more than that. But it helped.

Somehow he managed. His room had a window directly toward the sunrise. Bit by bit the sky lightened; from blackness to gray, and from gray to pink, the change came in the wonderful way that men of all ages have known. Ross watched, his heart singing with exultation. He had won.

At twenty minutes after five the sun peeped over the Mount Hamilton range. Ross waited until the full orb was clear of the mountains before he quit the window.

Then he went and sat down. He was tired, but immensely happy. He had fought the "jinx" fairly, and had been the victor. All that now remained was to wait a little longer—until seven o'clock—when Jawge usually awakened him— and then—

He sat up with a jerk. He had dozed!

That wouldn't do. He glanced at his watch, saw that only a minute had elapsed, then got to his feet and remained standing for an hour, until he was ready to drop in his tracks.

Again he looked at his watch. A quarter to seven. Well, he might as well rest those last few minutes. What could be the harm? He sat down, gave a deep sigh of relief, and—

Awoke with another nervous jerk. Had he dozed again? He glanced at the sun—it had not changed its position perceptibly. His watch said that it was almost seven.

Time to make a move. He laced up his shoes, slipped his automatic into his pocket without stopping to think why he had done it, and then rang Jawge's bell.

Several minutes passed. Ross rang the bell again, this time long and noisily.

There was no response. Very well, he would go and see for himself!

He strode out into the corridor, and started for the servants' quarters. These were located at the extreme end of the other wing. To reach them he had to pass the doors of most of his fellow exiles. No sound came from either.

The house was strangely silent. Ross reached the door of Jawge's room and knocked softly. There was no response; he repeated the knock, more loudly. Again getting no results, he pounded and called the valet's name.

Then he tried the door. It was unlocked. He opened it and went in.

Jawge lay asleep, his mouth slightly open, sleeping the sleep of the just. Nothing could rouse him short of methods that Ross feared to use.

He went back into the corridor. Queer, how quiet everything was. He paused at every door and listened. From each room there came the unmistakable sound of slow, heavy breathing.

The whole house was asleep, save only himself.

He went back to his room. He had been gone perhaps ten minutes. He picked up his watch.

It had stopped. It was run down.

He clapped a hand to his face; and then it dawned upon him that he must have slept a full twenty-four hours, when he had thought it only a doze.

He had skipped Monday again!

CHAPTER XVIII.

FRIDAY, AUGUST 27.

SOMEHOW the days dragged by. It seemed as though Friday would never come. Ross tried his best to kill the time, but now that the book was done and the garden needing no care at his hands, there was no work such as would have helped him. The hedge was finished. He began to long for the reins of his father's affairs; he told himself that the one week of outing which he had promised himself could be cut to a single day. After that he would come back, get on the job, and stay there.

Friday morning found him awake an hour before time, eager and excited. He planned his get-away to the last detail. He gave the Retz a thorough examination to make sure that nothing could go wrong at the last minute, to keep him from driving for Robinson's office as soon as twelve o'clock had come.

The others were just about as eager. Nobody even mentioned lunch. The whole thing had been irksome; even the servants, to whom the confinement had been little different from what they had always been accustomed to, showed an enthusiasm for the liberty to come. Not that either of them intended to seek another position; but each planned a short vacation—Ross consulted, of course—with childlike excitement.

Spencer spoke for a place in Ross's roadster. "I'm as anxious as anybody to see friend Robinson," said he. "I called him up just now, and he said that he'd wait in his office till we get there, and have lunch with us somewhere."

Aunt Janet was the only one not in a hurry. She said that she would wait until MacDonald wished to take her in the limousine. Ross offered to postpone his own plans, but she wouldn't ask it of him. As for Shirley and Aurelia, they were intending to use the remaining roadster.

There was something comical about the

way they all watched the clock. Ten weeks! There was a sundial out in the garden, to which Ross wandered every now and then, hoping that no one saw him.

Ten weeks? Ten years!

Once Ross remembered that Shirley still had something new to look forward to. This was the day when, according to the will, she could break the seal on the silver-mounted cigar case and appropriate its contents. Again Ross hoped that it would recompense her for the smallness of her legacy. Had it not been for what had been said the last time they talked together, he would have asked her to let him see what she found.

But he did not see her at all during the last half hour of that morning. He asked for her, in as casual a manner as he could contrive, and learned that she was in her room packing her trunk.

At last, finally, and in due course—noon arrived. It found Ross and his three relatives out on the piazza. There was no doubt about the hour; clock and sundial agreed to the dot. And, true to his promise, Ross waited until a few minutes past twelve before making a move.

"Well, time's up!" he cried.

"Glory be!" seconded Aurelia.

There was an affectionate leave-taking. Ross forgot all that had passed between him and Aurelia, and gave her a memorable kiss. She took it almost tepidly; and the last look she gave him was merely a wistful little smile.

Shirley did not show herself. Ross waited an extra minute, in the hope that she would come out; then he reached the conclusion that perhaps it were just as well that she stayed upstairs after he had gone.

"Good-by!" he shouted to his aunt, up on the piazza, to the group of servants, to Aurelia over there in the other car. Spencer echoed the cry, from his side.

"Good-by and good luck!" came the reply.

And he drove away.

"Great, isn't it?" yelled Spencer in his ear, as they approached the gate. "Nothing like being cooped up the way we were, to appreciate freedom when—"

"Help!"

Ross jerked his head at the sound. Where had it come from—upstairs? It had sounded like Shirley's voice!

He stopped the car, with the front wheels just projecting beyond the lines of the wall.

"Did you hear that?" he demanded of Spencer. "What was it?"

"I—I didn't hear anything." His cousin seemed oddly agitated. "You must be—mistaken. Come on; let's beat it!"

"Beat it, nothing! I tell you I heard some one call for help! And it sounded like—"

Ross checked himself, and scanned the group on the piazza. Shirley was still absent; and—where was Maggie? Great Scott! What if—

He stopped the engine and prepared to jump out of the car. Spencer caught his arm.

"Here! Where are you going? Don't make an idiot of yourself!"

"Let go!"—all his suspicion rushing back with force. "I mean to see—"

The sentence was never finished. Spencer suddenly let drive, and planted his right fist full in Ross's face.

Back he staggered, bumping against the gate. Spencer leaped to the ground. Another instant, and the blow would have been followed by a more telling one.

But in that flash Ross recovered. He dodged, and countered with a left at Spencer's jaw. The smaller man collapsed.

Ross turned and dashed toward the house. As he did so, he saw the group on the porch break up. Down the steps ran three men—Jawge, MacDonald and Meisterheim; and he saw that they all had weapons in their hands. More, they raised them as though to fire.

"Hey!" Ross shouted, in alarm.

He jerked his own automatic from his pocket, and shot into the air. Instead of scattering, however, the three returned his fire.

Ross darted behind some bushes, ran up the grass terrace, and made for the front of the house. Jawge sprinted to cut him off. Ross fired twice at him as he ran, but without effect.

He made straight for the east wing, not for the front entrance. He reached the

place; and without pausing leaped on the ledge of the library window, reached up, caught the lintel, and swung himself aloft.

Around the corner dashed Jawge and the other two men, shooting madly as they ran. Ross took no time to reply, but kept on climbing. He was fully exposed, but so far he had been untouched.

He reached the window of his own room, and pulled himself up. A bullet shattered the window-pane, and fragments of glass tinkled about his face; but it only made it easier for him to break in. Another second and he was through, unscathed.

He sprang to the door and jerked it open.

A fusillade of shots greeted him. At the head of the stairs stood Phillips and Felice, both firing frantically.

He slammed the door shut, thrust a fresh magazine into his gun, and dashed into the hall, yelling defiance and shooting straight and fast.

The two on the stairs turned and fled. They fired back at him, without scoring. His own shots seemed to have missed them. He paid no further attention, but ran down the corridor toward the other wing.

In front of Shirley's door stood Maggie. She had a long, keen carving-knife in her hand. And she was cool.

"Kape back," she warned. "Oi know how to' use ut!"

Without a word he plunged forward, parried the knife with the barrel of his pistol, and with the other hand wrested the blade out of her grasp.

"Give me the key!" he panted.

"Go t' hell!"

He threw his weight against the door. It burst open. He darted in.

Shirley lay across the bed, tied hand and foot, and gagged. In a moment he had her free. And keeping the door covered with his pistol, he thrust Shirley into a chair.

"Oh!" she gasped. "Oh! That was —*awful!*"

There were running steps, and loud voices out in the hall. Then, an ominous silence. Ross tiptoed to the door, slammed it shut, and locked it. A shot rang out; he returned it through the door. And he dragged Shirley's chair out of line of any possible bullets.

"Ross!" whispered she. "Oh, Ross! I'm so sorry!"

He could not listen then. He ran to the window, and made sure that he could not be surprised from that direction. There was but one door into the room. He went to the lavatory and drew a glass of water. Shirley drank it thirstily, her shaking hand spilling the fluid on her dress.

"Don't!" said she, as he started toward the door once more, to listen for developments. "You—don't have to, now. They won't bother you any more. It's—all over."

"What's all over?"

"The—the game. The plot; the conspiracy. It's gone to pieces!"

And she gave him a shy, half-affectionate glance.

He eyed her in bewilderment. There was a big explanation due; but—what help could he give?

She drew a long breath. She hesitated while summoning the best words; then, after another glance at him that made his heart thump still louder, she began:

"You must remember, Ross, that none of us actually knew you, before the day you first came. We knew of you mostly by hearsay; you had been away so long. And we knew very little good about you.

"So—we thought you didn't deserve your good luck. On the other hand, we—I, and your aunt and the servants, at least —thought that *we* could use that money to better advantage than you. So we planned to put it over on you!"

"I see." He didn't see anything, but he had to say something. "Whose plan was it?"

"Mine," half proudly, half regretfully. "I worked it all out. And I put it up to the others immediately after we heard the will read—before you arrived—before we got acquainted with you. The plan was to make you break the conditions of the will."

"Of course," again not understanding. "You nearly succeeded, too, more than once."

"That isn't what I mean. My plan was —to make you leave Treenook before the ten weeks were entirely over!"

Ross scratched his head. Which trap was she referring to?

"Well?" inquired Shirley. "Don't you understand? Don't you see the meaning of the missing Mondays now?"

"I'll be shot if I do."

"You came very near getting shot," she said, "because you didn't! Pshaw! I should think you'd see it now! Don't you get it?"

He tried to think. The dead silence out in the corridor confused him. He shook his head.

"You'll have to explain, I guess."

"I guess so," wearily. "This was my plan: When you woke up, that first Monday morning, you were to *think* that it was Tuesday!"

"Monday—Tuesday!"

"Exactly. It wasn't Tuesday, at all. It never *was* Tuesday!"

He blinked.

"You mean, that I haven't really skipped a Monday? That—no one else has? That it was—"

"Just that, Ross. A frame-up. Everybody in the house was wise except you."

"Everybody!"

"Including your aunt, and Jawge. It was a plant from start to finish. The whole thing was worked out to the last detail, so as to make you think that you had really slept through all those Mondays.

"To put it over, we had to plan any number of tidings. The great necessity, the chief detail, of course, was to keep you from guessing the true explanation of the mystery. That meant, we must give you something else to think about!

"So we invented the scheme of having some one else besides you 'miss' Monday. By arranging to have first one, then two, and three people 'afflicted,' besides yourself, you were misled into thinking that it was real."

"But—but," stammered he, "I don't quite see! How about my beard growing out so long? And my watch running down? And—and those newspapers!"

"All planned out in advance. That beard of yours was Mr. Spencer's idea; he's enough of a doctor to know how to stimulate the growth of the hair temporarily; the stuff works on the opposite principle of a depilatory. He doctored your soap with it—soap that Jawge put into your bathroom only on Sunday!"

"But—the watch!"

"We had a duplicate. Remember that Jawge was one of the conspirators. With him on our side, we could put over anything; he stole your keys, for instance. As for the watch, he simply exchanged the 'fixed' one for yours when he got a chance Sunday night after you were asleep. The last time, however, Spencer sneaked into your room and made the exchange while you were at Jawge's room trying to rouse him!"

"And—the newspapers?"—weakly.

"That was the most difficult thing of all, but the most convincing—wasn't it?

"We couldn't afford to buy a paper; we had to take the owner of Los Gatos *Chronicle* into our confidence. He was to get a third of the loot, if we succeeded. Just think, Ross—you had a genuine, special edition! How's that for honor? A newspaper printed just for one man, so as to get that faked date line!"

Ross gasped.

"Do you mean to say that nothing has been genuine? That all you folks have merely *pretended* to sleep on Monday? That you were laughing up your sleeves every minute while I was discussing the 'mystery' so soberly?"

"No; we didn't do much laughing. We were on pins and needles the whole time, for fear you'd guess the truth!

"But now you understand, I imagine, why Aurelia flirted so outrageously with you. She never meant a bit of it; she was merely giving you something extra to think about! She is really in love with her husband again; he works on that paper; and if the scheme had succeeded they'd have been remarried and been rich. That was all there was to it.

"The same with Felice and her 'ghost,' Ross. There never was anything at all in that pit under the trapdoor. She merely acted her part very well; she and I rehearsed it seven or eight times, with Mr. Spencer taking your part!

"He did the best lying, I think. He lied about phoning to Mr. Robinson, and so forth. It was he who chloroformed you

every Sunday night, except the last, so that you'd feel loggy when you woke up.

"By the way—he and Felice are going to be married."

She hesitated oddly, then hurried on:

"You may wonder about our going to church on what really was Saturday, instead of Sunday. We simply picked out the Seventh Day Adventist Church, that's all!

"As for Jawge sleeping in the 'Cell,' and afterward out in the corridor, that was merely part of the general scheme to give you plenty to think about. The same with what you saw when you were up on the roof; the servants knew you had gone there—they staged that little conference purposely to puzzle you, and make you think that you could trust Jawge. We had the same motive—Mr. Spencer and I—for staying in the limousine instead of going into the church."

"Oh, it really was you two, was it?"

She nodded, and gave him a strange look. Then she continued:

"We had nothing to do with the secrets of the ten rooms. But your aunt knew all about them—had helped your father plan them, in fact. And although you may not have realized it, she really made you suggest visiting them at the rate of one a week. All to help fill your mind!

"The fire, of course, was part of the scheme. It almost worked, too—all by itself.

"You nearly spoiled things for us, by your sudden decision to stay up the last 'Sunday' night. But Jawge saw you through the keyhole, standing by the window. And the fact that you were fully dressed made it clear what you were up to.

"The auto races, of course, were simply to keep your mind busy.

"That telephone call, however, was accidental. You'll find Mr. Robinson's number in that envelope when you open it. He had momentarily forgotten about the arrangement; he apologized when I reminded him.

"My slang, which I think puzzled you, is really natural to me—at times.

"In short, Ross Blanchard, we came mighty near fooling you! If we had, you'd have left the estate ten days before the full time was up. You think it's August the twenty-seventh; but it's only the seventeenth!

"If you had driven your car out of the gate a few minutes ago, you would have lost your legacy, and we'd all have shared in it!"

"How much would your share have been?" It was all Ross could think of just then.

"Allowing for that newspaper crook's third—almost seventeen thousand dollars."

"Whew!"

Ross told himself that it was clever. They had fooled him completely. Besides—why not a six-day week, a Mondayless week? He had agreed to it!

No sound came from out in the corridor. Ross still had the gun in his hand; he thrust it into his pocket and said:

"This scrap just now—it was real, wasn't it?"

"Blank cartridges, mostly. That's all there were in your gun, too. You didn't think," as he examined the weapon, "that we were as desperate as all that, did you? We drew the line at actual bloodshed. All they were trying to do was to scare you off the premises."

"How about Maggie?"

"Ah, that's different. You see, when I found out the—the truth about you this morning and told the others that I wasn't going on with the game—well, I think the others would have been willing to tell you the truth right then, only that newspaperman wouldn't let us back down. The fact is, your folks have come to like you lately.

"But they had to put Maggie on guard over me, to keep me from telling you. I was standing at that window, with her hand over my mouth, when I saw you drive away; and I'd never have managed to call to you if I hadn't bit her finger first!"

Again there was silence. In a minute or two it became strained. Then Ross said:

"That—that affair between you and me: it was all a part of the game? Simply—a frame-up?"

She got to her feet. She did not look at him. She fingered her dress nervously.

"No," she answered jerkily. "It—it wasn't a fake. It—was real."

"You—still despise me?"

"No." Again the pause. "I—I opened your father's cigar case this morning." She produced a crumpled slip of paper. "I found this—telegram in it. I never knew anything about that, Ross. It came when I was over in town, and your aunt read it to your father. He never told me a word about it. But he put it—where I'd find it."

Ross suddenly understood. That telegram had altered everything! From an enemy, it had changed Shirley Vail into a friend.

"And that's what made you break with the others?"

"Yes," daring now to glance up at him. "They—they would have told you the truth, if that *Chronicle* man had allowed them to."

Ross felt a sudden desire to shout. But he didn't.

"I'm willing to forget all about it," said he, "if they are. They're a dandy bunch. I'd like to be friends with them all, from aunty to Meisterheim."

Another awkward pause. Ross knew what he wanted to say, but he couldn't think how to say it.

Finally Shirley took something from her bosom. It was that fatal letter. She gently drew the telegram from Ross's hands, and placing the two notes together she tore them into bits.

"Are you—do you want to be 'friends' with me?" she asked. She moved an inch closer. "Or—or is it too late now to—"

She found herself suddenly in his arms. His lips sought hers, and found them.

"I am trapped," he smiled. "Here in a girl's room, and holding her in my arms! I—I'll just have to marry you, I guess!"

The door burst open, and the others romped in.

THE END.

GARDENS

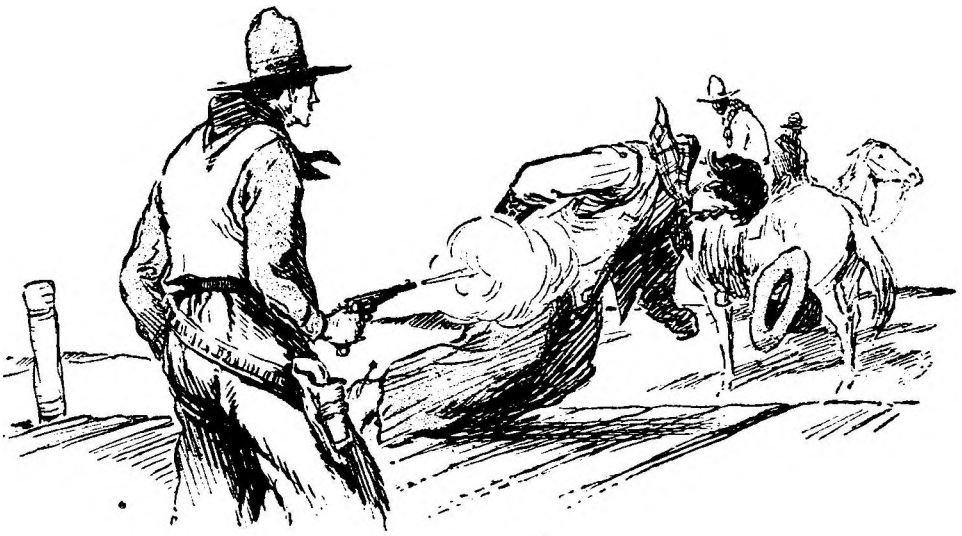
GARDENS are homes for happy thoughts:
They live there.
And so we go to—or we ought—
Forgive there.

And to remember certain words,
Now dimmer;
Where like fireflies, the garden's birds
Still glimmer.

And we forget, in gardens what
Alarms us:
For they repel, these wardens, what
Still harms us.

Gardens are built for quiet thoughts,
Or gay ones;
To make one (where the flowers fought,
With toil their life and beauty bought),
Recall one's prayers, as one ought,
And say one's.

Mary Carolyn Davies.



Last Hope Ranch

By CHARLES ALDEN SELTZER

Author of "Riddle Gawne," "Brass Commandments," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PART I.

LISBETH STANTON, daughter of the owner of Last Hope Ranch, is temporarily alone at the big house with Philippe Mendezo, their Mexican gardener. Intuitively alarmed at his smouldering, drunken gaze, she manages to lock him in the small, windowless cholla house and then undergoes a long, nerve-racking vigil—rifle in hand—fearing that the infuriated captive will break out. Eventually, a stranger comes riding up out of the desert—a tall, slender man with hair uncut for months, but who looks and rides like a cowboy. He releases Mendezo, disarms him of a knife, whips him into submission with a quirt and orders him off the place. Then the stranger announces bluntly that he intends to remain at the ranch, compels Lisbeth to cut his hair and arrays himself in her father's Eastern tailored clothing. Rancher Stanton returns now and identifies their caller as Ned Templin, a bad man, a killer. Soon thereafter the sheriff's posse arrives in search of this bandit, but gratitude leads both Stanton and his daughter to introduce him as their tenderfoot visitor from the East. After the posse's departure three desperadoes invade the ranch-house, knock Stanton unconscious and are abducting Lisbeth when Templin—again in cowboy attire—appears to these evildoers as a deadly apparition of vengeance.

CHAPTER V.

GUN-PLAY.

KELTON halted, dropped his hands to his sides. A ghastly grayness came into his face. He stood motionless staring at Templin. Stagg did not move from his position at the edge of the veranda. His mouth had popped open, his gaze was still vacuous.

Bill, Lisbeth's captor, stood beside the girl. He seemed as rigid as one of the posts of the veranda. His mouth was still open; he had not closed it after uttering the shriek of recognition. A strange paralysis seemed to have seized the three outlaws.

Stanton had not changed position. Although Lisbeth knew her father was in dire need of attention, she did not move toward him. It was as though a heavy hand had

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been laid upon her, rooting her to the spot where she stood.

Violence, more deadly than that which had struck her father, was imminent. Impending, hovering close, was death. Lisbeth knew it. Knowledge of the same sort was in Kelton's eyes, in Stagg's, and in Bill's.

Templin's eyes were enigmatic. Plain in them was the cold unconcern Lisbeth had seen before; the calm serenity she had observed with her first inspection of him was still in the atmosphere around him. On his lips was the faint half smile she had observed at times when he seemed to be amused. He couldn't feel amused now, she was certain, and yet the smile was there. She noted, however, that the smile had a different quality; his lips were a little stiffer than usual; they were curved with slight mockery, with a waywardness that was almost wanton. His eyes, too, seemed to have changed a little—much, she decided as she watched them. They had strange flecks in them, flintlike points.

The Templin who stood in the doorway was much like the Templin who had used the quirt on Philippe Mendezo. There was this difference: the Templin who had chastised Philippe had been a passionless individual, while the Templin who was now facing the three outlaws was in the humor to do violence.

He had changed his clothing again; he was arrayed in the garb he had worn when he had ridden up to the edge of the veranda out of the desert. His hair had been cut and he had shaved. That was the only difference.

He now was well groomed, where before he had seemed wild and uncouth. Around his slim waist was the cartridge belt he had discarded when he had donned the clothing of Eastern cut; in the black leather holster at his right hip was the heavy revolver he had worn when she first saw him.

He seemed not to notice Lisbeth.

"Kelton," he said, "I reckon Blaisdell put you on my trail."

Kelton silently nodded.

"You didn't need much urgin', Kelton?"

Kelton's face reddened, slowly paled in the silence that followed.

"Speak right up, Kelton. I reckon we ain't mistakin' each other. Blaisdell didn't have to urge you none?"

"Nary an urge!" snapped the other.

Templin, Lisbeth noted, had reverted to the idiomatic, ungrammatical speech he had used before he had donned the Eastern clothing. Strangely, when he spoke in that manner, he seemed more virile, more rugged, more natural than when he spoke in the language of the East. But that, she knew, might be because this situation was different from the others.

"Kelton," said Templin, "I reckon he didn't. You'd be a heap eager to trail me if you thought there'd be a chance of gettin' me at a disadvantage. You an' me never got along. Kelton, I reckon you've always been a bit envious because you know I can sling a gun a little faster than you."

"Hell!" sneered Kelton. "You've never proved it!"

Templin smiled faintly. "Shucks," he said gently.

It was as though the exclamation had been made to conceal a sigh of regret.

"Always yearnin' for trouble, Kelton," he added. "There never was any use arguin' with you. Stagg," he went on, addressing the latter and appearing to have decided upon the futility of persuading Kelton, "I reckon you didn't need any urgin' either?"

"Templin," replied Stagg, "I'm givin' it to you straight. I'd a heap ruther Blaisdell had sent me hoofin' it into old Cochise's camp!"

"Stagg, I'm believin' you. You never was dead set on headin' into trouble." He now looked at Bill, though it was noticeable to Lisbeth that he did not turn his head from Kelton, but seemed to watch the three men with a steady, probing stare that would catch the slightest move made by any of them.

"Givins," he said, "how about you? Was you pinin' to run into me?"

"Nary a pine, Templin!" quickly answered the other. "Fact is, I got a heap of gooseflesh on me when Blaisdell turned them eyes of hisn on me an' told me I was goin'. Templin, thar ain't never been no bad blood between you an' me!"

"Givins," said Templin slowly, "an' you; Stagg, an' you, Kelton! I'm askin' you to do a heap of listenin'. I got to the Last Hope this mornin'. I'm goin' to stay here. I ain't doin' any explainin'. Nobody's goin' to get away from here to spread word around that I'm here. You boys would have got off clean if you hadn't got an idea you wanted to get tangled up with a woman."

"Thet was Blaisdell's notion," said Bill.

"Well, then, your mistake was in follow'in' Blaisdell's orders about stealin' Miss Stanton. I reckon it don't make a heap of difference, though. You boys come here an' make it certain that I've got to show myself. That brings me back to where I was. I reckon you understand.

"Nobody's goin' to get away from here to tell folks I'm here. You gettin' that plain?"

"Templin, you mean thar's goin' to be gun-play?"

The speaker was Givins. He was visibly nervous. His face had grown ashen.

"Givins, that's how it shapes up. There's a way out for the three of you. There'll be no killin' if you boys will hit the breeze out of the country without leavin' word where you've gone, an' givin' your promise that you'll not mention meetin' me here."

"Thet means we've got to slope without seein' Blaisdell again?" Givins spoke jerkily, while covertly searching the faces of his confederates.

"Givins, you've got intelligence."

"Hell!" exclaimed Givins. "I'm hittin' the breeze out of the damn country right now! I ain't wantin' no truck with a guy of yore disposition."

He backed away, reached his horse. No word was spoken by Stagg or Kelton while Givins moved. Stagg was watching Templin steadily. He continued to watch until he heard the creaking of saddle leather, which advertised that Givins was mounting his horse. Then Stagg's gaze wavered, his mouth opened, his lips moved.

"I reckon this game's a heap too uncertain for me," he said; "I'm aimin' to change my habits of livin'!"

He backed away, casting a sidelong glance at Kelton as he moved. Stagg reached his horse and climbed into the saddle. Neither he nor Givins made an attempt to depart.

Templin's left hand was raised, the palm toward them. Both men understood the significance of the motion. Templin was signaling them to wait. Something was going to happen.

Templin was not looking at Givins and Stagg; his gaze was fixed upon Kelton with terrible definiteness. Templin was no longer at ease in the doorway. His body had stiffened, he was leaning a little forward, his legs slightly asprawl.

Waiting, tense and eager, Givins and Stagg heard Templin say:

"Kelton, talk straight an' plain! Are you throwin' in with Givins and Stagg, or are you still trailin' with Blaisdell?"

"Templin, I'm stayin' with Blaisdell. You can't herd-ride me!"

Templin spoke to the other men, though his gaze was still fixed upon Kelton.

"Givins an' Stagg," he said slowly, "you're stayin' here a little while. To plant Kelton." He now spoke to Kelton.

"Kelton," he said, "you're choosin' your own time. Throw your gun!"

Instantly Kelton acted. His right hand, which had been hanging at his side, moved upward with a flashing motion.

In his eyes was the light of victory, for while his own hand moved Templin's was merely poised at a little distance from the holster at his hip.

And yet while Kelton's fingers were closing around the butt of his weapon Templin's gun was spouting fire. Twice long lance flames darted from Templin's right hip and ended at Kelton's chest.

Upon Kelton's face was an expression of great amazement. He had got his gun out, but his weakening fingers could not hold it. It dropped at his feet. He sank toward it, as though seeking it, but toppled gently forward and lay, his head resting upon one arm, as if sleeping. Twice his fingers twitched and then became rigid.

"I reckon you had to have it, Kelton," said Templin.

He walked to the edge of the veranda and motioned to Givins and Stagg. The men slid off their horses and came forward.

They seized Kelton's limp figure and bore it away. Templin followed them.

Not until the men had gone did Lisbeth move. Then she shuddered and sank into the chair.

She sat there a long time. She felt she must have fainted, for when she again became conscious of what was going on around her she was lying back in the chair staring dully at the beams in the ceiling of the veranda.

She was trying to remember what had happened when she heard a groan, and turned her head to see her father leaning against the wall near the kitchen door, looking at her. He had managed to get to his feet, but was reeling dizzily.

Lisbeth darted toward him. Though her own legs were trembling with weakness, she managed to get Stanton into the house and upon a couch in the living room. There she bathed his head and gave him stimulants. Twice when she went into the kitchen for water and bandages, she glanced out of the windows dreadingly. There were no signs of Templin and the others.

She worked for fully an hour with Stanton. For a time it seemed he must have suffered a fracture, for he lay motionless, staring at Lisbeth with glazed, unseeing eyes. But when it appeared that he would not regain consciousness, that her efforts were to be in vain, he suddenly smiled at her.

"Lisbeth," he said, "Kelton hit me, didn't he?" At her nod he went on: "I heard shooting and talking. But I couldn't get things straight in my mind, and couldn't see what was happening."

Lisbeth told him.

"Templin's a mystery," he smiled. "But —somehow—I like him—I trust him."

Then, with Lisbeth at his side, Stanton fell asleep.

CHAPTER VI.

AN ENIGMATIC MAN.

DUSK had come when Lisbeth, sitting in the kitchen, heard a step on the veranda. She did not move as the steps came nearer; she did not even look up when she heard the screen door open. She knew Templin was there.

Several times during the afternoon she had seen him outside. Once he had stood at the fence of the horse corral, leaning against it, staring eastward. Another time she had seen him standing at the stable door, and once he had come upon the veranda to drink from the olla.

But she had not appeared to notice him; at least she had not permitted him to see that she had been watching him. She had not yet got the scene of the killing out of her mind, and she felt she never would. For even though she knew Kelton had deserved killing, she felt the act had been murder. He knew he had no chance with Templin. Templin had known it. Lisbeth had seen that Templin had appeared to give him a chance. Yet all the time Templin had known Kelton would have no chance.

To be sure, Templin had offered him his liberty under a condition; and perhaps Kelton should have accepted the condition. But there remained the bald fact that Templin had deliberately killed. That was what Lisbeth had to face—the scene of Templin shooting the man down.

Perhaps, if Kelton had been the first, Lisbeth might have condoned the offense. But there were the two men Templin had killed in Wilcox; there were his other crimes, which he had not denied to Sheriff Norton; and no doubt there were other murders.

Ned Templin was an outlaw. Her father had told her about him; Sheriff Norton had been seeking him; his action in shooting Kelton had been visible evidence of his venomous disposition.

Besides, Templin was bold, reckless, dominating. He had an iron will, a ruthless manner. He would have his own way; there was no stopping him.

He was an enigma, a menace, a mystery. Against her will she was interested in him, and when he lingered at the door, standing there silently, she at last was forced to look up at him.

"Well?" she interrogated belligerently.

"It got sort of lonesome outside," he said slowly.

"So you thought you would come in here without an invitation," she said, her voice still belligerent.

"I reckon that's it. But I'm here."

There was something in his tone which carried the implication that his words were final, like his presence. He meant to stay whether she liked it or not.

"I suppose we are powerless to prevent your staying," she answered. "Father seems to be hurt rather bad, and you don't seem to be gentleman enough to leave at my request."

He moved away from the door, walking to the entrance to the living room without answering. He peered into the living room, saw Stanton lying motionless on the couch, and turned to Lisbeth.

"I reckon he's hurt bad?"

"Bad enough," she returned shortly. "I thought at first he had suffered a fracture. But I think not. He has regained consciousness and has spoken to me. He was rational."

"That's good. Kelton must have hit him quite a clip."

He stood near the living room door through a heavy silence. Then he walked to a chair and dropped into it, stretching his legs and heaving a deep sigh.

"I'm sure a heap tired," he confessed. "Not havin' done any sleepin' for two nights, I'm sort of yearnin' for a bunk. Is there a bed in the house that ain't workin'?"

"We have a spare bedroom downstairs—if you feel that you must impose your presence upon us."

"I'll take it without further recommendation," he said.

For a time she sat, staring out of the doorway and listening to her father's deep, regular breathing. When the darkness became so dense that she could not see Templin's face she got up and lit a lamp. He sat with folded arms watching her.

Templin's presence irritated her. She and her father owed him something for what he had done, and she believed she would have acknowledged the debt had it not been for Templin's self-assurance, his boldness and the steady serenity of his eyes whenever she caught a glimpse of them.

"Your room is ready whenever you want it," she coldly informed him.

"I ain't as tired as I was," he drawled.

"You must have wonderful recuperative powers," she mocked.

"I reckon."

"Why play the hypocrite?" she demanded. "At least with me? I know you can speak the language of civilization. Then why speak that jargon?"

"Lazy, I reckon." He persisted in using the "jargon." "A man takes on the character of his environment. The western dialect is picturesque, isn't it?"

"Perhaps. But it is not—not what one ought to use, especially one who has been taught better."

"We'll say it's just preference."

"Then I should say your preferences are not commendable."

"Oh, shucks, I reckon you're tryin' to quarrel with me!" He leaned back in his chair and regarded her gravely. "You're still holdin' that tonsorial job ag'in' me," he said gently. "You hadn't ought to. You see, some one had to cut that shock of hair, an' you was the only one around.

"Figure it this way: if you hadn't cut my hair the sheriff would have known me. He an' his posse would have taken me back to Wilcox, an' I wouldn't have been here to keep Kelton from takin' you to Blaisdell."

"Well, I suppose I'm to feel grateful for that."

"Don't do it if it's goin' to strain you any," he said mockingly. "The chances are that I'd have had it out with Kelton anyway. That was bound to come."

"You mean you would have had to kill him?"

"Yep. You see, he had a notion that he could beat me to the draw. He's entertained that notion for a considerable time. It's odd how a notion like that will take hold of a man; but once he gets it he's gone; it 'll keep runnin' around in his head until he can't think of anything else."

"Well, I hope you are satisfied; you have killed him."

Her gaze was level. "But I suppose killing people is no novelty to you," she added.

"You're tryin' to be disagreeable. You

don't give a man credit; you don't say nothing about me lettin' Stagg an' Givins off."

"I presume you did find it hard to let them live. They have gone, I suppose?"

"They were fannin' it north the last time I saw them."

"Do you think they will keep their word to you?"

"I reckon. They understand that if they talk to Blaisdell I'll see them later."

"You think they are afraid of you, I suppose?"

He refused to be disturbed by her sarcasm. "Stagg an' Givins will be discreet, I reckon," he said quietly.

"Oh! I presume you know them—very well."

"I know them. An' I know Blaisdell."

"I think you do not know Blaisdell as well as you pretend," she said. "For when you saw the riders coming you told us Blaisdell was with them. You were mistaken."

"I reckon I was."

"What made you think Blaisdell was coming? Did you expect him?"

He looked quickly at her, yawned and got up.

"I'm gettin' powerful tired agin," he said. "That bed you talked about gets more an' more invitin'. I keep seein' it. I reckon I'll say good night. If you're feelin' better natured in the mornin' I'll talk to you agin."

He bowed to her, walked through the living room to a half open door. He peered inside, turned and smiled at Lisbeth, stepped through the doorway and closed the door behind him. Almost instantly he stuck his head out to say: "If you're needin' any help with your dad to-night don't hesitate to call me. Good night."

Lisbeth did not answer. She sat very still for some minutes wrestling with a futile rage that was not unmixed with grim amusement. She wanted to be angry, but discovered that her rage was not deep nor sincere.

There was too much curiosity in her; too much amazement; too much concern for her father. The concern conquered. She got up, went to her father and tried to forget Templin.

She sat beside her father until he awakened. She discovered that he was feeling much better, so she helped him upstairs to his room, after which she entered her own room, to sit for some time on the edge of the bed thinking of Templin.

CHAPTER VII.

THE STIRRING OF CHIVALRY.

TEMPLIN arose with the dawn. As he moved cautiously through the house he heard no sounds from the second floor. Silently he opened the front door, went onto the veranda and stood there for some seconds looking about.

Then he strode to the stable where he had concealed his saddle and bridle, got out brush, razor, and mirror and proceeded to the water trough under the windmill and shaved himself. Restoring his shaving kit to the slicker, he hid saddle and bridle and returned to the house. In the kitchen he found a clean towel and soap. He washed his face and hands, combed his hair and again went out upon the veranda.

Yesterday he had used Stanton's outfit to shave himself. He did not remember whether he had told Lisbeth he possessed such an outfit. Yesterday he had been in a hurry, and he might have lied. It made little difference as long as one could lie plausibly. It was not always convenient to tell the truth.

Suppose he were to tell the truth about the circumstances that had brought him to the Last Hope? Suppose he were to tell the truth about the killing of Putt and Barkwell?

Tell Lisbeth? He thought not. He stared eastward. His thoughts were as derisive as his smile. Lisbeth would never know through his telling her. The girl had enough to contend with—secret, sinister forces were marshaling against her.

He was glad he had come to the Last Hope; glad he had obeyed the strange impulse that had seized him; glad that his curiosity had driven him to see the girl whose beauty had been discussed in numerous cow camps.

He had come in time; he had been on hand when the first blow had been struck; he was determined to be near when the

others came. For there would be other blows. Blaisdell was not the man to be defeated at the first attempt.

Templin heard the screen door open. He sat very still, staring straight ahead, pretending absorption, although he knew Lisbeth's step.

Responding to her salutation he got up, bowed to her and stood silently watching her, observing that she was slightly pale and anxious.

"How is your father?" he asked quickly.

"Father puzzles me. He is awake; he apparently has no fever. He looks at me, answers me rationally enough; seems to be resting easy, without pain. But he seems preoccupied and his eyes lack the quick intelligence that has always been in them. He seems the same and yet there is a difference in him that baffles me."

"That was quite a rap Kelton gave him, I reckon. But I expect he'll be comin' around. Mebbe I'd better run up an' have a look at him. An' there's a doctor in Cochise."

"Don't go up now, please," she said. "He was going to sleep when I left him."

She walked close to Templin, so close that he could have reached out and touched her; and then stood very still and rigid, gazing into his eyes. There was a quiet determination in her manner that made his eyes kindle. She was afraid of him, yet she was going to pretend she wasn't.

"Templin," she said, "there are several things I want to know, and I think you can tell me."

"I'm listenin'."

"Who *are* you? And what are you here for?"

"I'm Ned Templin. I stopped here because my horse went lame."

Very quietly she answered: "I don't believe you. At least, I do not believe you are telling the entire truth. When you talked with Sheriff Norton your name was Lawrence Lanning. No man can have two names. One of yours must be an alias. Which is it?"

"Ma'am, I'm not makin' any confessions this mornin'."

"That is your way of telling me to mind my own business, I suppose," she said quietly. "As a matter of fact, names do not make much difference. You are you, no matter what name you adopt. But you certainly don't expect me to believe you came here merely because your horse went lame?"

"That's what I told you, ma'am."

"Templin, you are keeping something back—something I feel sure I ought to know. If your coming here was on account of your horse going lame why did you say this to Kelton: 'Kelton, I reckon Blaisdell put you on my trail'?"

"Mebbe I had that notion, ma'am."

"Templin," she said scornfully, "I believe you are afraid to tell the truth. I do not believe Kelton expected to find you here. He would not have been so amazed at sight of you if he had been searching for you and expecting to find you at the Last Hope. And while we were standing on the veranda before Blaisdell's Riders came you seemed to know they were coming. You named them before you could see their faces. How did you know they were Blaisdell's Riders?"

"Guessin', I reckon."

"Templin, you are deliberately lying to me!"

Templin did not answer.

"You see!" she charged. "You have no answer!" Her voice changed; there was a pleading note in it. "Templin," she said, "please tell me what it all means! You come here as Ned Templin, the outlaw. You change your clothes and become Lawrence Lanning. A posse follows you, accusing you of murder. My father returns, finds you here and helps you to escape the law.

"Blaisdell's Riders come, attempt to seize me. There is mysterious talk between you and them—talk that gives the impression that you and they have been friends, but now are enemies. You kill Kelton and warn the two other men that they are not to tell any one you are here. You declare you are going to stay here. Why do you mean to stay here?"

"Just tired of runnin' around, I reckon."

"Ah, Templin, that subterfuge is too shallow."

Lisbeth felt that she could not force him to tell her anything; that he intended keep-

ing his knowledge to himself. The conviction dismayed her because it vindicated her fears of a secret and terrible menace.

"Templin," she said, "tell me this at least: Have you come here to harm father?"

"No."

She looked straight into his eyes. They were steady, grave, sincere.

"Well," she said, "I suppose I shall have to be satisfied. I don't want you here; I feel certain trouble is coming. But you won't go away, I can't drive you away, and father doesn't seem to care."

She sank to a chair and stared at the flaming lances of the rising sun. An atmosphere of dull resignation seemed to have settled around her. In her eyes was a confession of impotence. She was baffled.

Yet she discerned one golden thread of hope in the fabric of tragedy that the events of the day had woven around her. That was the grave sincerity of Templin's eyes when he said he intended no harm to her father.

Templin was silent, watching her. The admiration he felt for her he kept invisible. She was pale, there was the light of a terrible anxiety in her eyes; he knew she must be enduring agony of uncertainty about himself, about Blaisdell. He knew she felt that though one tragedy had happened another impended.

If she had heard of Blaisdell at all—and he knew she had from the way she had started when he had mentioned the outlaw's name—she knew it was not Blaisdell's way to defer any action once started. He was determined, relentless. Defeated in his first attempt to take Lisbeth he would strike again.

Templin could give the girl no consolation. Telling her the truth about himself and relating to her what he knew about Blaisdell would not help her.

What would her reactions be if he should tell her that he had been a member of Blaisdell's outlaw band for several years, and that Blaisdell had valued him so highly that he and the outlaw chief had almost clashed when the break came, and that Blaisdell had ordered his men to kill him on sight—a deed that Blaisdell himself had not dared to attempt single-handed?

What would Lisbeth think if she knew that Templin's break with the outlaw chief had come about because of Lisbeth herself? That he—Templin—had declared to Blaisdell: "When you go to draggin' women around by the hair, I'm through!"

Those had been his words, uttered upon the impulse of the moment, before he had been seized with the whim to ride to the Last Hope to see the girl Blaisdell had selected for a victim.

Templin was not prepared to declare that his whim to ride to the Last Hope had been chivalric. Probably curiosity.

But since he had seen Lisbeth his thoughts had been more or less chaotic. Malice toward Blaisdell he certainly bore because of Blaisdell's order to his men that Templin be killed on sight. Pity for Lisbeth he had felt at his first glimpse of her.

Although he had not put the thought into words his first glance into Lisbeth's eyes had steeled him against Blaisdell's intention. Blaisdell would never get her. He would stay at the Last Hope for one purpose, for that purpose.

Templin hadn't any false notions. He knew Lisbeth hated him, feared him, despised him. She certainly had a right to feel that way toward him. He had no illusions. His trade did not permit him to think seriously of women; certainly there was nothing in his life as an outlaw to attract feminine interest to himself.

He couldn't love as other men loved. But he could serve. What was more to the point, he could disappoint Blaisdell.

Yet he was aware that not in years had he felt so comfortable, so satisfied. Life at the Last Hope was distinctly engaging, if nothing more.

He had felt an odd thrill in standing in the doorway of the ranch house defending Lisbeth. He had felt a sort of proprietary interest in the place; for the first time in a long while he had felt responsible. Moreover, despite his conviction that Lisbeth was horror stricken over the killing of Kelton, he was certain she must feel an impulse of gratitude toward him.

Now, having defended her, and knowing that some time must elapse before word of what had happened could reach the outlaw

chief, even if Stagg and Givins should break their promise, he might have warned Lisbeth and Stanton to leave the country or to go to Wilcox, where they would be safe. But that course did not appeal to him because it would mean a breaking up of this new order of things.

He could not go with Lisbeth and her father to Wilcox, even though he should don the Eastern clothing that had fooled Sheriff Norton. Possibly the sheriff would not recognize him, but certainly he could not long escape being picked out by the vigilant eyes of the outlaws who had known him for years.

No; he would not suggest Wilcox. But as a means of lifting a load from his conscience he would approach the subject obliquely. He turned slowly and looked at Lisbeth, who was staring at the blazing colors that streaked the horizon.

"You like it here?" he asked.

"No!" she replied shortly, with vindictive emphasis.

He felt a distinct disappointment, but his expression was stoical.

"Your father does, I reckon."

"I suppose so. He wouldn't stay here otherwise."

"You're stayin' here because he is."

"Yes. Oh, I hate it! I hate it!"

"Well," said Templin, looking past her into the desolation that stretched to the four horizons; "it has its bad points, for a fact. But even hatin' a place, it seems I'd hate it more to have some one run me away."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, it looks to me as though that's what Blaisdell is aimin' at—to scare you an' your dad out."

"Blaisdell is going to be disappointed, if that is what he is thinking of doing," she declared. "We are going to stay right here until we get ready to go!"

"You'd be pretty safe from Blaisdell over in Wilcox," he now suggested.

"We are going to stay right here! Blaisdell would not have attempted what he did attempt if our men hadn't left us."

"You mean you ain't got an outfit?"

He saw Blaisdell's hand in that. He had no doubt that the outlaw chief, through threats or cajolery had induced the Last Hope men to desert. Blaisdell had done that in a number of instances when he had directed his attention to a particular ranch. Not always had he succeeded in drawing off an entire complement of men; but there were always some who could be induced to leave.

"There's isn't a man left. One by one they have deserted us. Father went over to Lazette to hire some men. I do not know whether he succeeded."

"How much stock have you got?"

"Three thousand head of cattle."

Templin doubted the statement. With the herds left unprotected, Blaisdell's Riders would deplete them rapidly. Blaisdell always struck swiftly.

"When did the men start leavin'?"

"About two weeks ago. The foreman went first, with three of the men. After that nearly every day one or two would leave."

Templin was acquainted with Blaisdell's methods. When a ranch owner incurred his enmity, Blaisdell's first move was to deprive him of his men. Then, when the prospective victim was helpless, Blaisdell would strike.

Templin had participated in a number of such events. Nor had he been reluctant to participate in them. They had provided rare diversion because he had been with the aggressor.

Odd it was what a difference a change of positions made. Chance had placed him at the Last Hope as a defender, and though this position was fully as diverting as the other, there was something added to it.

He was unable exactly to define the emotions that gripped him at the thought of engaging in a war with his former chief. He had not been a champion of the weak. He thought that the answer might be found very near him, in the person of a girl who was watching him.

The incipient chivalric impulse which had impelled him to tell Blaisdell that he could no longer continue his associations with the latter if he meant to fight women had grown amazingly since he had seen the girl Blaisdell had selected as his victim. A strange hatred of Blaisdell had seized him. He grasped that as being something tangible

upon which he could base the other emotions that seethed through him.

He did not remember that he had ever liked Blaisdell. Nor had he disliked the man. Now he could see Blaisdell's face when the latter had talked about the girl; he had a vivid recollection of it and he was astonished to discover that in his mental picture he saw the outlaw chief in a new light. A new character had developed and it shone in the man's face. The wonder of it was that he had ever been able to serve under the man, to be near him without shooting him.

Perhaps Templin had some slight suspicion of the leaven that was working in him. The sensation of satisfaction he had felt in being near Lisbeth was not to be misunderstood, and he acknowledged it. Yet because he knew it was futile to hope, he felt the sensation must be disregarded, that he must base his hatred of Blaisdell upon a newly discovered conception of the man's character.

One thing was certain, he hated Blaisdell. It made no difference how that hatred had been aroused, it was in him, and he treasured it.

Had Lisbeth been able to see Templin's eyes at that instant she would have discovered that the calm serenity she had observed in them had gone. Watching his profile she did observe that his lips had tightened and that curious little wrinkles had formed around his eyes. These things warned her that a change had come over him, but before she could open her lips to speak to him in order to make him turn so that she could satisfy the curiosity that had taken possession of her, her father's voice reached her.

"Jefford!" he called out.

Lisbeth got up and stood rigid, grasping the back of the chair upon which she had been sitting. She stared at Templin and he saw that her eyes were alight with a great amazement.

"My God!" she breathed in an awed voice; "what does he mean? Jefford isn't here! Why, he hasn't seen Jefford in years!"

"Who is Jefford?" Templin got up, aroused by the girl's manner.

"Jefford used to be father's secretary. He was more; he was a friend. But it has been years since he has seen Jefford!" She took several steps toward Templin and stared at him with widening eyes.

"You!" she gasped; "you are not Jefford?"

"I reckon not," Templin replied gravely. "I've got two names right now. Another would be a heap burdensome; I'd never remember them. I reckon the Jefford he's talkin' about must be in his mind."

Lisbeth gasped; stood silent as Stanton's voice again reached the veranda. This time he spoke peremptorily, impatiently:

"Jefford! I want to speak to you! Come here!"

Lisbeth closed her eyes and pressed her hands over them. When she uncovered them they were alight with a great fear and dread. She looked inquiringly at Templin, who significantly touched his forehead and spoke regretfully:

"I reckon that tap on the head is doin' it."

He started toward the door, but Lisbeth reached it before him. It slammed in his face as she sped through the opening; and though he moved quickly he was only in time to see Lisbeth's skirts as she fled up the stairway.

When Templin reached the upper landing Lisbeth was in Stanton's room. He could hear her voice as she spoke lowly, soothingly to her father. It was apparent that she was assuring him that Jefford was not within call, for he answered stridently:

"Don't try to deceive me, Lisbeth. I'm not a child, even though this weakness has come upon me. Jefford is here! He came yesterday! I tell you I want to speak with him. There is something I must tell him. I must! I must! Do you hear?"

"All right, father," came Lisbeth's voice, low, placative; "I'll call him."

She emerged from the room, closed the door behind her and came toward Templin, holding a finger tight-pressed over her lips.

"Templin," she said, whispering as she drew close; "his mind is wandering! He thinks you are Jefford!" She leaned against the wall, vainly trying to suppress her agitation as she watched Templin with strange

intentness. "You are Jefford!" she charged; "you must be!"

Templin shook his head negatively.

"Your dad's got things mixed. I ain't Jefford. I never saw the man; never heard of him. My name's Ned Templin. It always was except when I changed it to Lanning to fool the sheriff.

"It looks to me like your dad got hit harder than we thought. He'll sure need a doctor to fix him up. There's no sense of your hangin' onto any hope that I'm Jefford. It looks to me like your dad is in bad shape. I'll hustle right over to Cochise an' bring the doc back with me."

"Jefford," came Stanton's voice again, querulous, high-pitched; "what in thunder are you delaying for? What are you talking about. I don't want a doctor, I want you! Come in here!"

Templin hesitated, but Lisbeth seized him by an arm and pushed him toward the doorway.

"Go," she urged; "please go. Perhaps if you will talk with him for a while he will go to sleep!"

Templin entered Stanton's room. Lisbeth was close behind him. Stanton was lying on his back in bed. He was fully dressed, though; and when he saw Templin enter he got up, walked to a chair and stood with his hands resting on its back. He bore no visible sign of injury; he was as erect, as cool and imperturable as he had been when in the same room the day before he had watched Templin from behind the barrel of a six-shooter.

"Come in, Jefford," he invited when he saw Templin. "I'm mighty glad to see you. Too bad I was too ill yesterday to receive you."

Glancing at Lisbeth, Templin saw her shrink as if from a blow. Stanton evidently had no knowledge of what had happened to him. He had no recollection of the events of yesterday. His eyes were unnaturally bright and held a light of high intensity.

"Lisbeth," he said; "will you please retire. I have something very important to say to Jefford. And, remember, I do not wish to be interrupted."

Lisbeth backed toward the door. She had almost reached it when she dropped her handkerchief with which she had been surreptitiously dabbing at her eyes. Templin, standing close to her, reached down and recovered it. As he rose Lisbeth's lips were close to his ear.

"Humor him, Templin," she whispered. "Don't be cross with him—please!"

CHAPTER VIII.

CONFESSION.

EXCEPT that Stanton's eyes were extraordinarily bright and penetrating he was the same as when Templin had talked with him the day before. There was about him the same cold self-control, the same deliberation of manner and the same calm assurance.

That was Templin's first impression. As Stanton faced him after the door had closed behind Lisbeth, Templin observed a change in the man since yesterday. His lips were pinched together; they were white, as if he were enduring much agony.

Templin thought the agony was mental. The same agony haunted his eyes; they were furtive, searching, tortured, reflecting, it seemed to Templin, a terrible anxiety and a stealthy eagerness. They lacked the clear directness of yesterday, the confidence, the sanity. They were the eyes of a man who visioned yesterday's ghosts, regrets.

Stanton motioned Templin to a chair and seated himself in the one upon whose back he had rested his hands while Lisbeth had been in the room. Then he said:

"Jefford, where have you been keeping yourself all these years?"

Stanton was violently agitated. His lips were quivering, his fingers were working nervously; his eyes, gleaming and shifting, were eager; his gaze roved from Templin's lips to his eyes, to his forehead, his chin, his nose, incessantly probing, inquiring.

Templin soberly reflected upon Lisbeth's plea that he should humor Stanton. There seemed to be nothing else to do. For him to deny being the man Stanton thought him probably would arouse him to a frenzy.

That, Templin supposed, was what Lisbeth anticipated and wished to avoid. At

the same time he had no liking for the deception, and had he not considered Lisbeth's feelings he would have risked arousing Stanton.

"I've just been roving around, Stanton" he answered.

"Jefford, I heard you had died."

"I don't seem to be dead, Stanton."

"You don't." A wan smile flitted over Stanton's lips. But there was no mirth in his eyes; they were still agonized, eager, fearful. "But you've changed, Jefford. That is, in some ways. You've got a quieter eye, some way. It used to be hard to catch your eyes, they were so confounded shifty. You've discovered how to look a man straight in the eye. You've got a better mouth, too; it's firmer. Otherwise you're the same Jefford. But you don't grow any older, Jefford. How is that?"

"I've been taking care of myself, Stanton."

"Yes; that's evident. I've tried to. But it's hell, the life I've lived, Jefford. But I've been sorry, Jefford—damned sorry! What are you doing out here? Why did you come?"

"Just drifted out."

"You're a cowboy, Jefford. What brand are you riding for?"

"The Pig-Pen over on the Wolf," lied Templin.

A contempt for Stanton was growing in Templin. The man's present mental condition merely proved to him that one could not judge character with any degree of accuracy by a glance.

In Stanton's room yesterday Templin had been impressed by the man's quiet confidence in himself, by the steadiness of his eyes, which had seemed to indicate an iron self-control and courage of a rare sort. Stanton's mental derangement betrayed the coward in him, a strain which his sanity had concealed.

For Stanton was frightened by some hallucination that had seized him; his condition had exaggerated a memory that had tortured him in his normal state. He had always been afraid of the memory, but he had fought the fear. Now it was a naked thing, lying visible to any one who might look at the man.

Templin was not surprised when Stanton leaned toward him and said hoarsely:

"Jefford, he's here! He's here!"

"Who is here?" inquired Templin.

"Blaisdell!"

Stanton almost shrieked the name. It was as though he expected Templin to share his frenzy.

Templin was unmoved.

"Well, what of it?" he questioned. He thought that perhaps Stanton's sanity had momentarily returned, to give him a fleeting recollection of what had happened yesterday. But a swift glance into Stanton's eyes told him the man's reason was still dethroned.

"Jefford," he whispered. "Aren't you afraid of Blaisdell?" He seemed amazed, incredulous.

"I'm not afraid of Blaisdell, Stanton."

"Good Lord! Not afraid! He says he's not afraid of Blaisdell! Why, Jefford, Blaisdell would kill you if he knew you were here! He'd kill you as quick as he'd kill a rattlesnake; as quick as he'd kill me, if he got a chance! You're not afraid of Blaisdell? Ha, ha, ha! Jefford, have you forgotten what we did to Blaisdell, and to Blaisdell's wife and child?" He leaned forward and peered into Templin's eyes, searchingly. At last he drew back, wonderingly.

"By Heaven, Jefford; I believe you have forgotten!" For an instant he leaned back in his chair, writhing, covering his eyes with his hands as though in an effort to blot some terrible recollection from his mind. He groaned, sobbed.

"Oh, God, Jefford; I wish I could forget! If I could only forget for just one minute! But I can't, Jefford, I can't, I tell you!"

He withdrew his hands from before his eyes and settled heavily in the chair, his shoulders drooping, his hands hanging at his sides, his chin on his chest.

A terrible weight rested upon Stanton's conscience. Templin was certain of that. It was equally certain that remorse was torturing the man. Perhaps the remorse and not Kelton's blow had deranged him.

It was not Templin's affair. His only conscious emotion, aside from his growing contempt of the man, was that of sympathy

for Lisbeth. Stanton had evidently committed a dishonorable deed. Jefford, his former secretary and friend—according to Lisbeth—had shared his guilt.

Templin would have left the room. He had no desire to listen to Stanton's raving; he did not care to hear more of his secret. He felt a certain pity for him, but his concern for Lisbeth was greater, overshadowing it. He wondered if Lisbeth knew her father's secret. He decided she did not, or, being aware that Stanton had mistaken him for Jefford she would not have permitted him to be alone with Stanton.

"Stanton," he said quietly, "you'd better go to sleep. I'll send Miss Stanton in."

"Jefford, I don't want Lisbeth!" Stanton sat straight in the chair again, glaring wildly. "I don't want her, Jefford! I tell you I don't want her! If she knew what I did twenty years ago she'd never speak to me again! She'd leave me!"

He got up and paced the floor. His malady had transformed him. He was not the man who had faced Templin the day before. A dormant and craven trait of character now dominated him. The cold self-confidence of yesterday had been a mask, a veneer. Templin's pity was for what he saw now and was not for the man of yesterday.

Stanton ceased pacing the floor; he halted near Templin.

"Jefford," he said, "you've forgotten. You say that. I think you are a liar. You're trying to evade responsibility, now that you've heard Blaisdell's here. You can't do it, Jefford. I'll remind you.

"You're the man who suggested stealing Blaisdell's fortune. You engineered it. You sent Blaisdell on that European trip to get him away so that we could ruin him. You remember that, don't you?

"And you remember how Mrs. Blaisdell was found, don't you—she and her daughter? Both dead! Too proud to beg or to ask you and me for aid! And Blaisdell in Europe on a secret mission, with his wife not knowing where to reach him.

"Ah, you fixed that, didn't you, Jefford? You were devilishly cunning. You knew that if Blaisdell heard what we were doing he'd come back and kill both of us!

"Jefford, you know I wasn't responsible for what happened to Blaisdell's wife. You told me you had provided for her. You juggled things around until you made me think that it was just a cunning business deal. Then you got your share and disappeared. You sneaked, Jefford; and left me to face Blaisdell!"

He shivered.

"Face Blaisdell!" he said. "God! After what he found when he got home? He'd have choked me to death! Face him!"

"Stanton, you'd better lie down and get some sleep."

"Sleep!" His laugh was bitter. "Jefford, I haven't slept in a century. Yes; it's that long since it happened. Longer! It's been an eon or two—a dozen of them! Sleep!" He glared wildly around the room.

"Jefford, I can't get away from Blaisdell's wife. She follows me everywhere; she and her daughter. Those two chased me out of New York. They were everywhere.

"It got so that if I went to my club they'd be standing somewhere near, watching me. When I'd walk the streets they'd be moving along beside me, or just behind me. Often I'd turn and see them. They'd be sitting opposite me when I'd dine alone. They were with me at breakfast, at lunch; and when I'd go to bed they'd be in the room watching me.

"It wouldn't have been so bad if they'd have said something: if they'd have changed the expressions of their faces. But they were always the same. They'd stare at me with their damned accusing eyes; stare at me like they were looking me through.

"It got to be unbearable, man! I couldn't get away from them. After a while I began to talk to them. Then I got afraid of myself. I felt I had to get out of there; to go some place where they couldn't find me.

"I sold out and went to Chicago. For a few days I didn't see them. And then one day when I was dining alone I saw them sitting across the table, staring at me. They didn't say anything; they just sat and looked at me. How they ever found out where I was I don't know. But there they were.

"I left my dinner half finished and went

out into the streets. I walked around for several hours with them tagging at my heels. Both of them stood at the foot of my bed that night and looked at me. I'd go to sleep, but when I'd wake up they'd still be standing there.

"They were there in the morning. I cursed them and they left. I got out of Chicago. Went to a little town in Ohio. They followed me there. I jumped from one place to another.

"Sometimes it would seem I had escaped them, but after a while they'd turn up again, to stand near and stare at me. They never bothered me when Lisbeth was around. That is, not until lately.

"But they've hung on. I don't know what they want, for they won't talk. Jefford, they were in this room all last night, standing at the foot of my bed looking at me. The other day, riding home from Wilcox, they walked along beside my horse.

"I asked Blaisdell's wife what she wanted. She didn't answer. I asked her again, and I told her her place was with her husband, who was in the country. She didn't say anything; she just walked along, looking at me.

"Jefford, I know they are not real people, though there's times when I think so. Then I'll talk to them. That's a bad sign, Jefford. If they keep it up I'll go insane.

"I know that; I'm not a fool. A man can't keep on running away from people like that, arguing with them and having them close to him all the time. A man has got to have some sleep.

"Do you know why I called this place 'Last Hope?' Because when I bought it I decided that if they followed me here there'd be no use of going any further. I'd have to kill myself to get rid of them, and that is what I intended to do.

"But I haven't had the nerve. I'm still here. When I heard that Blaisdell was in the country, I got an idea that his wife had come out here looking for him, and I decided that if I could kill Blaisdell his wife would go away.

"But I was as much afraid of Blaisdell as I am of his wife. I couldn't face him. I have heard he is around, but I haven't seen him. I had to give up that notion.

"Then I got the idea that if I killed Blaisdell's men maybe Blaisdell would get disgusted and leave the country, taking his wife and daughter with him.

"I've killed two or three of Blaisdell's men out in the desert. I killed two more the other day, over in Wilcox. I told Lisbeth I was going to Lazette to hire some men, but after I rode the Lazette trail for a time I switched off and went to Wilcox.

"One of Blaisdell's men that I killed didn't die right away. I did some things for him and he had told me that two of Blaisdell's men were in Wilcox posing as decent citizens. They were Jeff Barkwell and Ernie Putt. I met them in front of Cheever's store and killed both."

Stanton laughed lowly.

"Funny thing about that deal," he added. "A man named Templin got blamed for the killing. His horse was standing in front of Cheever's. I didn't know then that it was Templin's horse. I found that out later, when he rode him into my corral.

"I'd sneaked into Wilcox after dark. I left my horse at the edge of town, in a grove of juniper trees. I met Barkwell and Putt in front of Cheever's and downed them. It was easy. For years I've been practicing with a six-shooter, expecting to kill Blaisdell if I met him.

"I'd trailed Barkwell and Putt for two hours, trying to get them alone. I thought I'd got them safely, but after I killed them I saw a man standing down the street a little ways. He'd seen me.

"I had to get away quick, so I took a roan horse that was hitched to the rack in front of the store. I rode the roan to the juniper grove where I got my own horse. I'd lamed the roan someway, or maybe I'd kept him; he was a mighty good horse.

"I was riding away when I saw a man running toward me from town. I don't know who it was. Maybe it was the man who'd seen me shoot Barkwell and Putt; maybe it was Templin. I didn't wait to see, and I'm certain he didn't get close enough to me to be able to identify me if he'd see me again.

"I rode back the way I had come, swinging around again to the Lazette trail. After I got to the trail I took my time. I figured

that if the man who saw me kill Barkwell and Putt wasn't the owner of the roan horse, the owner of the roan would be blamed for the murders.

"When I got home I found Templin had come. At first I was afraid he'd come for me. I didn't know him until then; I'd never seen him. But I'd heard of him; heard he was an outlaw and that he ran with Blaisdell.

"But he'd done something for my daughter. I didn't want to kill him, though I went upstairs for that purpose. After I'd seen him I didn't have the heart to kill him. He was too cool and quiet.

"I questioned Norton about Templin. It seems the man who had seen me kill Barkwell and Putt had mistaken me for Templin. The man, a fellow named King, had seen Templin in town earlier, riding the roan horse. When he saw me mount the roan he thought I was Templin. Templin had to light out, on a lamed horse.

"The sheriff's posse was close behind him. Templin wouldn't run any more. He'd made my daughter cut his hair. He'd shaved. He dressed himself in some of my clothes and passed himself off as an Easterner, visiting us. He called himself Lawrence Lanning. He got away with it.

"Then some of Blaisdell's Riders came. That's all I remember. It's queer. Something must have happened."

Stanton paused and brushed a hand over his forehead as though in an effort to refresh his memory.

"Strange," he added, staring vacuously at Templin; "I don't seem to remember anything further. Jefford, I think I'm going insane. Something is going to happen to me; things are so jumbled I can't figure them out.

"But I want you to promise me one thing, Jefford; that you'll find Templin and tell him to take care of Lisbeth. Templin's an outlaw, but he's human and he's got a heart. I'd rather trust him than a good many men who have better reputations.

"I'd trust him before I'd trust you, Jefford. Why, damn your hide, Jefford; I can't trust you at all! You're dead! You died years ago! I know it! You can't fool me! You've come here to devil me; just like Blaisdell's wife and daughter!

"Get out of here! And take those damned women with you! Do you hear! I won't have you around; I won't—!"

"Steady, Stanton," said Templin. He stepped forward as Stanton swayed and toppled limply forward, caught him in his arms, lifted him from the floor and carried him to the bed. He stood for an instant looking down into Stanton's face, disgust gripping him.

Then he moved softly to the door, opened it and let himself into the hall. Closing the door he stood with a hand on the knob.

"Damn your miserable hide, Stanton, you ought to suffer!" he declared, aloud.

He turned at the sound of a footstep behind him, and saw Lisbeth at the farther end of the hall, coming toward him.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

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SAPPHO'S FLOWER SONG

I PLUCKED a rose beneath the leaves
Where deep blue streams went flowing,
It stung me with a hidden thorn
Although so sweetly glowing.

And so beneath the shades of night
I plucked love's passion flower,
It stung me with a thousand thorns
And wounds me to this hour.

Elizabeth Westermain.

Broom-Sedge

By JOY KIME BENTON

THE ultra-expensive roadster turned from the highway and swayed slowly over the rough country road, bumping into washed-out gullies, grinding through beds of yielding sand. Graham Reindel swore polite but soundless oaths under his breath and gave his undivided attention to holding the car to the narrow road. By his side Fleta Reindel, his wife, a woman in her early thirties, but in her carefully preserved beauty looking little more than a girl, sat and stared listlessly at the gray sand, the scrubby blackjack oaks, and the endless reaches of bending, whispering broom-sedge. For miles no word had been spoken. It was she who finally broke the silence.

"Can't you drive faster, Graham? We're late." She consulted the tiny jeweled watch at her wrist and frowned.

The man made no answer, but the car gathered speed. There came the sound of breaking timber, the sharp snap of metal, and the car listed and settled heavily among the rotten poles that served as a bridge across the bed of a small stream now dry.

"Damn." The word was spoken quite without emotion. Graham Reindel got out.

"Graham!" Fleta Reindel's carefully modulated voice held annoyance.

From the rear of the car he answered her. "I will revise that to 'the deuce' if the other word offends you." His tones were smooth and even.

Fleta shrugged silken shoulders. "There is no need of your being coarse," she said coldly.

Already she was sorry that she had insisted on leaving the main road and coming this way. She had hoped that the sight of the spot where they had spent their honeymoon might soften her husband. She remembered with a dull ache at her heart how they had slipped away and come to the sandhills of North Carolina to his hunting lodge. City born and bred, it had been her first real experience in the country. They had dawdled a day at Pinehurst, then had driven over this very road in a buckboard. She had laughed then at its roughness—she did not remember that it *was* so rough. She remembered only the loneli-

ness that clutched at her heart upon seeing the interminable stretches of shifting gray sand, the twisted blackjacks, and the blowing, whispering broom-sedge. She had asked her husband why they passed no houses, only a cabin here and there, and he had told her that the land was too poor to grow anything but blackjacks and broom-sedge. She had clung to his arm, vaguely terrified at the singular silence, the bewildering sameness, the loneliness and the desolation; and he had laughed at her fears and tenderly comforted her.

That had been very long ago—ten, twelve years! Now, as she looked across the stretches of broom-sedge bending, whispering derisively in the sharp December wind, the same old nameless terror came clutching at her heart. Broom-sedge! Ugh, how she hated it! It had been a long time since her husband had been tender with her, or had comforted her. Not since— She caught her breath sharply and her eyes filled. Always he was courteous and considerate, nothing more.

Now as he came from the rear of the car she saw that something out of the ordinary had happened.

"The axle is broken." He scanned the horizon. "I shall have to go for assistance. Do you wish to go with me, or would you rather wait here?"

Fleta Reindel got hastily out. "I would rather go with you. I—I am afraid here." She took a few steps forward, her high heels making tiny wells in the deep sand which immediately filled again.

He looked at her small, ineffectual feet. "I don't know how far we'll have to walk."

Together they went up the road in silence, the woman struggling through the sand, which grew deeper with each step. Finally her husband noted her distress.

"Will you take my arm?"

She reached up and took the proffered arm, but after a few more steps she halted. "I—I can't go on. I will go back to the car and wait."

"As you like. Perhaps you had better wrap up in the robe—it is growing colder. I shall be gone no longer than is absolutely necessary, and there is no reason why you should be afraid."

Huddled in the car, she watched her husband until he disappeared from sight.

The passing sun slowly lengthened the shadows of the blackjacks until they merged into the darkening masses of the broom-sedge. The wind rose a little and whistled lonesomely through the branches of a solitary pine tree. A flaw of unexpected snow dimmed the air momentarily. The woman in the car strained frightened eyes through the fast deepening dusk.

Suddenly from the stillness there came the most eerie and foreboding of sounds, the mourning ululu of a downy owl. Hearing, the woman's fast failing poise forsook her. She started to her feet in terror and went stumbling up the road. From the shadows on one side of her a plushy-footed rabbit slipped phantomlike and disappeared soundlessly into the sedge on the other side. At the unexpectedness of it the woman's self-control snapped. She cried aloud.

On and on she ran. The stealthy sand sucked at her feet and held her back. Her breath began to come in gasps. Then far across the fields, almost hidden in the blackjacks, she saw a tiny, flickering light. Heedless of the briers that scratched her, of the broom-sedge that tangled her feet, she stumbled toward it and at last pushed against the unfastened door of a cabin and swayed unsteadily in.

From the semidarkness in one corner of the room came a cry fraught with terror. "Jud—Jud!"

The light of a few chips blazing feebly in the fireplace revealed the figure of a woman crouched by a broken bed. On the bed lay a tiny, formless bundle of rags from which issued labored breathings.

"I—I am not Jud. I am Mrs. Reindel. Our car broke down, and my husband has gone for help."

The woman by the bed sprang up. The terror in her eyes slowly faded. "I thought you was my man."

A shrill, whistling breath cut the air. The woman by the bed gave a sob and caught the bundle of dirty rags to her flat breast. "My baby—oh, my baby!" Her voice rose to a helpless wail.

Fleta Reindel forgot her own fright in the terror that the raucous breathing of the

baby brought to her heart. There flashed into her mind a never-to-be-obliterated picture—of nurses, doctors, the stern, set face of her husband, as they fought amidst every comfort and luxury for the life of her child—and lost. Of herself, young and carefree, coming in late from a gay party, to meet the hard, accusing eyes of her husband. She had not dreamed that a baby could fall ill so quickly. She had been young—so young. Youth had called to youth, and she had gone her happy way, little thinking that her baby's life should be demanded of her.

She had loved her baby, but it had died, and her husband— There had been no more children. He had told her that she was not fit to be a mother, and his eyes, bitter and accusing, had left her stunned. After a while she had thrown herself into the wildest gayeties to forget, and the breach had widened until their lives had grown apart. But under the mask she so carefully fashioned there was always the intolerable ache, the hurt surprise that her husband should be so blind, so unforgiving.

Even as she thought, the sight of this other mother's anguish impelled her to action. She had spent countless hours of penance in searching—in *knowing* just *what* to do—since that night long ago. The pose, the poise, the polish fled from her face and left her eyes naked.

She took the baby from the mother's arms and laid it face down across her lap. "Get me a pail—quickly!"

The woman stared at her stupidly. Her face had the strange, set expression of a sleep walker.

Fleta Reindel shook her by the arm roughly. "Listen—listen carefully, and do as I say. We can save your baby—we will!" She spoke slowly and distinctly. "A pail—get me a pail with some water in it. There! Now something metal." Her eyes went swiftly around the squalid room. "That iron there—that will do. Stir up the fire and set the iron on the coals." Again her eyes frantically searched the room. "That chain on the door—get it and put it on the coals also."

By the flames that sprang up Fleta Reindel saw that the mother was young, scarcely more than a child, and that the cabin was a hovel.

"Your husband—where is he?"

The look of terror again flared in the girl's eyes.

"Jud—I—I don't know where he air—he air drunk." She did not add that the revenue officers were after him, but her eyes sought the door uneasily.

"How long has the baby been like this?"

"Since day before yistiddy. I couldn't leave her to go an' fetch help; hit air three mile to the nearest neighbor, an' I dassent leave her." Her voice trailed off and the heavy lids of her eyes fluttered down even as she spoke.

Fleta Reindel shook her desperately. "You must stay awake a little longer—you *must*." Swiftly she spread her coat tentwise over a chair, took a ragged quilt from the bed, and placed it beneath the coat. Tenderly she laid the baby on the quilt and placed the pail of water close beside it. "Now get me the iron." Carefully she lowered the iron into the water and a cloud of live steam arose.

The mother screamed and clutched Fleta Reindel's arm with frantic fingers. "My baby—my baby—you air killin' hit. Hit air so little—my baby!"

The other woman shook her off, and, working swiftly, dropped the hot chain into the pail also.

From beneath the coat there came a terrible whistle, and at the sound of it the mother flew at Fleta Reindel with insane fury in her eyes.

"My baby—you air killin' hit. By God—I'll—"

There was a sound of some one calling from without, a swift step on the porch, and Graham Reindel sprang forward into the room in time to catch the chair that was upraised over his wife as she knelt on the floor beside the struggling child.

"Graham!" She lifted the gasping baby in her arms. It was beating the air with tiny fists and the little face was blue as the whistling grew louder from the fast-closing throat. Suddenly there came a sound more terrible than any before, and Fleta Reindel turned the child face down. It struggled feebly for a moment and then a horrible

something burst from the little lips. Again the tiny fists beat the air feebly and a second horrible something broke. "The membrane—it's the membrane!" Fleta Reindel laid the baby white and motionless in its mother's arms.

A terrible wail came from her. "My baby—hit air dead." She rocked her thin body in an abandonment of grief. But even as she spoke the wee eyelids fluttered, and the little breath began to come more easily.

Gently, Fleta Reindel took the baby from the unresisting arms. "You must sleep now."

Graham Reindel guided the halting, stumbling feet to the bed, and the young mother fell across it, asleep even as she fell. Carefully he drew the ragged quilts close about her and tiptoed back to the hearth where his wife sat, wide-eyed, dishevel-haired, holding the baby motherwise. She looked up at him, finger to lip. He saw that there were two livid burns across her white hand. "Sh-h—we must not awaken her."

But there was no need for caution. Two days of sleepless watching and waiting had done their work; the young mother slept the sleep of exhausted youth.

Through the night they sat, husband and wife, and watched the child that now slept peacefully. And occasionally they talked softly of singularly unimportant things. But when morning came the two of them went and stood by the one small window. All around as far as the eye could see lay the unbroken stretch of sand, blackjacks, and broom-sedge. Gently, Graham Reindel lifted his wife's face between his two palms and looked long into her eyes.

The sun was rising. Softly it silvered the gray sand, bronzed the scrubby blackjacks, and, touching each stalk of the broom-sedge, turned it into shining gold!

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IN THE FOREST

COME, wander with me through the quiet shade
Of yonder forest, branching 'neath the blue,
Where timid sunbeams glisten, half afraid,
Yet eager still, to kiss away the dew.

Come, let us turn aside from beaten trail,
And look adown the gorge, so long and deep,
Where rhododendrons blossom, sweet and pale,
As if scarce awakened from white winter's sleep.

Come, let us brush aside the hanging vines,
And skirt the open, till we reach the glen,
Where we can catch the faint breath of the pines,
And with dim fancies bridge the "now" and "then"!

Come, let us see, reflected in the stream,
The slender birches gleaming 'gainst the dark;
So shall our hearts grow tender as we dream;
So shall our souls receive God's finger-mark!

Alice Garland Steele.

Jungle Test

By KENNETH PERKINS

Author of "The Blood Call," "The Beloved Brute," "The Bull-Dogger," etc.

CHAPTER XIII.

DIANE MAKES A FRIEND.

THE jungle which lay between Jamgad and Ganj was the main factor in the Rao's isolation from British political and social affairs. The Rao found it difficult to indulge himself in the social activities of which he was so fond. It is true that during the polo season he was one of the principal figures in the Madras matches, and he also entered several of his horses in the Skurry Stakes at Ootycamund. At this hill-station His Royal Highness was in the habit of giving a series of teas and tamashas for which, in Anglo-Indian society, he achieved considerable fame. But in his own feudatory state the Rao rarely had the opportunity to display his hospitality to Anglo-Indians, except, in very unusual instances, to some I. C. S.-Wallah, some member of the Public Works Department, or perhaps to a so-called "moffussil"—his designation for uninteresting up-country planters or missionaries.

Perhaps the fact that the Rao's principality was a backwater of civilization would not have troubled him personally—for some reasons he rather relished being out of a too direct surveillance on the part of the British Raj—but there was one aspect of his isolation which caused him regret. It concerned his daughter, Jinvalee.

The ranee Jinvalee was at all costs to be saved from a harem, or zenana. That was the Rao's greatest desire in life. But that salvation carried with it the necessary corollary that she could not marry a Hindu or Moslem. In order to be the single wife of her master, it followed that Jinvalee must marry a Britisher or some other supporter of a monogamous civilization.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for January 13.

The Rao came then to the definite resolution that Jinvalee should marry into the English nobility. To that end he desired to introduce her into the aristocracy of the vice-regal court at Delhi, and to let her meet the higher I. C. S. Britishers and their wives of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras.

The only trouble was that the little ranee Jinvalee had not as yet acquired the so-called poise of English ladies, and it was therefore the Rao's wish that she come into contact as much as possible with London-bred women. This contact with them, he resolved, should not be confined. A Hindu girl knows how to act in her own sphere—the zenana. But Jinvalee, the Rao determined, should meet and observe English ladies everywhere; in the presence of men, on the veranda, on the lawn, at the table. It was only thus that she could acquire the necessary occidental poise.

It was for this reason—his unsatisfied zest for British society—that the Rao looked with considerable pleasure on his present position, as the host of a "lost" sportsman, and of a "rescued" white woman.

He assigned a suite of rooms to each. Diane Herries was presented with six body-servants: a *matey*, two punkah-coolies, who instead of pulling a squeaky punkah used large peacock fans, and finally three maids, supposed to be well schooled in European manners and customs.

Dunboyne was assigned a *khitmatgar* and a *chuprassi*, in addition to his own servant, the guide, who, according to Indian custom, was supposed to stand behind his seat at table even when the master was dining out.

An elaborate dinner was ordered which His Royal Highness stipulated was to be conducted along strictly European lines. A Hindu *burrah khána* could scarcely be attended by a "miss-sahib."

Rules of caste made it impossible for any of the nobles to eat rice with these white people. In fact, the dinner that the Rao planned broke several very vital customs of his country and religion. First, a woman is not supposed to eat or even be seated in the presence of a man. Furthermore, in certain castes it is obligatory to eat nude. These rules were necessarily waived for the present, and in addition the Rao was guilty of a very novel and startling innovation: Jinvalee, his daughter, was invited to the feast!

"She is half European herself," His Royal Highness explained. "And such a dinner will appeal greatly to the occidental tastes which I have inculcated in her heart."

The Rao visited his daughter in her apartment a short while before the dinner in order to impart a few words of advice concerning how a young ranee should behave at a dinner where Europeans are present.

But there was something far more vital about to take place in Jinvalee's suite—an incident which changed the whole aspect of the dinner to one of somber and imminent tragedy. The dumb dwarf knew something about the two white "guests" and their servant which no one else in all Jamgad knew. He had been burning to tell the Rao the truth of the matter ever since he was bound and thrown into a howdah in the jungle. Now was his chance. While the Rao was casting his skilled eye in a last appraisement of his daughter's costume, the dwarf crawled between Jinvalee and her father, grunting and snorting.

"He wants to speak to you," Jinvalee said to her father. "He has something very important—something you must know before you give this dinner to your two white guests!"

As the Rao did not understand the dwarf's method of conversation—a language revealed only to the little ranee, his mistress—Jinvalee interpreted the sniffs, cries, wagging of his gnarled fingers and clapping of his hairy hands.

"I would like to know first on whose authority he went out on an expedition of abduction," the Rao demanded.

A long series of grunts on the part of the dwarf and an intertwining of his root-like arms and fingers, was interpreted by Jinvalee.

"He was on no authority but his own," the ranee explained. "He heard me ask once for a playmate—who would be a white girl. So, faithful *matey* that he is, he set out with coolies to find me one."

"Yes, yes, a very faithful *matey*," the Rao laughed. "And he shall be rewarded. You can come down and meet your playmate now. But leave this man-beast up here, as his appearance strikes terror into the heart of the memsahib."

The dwarf replied to this with a frantic dumbshow. He was so carried away in his fear that the Rao would not wait, that he grabbed him by the tail of his coat of gold cloth.

"He says you must know something about these two white people, the memsahib and the Englishman, before you give a dinner to them."

She paused to watch more of the finger language. "He says that in the dak-bungalow beyond the jungle where he found the memsahib there was also this man, whom you are making your guest. He heard people in the dak-bungalow talking, late in the night—after the memsahib was in bed. It was this white man he heard." A final rapid wringing of the hands on the part of the dwarf, a folding of the long hairy arms, and gutteral apelike sounds, then: "The memsahib and this white man are lovers!" Jinvalee cried. "They are betrothed."

The Rao burst out in a roar of heathen oaths. "Then they lied to me—both of them! And he—the son of pigs—the unclean—the Englishman! He dared to lie to me and pretend that he was a hunter lost in my jungle! I will torture him! I will destroy him! I will cast his bones beyond the gates of the city! I will—"

The Rao checked himself. It was not a usual occurrence for him to give way to rage. He preferred to vent his anger in a different way. He had learned that there were certain peculiar rules always observed by his paragon of manhood—the sporting hunter. One was to curb one's anger—or else to cloak it. The Rao in this case took a sportsman's view of the matter. He had accepted the word of liars, and been fooled. He would consider it a defeat—that is to say a preliminary and insignificant defeat. The sport could go on, on entirely different lines.

"Then the dinner cannot be given?" Jinvalee asked disappointedly.

"No, of course not!" the Rao said firmly. "A dinner given to these two lovers would be a ghastly parody—a masquerade with two lying white people sitting opposite to me! They would smirk with painted faces, pretending they are strangers, while at heart they drink deep drafts of love with their eyes!" Again the Rao found it necessary to remind himself that he was not taking a sportsman's view of the matter. He paused a moment.

"And yet," he thought, "if I am to make a sport of this, I can. It will be a true sport. The dinner will be all the more exciting. The two lovers will be forced to sit through the whole evening acting their parts. I also can act a part. I shall pretend that we know nothing of their love. I will play with them as a young tiger plays with a wounded jackal—as a cat plays with a bandicoot."

He turned to Jinvalee. "My beloved daughter," he said, "I shall sacrifice my own prejudices for your sake. I shall continue the dinner as it was planned at first so that you may observe the ways of the English memsahibs. At the Madras Sweepstakes next season you may be called upon to show your bringing up before English lords and ladies. But remember this during the evening; the white man and his betrothed have protested to me that they do not know each other—why I cannot imagine. But inasmuch as they are our guests it is impossible for us to question them. We will both act as if we had never discovered their perfidy from the finger tips of this dumb brute of yours."

Jinvalee regarded this as only a further evidence of the magnanimity of her royal parent, and accordingly she concluded decking herself out with paints, sindur and precious stones.

Having satisfied himself that the dwarf was safely locked up so that his untimely entrance would not take away the appetite of the white girl, the Rao left to join his guests. Jinvalee followed a moment later. But before she left her apartment, she quietly unlocked the door of the dwarf's room—an inveterate habit of hers whenever her pet had incurred the royal displeasure and consequently suffered incarceration.

The banquet table was set with carved chairs instead of mats upon which the guests ordinarily were invited to lie down or squat on their haunches while eating. Imported crockery and silver plates from Ajmer and Muradahad were used instead of the customary plantain leaves.

The dining room into which Dunboyne was ushered appeared to be some old sanctuary which had probably served the Rao's ancestors as a temple for devil-worship. The walls were of stone, thickly carved with Krishnas. Dunboyne was given to understand that there was no measuring the thickness of these walls for they were of solid granite—a part of the earth. The temple in which this supposedly European dinner was given, was in reality a cave hewed out of a giant stratum of rock. The life-size idols portrayed Krishna in many avatars; some showed him playing a fife and standing upon five serpents; others showed him lame; others in the act of stealing; others as a cowherd.

Although Dunboyne could see only two persons in the room besides himself—the fanbearer and his own servant—he felt, as the torches illumined the figures of these Krishnas as if he were surrounded by innumerable savage beings.

A moment after Dunboyne and his servant had been ushered into this sanctuary the Rao entered in company with Diane. Diane refused the offer of one of Jinvalee's Paris gowns and her costume still remained a simple white frock, silk stockings and pipe-clayed white shoes. Her hair, of course, had been dressed by one of her "Europeanized" maids.

From the expression of Diane's face Dunboyne could see that she was not yet fully aware of her danger. Her only inkling so far that they were actually prisoners of the Rao instead of his guests, had come in the jungle when Dunboyne pretended he had never seen Diane before. This, of course, gave her a very clear intimation of danger, but she did not as yet see that this danger was her own—she had thought at first that it was Dunboyne's. For her the dim room, heavily scented with myrrh and amber, flaring with torches, peopled with idols, and with this Hindu prince in the center, took on an aspect that thrilled her adventurous spirit without terrifying her.

The Rao, probably in deference to Dunboyne's besmeared and tattered whites, did not put on full evening dress for the occasion. It was certainly not a dress affair. The long tight fitting jacket which His Royal Highness wore resembled a frock coat except that it was of gold cloth and cut with skin tight sleeves. A tightly bound turban of green silk was surmounted by bird of paradise feathers and an emerald pendant hung down to the intersection of his black eyebrows.

Dunboyne and Diane, acting on the supposition that their first introduction had been in the jungle, chatted stiffly about the droughts and the expected break of the monsoon. Then the fourth member of the party was introduced.

"My daughter, Jinvalee," said His Royal Highness. "It is rarely she has the pleasure of dining with Europeans and we both consider this a long-wished-for opportunity."

Jinvalee, dressed partially after the manner of a nautch girl, wore a shimmering shawl of Punjab silk covering her waist, which if the nautch costume were carried out would have been bare. Her raven black hair was parted in the middle and combed down tightly, terminating in rosettes heavily jeweled with garnets. Red and yellow beryls from Ceylon contrasted with the deep red of these garnets, presenting an effect of bewitching brilliancy.

Jinvalee had learned that nose rings were a sign of barbarism, but that earrings were not. Why, she did not know. But out of respect for this curious European distinction her delicate nose remained unadorned, while fire opals—a brilliant outburst of them—hung from invisible ears. There was nothing particularly civilized about the picture of Jinvalee in this costume which she had learned was her most alluring. She was a little barbarian; there was no doubt about that, and of such a contrast to Diane Herries that the white girl seemed like a lily and the other a flame.

And yet when these two women looked into each other's eyes they knew that there was a ground common to both. For all the

outward difference there was a strong kinship between them. Both were young, both were beautiful, helpless, ravishing; both loved each other almost at sight.

When Diane was ushered to her seat at the right of Rao, Jinvalee of her own wish sat down in the chair next to her, curling her knees and bare jeweled feet, tailor fashion, underneath her.

"My father let's me act as the English ladies," she remarked, lighting a slender perfumed churuttu. "He gives me everything my heart desires. But it is really impossible to sit as you do."

"Everything within reason," the Rao corrected, "and truth to tell I allow her many things beyond. But at one point I draw the line. She actually begged me to take her into the jungle on this last hunting trip of mine! Fancy that! Perhaps you do not know that the respectability of a Hindu is measured by his success in keeping his womenkind under lock and key. When a man is too poor to segregate his women he loses the respect of his fellow countrymen."

Dunboyne turned to Jinvalee: "Do you mean that you really want to get out there into the jungle?" he asked incredulously.

"I want to kill a tiger of my own so that when I have visitors I can show them the skin and head and say: 'This tiger I shot on such a day with such and such a gun.' That is the way my father talks to his guests."

"It is my daughter's greatest passion," the Rao observed, "and I know her well enough to realize that some day she will have it fulfilled. As my counsellors have warned, the gods will punish me for freeing this girl. This emancipation of womenkind is a very delicate matter. We let them step out of the home where they belong and they want to go a step farther into the jungle!"

"Fascinating!" was Diane's comment.

"Since we are telling each other our desires," the Rao said, "may I ask what yours is? Perhaps I as the reigning prince of this little state may be able to grant it."

"Mine is to get out of India," Dunboyne said fervently.

The Rao still looked to Diane for her answer.

"To find my lover," she said.

"Your lover?" the Rao lifted his eyebrows, politely prompting her to go on.

"I telegraphed him to meet me," the girl continued. "We were to meet at Ganj. Then it was that I fell into the hands of these thags—"

"Whom I have ordered executed," the Rao put in.

"My lover did not come. It is two years now since I have seen him and there are many things for us to talk about. I am eager to talk with him."

"About what, for instance."

"I want to know if he really loves me as he swore he did when we bade each other good-by in London and he came out here to make his fortune."

"How could he help loving you?" the Rao asked.

"Yes, how could he help it?" Dunboyne added.

"My desire is very much like yours," the Rao said to Diane. "To meet my beloved, to take her in my arms and smother her with kisses, to let her hair, which should be of a glorious auburn, fall about my face so that the tresses would cool off my forehead like a breath of incense."

Diane and Dunboyne exchanged glances; the former whitened.

Jinvalee turned to Diane laughing. "Your hair is a beautiful auburn, isn't it?" she said naïvely. "Last time father said his favorite color was brunette."

As Jinvalee laughed Dunboyne masked his feelings by tossing off a goblet of wine. His hands clung trembling to the stem, the whites of his knuckles showing the tensity of his grip.

Diane collected herself and broke into a light laugh. "Then we have both been denied our desires," she laughed.

"Yes and for that reason it'll be so much more satisfying when we get what we want."

The dinner, although served in a strictly occidental fashion, was composed of many elaborate Indian courses: delicious curries and sambal, iced mangoes, salads with bits of purplish, cold meats, which Jinvalee announced were peacocks' tongues, and final-

ly pomegranates with a wine of such dark red as to seem almost black.

A distinctly European touch was added at the end when the two gentlemen remained for cheroots and coffee while Jinvalee accompanied Diane into an adjacent room.

When the two girls were seated upon the divan Jinvalee offered her guest one of her bamboo tipped cheroots, but Diane, immediately upon finding herself separated from the Rao, threw off her mask of nonchalance and grasped the hands of the little Hindu girl:

"I am in trouble," she said. "You can help me. Perhaps you do not know—no, you are too innocent, too lovely, to think of such things, but I am afraid."

"Afraid of what?" Jinvalee asked as a *khitmatgar* held up a tiny gold lamp for her cheroot. "Do not be afraid of this servant," she said. "He cannot understand English. Tell me everything. Confide in me."

"Yes, I will confide in you," Diane said hurriedly. "You are a lovely thing. There can be no evil in you. I feel it. I knew it when I first saw you."

"You are trembling. What has frightened you so?"

"First tell me this: what does the Rao do to men who oppose his love affairs?"

"His what?"

"I mean when he is in love with a woman and some one opposes him, what does he do?"

"No one ever opposes my father when he is in love."

"Ah!"

"Why?"

"But if some one did oppose him?"

"Well, I suppose he would say: 'Off with his head!'"

"An Englishman?"

"No, he does not cut off the heads of Englishmen. I think in that case he would find something else to do about it."

"Kill him?"

"Oh, of course! But I mean in a quieter way. My father has said that he does not like to interfere with the British Raj. The British Viceroy has more power than our gods, so they say. But why do you think of such things. You needn't be afraid of my father. He will do anything you say."

Diane drew her hand away suddenly and stood up, her face white, terrified. Jinvalee reached for her hands. "You are a very fortunate woman," she said, "and I am glad, for I love you."

"Why am I fortunate?"

"Why, don't you know? It is very easy to see the truth. No one has told me, but I can always solve such situations by watching people's eyes. My father loves you. He is going to make you his queen."

Diane suppressed a scream and put her hand to Jinvalee's lips.

"Can it be that you are not happy?" she asked. "Can it be that you do not love my father who is the Rao?"

This indeed was a circumstance considerably beyond the comprehension of little Jinvalee. Here was a woman who had found grace in the sight of the splendid, the perfect Rao of Jamgad. Jinvalee had never dreamed that there was a woman who could not love her father. "Don't you love him?" she asked with wide open eyes.

Diane did not answer, but she tightened her hold upon Jinvalee's hands as if she were the only support then in a storm of dreadful tribulation.

"Do you not fear him?" Jinvalee asked.

"Fear him?" Diane stiffened her lips, but as she felt her own strength revivifying her, her face brightened. "Why, of course, I don't fear him," she said resolutely.

"Ah!" Jinvalee cried with infinite disappointment. "Then you do not love him."

Diane looked up in bewilderment. "Why do you say that? What do you mean when you say love?"

"I thought that love was the same all over the earth. East and West are one when it comes to love. But I will tell you what we mean—we Hindu women—when we speak of it: first, we mean Krishna—Krishna, the God of Dreaming Maids. We have just come from the room which is adorned with hundreds of Krishna idols because it is a room of love. Beyond that I cannot understand much of what love means except fear of your lord and master.

That is the first and the last! That is the greatest part of love—fear of the husband and worship of him; prayers to him while he is absent and you are waiting in the zenana for his return at the end of day. That is the Hindu woman's idea of love, so they say. For my part I understand nothing of it except that Krishna is the God of Dreaming Maids. That is easily understood. The rest is for wives—not for me."

"Can you imagine, then, how terrible it would be in a zenana for a woman who does not fear her lord?"

"They all fear their lords. No woman likes a beating."

"But that is not love."

"Perhaps not. But they say it is akin to it."

"Can you imagine a woman imprisoned in a zenana, the slave of a man she does not love?"

"Yes, that would be different I admit."

"Can you imagine a woman who does not believe in Krishna?"

"Then it would be horrible to be given to a man," Jinvalee cried, lifting up her fragile jeweled hands.

"That is what is to happen to me!"

Jinvalee looked into the eyes of Diane and a light came to her face—a light in which was revealed all the horror of a dreaming maid awakening to some great new and dreadful truth. And Diane looked into the eyes of Jinvalee. The two illuminated each other. They saw into each other's heart.

In the room of the Krishna idols there had been during this conversation a subdued flow of talk between the Rao and his guest. Now, as Diane was clasped sobbing in Jinvalee's arms, there came a break. It was the crack of a gunshot—sharp, choked, concise, sinister—a deafening conclusion to the quiet modulated sounds of the evening.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE RAO SHOWS HIS HAND.

WHEN Jinvalee, in company with Diane, had left the dining room, the Rao and the Britisher lit their cheroots and sipped the small silver cups of anisette and coffee which a *khitmatgar* placed before them. The servant then stood behind the Rao, waving a large fan of roots intertwined with peacock feathers. Dunboyne's *shikari* meanwhile took a place behind his master, folded his arms and stared fixedly at the idols of the opposite wall. It would take a very interesting turn in the conversation, so it seemed, to disturb the Buddhistic placidity of that large strong mouth, that uplifted chin, those black calm eyes.

"There are many things of great interest to us both," the Rao said, "which we could talk about, but all of them would be like turning lanes leading to one inevitable conclusion. Would it not be better to broach immediately the subject which concerns us both so vitally, and thus avoid the suspense which is so nerve-racking?"

Dunboyne could well understand the purport of the Rao's words. He himself was indeed suffering in a torture of suspense. His masquerade as a stranger before Diane had shaken him. But even though it was a strain which he felt he could bear no longer he knew that his only move at present was to continue the same game.

"I cannot say that I understand just what you mean," he replied, evincing something of the perfect equanimity of the *shikari* standing behind his chair.

"Unpleasant as the point of my remarks is," the Rao said, "it is perhaps best that I come to it at once." He cleared his throat and puffed thoughtfully for a moment at his cheroot. "The fact is," he began, "I find myself in a very mortifying position. When I asked you upon our first meeting whether or not you were acquainted with this damsel, you answered no. And now, embarrassing as it is, the actions of the lady lead me to think that I may have misunderstood you.

"Will you pardon me, and refuse to regard it as an insult, if I ask you the same question again? Before you answer, let me state exactly why I should treat you, a guest and a member of the conquering race, in such an insolent manner—so insolent as to suggest that I might regard the answer you put to my question in the jungle as a lie."

The Rao paused. Dunboyne still sat with blue lips closed, his white face, like the face of his rigid servant, giving no sign of what was passing in his mind. The Rao noting this in his casual and polite glance, went on:

"My reason for making so important a point of this matter is this: if it is possible that you as a Britisher are acquainted with this woman, I could not risk the wrath of the British Government at Delhi if you brought to their attention the fact that this lady disappeared in my jungle, that she was seen in my palace and never heard of thereafter. If you wish to act as my guest and keep everything that you see in my kingdom a secret, then I will reward you—and give you safe conduct to the presidency beyond my borders. If, on the other hand, you do not feel justified in keeping in confidence what you see here I can naturally understand the danger of my position. You have a great and powerful empire behind you—the British. Now, of course, if you know this woman you will doubtless want to save her and our relations with each other will be greatly complicated.

"On the other hand, if you want to wash your hands of the whole matter, swear secrecy and be given a safe escort back to Ganj, I desire very much to hear you repeat what you told me in the jungle—that you are not acquainted with her, that you have never heard of her, that for all you know she is not an Englishwoman, but perhaps of some other white race, in short, that you deny her."

During this speech the *shikari* had been regarding one of the stone Krishnas with his continued inexorable stare. Not a muscle had moved to betray a single emotion. *Shikari* and Krishna might both have been of granite. But there was one emotion—a desire, or perhaps a hope—which surged through the *shikari's* tense frame: he wanted to see Dunboyne's face instead of the straight black hair on the top of his head. There was no telling from that cranium whether his master was calm or hysterical and the *shikari* desired very eagerly to find out. It was literally a matter of life or death.

He found out by Dunboyne's rejoinder, which was delivered in a manner surprising enough to make the servant shout with joy and laughter. But the servant did not shout. He did nothing—except evince a more vital interest than ever in one of Krishna's granite arms.

"Your remarks are so replete with dramatic possibilities," Dunboyne said, "that I cannot immediately put a stop to them by a brusque answer. Several points you mention present problems. Let me put myself in the position of a man who looks askance upon the abduction of a white girl and who admires the peculiar dispatch with which it was accomplished, accomplished so perfectly that the girl herself thinks you were saving her from thags instead of actually abducting her. Let me even go a step farther so as to put myself in the position of a man who might be her lover."

"By that method we can arrive at very satisfactory conclusions," the Rao agreed enthusiastically.

"Well, in the first place; you say that if I deny her and go back to a British presidency you would gladly let me go, giving me guides and an escort."

"Exactly."

An observer might have detected a slight parting of the *shikari's* lips at this juncture, but nothing further. Dunboyne hastened on:

"What would prevent me from immediately setting the Director of Central Intelligence upon your heels? What would prevent me from getting in touch with the Governor-General and bringing a regiment from the South Indian Army to destroy your city?"

"The word of a gentleman."

"Ridiculous."

This answer from Dunboyne brought a stir of surprise from the servants—with the exception of the *shikari*. His reaction, whatever it was, was perfectly masked.

"Everything would be fair," said Dunboyne, "since this hypothetical case would be a matter of both love and war."

"I consider it neither a matter of love nor of war, but a sport," the Rao said. "As a British sportsman would you go back on your word?"

"Yes."

"Well, I would not!" the Rao shot back. Then resuming his unctuous tone: "But with the fear that you might, I would protect myself."

"How?" The smile on Dunboyne's mouth curled with a timid suggestion of scorn.

"You would go free with this understanding—that in the event of your ever revealing what you have seen or heard here, this woman who is in my possession would immediately be gotten out of the way."

Dunboyne blanched. Half rising from his seat, he cried: "You may think a native prince under the jurisdiction of the British Raj could dare—"

"Dare to do such a thing?" the Rao interrupted. "No, not openly. Not by any means. That would be most foolhardy. I should, of course, protect myself and this would be the story: So far it most certainly appears that I saved the white woman from the thags. There are thags on the borders of my estate—Government knows that. I myself have given big donations to the presidency to help put a stop to their barbarous practices. I will say that they abducted the woman—that I saved her."

Dunboyne covered his sneer with a trembling hand, and the *shikari* who, apparently, had been holding his breath for a serious length of time, exhaled now in an audible, spasmodic puff.

The Rao went on:

"The story will then be given out that the girl was brought to my palace, that one of my *risaldars*, overcome by her beauty, attacked her with the misunderstanding that she could be treated as an unmarried Hindu woman. Then I would say that the girl, frightened beyond measure, cast herself from one of my parapets to her own destruction."

"A good story," Dunboyne said politely, "but does your Royal Highness think that the mere utterance of the story itself would be convincing?"

"No, your point is a good one. There would be of necessity a certain amount of proof—a little less than circumstantial—a little more than the word of a Hindu prince. I would, of course, say that I killed the *risaldar*."

"There would be a search for the woman," Dunboyne pointed out.

"Of course, there would. I would expect it and be prepared. The search would come in a few weeks and by that time, it is not unreasonable to suppose, I would be tired of the girl myself."

He caught Dunboyne's horrified look and then glanced above at the *shikari*. There was no horror—or any other emotion in the brown face. The *shikari* to all appearances could have been ignorant of the language in which the conversation was being carried on. "As I have said," the Rao went on, "this is not a matter of love or war, but a sport."

"Rather dreadful!"

"Yes, but it is only in the event of my hearing that the British were entering my domain in search of her. If they came they would not have to search long, for I would show them exactly where the girl had fallen. And perhaps it would be necessary to show the body of the girl herself at the foot of the parapet. The *risaldar* who would be supposed to have been killed—" He turned to the *khitmatgar*: "Where is this *risaldar*, Thapir Singh?"

Dunboyne arose and shoved back his chair. "You aren't going to—"

"Wait and I will show you how perfect will be the fabrication of this whole incident."

The Rao drew a revolver from the lower folds of his coat, made a remark or two about its balance, its make and its accuracy, twirled it and spun the cylinder, and then looked up at the entrance of a captain of the local army, a type designated by the British as the Rag Tag Irregulars. This was the man who had answered in response to his call. His huge six feet of bones and brawn was trembling from turban to toe.

"I wish to present the *risaldar* Thapir Singh," the Rao said. "His name was this day mentioned in connection with my daughter. He is an officer and a good horseman, and my daughter, Jinvalee, who has a weakness for such graces, fancied him. But this scurvy gentleman went too far. I am therefore to be pardoned for

what I am about to do. He will be a substantial exhibit in my defense should Government desire to try me or to ask embarrassing questions."

"Look here," Dunboyne cried hysterically, "you mean—"

"This is the gentleman whom we will designate as the person attacking the captive white woman."

The *risaldar* had now gotten an inkling of what was to be done. He screamed a few words and then fell forward groveling to a position of abject and fear-ridden abasement from which he never again lifted himself.

It was at this point that Jinvalee and Diane in the next room heard the sound of the revolver shot.

One person other than the Rao contemplated this execution with perfect Hindu tranquility: it was the *shikari* upon whom the event had scarcely any more outward effect than upon the surrounding inscrutable Krishnas.

CHAPTER XV.

A MASTER—AND A MAN.

HIS Royal Highness the Rao of Jamgad observed that the climax which had been reached in his conversation with Dunboyne was not a scene ordinarily pleasant to the eyes of women. Womenkind, he had learned in his studies in occidental culture, were possessed of inherent sensibilities easily shocked at the sight of death. Krishna was not the fount of life—in occidental eyes—but women themselves. The Rao considered it wise to bar the entrance of his daughter Jinvalee and the white girl, who, upon hearing the gunshot in the Krishna sanctuary, rushed terror-stricken to the door.

The door closed peremptorily in their faces while the *risaldar's* body was being taken away. The Rao then sent a servant with apologies to Diane Herries and the request that she wait a few moments with Jinvalee.

"I will be pleased to call for her then," said His Royal Highness. "But as for my daughter Jinvalee, she must be kept out of the scene altogether. Tell her to retire or amuse herself as she will."

He turned to Dunboyne who stood dazed, shaken, perfectly convinced now of the Rao's power.

"I am in your hands," the Britisher muttered, scarcely giving his words sufficient breath to be heard. "Do whatever you want. You can see how powerless I am. I myself realize it. You could have killed me instead of that *risaldar* and have had done with the whole horrible affair."

"Not exactly," the Rao corrected politely. "My best interests demand a different solution."

"You mean you actually *prefer* that I leave this place alive and go back to civilization?"

"Exactly. If you are the lover of the miss-sahib—which, I may remind you, you have not yet admitted—it would not do to peremptorily put a bullet into you. I have some regard for the girl's feelings. I might say that they are of considerable concern to me."

Dunboyne lifted his white face in perplexity. Then the full significance of the Rao's diabolical words came upon him.

"You don't mean you're going to make love to her—to actually try to win her?"

"Why not? Am I so unprepossessing?"

Dunboyne doubled his fist. The horror of facing this devil and listening to his smooth, calculating villainy overcame him. He would have leapt for the man's throat, but a hand grasped the tail of his white torn jacket. He turned and looked into the face of his own *shikari*.

"The hour is not yet at hand," the *shikari* whispered.

"To make myself perfectly clear," the Rao went on, "I am anxious not to let my position as a suitor become too complicated. If the girl's own lover is killed before her very eyes, it is not reasonable to suppose that the murderer would be very successful as a substitute. Though I remember having read in one of your English plays that your King Richard the Third made love to Anne under similar conditions. I should prefer to eliminate the girl's lover in a way more compatible with my desires. It would be much more convenient for me, if

she saw that her lover were unworthy of her. If he denied her in her presence—thus putting himself in the light of a coward, my subsequent course would be easier—and certainly more pleasant." The Rao turned to his *khitmatgar.* "Call the miss-sahib," he said.

"A brave man would prefer death," the *shikari* whispered to Dunboyne.

The Rao looked down in some surprise at the servant squatted at Dunboyne's feet.

"What did that silver-tongued louse say?"

"O Maha-Rao," the *shikari* replied, using that form of address which all Raos love. "A brave man would prefer death to forsaking his beloved at such an hour."

The Rao smiled and rubbed his hands. To call a Rao a Maha-Rao is like calling a rajah a maharajah or a second lieutenant a captain.

"I am glad you are the body-servant of a guest," the Rao remarked, "for otherwise I would have to kill you for your audacity. As it is, I will merely say that you are a very valiant *shikari*, particularly since you must realize that if your master were the lover of this woman you would be put to death with as much dispatch as he."

"A good servant will follow his master whither he wanders. From the present world into the jungle, from the jungle into Nirvanah!"

"Excellently said!" the Rao cried. "Pity it is you are not of a worthier caste. I would gladly employ you as my counsellor. As it is, I offer you a position now—in the event, of course, of your present master leaving this country. Let us say, you shall be my bodyguard and wear a *khilat!*"

"O Maha-Rao!" the *shikari* replied humbly. "My carcass is too vile to wear raiment which is the gift of a king of kings! Besides this I am in the employ of the Britisher who pays me nightly for my miserable services. *Adrushtam!* And that settles it!"

Whether this was settled or not, the entrance of Diane Herries put a stop to it. The Rao offered the pale, almost hysterical, girl a seat, then a glass of wine, both of which she refused.

"I have avoided thus far saying what I am about to say," the royal host began quietly, "thinking that the purport of my remarks might be displeasing to you—perhaps even distressing, particularly so to one just rescued in the jungle from thags. For that reason I waited until you should be refreshed with the repast we have just had together. Now, perhaps it is best that I tell you. According to the custom of our country a woman who meets a Rao in the jungle is considered sent to him by Krishna as a divine gift—a bride."

The Rao, seeing the girl blanch at this word, hurried to explain. "We might discuss that part later; for the present suffice it to say that it would be a flagrant breach of custom for me to send you back to the presidency from which you wandered into my jungle. You are, as it were, a bird caught in a net.

"The net is Hindu custom, which cannot be broken. I know this to be a truth from experience. I myself have tried to free my own daughter from this net, and I am told repeatedly by my counsellers as well as by my Brahmin priests that I shall be punished. In a word, my people are already dissatisfied with my conduct as an idol-breaker. Many laws I have transgressed, but this one I dare not. It is impossible for me to give you permission to return to Ganj."

"Then it is coming to that—after all!" Diane cried. "No, no! Let me go—I will find my way through the jungle alone. Let me go! I would rather die!"

"The gift of a god cannot be returned so carelessly. In fact, it cannot be returned at all except with the direst of consequences—a drought or a plague or a famine—all would be blamed upon my own act."

Diane staggered as if in a daze and then burst out hysterically: "What have I done that this horrible trap should be set for me? What am I to be punished for? You do not understand! I am not a gift! I am innocent of whatever I'm being punished for. I came to Ganj in search of my lover—what harm was there in that? Surely no girl could be punished for that!" She continued to sob, not knowing what she was saying, until suddenly her gaze met

Dunboyne. She collected herself, standing still for the first time, pale and quiet as death.

Her lover was there before her, his blue lips set and masking the tumult in his own soul. Involuntarily she held out her arms to him for his help, and then she saw a transformation come over him.

Outwardly Dunboyne remained as before—pale, inexorable, his forehead moist and shining, his lips ashen. But in Diane's own mind he had changed to a different man. She had a curious but compelling thought that perhaps she had made a mistake about this man's identity. He was only a counterpart of her lover, not the man she had met in London.

The Rao interrupted this mute and tragic drama by playing the final and greatest move of his game: "I have observed by your actions," he said, "as well as certain actions of this Englishman who is my guest, that there may after all be a relationship between you two which has been hidden from me. I asked this man if he had known you—that was when we three were in the jungle. He said you were strangers. I feel it would clear away certain doubts in my mind if I were to ask him the question a second time."

He turned to Dunboyne: "There is no tradition in my country which makes it obligatory for me to hold British hunters prisoners when they have been lost in my jungle. Therefore, if you wish, you may depart this very night. I will give you an escort of *sowars,* an elephant, a guide. They will take you in safety as far as Ganj. Needless to say if you are a lover of this beautiful woman, you will neither expect me to arrange your departure, nor will you wish it. Therefore, it will simplify the problem in which we are all now involved, if you tell me again that this woman is nothing to you—that you deny her."

There were only two courses for Dunboyne to take—a choice that outwardly seemed simple enough—either to deny or to claim her. In the end it would apparently make little difference to the girl which he chose. In either event it was not likely that the Rao would alter his intentions regarding Diane Herries. Of course, it would have been a comfort to the girl to know that he—Dunboyne—was there to fight the game to a finish, and on the other hand nothing could have made her tragedy more poignant than to learn at that moment that her lover was unworthy of her.

And yet Dunboyne was forced by the terrific emotional stress under which he was laboring to answer one definite way, and to answer almost without hesitation. Dunboyne felt that if he claimed her he would be opposing not only the bestial Rao, but the bestial idols behind him. He was numbed—numbed by the thick scented gloom, numbed by the drowsy incense, by the fear of Kaali, Siva, Brahma and the painted signs on the Krishnas' foreheads. The course he chose to follow was the one safest for himself.

"I tell you I do not know this woman," he said. "She is nothing to me. I am not a *darogah* from the Viceroy. I am a tobacco exporter and I have nothing to do with Government. As a guest of a Rao, I cannot interfere with the century old customs of this country, so that even if I desired to save this white woman I would not."

The *shikari* had thought this matter over in his own mind. He had withstood the effect of the incense mists as well as the terrifying aspect of the idols all about, and the conclusion he came to was perhaps more free from emotional stress. The *shikari* knew that Dunboyne's days—for that matter hours—were numbered if he claimed the girl. His only beneficial move would be to help the girl bear her tragedy whether it hastened his own death or not. It was for this reason that the *shikari* crept to his feet and whispered:

"Go to the Lovely One now; she needs you. She is of your race—and wants you. Go to her and woe be unto us, master and man!"

Dunboyne knocked the *shikari* aside. "I don't know her and I care nothing for her."

Diane Herries had recoiled as if under a blow. She put her trembling hand to her forehead and reeled in a swoon against which she could fight no longer. She did not fall to the ground. Instead a pair of strong arms encircled her and bore her limp

weight. They were not the arms of Dunboyne—nor of the Rao himself—but of the footling *shikari* who came to her in that moment when all hope—all help—had gone.

CHAPTER XVI.

A PROPHECY FULFILLED.

IN the rear of the palace court the servants' lines separated the more prepossessing parts of the royal gardens from the Keddah where the elephants were tethered. Here one of the Rao's mahouts, a Mohammedan by the name of Ali Jung, hobnobbed with such of the Hindu servants as were low caste enough to accept his friendship. The keepers of horses were by their trade so polluted that to eat Turkish paste and dates in the little house of Ali Jung made no material difference in their caste standing. Mohammedans and horses were alike in their defilement. One was no worse than the other.

The mahout's hovel was at one end of a long picketline of elephants. Ali Jung was a burly brute with a bushy beard and a fat head, shaved close except for one tuft, by which, he affirmed, the prophet would be enabled to pull him into Heaven. His hulking body seemed to occupy a half of the cubic space of his room. Two small horse-keepers, a dog, a mat and a lamp occupied the rest. In a corner was a niche—a *mihrad* which indicated the direction of Mecca to those who were godly. Ali Jung used this space as a repository for sweetmeats and tobacco. The smoking of *mukhzi,* "the shameful," was one of Ali Jung's many reprehensible deeds. He smoked it in a water-pipe in which his guests, the grooms, joined him with a complete disregard to both sanitation and religion.

To this disreputable trio of the lowest possible stratum of Indian society there came news of what was happening within the palace. The Rao was giving a feast to two members of the conquering race and to this feast he had actually invited his own daughter.

The Mohammedan and his two Hindu friends, although themselves unconscionable breakers of custom, were loud in their denunciation of their betters. The mahout could transgress his Moslem precepts by smoking and the two Hindu grooms could break their caste by eating with a Mohammedan, but when it actually came to their king inviting his daughter to eat food in the presence of two white people—that was most certainly a deed of shame.

"This princess should have been given in marriage long ago," the mahout cried, bringing his huge hairy fist down upon the dusty mat. "To be unmarried at her age is a shameful thing!"

"I have a daughter," one of the grooms remarked, "born in the same month of Aghan seventeen years ago. She has been married now for seven years and is never seen without vermilion on her forehead which denotes her respectable married state. And this Princess Jinvalee—what has she been doing these seven years I wonder?"

"Wondering whether she will be in the palace—even here among horses! Even into the presence of her father!"

"Tossing a little yellow feathered ball which looks like a newly-hatched chicken. They call it badminton!" Ali Jung snorted. "What lunacy! What exercise! What a waste of god-given energy. By Amr which is the Word! I cannot understand the Rao!"

"And she rides horses!" one of the grooms protested. "Think of a woman riding on the back of a horse! And without covering her face this princess rides!"

"By the beard of the Prophet," the mahout exclaimed, "by *ruh ulgudus* which is the holy spirit, by Iblis, who is the father of Satan, I cannot understand womenkind!"

"No one can tell what a woman will do if she is given freedom. But whoever dreamed a woman would ride horseback. It is the Rao who has done this!" The groom lowered his voice. "He so worships her that he will grant every wish. Some day the gods will bring him to account for this manner he has of laughing at them!"

It was at this point that the news came to the mahout's little hovel, that the Rao had summarily put one of the soldiers to death. The *risaldar,* Thapir Singh, who had

been Jinvalee's instructor in horsemanship, had been accused of making love to his pupil, had been summoned into the presence of the Rao, and there, before the Englishman and one or two servants, the Rao had put a bullet into him without question or ceremony.

"Thapir Singh was a good *risaldar*," the mahout observed. "It is an unjust death because the Rao should not have permitted his daughter to consort with a man to whom she was not married."

"The *risaldar* was a reputable man," said one of the grooms. "And a good horseman. Except that he insisted on my cleaning his horse's foul hoofs every night, which was very troublesome."

"He was most certainly a good man," said the other groom. "He had three sons. What more proof of worthiness does a good Hindu want? Yes, it was the Rao's fault. He will be punished for letting his daughter go here, there and everywhere, as she lists."

"He laughs at the gods and they will be avenged."

"*La ilaha illa-llaha!*" said the Mohammedan mahout. "There is no god but Allah! But he will punish this son of Iblis who is the king. A woman who is permitted to go unveiled into the presence of men, and act as men act, is an abomination forever."

"The king has done wrong!" one of the grooms whispered. "Let him beware of Kaali-ka! Let him beware of Siva the Destroyer!"

"No man can break a custom without incurring the wrath of his gods."

At the very time that these three miserable bickerers were prophesying that their several gods would punish the Rao for his extraordinary conduct, their prophecy was being fulfilled.

During the momentary confusion that attended the murder of the *risaldar* and Dunboyne's subsequent denial of his fiancée, one of the men in the Krishna room found it very convenient to slip out unnoticed. Diane Herries, who had fallen in a momentary faint, was taken from the arms of the *shikari* and carried by the Rao himself to a balcony above the Krishna room which overlooked the town. The Rao had snapped out an order to one of his servants.

The servant ran to the hut of Ali Jung, the mahout, and ordered him to prepare one of the tuskers for a jungle journey. Three mounted *sowars* were ordered to report in front of the *gopura* of idols which served as the gate of the palace. Dunboyne meanwhile, finding himself for the moment deserted, took a deep drink of some of the Rao's black wine, and waited. A calmness came over him, due to a feeling of enormous relief.

Disaster had come, and the confusion had seemed like the complete routing of an army after a battle. Outward events showed irrevocable disaster. But in that dungeon of despair, lost hope, wrecked lives, one man held a certain key:

The *shikari,* unnoticed, got up from his haunches.

He was no longer fawning. When he stood up, his athletic form was at once revealed. Surely enough his curly black hair showed that he was not a high-caste Hindu, but his sharp brown eyes betrayed a quickness and perception that was wanting in the holiest sects of Brahmin or Sivite.

When he slipped into the adjacent room, Jinvalee, who had been dismissed from the whole drama by the order of her father, saw him, and wondered at the change that had come over him. Her first explanation was that having so long been a servant among English hunters he had outgrown the humbler ways of the Hindu. She looked up at him surprised, amused, expectant.

The *shikari* looked down at her, opening wide his brown eyes in the manner of a man offering a child a surprise bag at Christmas:

"Do you want to go on a tiger hunt?" he said with an expression calculated to stimulate wonder and excitement.

Jinvalee broke into a silvery laugh. What nonsense was this! And yet what soul-thrilling nonsense! An invitation to a tiger hunt by a Britisher's hunting guide.

"You may think I am a lunatic," the *shikari* went on. "But it is not I that am inviting a princess to go into the jungle. I am lowly—and merely a hireling. My

master is the one who sends you this invitation. He heard your wish expressed at the table. He is a rich viscount, a British lord, and he desires to repay the hospitality your father has offered him by granting you the one wish he has always denied you."

"Tell him I think he is a very kind English sahib—and also that I think he is slightly moon-struck!"

"You mean that you will not go into the jungle and follow your desire? Into banyans where you hear the macaws laughing, where you see the Rhesus monkeys scampering about among the plantain trees, where in daytime it is like moonlight and at nighttime it is like Paradise? Do you mean you will refuse to come into the Garden of Eden?"

"My father would have my head cut off!"

"Not he! He would be angry—yes, for a day or two. But then he would laugh about it as a good joke. He is fond of Englishmen—particularly of viscounts—"

"Yes, I have heard him say he is fond of viscounts," Jinvalee responded. "But I would not dare, even though the jungle is a beautiful place—"

"With tigers!" the *chuprassi* whispered. "We have guns—big game guns. You can kill a tiger and bring its pelt home as a present for your father."

"Ah!" Jinvalee caught herself in the act of picturing this delightful episode: to bring a tiger skin back to her father!

"No! No!" she cried desperately. "I must stay here. The little miss-sahib is in sorrow. I want to go to her—and help her."

This nonplussed the *shikari* for a moment. Then: "Why do you want to remain with her? Your father will take care of her."

"'Yes, that is the trouble," Jinvalee answered readily. "She does not want to be taken care of by him. She wants him to forget her. I have sworn to myself that I will make him forget her."

"Good!" said the *shikari* as if he had completely won the argument. "This is the way to make your father forget her. Come into the jungle for a tiger hunt. We will return long before morning. You will not be going with me—a stranger and a servant—but with my master, an English nobleman who is the friend and guest of your father.

"In addition your own *sowars* will go into the jungle with you. It is all arranged. There is to be an elephant in front of the *gopura* in half an hour. One of your own mahouts will lead him along the jungle paths—Ali Jung, the Moslem, a very trustworthy man. Bribe him to let you hide in the howdah. Here is a bag of rupees for this purpose. He cannot refuse *dustoorie* bribes, particularly when you, who are a ranee, offer them!"

"It's all nonsense. Go away. I don't want to talk any more about it."

"It's for the sake of the little white girl who is in distress," the *shikari* continued insistently. "Your father will forget her to-night when he learns that you have disappeared. It will be a great blessing to her. You will be blessed among womenkind and your seed for many generations will be blessed for this good deed!"

"I could not bear my father's anger!"

"For the memsahib's sake. Yes, perhaps it would be too great a sacrifice—to incur the Rao's anger—"

"For her sake!" the little princess began. "No, no! You go away. I don't believe in this foolishness—and my father would never forgive me—"

"Unless you brought him a tiger skin and—"

The girl held up her hand. It was like a hand thrust out of a pool into the light and dripping with pearls.

The *shikari* stared. She, instead of speaking, met his gaze and saw a proud, canny light which she had never seen in the eyes of pariah servants or *shikaris*.

"Who are you?" she asked finally.

The *shikari* seemed to collect his thoughts. He rubbed his hands.

"I am—"

"You are not a *shikari* or a body-servant to that Englishman."

"Not exactly. But I am a hireling. He pays me ten rupees a day. If I fail in this errand, my occupation will be gone."

"A hireling?" the little ranee's nose wrinkled in disgust.

"Yes—a pariah."

"Please go away."

The *shikari* bowed himself out, having, without his customary ostentation, left the bag of rupees at the girl's jeweled feet.

When Dunboyne climbed into the howdah of the Earth-Shaker which the rajah had lent him as his transport from Jamgad, the mahout Ali Jung felt a certain elation mingled with fear. He had a bag of rupees tucked away in his *chudder,* the enveloping cloth peculiar to Moslems. This was the cause of his elation.

His fear was due to something less tangible; in a vague sort of way the burly mahout felt that perhaps there were some other gods besides Allah. At that very moment, he realized, the Rao's gods were punishing him for his habit of permitting his daughter to transgress the custom.

As Ali Jung stuck the ankus into the thigh of the Earth-Shaker, he said:

"On one point, Mohammedans and Hindus most certainly agree: a woman is an abomination forever!"

It was thus that the gods brought judgment upon the Rao, and the prophecy made by Ali Jung and his cronies, the grooms, was brought to pass.

CHAPTER XVII.

DESERTED!

THE Earth-Shaker was not one of the ordinary *dwasala* elephants which composed the bulk of the Rao's herd. He was a *kumiria,* a term applied by mahouts to the finest grade of tuskers—nine feet in height, big-headed, thick-skinned, strong of trunk, shrewd.

Dunboyne and his *shikari* sat in the shelf-like seat of the howdah under a muslin *chutree* which served as a canopy. The howdah was constructed firmly of sweet smelling kiabooca wood and fiber, affording shelter in the jungle from the tigers. A lantern held by the guide lighted the pale face and shaven jaw of Dunboyne. In front of the howdah sat Ali Jung, the mahout, his huge hairy legs thrust out so that the rag soles of his sandals almost reached the elephant's frontal lobe. Three *sowars,* mounted on Baluch ponies, led the way as the outfit started for the jungle. One of the horsemen carried a torch which cast the shadow of the huge rocking howdah against the façade of the palace.

A balcony bulged out from the façade, the balcony to which the Rao had taken Diane Herries. The scene of Dunboyne's withdrawal was full of significance for both. The Rao considered it a complete triumph. He had defeated Dunboyne unconditionally.

As far as he could imagine, there was no possibility of the Englishman's returning. The Rao watched the huge beast lumbering off, the three *sowars* opening up a lane in the crowded street, the torch pulsating with a smoky flame. These were details of a victorious scene. It had been a sport, partly a chess game, but more like a hunt. That hunting-howdah brought a smile to the Rao's handsome mouth.

"In it I have packed away the hindrance of my desire!" He turned to Diane: "It is a very satisfactory outcome."

Diane watched the howdah rocking like a little boat through that crowd of turbaned Hindus. The horror of her fate grew until it seemed more than she could bear. Her fate had not come upon her suddenly—it had come like the dark. It had crawled stealthily upon her, surrounding her on all sides before she realized it.

"He is a very reasonable young man," the Rao said gayly. "If he was your lover I admire your choice."

"Yes, he was my lover," Diane cried. "If you want to know the truth from my own lips I will confess it! He was my lover—and he is my lover now!"

"Now?" the Rao asked incredulously. "Can it be possible you do not understand the present situation? If he loves you and does not come back—"

"A lie! He will come back."

"Ah! Then you have faith—a very good thing! But let me show you the light. I entered into a simple compact with this Englishman whereby it was agreed that I would give him his life if he renounced you—"

"A compact!" the girl whitened with

anger. "You mean he treated this like a bargain?"

"A bargain, yes, or shall I say a gentleman's agreement? Of course, there was no money concerned. I pledged my faith—my word as a sportsman. He chose his own life as you see. The escort I have given him will accompany him to Ganj. Ali Jung is a very trustworthy mahout—when properly paid."

This stark announcement of Dunboyne's perfidy might have been the final stroke, powerful enough to break the girl's spirit. But there was one trait in her own character that saved her. Plunged as she was into the depths of despair at the news, she still clung doggedly to her faith in Dunboyne.

"He is not going to Ganj. He will come back," she cried desperately.

Diane ignored the Rao. She cared nothing for what he believed. She was really trying to convince herself of her lover's faithfulness. She even dared to hope that Dunboyne and the *shikari* were not really forsaking her; perhaps they were playing some trick on the Rao by going away. Surely they would come back.

"Yes!" she cried, "my lover will come back. Take my word for that. He will come before this dreadful night is over."

"A very commendable faith—perfect, inimitable! Would that my wives put such trust in me as you put in this man who"—the Rao dropped his voice to an unctuous whisper, "who under the pressure of adverse circumstances, has forsaken you!"

"You lie!" Diane burst out furiously. "He has not forsaken me. He would never forsake me!" Her screams were in pitifully futile contrast to the Rao's whisper. "When you say that, you are a beast and a liar!"

The Rao lifted up his hands in protest. It was then that Diane detected their perfume as her captor moved closer. She turned, covering her face. And the Rao standing directly behind her, pointed across the balustrade to the elephant moving down the crowded street of the city.

"Why should your lover come back to his death when I have given him the means of saving his life? It is a good elephant," he said almost purringly. "I gave one of my best. Your lover is safe in that howdah—one of my strongest hunting howdahs. See how it moves away into the night with the blessing of my people and my gods."

Diane opened her eyes, riveting them almost hypnotically upon the vanishing cortége. A little while later there was merely a dim flare of a torch which seemed to slowly burn out.

"Down the long unwinding road, through tope and rice khet they will ride! And then the hills and finally into the black smother of the jungle where the gods live and have their being. Thus my troubles vanish; thus the barriers to my desire are taken away in that howdah. May the jungle gods be merciful to this man who was your lover."

"May they be merciful to you!" Diane cried, turning about fiercely. "May they be merciful if there are gods in the jungle or in Heaven."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

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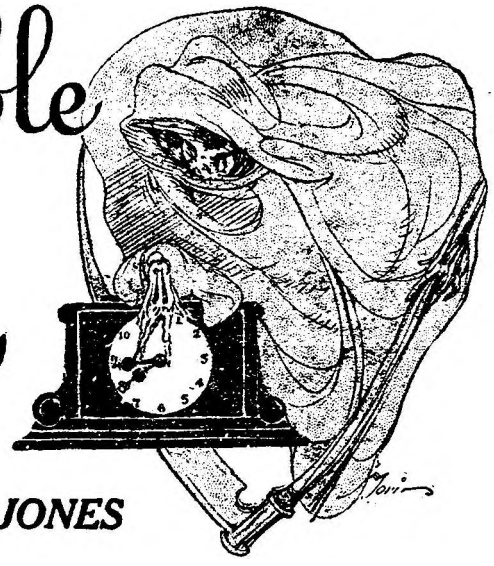
IF THOU BE WISE

IF thou be wise, make haste
To bargain well with Fate.
Ask much, but take whatever she may give
E'er yet too late.

He is a fool who thinks
To have without demand;
He also is a fool who spurns the gift
Within Fate's hand.

Lilian Nicholson.

The Marble Clock



By MARC EDMUND JONES

YOUNG George Rannenberg's elation was beyond concealment. He put down the phone and faced the girl again. "Gee, Mary!" he exclaimed. "Uncle Bill has sent for me; wants to see me to-night—about eight thirty. Gee!" He took a deep breath. "It's lucky I called the landlady for any messages."

"Your Uncle William Rannenberg, with all the money?" Mary queried.

"Yeh!" Then he remembered something, and rushed to slip an arm about her. His voice lowered. "Mary, if he decides to take me back in his good graces again, why, you and I can go right ahead and—and have our own little home right off—"

Unaccountably she pushed away, just slightly. Her glance traveled swiftly around the little parlor of her father's home. The wall paper, large flowered, was faded; and the pictures were cheap, prints and reproductions, many unframed. The piano, scratched, blistered by heat from the gas radiator, was littered with ephemeral sheet music, yet—

"I'd rather marry you for what you earn, George," she said.

He chuckled. "Uncle Bill's favor is not to be sneezed at."

But again she changed. "I'm afraid. I've got the strangest feeling—" She hesitated. "I've a premonition you shouldn't go."

"Nonsense! I'm going right up."

"It's—it's barely seven thirty." Her eyes were still troubled.

"If I'm a little early the old fellow will see how really interested I am. Besides, I want to walk, so as not to get too excited." He squeezed her arm. "It's over on Mount Vernon Place, and—and we can't afford to pass up a chance to inherit the money of a man who owns about a quarter of this city of Baltimore—can we?"

She shook her head, dutifully and very dubiously.

II.

THE winter moon was unusually bright, and the shadows were as sharp as the figures upon an Egyptian vase. The new Standard Oil Building stood white and ghostly against the lights of the old city; at its base the constant stream of automobiles gave the whole the appearance of an animated and illuminated model at some exhibition.

But to George it was reality, and hopes ran riot. He paused beneath the scaffold of a new tiny corner bank building, dodged through the traffic, strode up the narrow street to the little square where his uncle

lived. Here was contrast. The stately George Washington Monument dominated an aristocratic silence, for this was still one of the most exclusive sections of the Maryland city.

Most of the old homes had been remodeled into apartments, but there was still the brown stone and a sparing sprinkling of red brick, with bell and name plates and all the brass of letter boxes polished as highly as when colored labor was owned and not paid for by the hour and day.

Square in the shadow of the towering shaft was the apartment where William Rannenberg lived. All at once George paused, with recollection of his last visit to Mount Vernon Place. Between uncle and nephew had been much bad blood. It was just two years before that the old gentleman had closed the door upon his logical heir after a scene of threats with such upraised voices that the elderly and wealthy spinster tenant of the floor above had come down herself to investigate.

The feeling between the two branches of the Rannenberg family had dated back to the younger brother's marriage. The mother of George, with the spunk characteristic of the actress, refused the older brother's offers of assistance when George's father died soon after his birth. More than that, she so raised her son that when she died George in turn refused to suit his ambitions to his uncle's odd notions, and the little feud continued.

So the handsome vestibule of the brown stone house in the shadow was very familiar to George. In earliest babyhood he remembered it as the old Baltimore Rannenberg home. Now it was three ultramodern apartments, his uncle retaining the second floor. With his hundreds of visits to Mount Vernon Place in childhood and boyhood, it was strange that now this sense of distaste should come upon him.

And Mary had spoken of a distinct foreboding!

He shook off the mood. To summon his cheerfulness he began to whistle softly, "Tuck me to sleep in my old 'Tucky home."

He pushed the bell button vigorously. There was no answer.

His spirits sank, and the vague sense of fear returned to him. Then he remembered that his uncle's hearing had been failing two years before. It was possible— His glance traveled to the inner portal, and he noticed that it was ajar.

Without hesitation he pushed through and ran up the steps. There he stopped again, at his uncle's door.

It was strange to announce himself in this fashion, but he had been summoned. He knocked softly. No answer. He put his hand on the knob speculatively, and found that this door also was open.

He pushed in. The little hallway was unchanged after two years. The same pictures hung in the same places, and there was the little table with flowers—always William Rannenberg had flowers about. Ahead was the front room used by his uncle as living room and studio. There was a light. Closing the apartment door behind him, he pushed on in now without hesitation.

First to catch his eye, upon the mantelpiece squarely facing him, was the black marble clock. This brought a little reminiscent smile, for of itself the ugly timepiece, overlarge and as inartistic as the craft of man could make it, had caused the principal quarrel between his mother and her brother-in-law. She had remarked that no man with soul could own such a bit of furniture. William Rannenberg undoubtedly had kept it thereafter in sheer spite, placing it in its present prominent position.

Suddenly George remembered his errand. Where was his uncle? Why had the old gentleman sent for him? And even as these queries flitted across his mind there returned to him, redoubled and swiftly, the feeling of indefinable fear. Slowly his glance traveled to the floor. With a sharp intake of breath and a gasp he understood. There lay the body of his uncle, on its back, sprawled with one hand wide fingered in the broken bits of a glass vase—as if that had been a futile weapon.

The victim's coat was open, and on the vest an unmistakable spot. Nor was there any chance of overlooking the presence of death. On the tiny white Persian rug lay an appreciable little pool of red.

And then, in his second wild glance about the room, George noted the signs of violence. One chair was upturned, an electric lamp had been swept from the table and now swung oddly from its cord. The door into the bedroom and bath beyond stood open. While the further section of the apartment was lighted brilliantly, there were no signs nor sounds of life. All windows were closed, and in the air was the faint unmistakable reek of a cigarette which had burned itself out and scorched a furrow in the fine varnish of the mahogany center table.

The cigarette held George's attention for a moment, for his uncle did not smoke and had strongly objected to the habit in his nephew. But this cigarette had not been lighted by George. In another instant he waked to action.

Grasping a brass ornament from the mantel, one that would serve as a weapon, he hurried into the back rooms. But he was alone in the apartment. More, there were no indications of the mode of ingress and exit of the murderer. Probably the same door had admitted both visitors.

Another glance at his uncle, and the horror of the situation swept home to the nephew. And with horror came a trace of latent affection, a desire that the guilty person be caught at once and punished. He hurried to the telephone. The police must be called quickly.

Then he stopped and went ghastly white. He was alone in the apartment with the murdered man. Upon the occasion of his last visit there had been a violent quarrel. In the two years there had been some correspondence, and none of it affectionate. And as for motive—the police always searched for motives, he knew—he was his uncle's only heir.

Fright and an instinct for self-preservation succeeded every other thought and impulse. He turned and literally bolted from the place, stopping only to make sure that the apartment door was closed and locked. Not until he was blocks distant, striding aimlessly and torn between a wish to get as far away as possible and a desire to control himself so as to awaken no suspicion on the part of those people he passed, did a sudden recollection come to him.

His gloves! He had left them in the apartment.

Of course there was nothing to do but return, and he started at once to retrace his steps. Yet with every passing moment the seriousness of his situation grew upon him. Because he had walked from Mary's home he had left earlier than necessary, and between half an hour and three quarters had passed before he discovered the body. Now before he could return to her there would be a total lapse of time of much more than an hour, perhaps two—and not the slightest chance for an alibi or real sort of defense should he be suspected.

And then as he turned into the little square once more there came an appalling realization. When he left the apartment he had been very careful to lock the door.

How would he get back in?

Yet there was nothing to do but try. And fortune seemed to favor him. Once more the door downstairs had latched imperfectly, and he was admitted to the inner hall without trouble, without seeing or being seen by any one.

He stole up the stairs, trembling now. Could he break through as stout a door as the one that faced him? Could he do it noiselessly? He put his hand on the knob, and as he did so cold perspiration broke out all over him. Impelled by some impulse, he turned the knob, and to his amazement the door opened. Then he began to tremble with downright fright, for he remembered distinctly that he had sprung the catch.

Some one had been there—or was there at that moment!

Realization of his own danger again steeled his nerves, or perhaps it was the prospect of meeting the murderer, the intruder who had left this door open in the ten minutes of his absence. He stole into the hall without a sound, and noiselessly locked the door behind him. From the wall he took an old battered revolver, a fond keepsake belonging to his uncle; many years out of date, but a weapon as good as any fire-arm when used for the butt end only. Thus prepared, George Rannenberg stole toward the front room.

There was no sign of life, yet in the apartment was the intangible "feel" of some one else present. Cautious, he paused in the door to the room where the body lay. For some unknown reason, as he strained to hear any sound, the first object to intrude itself into the range of his vision was the black marble clock directly facing him, and for some other reason, equally unknown, the fact irritated him. As the mind will take quick momentary bypaths of thought, even in the face of danger, he felt that he understood at last why his mother had hated the eyesore.

The next instant he realized that he could hear nothing, that the room before him was empty, that he would have to cover the rest of the apartment quickly. Before him, on the table, were his gloves just as he had left them. His glance dropped to the floor, and then came realization of a startling and unbelievable fact.

The body was not there!

His first thought, when the faculty of thought after a fashion returned to him, was that William Rannenberg after all had not been dead. But that was impossible. He had seen the bullet wound and the blood. And there—on the carpet still—was the little pool. Yet the body—

All at once he saw that this was indisputable proof that some one had returned to the apartment in the short period he had been away. This person or persons had some reason for placing the body elsewhere. It was hardly possible that everything could be accomplished and the apartment again left deserted. Probably some one was still present, hiding—

He glanced down at his weapon, idly, preparatory to taking up the further search of the place. What he saw checked him. On his hand was a great smear of oil from the barrel and chamber of the old revolver. Why should this, an ornament, be oiled. His uncle had let it rust for years, he knew. Without realizing the thought that came to him he examined first the chamber and found that the weapon was loaded. Then he sniffed at the barrel and could not mistake the conclusion. The thing had been discharged, recently. It—possibly, probably—was the revolver used to kill his uncle.

He flushed and quickly grasped the weapon in proper fashion. If there was any one in the apartment—

At that moment there was the slightest of sounds behind him, and he understood rather than felt, expected rather than knew the quick sharp blow upon the back of his head. He lost consciousness even as he crumpled up.

III.

HAZILY he struggled for utterance—

"Mary! Mary! We—we'll have our little home, now—"

Another instant he saw that her form was only a figment of his dream, or had he been dreaming? And where was he?

Suddenly he remembered the situation. He glanced up and about wildly while he started to struggle weakly to his feet. And as if it were some uncanny sort of joke of fate the first object to register itself definitely within his range of vision was the black marble clock!

Even as he swore under his breath his hand, outstretched as he sought to preserve his balance in his weakened condition, struck something soft. Raising himself on his knees, he found there beside him again the body of his uncle—just exactly as it had been the first time he entered the apartment. And the bits of broken vase were there on the floor.

The shock of this discovery served as a stimulant; yet George felt his mind reel. Could it be possible that the body had been restored to its exact former position in the moments of his unconsciousness? This was unbelievable, yet the evidence of his senses—

All at once he realized that this was neither the time nor place for speculation. He must escape, at once, for suspicion must be avoided. Finding the revolver still in his hand he put it down on the table quickly. There lay his gloves still. He pocketed them. Then he thought of finger prints. Once more taking up the revolver he took his handkerchief to make sure no marks were left. The further thought came to replace the weapon in the hall. Starting out with that idea, hurrying toward the door with grim determination to

get away—perhaps even to fly from the city for safety's sake—and yielding more to his panic with every minute, he suddenly heard voices outside. The police? There was no formality on the part of these newcomers. Evidently a shoulder was applied, for the door burst in. He had barely more than a quick vision of several blue coats before he was seized and the revolver and handkerchief taken from him. One of the officers, a sergeant, strode in ahead; then returned and glanced at George carefully.

"You're Mr. Rannenberg's nephew," he said. "I remember you, from the time I was on this beat. Well"—a pause—"I arrest you for the murder of your uncle, Mr. William Rannenberg!"

Mary hurried to George the moment he was able to get a message to her, and the presence of the turnkey and the bars between them did not serve to stop the quality of womanly sympathy and the measure of hope she brought.

"Listen," she gasped finally, "I got daddy on the phone and he's been to see his younger brother—remember I told you my uncle was quite a famous detective before he left the police department and went into mercantile business with his wife's brothers—anyhow he's going to help us out, and he'll uncover the clews and the real criminal in no time at all."

"You—you don't think—"

"Goose!" she assured him.

The coroner's jury, however, lost no time in reaching a unanimous opinion that wilful murder had been committed. In the arraignment in the police court George was held without bail and bound over to the grand jury. The proceedings were perfunctory and prompt, proof of the strength of the indications of the guilt of the nephew of the murdered man.

Parr, the former detective, made no secret of the fact that he regarded the case as hopeless.

"Get a good lawyer," he counseled. "Get one that's handled criminal cases, that can pull the stopper and let the tears flow when sympathy is the proper thing, who knows all the technicalities there are when it's necessary to stand the jury on their ears and make them think in terms of the Einstein theory or anything else that helps them to forget all the indications are that you plugged the old fellow."

George flushed. "But I'm—"

"Of course you're innocent," soothed Parr. "Nevertheless if it wasn't for little Mary's faith in you, and that look she gets in her eyes—why damn it, the evidence would prove that John the Baptist amputated Salome's head, it's that strong."

"But it's all circumstantial!"

"Now you wouldn't expect a murderer to employ eyewitnesses, would you? Almost all murder evidence is circumstantial. That's why the third degree was invented."

"But I—"

"You left Mary's house at seven thirty, or a few moments before. You were arrested one or two minutes after nine o'clock. That's an hour and a half for which you cannot account in any way that any self-respecting court would let into the testimony as proof of anything. Not a soul did you talk to or see that can substantiate a word you say. And as for your story of the now-it's-here and now-it's-not here body; it's a good thing you didn't tell that to any one but Mary and me."

"It's the truth."

"Of course! But save it in case it's necessary to put in an insanity plea. And remember that you are, or were, or might be—whatever the will makes of you when they read it—the heir of the man you're supposed to have murdered. Remember that the last time you called on your uncle, two years ago, you made such a row that the woman up-stairs came down to see if any one was getting murdered, and that now the old man has been shot, it was this same up-stairs tenant who suspected something wrong and called the police."

"What—why did she suspect something wrong?"

"I don't know. Probably some one will ask her that in court. But that don't help the fact that she did and that you were caught with the weapon in your hand."

"But there must be some evidence, some clew left by the real criminal." George felt a growing sense of utter despair. "Isn't there always some little thing overlooked?"

"On the stage, and in stories. But here

there's a mass of real evidence against you. Take that cigarette that burned out on the table. It was the same kind you smoke, and in those sassy letters you wrote your uncle and which he wrote you—they've found all that correspondence—your uncle several times talks about your slavery to the cigarette habit—"

"How can they tell it's the same kind of a cigarette?"

"It's pretty sure. The police have a bright young fellow in the department who's read Sherlock Holmes, and he analyzed the ashes, and ashes from the brand you had in your pocket, and all the other known brands."

"Still that doesn't prove much."

"Except that, if you were really making peace with your uncle, you wouldn't smoke while you were with him in view of his tremendously strong objections to the habit. It won't help your story with an imaginative jury, and some jurors have powerful imaginations."

"Aren't there any finger prints there, or clews of that sort?"

"I went over every inch of woodwork with my glass, every bit of furniture. I did as thorough a job of print hunting as I've ever done."

"And—"

"The only finger marks I could find were on the telephone and on that brass ornament which you said you picked up as a weapon. These were yours, of course."

"The door knobs, perhaps—"

"Handled by too many people. I examined them, but—" A shrug.

"Then it looks—"

"It looks as through your only hope is Mary. I'll keep on the job, and, of course, something may turn up through a stool pigeon, or through the tips that often come to the police from the underworld. However—"

Parr looked at the younger man with an oddly quizzical expression.

"How do you mean, my only hope is Mary?"

Suddenly the detective changed. He put a hand on the other's shoulder, the softness in his own expression betraying his fondness for his niece.

"Young fellow," he said. "I've done my darndest to make you realize just how serious the evidence against you is. Nevertheless I've known Mary since I held her in one hand, she was that small, and I've never known her to be wrong when she's sure of something. And she's sure that she will find a clew that will get you out of this trouble."

"A premonition?" George suggested.

"Call it anything you want," snorted Parr. Then, good-humoredly, "she *knew* something was wrong about that telephone call to go see your uncle, and she *knows* you'll be out of this mess in a few days, she says."

And George believed.

Mary came with afternoon.

"Tell me everything that happened, all over again," she commanded. "Put in all the little details you can. Try to remember your impressions and feelings—everything."

He obeyed. When he had finished she sat, thoughtful for several moments. Then she faced him again, her expression puckered.

"It's strange that you should have noticed that black marble clock so much, George! I wonder"—hesitatingly—"could it mean anything?"

"What on earth could it mean! It's an ugly timepiece, an eyesore anywhere. A person could hardly help noticing it. Why, my mother was so irritated—"

Mary stopped him. "That isn't it. More than that, you were familiar with the clock, quite used to it. Think!" She put a soft little hand on his arm. "Think about the clock, dear!"

"How can I think about it?" He laughed in spite of himself. But suddenly, almost with the expression of the negation he sobered with an unexpected recollection. "I—I believe I remember something at that, Mary," he exclaimed.

"What?"—eagerly.

"Wait! Let me make sure!" Finally his eyes met hers. Under the spell of her insistence upon the little things the trivial incident loomed with vast importance. "Mary—" Yes, he was positive! "When I first went into the apartment and found

my uncle's body it was exactly eight twenty-five. That timepiece up on the mantel forced my attention and made me notice the time, only I didn't think about it before."

"Yes?"

"And when I came back to the apartment the clock forced my attention again and the time was"—he almost smiled, yet he remembered distinctly now there were no other things to carry his attention away—"the time was eight twenty exactly, or five minutes earlier than the time by the same clock fully ten minutes before."

"And—"

"When I returned to consciousness and the body was back in its place the clock was just exactly five minutes to nine, eight fifty-five, that is. I—I can close my eyes and see the face with the black marble frame just as clearly now for each of the three times as if I were going through the experience again."

Mary sprang to her feet. "That's the clew," she stated, with conviction. "The clock was fifteen minutes fast and whoever moved the body stopped to set the clock back. The reason for that is the clew to the murderer."

He took her hand. "You believe that I was not crazy; that the body of my uncle really was taken out and then returned?"

"Goose!" she exclaimed.

IV.

Parr came to see George the next morning, without Mary. "She'll not be to see you to-day," he said. "She's found it now."

"What do you mean?"

"The clew! It's just a case of a little hard work, and she's doing that herself and she's better at it than I would be. Just a few days, young fellow, and we'll have something."

"What—what is the clew?"

"She don't want you to know, any one to know until she follows it down. It's superstitious she is about that. But just a few days, young fellow!" Whereupon Parr left, supreme confidence in his bearing.

And it was two days, to be exact. On the morning of the second day they came, Mary in the lead.

"You're freed, George! And he's here, locked up already."

"Who?"

"The murderer, of course; and he's confessed and broken down, and—"

"Who is he, and why did he do it, and—tell me all about it!"

But they made him wait until the formalities of his release were over.

"He's a young fellow," Parr explained, starting the conversation, "looks something like you and very much like your uncle—no doubt in my mind but that he was your uncle's own boy."

"But uncle never married!"

"That's it! These illegitimate offspring are always a bad lot. This chap has quite a police record, reformatory twice as a schoolboy, a term in the State prison and a suspended sentence for forgery, besides a suspicious-looking acquittal in the killing of that waitress about two years ago."

"Still I don't understand—" George interrupted.

"It all has to do with the woman upstairs," Parr went on. "From the beginning that was the big hole in the State's case, as I saw it. She notified the police and they caught you, but the coroner told me privately that he estimated the time of your uncle's death at perhaps as much as an hour before you were captured, possibly two hours. She stated that she heard a slight commotion, and then a cry; whereupon she telephoned the police. But what could the commotion be, and if the coroner was right why did you hang around so long, and with the pistol in your hand, too? So the first thing I did, without a word to any one, even Mary, was to put a shadow on her. But that only helped in the solution. It was Mary—"

"But why," George interrupted, "did this—this son of my uncle kill him?"

"Goose!" Mary, somehow, was very happy. "For his money, of course. It was all a plot to put you out of the way as the only other heir, then to claim the property."

Parr leaned on the table. "There was much hard feeling. Your uncle wouldn't

acknowledge his son, I imagine, because the boy was so utterly worthless. I think the woman was able to force him to do many things. From all I hear of his cranky disposition this past twenty odd years, there must have been some raw sore in his private life. But undoubtedly he drew the line at admitting the relationship, although he allowed the woman in the apartment; in fact, so she says, he remodeled the house into the apartments so he could do that. She's under arrest as an accessory, and all that will come out."

"But how"—George was bewildered—"how did you get the clew to all this?"

"Mary really did it," Parr stated proudly.

"It was the black marble clock," she explained, "and the change in time. You see, there was a definite plot to get you out of the way and your uncle at the same time. This ex-convict and his precious mother"—her voice hardened—"they made very careful plans. You were to call at a certain time and you would have been admitted by the push-button and the electric latch the way it was planned. But you came early and surprised them. You came in and left while the murderer was up to see the woman just for a moment. It never occurred to him that you would come early."

"And he moved the body—"

"He thought you had gone for the police. He wanted to make your story contradict itself in its details. His mother was on the lookout upstairs so he would not be caught."

"Then when I came back for my gloves—"

"He saw his chance and knocked you unconscious. He was afraid you might leave again and had decided, when he saw you return, to go ahead with the original plot. He brought the body back from the bathroom where he had taken it. His mother telephoned the police."

But George still was bewildered. "I don't understand yet how you got on the trail of all this, or what clew—was it the shadowing of the woman upstairs?"

"Only partly," Parr explained. "That helped."

"It was the change in time, setting the clock back," Mary hastened to add. "You see, there was the chance that the relationship of this son to the murdered man might leak out. He had prepared a very careful alibi. Your coming early; then your going away and coming back, together with all that happened, cost him more time than he had anticipated. And on top of all he noticed that the black marble clock was fifteen minutes fast. If the police, by any chance, should go by that time he saw that his alibi would be destroyed. So he stopped to set it back."

"But that don't tell me what clew started you upon the discovery of all this," George protested.

"Oh!" Mary laughed, glancing at Parr. "The minute-hand of the clock was the only place this wonderful detective failed to look for fingerprints."

"And only a girl in love," Parr added, admiringly, "would have the patience to go through the rogues' gallery with nothing but a tiny pie-shaped section of a forefinger print to work from."

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JOYOUS GHOSTS

THE meadow is a milky way
More brilliant than the sky.
After the white glare of the day
The meadow is a milky way,
Each daisy's soul released for play
Becomes a fire-fly;
The meadow is a milky way
More brilliant than the sky.

Thomas Grant Springer.

Good Looking and Rich

By EDGAR FRANKLIN

Author of "A Noise in Newboro," "Regular People," "Whatever She Wants," etc.

CHAPTER XIV (*continued*).

CHANGE OF VENUE.

DISTANTLY low voices held converse for perhaps a minute. Then the heavy stillness settled down again.

"Nothing of importance, apparently," the tutor said. "Now, as to the—"

"Yes, Link?" queried Mr. Harley. "What is it?"

"I beg pardon for interrupting again," came the butler's queer monotone, "but the impression seems to have gone abroad that Mr. Alderson has returned. That was the grocer's man, sir."

Wolcott frowned more heavily this time.

"Don't ever bother us about ordering groceries, or anything of that sort, Link!" he said, testily. "We leave all that to you, you know. Order what you like, when you like!"

"Thank you, sir, but this is not about ordering, sir," sighed the man. "This is about paying for what Mr. Alderson had me order some time ago."

"A bill?" snapped John.

"A matter of seventy dollars, sir, if you please. The man sent word that nothing more would be delivered until it was paid."

"Well, say!" began Mr. Harley, with considerable force. "It's all right in one way, of course, but this thing of coming across with seventy dollars every few minutes is too much—"

"Wait, Jack! Wait!" Wolcott commanded. "One has to do this kind of thing occasionally. The bill is—er—quite all right, Link?"

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for December 30.

"Oh, quite, sir. It's been overdue for a matter of—"

"Pay it, John!" directed the new Wolcott.

"But why should we—"

"I wish you'd pay it, Jack," smiled Mr. Wolcott, with a calm that was positively ominous.

He maintained the forced smile until the butler had departed with his newest contribution; then:

"Jack, I think it's rather bad policy to whimper over little things like that. With a fellow of Alderson's stamp there are bound to be a few such trifles, you know. Just in ordinary decency we'll have to settle them and say nothing. He was pretty nice."

"He was—but he wasn't nice enough to warrant a hundred and forty dollars expenditure in ten minutes for bills we never contracted," John said grimly. "You're not getting the delusion of great wealth, are you?"

Wolcott looked rather startled.

"Odd that you should have put it that way," he smiled. "No, I'm not, Jack, but I am getting the feel of money since we've been here. It's mighty curious; nothing quite like it ever happened to me before. But all this luxury seems to be working into my blood. I've been wondering this last few minutes, whether I'm not an ass to tutor those kids for anything like five dollars an hour?"

"Eh?"

"Fact! I'm not falling in love with myself, you know, but I *am* one of the few who can jam young defectives like these into a helpless college. Be an absolute tragedy to their several families if they fail to make the grade, too—it always is. Now, since I'm virtually certain of putting them through, it might be just as well to triple the rates, guarantee results and stand pat on that. Take it or leave it, you know!" concluded Mr. Wolcott, very earnestly. "What do you think?"

Mr. Harley shook his head.

"Well, if that's the effect that fifty yards of velvet and tapestry and a couple of bales of rugs have on you, I think you'd better get back to Ebbridge Inn, Harry, where the furniture is purest golden oak and the only hangings are neat net curtains at the windows."

"No, but that's all wrong, you know," the tutor rejoined soberly. "It's just that golden-oak-and-net simplicity and conservatism that cramp and dwarf and retard one and knock out all idea of proportion and progress, Jack. For the last year or two, I've suspected that very frequently, but since we've come into this little nest of Alderson's I've stopped suspecting it."

"Ah?" sighed Harley.

"I *know* it now!" proclaimed Wolcott. "And I think it would be a mighty good idea to adopt as a fundamental principle that—well, what under the sun is the matter this time, Link? The butcher?"

The butler's own eye was dark with annoyance.

"No, sir—and asking pardon again, believe me, sir!—it is not the butcher. I may say, sir, that I wish it was, as we owe him only a matter of eight dollars and forty cents. I'm very sorry to trouble you, but Murkin insisted that I take up the matter at once or—"

"Who's Murkin?" John snapped.

"The agent of the building, Mr. Harley. This is—ah—in regard to the rent of the apartment."

"Not paid, eh?"

"No, sir."

"Seventy dollars, of course?"

"One hundred and seventy, if you please, sir," sighed the butler. "This'll be last month's rent, by the way, sir."

Mr. Harley faced him steadily.

"Will it? Well, you go back and tell your friend Murkin that there is absolutely nothing doing! We're paying our own bills—not all that Alderson has been contracting for the past year."

"Thank you, sir," said the butler, with a bow. "I understood, sir, from Mr. Alderson's note—his statement that you were taking over the joys and the responsibilities, as he put it—that in the—"

Wolcott, possibly, had submerged for a few seconds in the face of the last demand. Possibly he had not. At all events, he was on the surface again now and riding with graceful dignity.

"Ah—Link," he said, with the peculiar new assurance, "should we not feel inclined to meet this demand, what then?"

"Murkin insists upon immediate possession of the apartment, sir."

"We'll pay it!" concluded Mr. Wolcott. "Will you attend to it, Jack?"

"You mean, you want me to come across for this holdup, too?"

"If you please!"

"It's your money," Mr. Harley said gruffly, and tossed the billfold to him. "Sixty of that belongs to me, by the way. Please remember that it's not payable on demand to any—"

"We'll adjust that in a moment, old fellow," Wolcott smiled quietly.

When Link had departed again, he found Mr. Harley eying him hotly.

"You've gone crazy, you know!" that gentleman said, with simple directness. "There was no more sense in—"

"One moment!" smiled Mr. Wolcott, and rose and stepped to his side by way of making his remarks a little more impressive. "There's something about this shift, out of Ebbridge and into this, that you don't get yet, Jack. I do. It was predestined. It's a definite change in more than the merely physical sense. I'm not raving, by the way. Once in a while I *feel* these things and—no, there's no use trying to describe it. But I've never yet gone wrong on one of these little intuitions, Jack. I—I feel that I'm finding myself!"

"Potter fired me so I could do that!" John remarked bitterly.

"Don't brood over it. The thing happened and it was for the best! I *know*—oh, bosh! I can't say what I have to say with you sitting there and glaring like that!" Mr. Wolcott proclaimed impatiently. "But do try to grasp this much, old man, and I'm dead sure you'll find I'm right: we've moved ahead in making this change! We'll keep on moving ahead!"

John Harley ran his fingers through his thick hair and smiled somewhat sadly.

"I hope so," he said. "If I had ever realized how a few little decorations can stimulate you, we'd have had the old suite rigged up like the Sultan's palace long ago. Suppose we drop the New Thought stuff now and get down to brass tacks? I've been waiting some time to talk over my own troubles with you, Harry."

The tutor smiled serenely. Erect, he expanded his chest and, having expanded it, slapped it with his fine, strong hands. He had never done that before in John's presence.

"That's the one thing we're going to drop, absolutely and completely, for the rest of this day and evening," he stated. "We're both out of focus as regards that little bother, Jack. Instead, we'll do this: dinner—a good, light show of some kind—bed! And, meanwhile, not one word of anything we've been discussing. In the morning we'll get up at eight; and after breakfast—"

"Well?"

Mr. Wolcott laid his hand on Mr. Harley's shoulder and smiled with the supreme confidence of a man who has, indeed, at last found himself.

"By that time I'll have the answer, Jack," he said, in the tone of one who states the merest foregone conclusion.

CHAPTER XV.

THE NEWER LIFE.

BREAKFAST was over.

It had followed a night of surpassing peace—an excellent dinner, an excellent comedy, an excellent bed, with never a single jingle from the telephone—and as a matter of actual fact, John Harley did feel a good deal better. The pain that was the memory of Helen Stevens as she had walked away from him gnawed on and on, just at it must always gnaw; but it seemed a long time since any blond little Millie had ordered him to come and see her, since any dark Althea had flashed that maddening look of proprietorship at him. His head was correspondingly the clearer.

The uncanny change in Wolcott had abated not a particle. Last night he had sat and rocked with laughter over somewhat frail jokes, just like any ordinary mortal. This morning, clean-shaven, alert of eye, he looked the self-confident man of real affairs. Watching him covertly across

the breakfast table, new strength came to John, too. The basic Harry Wolcott was too steady and too sincere to look like that without cause. He had the answer!

He was positively kittenish about revealing it, too.

Twice during the meal John had suggested the great disclosure, each time to be waved away quite amusedly with the observation that the wise man never tries to mix soft food with hard thought. Now the last mouthful had been disposed of, however, and Mr. Wolcott, having borrowed a cigarette and remarked that he must buy some of his own this morning, sat back and grinned comfortably.

"Getting quite peevish, eh?" he mused.

"No, but—"

"Anxious. Of course," the tutor agreed with a tolerant smile. "Well, I have it, Jack!"

His voice grew tense. He pointed quite a hypnotic finger at Mr. Harley.

"*Money!*"

"What about it?"

"It's your solution!"

"I don't see it."

"That's because you're still too confused," and Wolcott looked about the snug dining room, which was mainly overwhelming near-Italian furniture tightly packed with furlongs of red velvet. "I'm not! I think my head's clearer now than it's ever been before in my life! It's astonishing! It astonishes me, anyway. If I'd ever collided with a rich little nest like this ten years ago, I'd be worth a million dollars now, Jack!"

"Possibly. And having analyzed your own sensations, what about me?"

There was an element of strained patience in Wolcott's smile now.

"Hang it! Why don't you use your own head?" he asked. "Listen! The thing that brought your aunt back to something like health was her happiness over your inheritance? Granted! The inheritance never existed. *But*—if you had plenty of money—I don't mean a few thousands, I mean hundreds of thousands!—it would be quite unnecessary for your aunt ever to know that you hadn't inherited the fortune. I mean to say that you'd be able to keep up all the appearances of great wealth, *because* you actually had it!"

"Doubtless. But when a man has two girls—"

"Jack! *Please!* Just for a minute, let *me* talk, will you? Assume that you are fairly wealthy. The benefit to your aunt remains. You go to her and, in a frank, manly way, explain that you actually do not love this Ames girl and that marriage would mean misery to both of you. You do it properly—and it's a thousand to one bet that your aunt will take it calmly and understand. After all, she desires your happiness. So! The most important part of it is out of the way, and you go to Miss Ames and explain the same thing."

"Pleasant idea!" observed Mr. Harley.

"Well, if you're going to get yourself engaged to every girl in sight, something of the kind is unavoidable!" Wolcott rapped out. "There is no absolutely painless way of undoing your tangle, you know. I suppose you *have* stamina enough to break the news to Miss Ames, so that it doesn't injure your aunt?"

"Yes."

"Do the same with the Wicks girl!"

"And her father—"

"Cannot injure you, because you're already wealthy and your money is tied up so securely that he can't reach even that! Then you get the girl you're really in love with, make her listen to reason and—I think it might be a good scheme to be called to Australia for a year or so. Are there any flaws in that reasoning?"

Exuberant gratitude should have been upon Mr. Harley's countenance doubtless; in point of fact, there was only disgust and disappointment.

"None!" he said grimly. "With half a million or so, it might possibly be feasible. Only where the devil does the half million—"

"We make it!" Wolcott interrupted.

"Oh!" John said blankly. "Just like that, eh?"

"Essentially, just like that. May I become a bit personal? You tried your hand at speculating a little while ago and the results were disastrous. Why?"

"I guessed wrong."

"That, probably, had less to do with it than anything else," said the remarkable Wolcott. "It was because you approached the thing with a timidity so tremendous that you couldn't possibly have won. You were afraid to take anything even resembling a real chance—and so you lost! That, I think, is incontestable. Now! Face about! Remember that you're a he-man and that nothing can lick you unless you let it, and *take a chance!*"

Better judgment, common sense, cold sanity and all the rest notwithstanding, there was something extraordinarily convincing about Wolcott this morning.

When he raised his voice with that blunt, declamatory effect and pounded out his words with a clenched fist upon the table until the cups and plates did a little dance, one could not fail to feel the force of him. Inside John Harley something eager stirred.

"Well? Go on!" he said hoarsely.

"Jack, you have about four thousand dollars, I believe," said the tutor. "I have about three—that makes seven, which is quite a mystic number to start with. I know a fellow in Wall Street named Saunders; he's a silent member of Bridger & Mott, which vouches for him, and he has as much real dope on the market as any man in the city. He's a gambler and he wins, steadily. He'll give *me* information!" Here Mr. Wolcott paused impressively. "Are you game to take your last cent and play the longest chance on the market that Saunders approves? I am!"

"All—everything on just one stock?" faltered the remnant of reason that remained to John.

"Absolutely—and double it! And play that again to the final penny—and double it! And play *that* in turn and double it, and so on until we have all we need!"

Mr. Wolcott smiled, calmly and assuredly as if the whole thing were already accomplished fact. Second after second, they eyed one another steadily—and then, with a bound, John was out of his chair and holding out his hand.

"Confound it! I believe you're right!" he cried. "I'm on!"

Wolcott went so far as to yawn as he pushed back his chair.

"Let's draw checks and get 'em certified and then go down to see Saunders," he said. "I want action!"

Intermittently, in the hurrying hour that followed, sinister and prophetic visions of this Saunders person flashed through the darker recesses of John's mind. He would be a small person, not too well dressed, with a roving eye and a characteristically blatant assurance who would give them the only real inside tip on—the Lord alone knew what shaky proposition.

It was a distant relief, then, to find Saunders a large, quiet, well-groomed individual, comfortably settled in offices which breathed the firm's solidity. He leaned back smoking a thick cigar, and listened to Mr. Wolcott, nodding now and then. He considered the ceiling for a moment and then, picking up his phone, exchanged a word or two with some mysterious being elsewhere in the office. After which:

"You want to start all this excitement to-day, Harry?"

"We brought a little cash for the purpose."

"Margins?"

"Yep!" said Mr. Wolcott.

Saunders leaned forward earnestly, his quiet smile upon the tutor.

"I believe you've picked a good time. There is a certain traction proposition that ought to begin boiling about eleven o'clock, if things are played according to Hoyle—and they will be. Universal Electric and Power. Know it at all?"

"No."

"Take it on faith, then. Play that!"

Without a single tremor, Mr. Wolcott produced his wallet and shoved two checks across the desk.

"Will you attend to it, Jim?" he said simply.

Thus, without excitement, without one annoying detail, were they launched on the great voyage to riches.

There are many men who, having placed their dollars in more or less speculative issues, can sit back comfortably and watch the blackboard or drape themselves over the ticker and, all unemotionally, follow their fortune. They are, in the main, gentlemen hardened by experience.

Neither Wolcott nor John Harley was at all hardened. The former, to be sure, did suggest loitering around the offices for a while, but it was a half-hearted suggestion not taken seriously by either of them. They made for the outer seethe of the great city and strolled on aimlessly.

"I think," Mr. Harley hazarded after a time, "that I might about as well be hunting a job while all this is happening. Norford was looking for a man last week—I'll swear that's the only opening worth while in our line that I've heard of for six months. We'll just drop in on Norford for a minute and—"

"Jack!" and Mr. Wolcott's lips curled contempt. "Wait until two o'clock, will you?"

"What for?"

"About that time, old man, you'll have forgotten that you ever thought you needed a fool job!"

"Say, do you *really* believe that?" John cried as a spasm of nervousness swept over him. "I—I mean, on the level, Harry? You haven't just gone crazy and swept me along with you, have you? So that we're likely to wake up suddenly and find—"

"Oh, my dear fellow! My dear, dear fellow!" Wolcott said sadly and patted his arm. "What a timorous soul you are, after all, aren't you?"

There was something of the bewildered and frightened child about Mr. Harley as he looked at his old friend, walking along so jauntily, head up, radiating satisfaction with the world.

"I—I—yes, I suppose I am!" he muttered.

They lunched in a queer little cellar, where Wolcott grew enthusiastic over the old, dust-covered steins on the walls and spent a full twenty minutes amiably discussing with the queer, soured little proprietor the decadence of things in general. This, that is to say, was the theme of the proprietor; the new Wolcott radiated sunshine and hope until toward the end the little man grew quite cheerful in his outlook.

It was more than John seemed able to grow. Noon was long past and they were quite ignoring the fate of all the money they possessed in the world. He found himself growing cooler and cooler as they strolled on again to the Battery. Mr. Wolcott, leaning against a stone pillar of the chain railing, only smiled at the harbor traffic for a time until:

"Let's do a little planning!" he said suddenly.

"On what?"

"On our profits, my boy," said the tutor. "We'll not sell out for a day or two, I judge, from what Saunders said. By that time, also according to what he stated as we were leaving, we should have doubled our capital. Shall we play it all again, or shall we make a little concession to conservatism, and put aside what we invested originally?"

"Let's do that!" Harley decided quickly.

"Very well. We will. And here's another point we'll stick to in our further operations; we'll never let a dollar stand still long enough to cool off!"

"No—only, some of them we'll take and anchor, Harry!" John cried. "Put 'em down deep somewhere, so they can't escape! I'll tell you! Let's always take half of what we make and put it into government bonds, Harry. I always feel sort of safe about money that's in United States bonds. We—we—we might even take more than half. Eh?"

Mr. Wolcott, lips parted for further speech, changed his mind. His complacent smile turned to a sneer and he shrugged his shoulders.

"You're not just attuned to this kind of talk at present," he said. "Let's go back toward Saunders's office."

The hour lacked something of two o'clock as they entered, Mr. Wolcott whistling softly to himself, Mr. Harley with white lips pressed close together and the strangest, most hunted look in his eyes. Saunders himself received them immediately, and John searched his face. Trained to immobility, it gave him no information whatever.

In fact, Mr. Saunders's lips did not seem inclined to give much more information during those first minutes. He smoked steadily, shuffled through papers on his desk and finally sat back.

"You're here after news?" he smiled slightly.

"Got some, eh?" Wolcott's jaunty tone inquired.

"Some—yes," the other confessed. "The —ah—Universal people held a directors' meeting last evening. All the big stockholders were represented, in fact. I hadn't heard a rumor of that. The session must have lasted nearly all night, Harry."

"Ah?" Mr. Wolcott said indifferently as he opened the pretty cigarette case he had purchased and selected a smoke.

"Word of it got here about an hour after your order was in," Mr. Saunders pursued, and avoided the other's eye. "I hate like sin to say it, Harry, because I don't miss fire in information once in a thousand times, but that meeting just about dissolved the confounded company."

"Did it—er—affect the stock at all?" Wolcott inquired with the first suggestion of concern.

"Harry, the thing might have been deliberately timed for your especial destruction," Saunders said annoyedly. "That stuff went to pieces faster than a dynamite bomb can blow up! You haven't seven thousand cents left of your seven thousand dollars!"

Out of Mr. Wolcott's cheeks sped the ruddy tinge of health and contentment; over them crept an awful gray.

"What—what was that?" screamed his high, cracked voice.

"It's a doggone shame!" the unaffected Saunders said with perfunctory sympathy. "If I'd been playing the market myself today it would have been on that Universal stuff, believe me."

"What you mean—what you mean—" Wolcott stumbled on blindly, "is that our—*seven thousand is wiped out?*"

"Clean as a whistle!"

"But—but—"

"Oh, it's not quite as bad as all that," Saunders smiled, for he did not know. "Get down on your knees and thank heaven it wasn't your *last* seven thousand, Harry. I know you well enough to know that you're pretty flush before you're risking anything like this on the stock market. Yessir! Be darned glad you're not down to bedrock, boy. I've seen 'em go the limit and then shoot themselves!"

"Shoot themselves—yes!" Mr. Wolcott agreed mistily.

"And 'pon my word, old man, next time I'll give you a winner!"

"Next time!" echoed John with a dreadful hollow laugh.

"And next time also, by the way, don't go in quite so heavily," Mr. Saunders advised. "You can be reasonably sure, but there's no predicting anything in the stock market with mathematical certainty—just as we've seen to-day. Unless you're loaded down with money, a couple of thousand is enough to chance on any one thing."

In the same perfunctory way he smiled at the pair. The pair, as yet incapable of motion, merely stared and stared at him. Faint contempt came into the smile.

"So that's that!" sighed Mr. Saunders as he rose. "I'm infernally sorry."

Still the pair sat, second after second. Inconspicuously, Mr. Saunders pressed a button beside his desk, and almost instantly a pretty girl appeared in the doorway and stated in clear, ringing tones:

"Mr. Leclair, of Montreal, to see you, Mr. Saunders. He has to catch a train back and he wants to know if you can possibly see him at once."

"Eh? Yes, yes! Immediately!" responded Mr. Saunders, and held out his hand. "Good-by, boys. Better luck next time, you know!"

It was when they reached the street that the power of speech appeared to return to Wolcott. He had shrunk several inches these last few minutes; his head sagged forward and his chest, so lately expanded, seemed to have collapsed. He glanced at Mr. Harley, whose lips were a thin white line.

"I—I don't know what to say!" choked Mr. Wolcott.

"If I were—you, I wouldn't say—anything for a while!" shuddered through John's teeth.

"I—no, no, of course not—if you feel that way about it, old man!" faltered the tutor.

The shrinking, which was almost an actual process, continued as they walked. Odd little whining sighs escaped Mr. Wolcott at irregular intervals; toward the end of the

second block he stiffened and turned to savage little growls. John Harley was not interested. He no more than glanced at his old friend when, with a stifled yelp, Mr. Wolcott drew out the cigarette case and, with a frenzied hurl, sent it clanging to the pavement, there to become the target of three small boys, who threw themselves upon it from three directions.

Five busy squares covered, however, and Mr. Harley drew in one long breath and spoke:

"I guess I can talk now without—er—doing anything violent!"

"Then—then let me say, Jack—" the tutor began brokenly.

"Don't say it if you're going to apologize for losing my money," John interrupted. "I'm of age and supposedly sane and nobody can force me into speculating. I did it of my own free will and—I'm sorry you lost yours, Harry!"

"Well, that—that's pretty splendid of you!" said Mr. Wolcott, and there were tears in his voice. "That—is a lot more than I deserve, old man. That—"

"All right. Let's drop the subject!"

"You—mean that?"

"Yes!"

The tutor sought for further words to express his admiration of his old friend. They did not come immediately. Ahead a subway kiosk appeared, and Mr. Wolcott winced.

"I've got a kid coming for a lesson at three o'clock," he muttered.

"Well, you'd better dig right uptown as fast as the train will carry you, and collect that five dollars," John said grimly. "We're going to need it about the time the florist and the gas man and the bootlegger come around for their bills."

"You're coming too?"

"I am not!" John rasped fiercely. "I'm staying down in the business section to hunt a job."

Thus for a time they parted. Mr. Harley, hurrying along by himself, declined absolutely to think. Too much stress had been put upon his mentality these last few days; one good dip into thought just now and any prospective employer, viewing the things that must be reflected upon the Harley countenance from within, might well call the porters and have him gently escorted from the premises.

There was Norford and the opening he had had last week—not quite a magnificent berth in a concern that was distinctly second rate. Still, it was infinitely better than no job at all; and without undue egotism Norford's outfit should have been thankful to snatch up John at the price they were probably willing to pay.

Norford, after the fashion of small-caliber men, viewed him with veiled suspicion.

"Personal call, eh?" he observed when they had shaken hands. "Are we going to do some real business with the Potter firm after all?"

"I don't know. I'm not with the Potter firm," John smiled easily enough. "We—ah—disagreed, you know."

"Er—yes, somebody did say that yesterday, I believe," Norford observed. "Well?"

"I understand that you need a credit man here, acquainted with the line?"

"Not looking for the job yourself, by any chance?"

"I am."

"Um! Well, that's too bad. I wish I'd known that sooner," Norford mused. "We found a man last Friday for that place."

"Aha?" said Mr. Harley, and managed to maintain the same easy smile. "Doesn't happen to be another yawning vacancy anywhere in the firm, I suppose?"

"No, there's not," its head said cheeringly. "Fact is, Harley, we're hard put to it keeping what people we have at work. Business is *bad*—no question about business being bad. We laid off four last month, and two more are going Saturday night."

"Really?" Mr. Harley said politely.

"In fact, business is rotten, and I don't see any signs of its improving," Mr. Norford declaimed further. "Never saw so many people out of work as there are today in our line. Why, this chap we hired for the credit job is a dandy—but he hadn't lifted a finger for eleven months! Got him for forty dollars a week, and he was tickled to go to work for that. Been looking around any?"

"No."

"Take my advice and just loaf for a while, Harley," said the pessimist. "Did —er—somebody say that you'd inherited a fortune?"

"They may have. People say a lot."

"Slightly secretive about it, eh?" Norford grinned. "Well, at all events you're fairly well fixed. Hang around a bit and watch the signs. You'll gain nothing and lose some prestige if you do any real active hunting for a job just now."

The saddest part of it all being, of course, that Mr. Norford was painfully accurate in his pessimism. This John had known when he entered the establishment: the present heat beneath his collar, the simmering fury all through him were, therefore, rather absurb. There was truth too in that suggestion of Norford's, that he would lose prestige by canvassing the entire line, hat in hand, seeking employment: Mr. Harley, as it was generally understood, had been on the way to becoming a person of importance in his chosen field, and one of the type that would be found sought after rather than seeking.

Well, then? For the sake of prestige was he to sit motionless and wait for starvation?

Two minutes, perhaps, Mr. Harley stood on the corner and glared at innocent bystanders and equally innocent passers-by. The thought had entered his mind even in the earlier part of the Norford conversation. It had crystallized as he left the office, and no amount of pride would fight off the common-sense aspect of it: there was always Braisted, the indefatigable!

Just how far Mr. Harley would travel as aide in a—possibly dubious—promotion scheme he had no idea; but Braisted's ten thousand times accursed office was just two blocks from this spot, and Braisted yearned to start him off at four thousand dollars a year, with commissions amounting to much more.

Braisted was in his outer office when Mr. Harley, with what pathetic dignity might be, closed the door behind him.

Braisted's eye brightened instantly. He crossed the room with hand outheld.

"Well, millionaire!" he cried. "This is a nice little surprise!"

"Yes!" John agreed flatly.

"I knew you'd do it, though, boy! I knew you'd be around, after you'd thought it over. You're uppish and funny in some ways, Jack, but I've always said you were a chap that knew a good thing when he saw it."

Mr. Harley smiled resignedly; in a shamed fashion he was almost fond of Braisted just then.

"Well, Braisted, I've thought it over—" he began.

"And you just made up your excellent mind that there wasn't a better resting place in the world for some of those millions than in this little proposition I'm getting together!" the other cried, and the suspicion flashed across John's mind that perchance they were not talking about the same thing. "Well, you were right, boy—you were right! Here! Listen! Drop one million dollars flat—no more, no less—into this, and I'll guarantee you that inside of a year it 'll be three millions or better!"

"Well—" John began rather faintly.

"Come into my private office and talk it over!" the other urged. "Bickling's in there; I want you to meet him."

"Bickling? Who's Bickling?"

The genial soul laughed uproariously.

"Johnny," said he, with an arm about Mr. Harley's shoulders, "d'ye remember how hard I tried to hire you? Well, you darned near broke my heart when you wouldn't sign on—and now I'm glad you didn't. Yessir, I'm plumb glad, John, because I've got Bickling, and I verily believe he's the best man in the world for the job. Pep! Punch! Personality! Looks! A brain! A tongue! I've signed him on for three years, and if he'd sign on for twenty I'd take him.

"Gosh! You'll like Bickling!" said the promoter.

CHAPTER XVI.

AFTER THE CRASH.

IN some fashion Mr. Harley's feet found a grip on the floor and he at last stood still. Braisted, after a tentative tug, looked at him in slight astonishment.

"Why, come on!" he said. "What's the idea of hanging back? This man Bickling—"

"Yes, I don't want to meet him!" Mr. Harley forced out with a sickly smile.

"Eh? Why not?"

"Because—well, you see, there's no particular reason, except that—why, I just stopped in for a minute, you know. I—that is, I didn't stop in to—er—meet anybody."

The promoter stared his frank and growing amazement.

"Well, what of that?" he grinned. "You stopped in at the right place at the right time, old man. Now, come see Bickling, and he'll help me show you just how and why we're going to make you richer than you are!"

"No, not to-day," John insisted, and backed away. "Some — er — other day when I have more time."

"This won't take--"

"I know, but I haven't even that much time," Mr. Harley explained with a small, wild smile. "I—well, good day, Braisted!"

"Well, *wait!*"

"I'll—wait some other time!" gasped the visitor as he fled.

Face darkening, Mr. Braisted looked after him for some seconds before turning on his heel and tramping into the inner office, where sat a dark and sleek young man.

"Say, Bickling," said Mr. Braisted, "did you ever have any trouble with a guy named Harley?"

"I never heard the name before."

"Well, maybe you've forgotten!" Mr. Braisted snapped, and sat down and bored through his aide with an eye that could be rather hypnotic when it chose. "He acted mighty funny when he heard *your* name."

"Yes? Am I to feel flattered or am I being accused of something?" the other smiled.

"I don't know till we get to the bottom of this!" the chief said quite warmly. "But I do know this guy has a wad of money that 'd choke a bull elephant, and I need it here in the business. Now—think back."

Mr. Harley rode home in the subway, and rather grudged the nickel.

To a certain extent he still declined to give his thoughts full and free rein—which was partly because the thinking machinery itself had grown numb and insensate for the time. He was hoodooed. It amounted to that and nothing else. Six months ago any one of a dozen firms would have welcomed him in their offices; he had clung to the Potter concern chiefly because of sentiment and because he liked the force. Six days ago Braisted would have thrown his arms about John, would have wept on his shoulder. Now Braisted had his Bickling, and frankly said that he was a more suitable man than John.

And it had been like that ever since that one Saturday afternoon lie, and now it would always be like that. In all probability, when he turned the corner, the tall apartment house would be in flames, and, since he had not even the capital to duplicate them, his three or four good suits would be consumed. Or, Link being of course, absent, he would find poor old Wolcott, self-slain, upon the floor; and just as he picked up the revolver detectives would burst in and arrest John; and eventually, unless the contrivance broke down by reason of his nearness, he would end his days in the electric chair. After one has endured a certain number of consistently unpleasant happenings, it is quite easy to forecast those that are impending.

The apartment house, however, had not so much as a smoking chimney, and there was nothing in Link's expression, as he opened the door, to indicate that the grisly pall of suicide rested upon Mr. Alderson's late home. John tottered in, pushed his hat at the butler, and tottered on toward the living room.

Or, come to think of it, Wolcott would be in there, pounding trigonometry through the thick skull of some adolescent idiot, wouldn't he? Well, he would drift into Wolcott's bedroom, then, that being farther from the sound of their voices, and bury his aching head on Mr. Wolcott's pillow for a while.

Yet, although John drifted through the door quite as he had intended, he failed to bury his head in the pillow. A suffering cranium was already buried there, Wolcott's

own. Stretched at length, the tutor lay face downward, and for an instant John's heart stopped. Wolcott stirred then and sat up, blinking wretchedly—and, with whatever justification, wrath flamed up in Mr. Harley.

"So stricken you had to cut the lesson, were you?" he observed acidly. "Well, if you ask me, that's plain damned nonsense! You've got to support this outfit for a while, Hal. There's no job in the world for me!"

"Isn't there?" Wolcott muttered in a queer, thick voice.

"There is not—unless it's an office boy's job, or something of the kind. What on earth did you send the kid away for, Harry?"

Mr. Wolcott's laugh was not a good thing to hear.

"I didn't send him away. He never came!" said he.

"Oh!"

"And he's never coming again and none of the rest of them are ever coming again! I haven't a pupil in the world, John! I'm smashed! I'm smashed flat! Flat!" cried the tutor.

Mr. Harley stared.

"Well, you've nothing on me in that particular," he said curiously. "Why the great collapse?"

"The house!"

"What? What house?"

"This house, of course! Lefferts called up and wanted to know what I meant by telling his son to come to a place of this character. I—er—I may have spoken sharply. I don't know. He blew up in one second, anyway, and withdrew his kid and demanded that hundred dollar advance back. Then—then the others did the same thing, Jack! I'm done, I think!"

"Yes, but the house? What's wrong with it?" John's rather hushed tone inquired.

"Why—virtually everything, I believe. It's notorious all over the country, apparently. I asked Link. He said that he'd heard something of the kind himself. About half the divorce actions of the last decade started at this address, as nearly as I understand it, and there have been several very delectable shootings—strictly family affairs, you know—elimination of the third angle of the triangle in one form or another."

"Good Lord!" breathed Mr. Harley. "That's what Alderson wished on us, was it?"

Wolcott wagged his head, and his smile was dazed and bitter.

"Yep!" he muttered. "His family rescued him from it, evidently, and he passed it on to us. I wonder why?"

"Eh? Do you imagine that there was anything but kindliness behind it?" John said.

"I dunno, Jack," said the tutor. "Nobody ever could be as innocent as Wilbur Alderson looks."

Heavy silence settled on the bedroom for a time. Wolcott, once more the rather shrinking tutor with no smallest trace of the late self-confident financial wizard, bowed his head and moaned and grunted rather senselessly—shook the head at intervals—moaned again—until Mr. Harley broke the silence with a sharp:

"Well, whining isn't going to help matters any. This is just another whack, of course, and if we've survived the rest of 'em we can survive that, too. Buck up and let's face the thing as it is. It seems to me that the time has come for some pretty plain speaking."

"Yes?" Wolcott said sharply.

"I've never pried into your affairs, Harry, any more than you've pried into mine, but we're about due for a complete showdown. Er—almost every man has a little cash tucked away somewhere, hidden even from himself, perhaps, to fall back on in the direst kind of emergency."

"Has he?" said the tutor simply. "I haven't."

"That check this morning really represented your last cent?"

"It really did!" Mr. Wolcott said, and brightened suddenly. "I get it now, though, old man. *You've* got something tucked away after all, have you? Gad! That's a lifesaver, Jack. That's good news. Even if it's only a few hundreds, that's the best news I've heard in—"

"Don't excite yourself," John replied bitterly. "I was speaking of the average man,

I'm below the average, I guess. I haven't an asset in the world now, except the car—and they tell me it's rather hard even to give away second-hand cars these days. Um—how much cash have you?"

"About twenty-five dollars."

"And I have sixty! Little less than a hundred between us, to last till we're both self-supporting again. Just what *do* we do next, I wonder?"

"Well, we get out of this sink-hole of vice for a beginning!" Mr. Wolcott said, with the first sign of reviving energy. "My Lord, Jack! I can't afford to live in this den another hour! I've got to go on tutoring and tutoring, day and night, till I've made up some of what I've lost—and I'll have to explain to Lefferts and Fowler and all the rest of them and get the kids back. Leaving this house is the first thing!"

"And going back to Ebbridge?"

"Certainly!"

"You go and I'll stay here!" Mr. Harley said briefly. "I may be steeped in somebody else's sin or I may sleep on a park bench, but I won't go back where those dear young ladies can catch me!"

"Oh, but—"

"That's flat! I may be a prig and an ass and everything else, but I'm all through being adored by females I don't even like. If ever one more of them tries it, I'll—I'll—well, I'll stay here and see that she doesn't!" He ended with an emotional puff. He looked about at the stifling hangings and smiled grimly. "This may be disreputable, but it's safe!"

"In that sense, it is, I suppose, but—"

"I beg pardon!" said Link, from the doorway. "You're wanted on the telephone, Mr. Harley."

"Who wants me?" John gasped. "How did they—"

"Only Mr. Alderson, sir," the butler said soothingly.

In the darkest and most mysterious nook of the stuffy private hall Mr. Harley picked up the receiver with unsteady hand.

"Hah! You, old chap?" said the voice of Wilbur.

"Harley—yes!"

"Glad to find you home. How's everything?"

"Oh—everything's lovely!" John said bitterly.

"Satisfactory, eh?"

"A gem!"

"Same statement goes for old Link, eh?"

"Oh, decidedly!" John said impatiently, for even taking into consideration the gratitude he should have felt, he was in no mood to chat idly with Alderson. "Couldn't be beat, old man—everything's perfect—Link, furnishings, everything."

Over the wire came a pleased sigh.

"Gad! Mighty glad to hear you say that, Jack. Er—anybody call?"

"Not a soul."

"Anybody telephone?" Wilbur inquired further, and his voice seemed to sharpen.

"No."

"That's queer—" began Wilbur, and stopped.

"What's queer?"

"Queer? Nothing—nothing at all, old chap. Horrible dearth of queer things, in fact; might make life a bit more interesting if a few of 'em would turn up, eh?" the baby voice pursued. "You find it so?"

"I—I guess so!" John said impatiently. "Is there anything of real importance on your mind, Wilbur?"

"Well, in a way there is. Another way, there isn't!" Wilbur went on, with a little laugh. "Fact is, there *was* a reason for calling up. I—say, I suppose you know I hate to mention this, old man; wouldn't do it for worlds if the family was a bit reasonable, you understand—but I'm strapped and—oh, go to it, Wilbur! Go to it! The man is rich!" exclaimed the oversized infant, with another laugh. "I was just wondering, old man, if you'd be decent enough to let me have a couple of thousand on account to-day?"

"On account of what?" John gasped.

"Eh? The flat, old chap—the furnishings and all—on what else?"

Just beside Mr. Harley stood a tall, slim marble lady, who seemed to have slipped into that corner for most commendable reasons of modesty. Receiver tight clutched, he swayed against her as momentary dizziness overcame him.

"Am I—am I *buying* this place from you, Wilbur?" he cried.

"I beg pardon?"

"I say, I—I thought you were loaning me the flat and—"

A gale of merriment rattled the instrument at his ear.

"My word, Jackie!" roared young Mr. Alderson. "Money ain't changed you a bit, has it? Always have to have your little joke! 'Loaning'—I say, that's rich!"

"Well, it may be rich, but—"

"I say, I *would* loan it to you, though, if there was any way of a penniless chap like me affording such a thing! You understand that, Jack. Nothing but the pressure of an unkind family on the pocket nerve'd ever make me sell it. My loss, your gain, old chap. I put ten thousand good dollars into that little nest, first and last. You're buying it for seven. If that ain't a bargain, what is? And another thing, Jack: I don't care a rap when you pay off the other five, so long as you let me have two thousand to-day!"

In the gloom, Mr. Harley's eyes narrowed. Quite evidently, a little surgeon's kindness, in the way of direct speaking, would have to be practiced upon young Wilbur.

"There has been a misunderstanding!" he said sharply. "I had no idea of buying this place. I don't want it, as a permanent home. And if I had bought it—"

"Well, but you did! Confound it, Harley, you did!" said Mr. Alderson, and his tone grew distinctly amazed and unpleasant.

"I never should have agreed to pay anything on it to-day or—er—for some time, because my affairs are not in such shape that I can pay out any such sums at present!"

"Does that mean I *don't* get it?"

"It does!"

One could almost see Wilbur, at the far end of the wire as his child-countenance reddened with really wild anger.

"Oh, well, now! See here, Harley!" he cried. "This'll never do! That's just welching, y' know! Changed your mind about my little home for some reason and you're just welching. And I won't stand for it, either! Hang it! I won't stand for that! Bit too unsophisticated for my own good, maybe, but I'm not an idiot!"

"I don't know what you're going to do about it," Mr. Harley said brutally.

"You don't, eh? Well, I know, Harley! I'm going to kick up some real excitement about this thing! I'm going to my father and make a clean breast of it and I'll warrant he'll get the money out of you! He never stops, once he gets started, Harley! He'll make such a noise that you'll never dare show your face in Ebbridge again! He—"

"Don't try anything like that on me!" John broke in sharply.

"Hey? What? What was that?" Wilbur demanded furiously. "You think I'm bluffing, do you? Well, by gad, Harley! I'll bet when my father gets done showing you up for the welcher you are, there won't be two people in town willing to be seen talking to you! He advertises things, my father does! He's made ten millions in advertising and he knows how! Er—do I get that two thousand?"

"No! Because—"

"I'll see pop and set fire to him!" Wilbur stated. "Good-by!"

"*Wilbur!*" John Harley yelled.

There was a dreadful little period of stillness on the wire—a period in which, himself all exposed, John visualized his aunt in her casket! A period in which, his present whereabouts revealed to all the world, Mildred and Althea and the father of the latter—

"Well? What is it?" Wilbur asked.

"I just want to say that it has been a very unfortunate misunderstanding, Wilbur," John remarked, in a very sweet and soothing voice. "There is nothing to be gained by starting a rumpus."

"You don't want one, eh?"

"Of course, not."

"Don't want to be advertised?"

"Eh? No, if you put it that way!"

"So I judged from some of the things you said before you went down!" Wilbur reflected aloud, and something very like a stifled, contented giggle seemed to hover behind the words.

"So, if you'll just calm down and—ah—be patient—"

"Righto, old chap! Say no more! We'll forget the little disagreement, eh?"

Wilbur cried, with almost suspicious heartiness. "Beg your jolly old pardon, in fact. Got a rotten temper and sometimes it runs away with me. Never meant a word of it, Jack. Only—I say, I suppose you'd be willing to do *something* for a chap who handed you his beautiful little home, provided he kept his mouth shut about the money part and refrained from starting anything?"

Mr. Harley winced. He had the queerest little sensation of having been trapped.

"Well? Wouldn't you?" Wilbur demanded, and there was a distinct note of warning in his voice.

"I—yes, certainly. Of course."

"Word of honor on that, old chap, eh?"

"Yes, unless you want somebody murdered."

"Oh, I say!" Wilbur protested, and his laugh and his drawl were as of old. "Nothing of importance, y' know. Only I've got friends, Jack—personal friends—not folks the family know, but regular friends. They might call, looking for me."

"I'll entertain them."

"Yes, that's what I mean, in a way. Be nice. Say I've been called away—and that I'll be back. Be sure to say I'll be back, if it seems to be indicated, old man. And another thing: my name's Hackett down there. Maybe Link told you? No? Well, it is—Wilbur Hackett. If—if any one calls, just be kind to 'em and say I'll be around again pretty soon and—"

"I think," John sighed, "that you're driving at something about which you'd better give me specific instructions."

"Like to, old chap. Can't. Have to stop telephoning. Father's just roaming around on this floor now. You're horribly discreet. You'll manage. Only bear one thing in mind, Jack!" Wilbur's voice dropped and regained the note of warning. "Be mighty nice to—to any one who calls. Offend one of my real friends and you offend me, y' know. And if ever you offended me after the trick you've played me with that flat, old chap, there's no telling—wow! I say! The pater's coming in here!" Wilbur whispered in sudden conclusion.

Not ordinarily a person who gave even passing heed to threats of the vaguer sort, Mr. Harley nevertheless felt a cool wave pass down his spine as the conversation ended.

Wilbur, a sufficiently deft and intelligent little blackmailer despite his new-born infant expression, had been speaking in riddles—not idle ones, either, but riddles of significance. Unless he chose to risk an eruption of this newest potentiality for trouble, it behooved Mr. Harley to find the correct answers and— Just at the door of the Wolcott bedroom Mr. Harley stopped short.

The tutor, on his feet and staring, voiced his own thoughts:

"Who's that singing up front?"

"I—I give it up!" John breathed.

"Not Link?"

"Link hasn't a soprano voice!" Mr. Harley whispered and whitened. "That sounds like Althea, Harry. It *is* Althea! How did she ever—where's the fire escape here?"

He looked around wildly, and up at the end of the dusky hallway the curtains parted to permit the passing of Mr. Link—to permit as well a flitting view of the large living room and its present occupant.

She was little over twenty. She was neither light nor dark, but she was striking. Even at this distance one saw her distinctly wonderful color, her great eyes, her mouth, which was open and—the curtains dropped and a full-throated wave of popular song seemed to beat on their far side.

"Link!" hissed Mr. Harley as he stayed that person's progress. "Who's that woman?"

"The lady in front, sir?" he queried. "Well—er—speaking of the joys and responsibilities, as Mr. Alderson put it—"

"What?"

"As one might say, sir, that's one of the joys," said Link.

CHAPTER XVII.

THEY COME!

THE smile came and went once more. The butler glanced over his shoulder and dropped his tone a little farther. "I meant to speak of it as occasions re-

quired," he said. "With *this* lady, will you be so good as to refer to Mr. Alderson as Mr. Hackett, sir?"

"I—yes!" John snapped. "Who is she?"

"Why, the name 'll be Kenningham, sir—Miss Betty Kenningham."

"Friend of Alderson's?"

"Oh, a very great friend, sir."

"Well, I don't like her looks!" John said bluntly. "She had a hat on when she came, I suppose?"

"To be sure, sir."

"Go in there and tell her to put it on again and get out!" snapped Mr. Harley. "Say that Alderson's not here, and won't be for several days—and then get rid of her. I won't have any women around this apartment. Go to it, Link!"

He pointed, emphasizing these strong words. They affected Mr. Link at least as much as they would have affected a block of granite. The butler's smile, while pleasant and respectful enough, held a quality of iron.

"I beg pardon, I'm sure, sir, but that's something I'd hardly care to undertake," he said. "Mr. Alderson is very particular how his friends are treated. And anyhow, sir, the young woman's come to stay."

"Stay?" John echoed. "How long?"

"Why, permanently, sir. I should judge!" Link said imperturbably, and held up the expensive suit case he carried.

"Well, she can't stay here," said John's stormy undertone.

"Quite so, sir. Would you be good enough to tell her yourself, Mr. Harley? I'd thought of putting her in Mr. Wolcott's room."

"You think again!" gasped the tutor. "I'm nearly enough ruined now without—"

John laughed disgustedly.

"Oh, dry up," he said briefly. "I'll go in and chase her diplomatically, friend or no friend."

He strode scowling down the hallway. Just at the curtains he erased the scowl, for after all he had given his word of honor—but the purpose behind the scowl remained quite firm.

He pushed aside the curtains and entered. The young woman, apparently about to shatter the keyboard of Mr. Alderson's baby grand, caught sight of him from the corner of one eye, and whirled around.

In her crude way, she was pretty enough. She may not have been actually coarse, but she was far from an ethereal type. However fine her large eyes, they were startlingly bold and frank. Nowhere about the young woman, in fact, lurked any suggestion of shrinking, girlish timidity.

Her stare at first was all astonishment. It rested upon Mr. Harley's features some five seconds and turned to pleasure. It passed on downward and examined him from head to foot and back again—and then expressed approval of the most candid and unqualified character.

"Well, who is with us?" she demanded genially.

"My name—that is, I'm a friend of Mr.—er—Hackett."

"I didn't know he had any friends as nice as you. He never let me see any of them."

"No?" John said briefly.

"Oh, I've got you now! I must be getting dumb!" cried the girl. "You're Mr. Harley!"

"Eh? Yes!"

"The rich one!" the young woman went on, and her glance acquired that killing character with which John was too familiar. "Old Linkie mentioned you. What's your other name?"

"Oh—John!" that person said patiently.

"They call you Jack?"

"Some people do."

"I will, too. I like that name—Jack. I'm Betty Kenningham. Everybody calls me Betty. I wish you would. You will eventually, anyway, you know."

"Why?"

"Well, hasn't Willie told you all about me?"

"He has not," said Mr. Harley, without interest. "And now suppose we drop the flattering generalities and get down to—"

"Didn't he *ever* speak about me?" Betty interrupted.

"Not that I recall."

"Well, what d'ye think of that!" the girl cried angrily. "What's the matter with him? Is he ashamed of me?"

"I'm—sure it isn't that!" John said.

"I'll bet *you* wouldn't be ashamed of the girl you were going to marry! You're not that kind."

"I would not," said Mr. Harley frostily. "You're going to marry Wilbur, are you? Well, that's very nice. And *now*—"

The eyes caressed him and then dropped.

"Oh—I guess I'm going to marry him," breathed the young woman. "I said I would. I don't know. A girl can change her mind."

"Exactly. And now, my dear Miss—"

"Betty!" the girl suggested suddenly, with a flash of the eyes.

"Betty—yes, all right. What I'm trying to get at is this: Wilbur's been—ah—called away, and he'll be back in a few days. Of course, with you and Wilbur married and all that, your being here would be quite the proper thing. But as it is, you'll readily see that you can't stay."

"Why not?"

"It's a little too unconventional!" John snapped.

"Oh, don't be silly!" laughed Betty, and crossed her legs, and so, as it seemed, dismissed the entire subject. "Jack! I'll bet every girl you meet falls in love with you?"

"My dear—"

"Oh! Oh! Naughty!" cried the girl, and shook a pink finger at him. "Pretty short acquaintance for the 'my dear' stuff, you know!"

"I was merely going to say 'My dear young woman, I—'" John began again hotly.

His anger brought the most lightninglike reaction; Miss Kenningham, who was really very swift and graceful, had left the piano and was directly before him, all dimples and contrition.

"Oh, now he's mad!" she cooed ever so winningly up at him, and simultaneously patted his arms. "He mustn't be mad! I didn't mean that, Jack—really! I'm not a bit like that. What is it I want to say—Upstagey—formal! I didn't really mind."

"Well, great—" John began in a gasp.

"S-sh!" commanded the young woman. "You're spoiled, you know! It's no wonder; you're too handsome not to be. There was a bird like that worked opposite me in the Follies two years ago—not handsome like you, Jack—a cheap skate, if it comes to that! But the fuss they made over that boy would have—"

"Yes!" Mr. Harley fairly thundered, since that seemed the only way to stay the flow of words. "I'd like to hear all about him, but there's no time now. *You'll really have to go!*"

"Why?"

"Because it's no place for you, of course!"

"I guess you don't want me here?"

"You're quite correct!" snapped Mr. Harley. "I do not."

Briefly, the eyes endeavored to express rage; there was no heart in it at all, and they returned to reproach—and then dropped in a hurt way, and the girl moved off several feet.

"I'm sorry. I can't go," she said softly.

"Why not?"

"I came here to marry Willie Hackett, and I've got to stay and—and marry him, I suppose. My brother says so!"

"Oh!" said John.

"Joe's kind of crazy, y' know," Betty sighed. "I don't know. I guess I can understand how he feels. I guess I'd feel like that if I had a sister. Only—oh, he thinks Willie's just trifling with me, y' know. He got all rabid this noon; he said Willie 'd marry me, or he'd kill him—all that stuff. I had to pacify him. I told him Willie and me were planning to get married to-night, anyway. I can't go back home, you know."

"Well, you can go somewhere else."

"On three dollars?" queried the gentle maiden.

"I've got fifty or sixty in cash—" Mr. Harley began desperately, and stopped before the sudden smile.

"Maybe I don't want to go anywhere else—now!" the girl said, to some extent enigmatically.

The situation, if you like, was growing rather shocking. Mr. Harley thought hard and fruitlessly for many seconds. He could almost have embraced Link, entering so suddenly with his:

"I beg pardon, sir. Mr. Hackett's on the phone and wishes to speak to you."

With a whirl, John was on his way down the hall to the dusky corner that was the home of the slim marble lady.

"You—hey?" Wilbur said. "I say, old man! Couldn't finish before, you know. The pater came in. He's gone now. I'm a prisoner in this house. Did I tell you that before?"

"No!"

"I am, though. Fact! Family won't trust me out of sight any longer. What I wanted to say, though. Jack, on the level, *hasn't* any one come to see me?"

"Some one has now. A lady to marry you!"

"*Betty!*" cried Mr. Alderson in a glorified gasp.

"Yes, and the best thing you can do is drop out of a second-story window, hustle down here, and marry her."

"Well, I say! Is she—she alone there with you and Wolcott?"

"And Link!"

"Well, that ain't proper!" Wilbur said hotly. "Tell her to go back home at once, Jack."

"I have. She refuses."

"Maybe *you're* not so anxious to have her go?" Mr. Alderson suggested with greater heat.

"Maybe I'm not," rasped Mr. Harley, "but as a mat—"

"All right! Let it go at that! I'll attend to this. Lemme talk to the kid."

Curiously, the young woman herself, who seemed fairly familiar with the premises, had strolled to Mr. Harley's side, and was even now smiling softly up at him.

"She's right here!" John said grimly. "Er—Betty! Willie wishes to speak to you."

"Hey! Hey, Harley!" Wilbur cried wildly. "Where d'ye get that 'Betty' stuff? What's the idea of her being down in that hall with you and—say! Put the kid on the wire!"

"Yes? Yes?" Miss Kenningham said, rather languidly, as she accepted the receiver. "Yes—sure! . . . Why, certainly I did; I came here to marry you! . . . What? Say, where do you get all this rough talk?" she asked, and turned upon John a smile that seemed to light the whole dusky area. "Well, there's nothing doing on my going home now, Willie. That's on the level—nothing doing at all; I stick right here and wait for you. . . . Yes, Joe's sore on you; he says the ceremony has to be pulled off now, or your family 'll be buying lilies for you. . . . Well, I can't help that, Willie. You know how it looks to Joe!"

Followed an interval in which Wilbur Alderson spoke so long, so ferociously, that Betty's smile died out, and her whole attention turned to the telephone—an interval also in which, from somewhere in the rear, Harry Wolcott sped to John's side.

"Jack!" he whispered, and his countenance was quite contorted. "The caterer's here for his bill!"

"You tell the caterer to go straight to—" Mr. Harley began.

"I don't dare! He's a big Greek, and he looks like a bandit! He brought an officer with him, Jack—and the officer looks as if he might be his brother. He says he'll get his money this time or start something that 'll be finished in Sing Sing!"

"All the same, you tell him with my compliments to go—"

Wolcott laid a shaking hand on his friend's arm.

"Jack, you don't understand that this all means scandal—hideous publicity—notoriety! I can't stand that sort of thing, if I'm ever going to get my boys back! He's hinting at all kinds of wild parties he's served here, and threatening to tell all he knows about them—whatever that may be. And if it gets to the papers, it 'll get to your aunt as well, and—Jack! I've only got twenty-three dollars and some odd cents!"

Whether it should or should not have been, his excitement was infectious. One scared glance Mr. Harley directed toward the rear of the apartment, then he thrust his billfold into Mr. Wolcott's hand, with:

"Don't part with any more of it than you can help. It's all we have in the world, Harry."

The tutor stumbled away through the dusk of the hallway.

"Say! Step on your brake, kid! That 'll be just about all of that, Wilbur!" Miss Kenningham was saying. "Nobody can talk to me like that and get away with it!

. . . Yes, that means you. . . . Well, all right, if you're sorry, only you got no right —what? Oh, sure—sure, I forgive you!" Miss Kenningham said boredly. "What? . . . Well, what if you *are* up State on a business trip? I didn't send you. That proves nothing to me, Willie. . . . No, I certainly will not tell him to get out and go somewhere else. Linkie said you asked him to stay here. . . . Well, I can't help that, Wilbur!" Betty giggled suddenly. "If you're going to have friends as nice as he is, that's a chance you got to take. . . . Oh, sure I'll wait—I'll wait a while, anyway. And listen! Don't hurry! . . . Yes, I guess you can. Jack!" concluded Miss Kenningham. "He wants to talk to you again."

"Hello!" John said drearily.

"Hello be damned!" roared the maddened voice of Wilbur. "You beat it out of that flat quick—d'ye hear?"

"I hear, of course," John said coolly, "but—"

"You won't, hey? You won't?" Mr. Alderson screamed, and it was plain that jealousy had hurled him far beyond the bounds of reason. "Say! I've got your number at last, Harley! You—you—why, you damned lady killer, I'll marry that kid now if I have to lick a million prize beauties like you to do it! Y' get that, don't you? You've put your awful spell on that little girl, too, have you? Well, Harley, I'll pay you off for that if I go to the chair for it! I'll start now and I'll pay you off if— My Lord! *There comes the pater again!*" gasped Wilbur, and the connection broke suddenly.

Mr. Harley hung up the receiver with a weary sigh. Betty was no longer merely beside him; her arm was linked through his and had been for some seconds, and they were moving toward the living room again while, a yard or two behind, John sensed that Wolcott was following.

Mr. Harley was calm, though. He seemed to have passed the point where sinister threats meant anything in particular. He freed himself from the clinging arm and smiled perfunctorily at Betty.

"There's no altering your determination to remain here?"

"Well—you know how it is," said the girl, and dimpled entrancingly. "What else can I do?"

"Nothing, I presume. I'll get out."

"But I don't want you to do that."

"Thanks, if it's flattering, but I think I'll go just the same, and— Oh, there you are, Harry! Er—Miss Kenningham—Mr. Wolcott, of course."

Miss Kenningham examined the tutor very briefly, discarded him within the third second, nodded more briefly, and turned her attention to John. The tutor himself, his mien suggesting a partial trance state, bowed hastily and also went on staring at John, with something of the expression of a bewildered dog.

"Well, Harry, you and I are going to a hotel for the night, at least," Mr. Harley said.

"Somewhere that — that you're well known?" Wolcott said strangely.

"What?"

"Because—because—well, here!"

His unsteady hand returned John's billfold—and a stab of mingled pain and horror bit into John's very soul. Three minutes back it had been at least comfortably plump, with its little collection of fives and tens. Just now, poor bit of leather, it resembled nothing so much as a billfold that had been dropped beneath a giant steam roller.

"This is empty!" John gasped.

"Yes, I know it is!" Wolcott chattered. "Sixty dollars, even, you had. He took that and he took all of mine—and that's staved him off for twenty-four hours and no more. He's coming back to-morrow night for the balance, Jack—two hundred and eleven dollars more. And we'll have to have it! That man's a terror! That man—"

"Idiot!" Mr. Harley managed. "How much cash have you left *now?*"

"I?" Wolcott faltered. "Thirty-five cents!"

"And I've got a quarter!" breathed John, as his hand returned from an investigation of his trouser pocket.

It is a dreadful thing to see an old, firm friendship on the verge of rupture—yet something of the kind seemed impending here. As Wolcott shrank and shriveled be-

fore the fiery eyes, Mr. Harley's nostrils dilated and the pallor of fury came to his cheek. And—he was master of himself again.

"I'll go—borrow some!" he said hoarsely. "I know one or two people in this neighborhood."

He strode off without another word. At the door of the apartment he found Mr. Wolcott at his heels.

"I'm coming with you," announced the tutor. "I—ah—don't care to be left alone with—er—a woman of that type! I—"

"You'll stay here!" John rasped. "Go in my room and close the door. Don't speak. Don't even look out the window, or you may lose that thirty-five cents. You've done enough tricks with money for one day. Good-by!"

The sun was setting when he returned, head bowed a little farther, shoulders hunched a little more wretchedly.

A vast peace brooded over the apartment as Link admitted him and then vanished toward the rear. The door of Mr. Wolcott's room was open, and he glanced in—and drew back. Miss Kenningham had settled down in the interval; her suit case, evidently packed with the impossible skill of the Armenian lace peddler, had disgorged its contents, and there were sheer little garments laid out on the bed and other sheer little garments on hangers in the open closet. Betty herself, in doubtless charming negligee, sat before the mirror, lost in deft manipulation of a lip stick. So John backed to the closed door next at hand and entered abruptly—and the tutor raised his head from his hands and cried:

"How much did you get? Jack, if you got only five dollars, we'll take that and go to some cheap place. Because we can't stay here! I don't dare stay here; anything might happen with a woman of that type about. She—she grew quite angry with Link over something a few minutes ago, and *her language*— How much did you get?"

"Not a dime!"

"Not even enough to—"

"Not even a nickel!" snapped Mr. Harley. "I found three cents I didn't know I possessed and bought a paper with them, so I'm out that much on the trip. Read it and distract yourself. Borden was out of town; Hammersly moved away last month; and Sam Gray isn't expected home before midnight. I've no other friends hereabouts."

"Then—then what are we going to do?"

"I don't know what you're going to do, Harry, but I'm going to quit fighting the jinx and just sit tight. At least we're hidden here; if the dear old Ebbridge crowd can't find me, nothing much can happen."

"Old man, I—I'm afraid you've lost your moral sense," he said. "With a woman of that type in the place—"

"Blast a woman of that type or any other type!" cried Mr. Harley. "I'll stay here now for spite! I'll stay if—"

"Well, that's good news, anyway!" Miss Kenningham remarked brightly from the doorway. "Dinner's ready."

She tilted her head prettily at Mr. Harley. Also, she extended a pink hand, beckoning him—and with a sudden loud, awful laugh, Mr. Harley bounded up and crossed the room to her.

As a matter of course, Link had laid the table for three. Link, at present, was moving back and forth with dainty dishes, and John was—why, John was fairly bellowing mirth that must be artificial. The female, as Wolcott thought of her in his own prim mind, seemed to accept it all as genuine and largely due to herself. She was lively to a degree. She flashed eyes at John Harley, and he seemed to have succumbed. She— Link was stepping to John's side.

"I beg pardon. Shall I lay another place, sir?"

"Why?"

"There's a lady asking for you. I fancied you might be expecting her, sir. A Miss Ames, if you please."

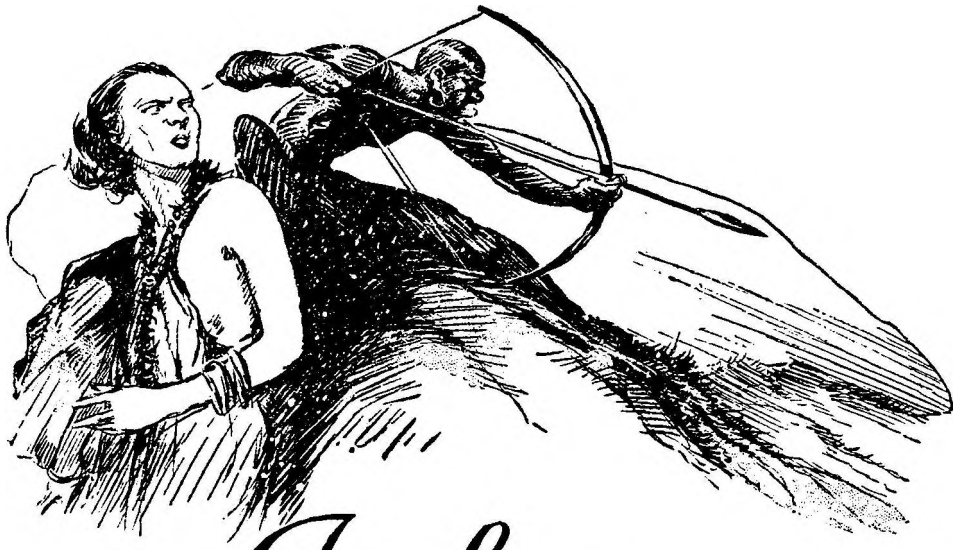
As an exploded balloon crashes to earth, so did Mr. Harley make the same trip. His color faded and the senseless mirth left his expression.

"Where—where is she?" he gasped.

"In front, sir. Shall I show her—"

"You keep out of it. I'll see her!" snapped Mr. Harley as he fled the table.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK



Inchung

By WOLCOTT LeCLĒAR BEARD

NOT ten yards away the broad Kaka hissed and roared as it rushed madly toward the distant Atlantic. In a little eddy, overlooked by the river, Inchung was washing her entire wardrobe. This wardrobe consisted of a single garment, something like a chemise.

Glancing around her eyes caught a series of flashes, far upstream. They were made, as she knew, by wet paddles that were working hard in order to make a perilous crossing of the tortured current. The sight thrilled her, as such a sight always did. It meant, perhaps, a touch of the life that people lived far beyond that world of torrent-threaded forest. At best that touch would be very remote and indirect, for no other kind ever came to Inchung's home, there in Caupolicán.

Caupolicán is not the name of a town; there is no town for more hundreds of miles than Inchung could have counted even had she known how many hundreds there were. It is a huge, uncharted district in trans-Andean Bolivia, covered with impenetrable jungle. It is reached, if one reaches it at all, by way of this river, the Kaka, which is shown on few maps, and when shown is drawn in by guesswork. For most of its length, it is a succession of rapids, many of them worse than the Whirlpool Rapids of Niagara. Inchung's brethren are the only beings on earth who can ride that fearful water. It was some of them, therefore, who were coming now.

Hastily wringing out her wardrobe, and hanging it on a bush to dry, Inchung straightened. Lithe and infinitely graceful she stood, watching her kinsmen's approach through great, dark-brown eyes that matched her cloud of long, loose hair. But her skin was not brown; it was the color of mellowed ivory. The jungle Indians are brown, but Inchung was no Indian. She was a Lequo; and the Lequos are a small and ever-decreasing tribe of Malayan blood that was marooned, no one knows when nor how, in the very heart of South America. Many of their women are handsome, and none are very dark, but Inchung was fairer

than her tribal sisters and also more beautiful. She differed from them in many ways.

Rapidly the approaching craft took form. At first they appeared like distressed water beetles, as they wallowed through the foam. Then, very shortly, they could be seen for what they were; rafts, shaped like stubby Norwegian "skis," lashed three abreast into *callapos*. There were five *callapos*—fifteen rafts—in all. They swung neatly in behind a rocky point, a hundred yards upstream. There they landed the passengers and freight they had been carrying and put out again, to dance lightly over the gigantic ripples, down to their village, a half mile below.

Inchung allowed the little flotilla to go by without even a glance. It had lost every vestige of interest for her. Her feeling toward the men of her tribe was one of tolerant contempt. Where the women were concerned, this contempt was less tolerant, and became an actual aversion. She had her reasons. Inchung was an atavism—a throwback to her ancestors of times long gone by. Her brethren, on the other hand, were not by any means what they once had been.

The pride of race which had kept their blood pure also had weakened it by generations of inbreeding. But it was since the tentacles of a huge corporation, reaching out for crude rubber, wormed their way into Caupolicán, that the Lequos began their swift and final decadence. It was to the *cañaza*—the malignant white rum that came over the Andes—that this was due.

Not that the Lequos were drunkards: rarely or never were they to be seen in a condition of drunkenness. They lived religiously up to their traditional hatred of cowardice. In running those terrible rapids they were as fearless and efficient as ever. At this point, however—at any rate, in Inchung's opinion—their virtues ceased. Their other interests were fast going, or had already gone. They were becoming sodden.

Therefore, Inchung despised them, and, leaving the village inhabited by the tribal subsection to which she belonged, built a hut for herself, well apart. No one objected; her comments on her neighbors of late had been frequent and forceful, so that she was not a pleasant inmate of so small a community. Besides, there was no shortage of women. They far outnumbered the men, so that there was more than enough of them to go around.

Living alone, Inchung was comparatively contented in a negative sort of way. She was torn, it is true, for something that she had never known—something that she was sure must exist, though she had only vague and undefined notions of what it was; but then, these longings always had torn her.

Now these strangers had come. Even though they were a hundred yards away, it was quite plain that one of them was of a race different from that of the South American Rubber Company's swarthy agents who, until then, were the only white men she had ever seen. So it was only natural, she told herself, that she should wish to have a closer view.

Slipping her newly washed and still dripping *camiseta* over her head, Inchung crept through the shore thickets, with the noiseless ease of a water rat, to a natural clearing in the jungle near the spot where the newcomers had landed. Just before reaching this glade, she stopped, and, parting the intervening branches, peered through.

She saw *cholo* — half-breed — servants, moving here and there, tightening tent guys, unpacking goods, fetching wood and doing the many things that must be done when camp is made. She recognized one of the servants as an old acquaintance who had been down the river before. At the time, however, she was scarcely conscious of seeing any of these things. Her eyes were fixed upon that one young man who was so different from all others she ever had seen.

That young man, whose name was Jimmy Landon, was simply a clean-cut young North American engineer, with a strong body, and a strong, pleasant face, with freckles on it. It was not a handsome face, but it showed virility, energy, power—everything that the men of her race had lost. Probably that was the reason why she gazed at him with such fascinated eyes.

Unfastening the mouth of a canvas sack, Jimmy began to burrow in it, much as a terrier digs into a rabbit hole. The eternal mother, that lurks in every woman, woke for the first time in Inchung's breast, and

made her fingers itch to take that sack and empty it properly. Its contents, she observed, were shirts and the like, which very evidently needed washing. This was a woman's province—clearly; and of this fact was born an impulse. The shock of its audacity made her draw a shuddering breath, as though she had unexpectedly dropped into icy water, but nevertheless she stepped resolutely forward, out of the jungle, into the glade, and took the bag from Jimmy's hand. She emptied its contents out onto the grass. In this unromantic manner began the one romance of Inchung's life.

From Jimmy's standpoint, however, there was no lack of romance in their meeting. What he saw was a golden-hued dryad, clad in a short and clinging garment, who had stepped without sound, as though by enchantment, from the jungle wall of tender green. But from the eyes of this dryad there shone a soul, which perhaps had been lent to them by that newly awakened instinct of motherhood. The wondering admiration in his face caused her to smile, so that his mind was recalled to a pictured guardian angel he had somewhere seen.

It was clear, however, that Inchung's appearance did not affect every one in the same way. Her former acquaintance among Jimmy's half-breed servants scowled when he saw her, and spat savagely on the ground.

"*La Tigra Esteril!*" he growled.

The jaguars which infest that country are locally known as "tigers." The saintliness vanished from Inchung's face, which now became that of an offended Diana, full of cold menace. The man quailed, as well he might. No woman is known among those half-savage *cholos* as "the sterile tigress"—which is to say "the unmated tigress"—without a real reason.

"It is probable, owing to your lack of brains, that you do not know that your words are insulting," said she, very quietly, in her own tongue. "You would do well, however, to remember in future that my name is Inchung."

Jimmy laughed with pure, astonished pleasure; he had understood every word that this vision had uttered—even her name, which in English would be "Constance." Why, her language was a mere variant of half a dozen Malay dialects, smatterings of which he had picked up during his wanderings in the Archipelago and the Philippines.

"Welcome Inchung!" he cried, using the Ilocano dialect, which her own closely resembled. "How can I serve you?"

"You also are welcome," she returned; and then calling attention by a twitch of her left hand to the bag she added: "It is I who intend to serve you."

She spoke rather absently, for she was looking around the camp with eyes that missed no detail. On some boxes that were piled near by, the familiar brand of the South American Rubber Company was missing. Never before had Inchung seen any packing cases that did not bear the red triangle.

"Are you not of *la compañia?*" she asked.

"No; I'm for myself," answered Jimmy emphatically. "This isn't company land."

"It is not theirs; it is mine," rejoined Inchung calmly. "It is true that the company greatly desires to obtain this land, but it shall not; the land shall be yours. Do you seek rubber as the company does?"

"No," answered Jimmy. "Gold. There ought to be some in that valley."

"There is—some," she conceded. Then, pausing, she looked with infinite scorn at the *cholos*, her eyes resting for an instant on each in turn.

"There is gold in that valley," she said as she finished her scrutiny, addressing the half-breeds, and raising her voice so that all of them could hear. "The gold, however, is scattered, so that labor is required if it is to be washed from the sands with which it is mingled. You—you *cholos* to whom I speak—are to perform this labor. You are, it is true, as lazy as the wild pigs which grunt in the jungle, and also as treacherous as the snakes that are slain by those pigs. Nevertheless, you are to work faithfully, for otherwise evil will surely befall you."

Then, with a nod to drive her threat home, she turned and walked swiftly away, vanishing as she came, into the jungle.

Jimmy gasped. He had been in many strange corners of the world, but never be-

fore had he met anything like this. If it was a local custom to have a golden-hued, sylvan goddess emerge magically from the jungle to meet a stranger, to bestow upon that stranger the gold-bestrewn landscape as a gift and then, after taking him under her protection, to depart, carrying with her his laundry to do—well, it certainly was remarkable that such a country still remained so thinly populated.

Also Jimmy wondered how his *cholos* had been impressed by this apparition, but this was something that he could not tell. Ask them he would not, and their faces expressed only sullen anger. He noted that they were working at their allotted tasks with unwonted energy, but only vaguely could he guess the reason, which was this: *La Tigra Esteril,* it is true, was out of sight; but there was no way of telling where she—or worse still, her emissaries—might be lurking, and it was a matter of the most obvious common sense to take no chances where she was concerned.

As a matter of fact, Inchung had not lingered near the glade; already she was on her way to those dreaded emissaries of hers. Treading jungle paths that would have been invisible to eyes less practiced than hers, she reached another camp—if camp it could be called. It was a mere sore on the body of the jungle, swarming with life.

The savages that were gathered at this spot were of a type so low that they had no tribal name. In fact, they had no tribes, but only herds, like those of the wild pigs. Like the wild pigs, every herd always had warred on every other, and all were hunted, as any other noxious animals might be hunted, by savages of higher types.

In Caupolicán, however, all this had been changed. Inchung had ordained it, and her people, in their growing lethargy, had not thought it worth while to oppose her. Therefore these herds of half-bestial humanity were allowed to come and go as they pleased. While there they would be secure from aggression; no Indians care to intrude upon the Lequo sphere of influence. But also the herds must keep peace among themselves. In short, Caupolicán was a sanctuary, ruled by Inchung, who was looked upon by her malodorous subjects as a deity.

Now she beckoned to a great-grandmother of the herd, who looked like a dessicated monkey. With awestruck humility the old woman came.

"Send people to watch all sides of the white man's camp," she commanded. "Let the watchers remain unseen, but ready for instant action should I desire it. Have everything that happens reported at once to me."

Without waiting for a reply, Inchung turned and went, by other paths, to her own hut. She cooked and ate. Afterward, with infinite care, as she might have washed old lace, if she ever had seen any, she laundered Jimmy's clothes. Iron them she could not; she never had heard of such a process. But she could mangle them by wrapping them around lengths of smooth cane to dry, and this she did.

At the same time once more she washed her own *camiseta,* which had suffered in its trips through the jungle; and she had only the one. This was because she had to make them herself, and never before had she felt any need for more—so why take the trouble? Poverty had nothing to do with it.

As a matter of fact, the Lequos are far from poor, as poverty is reckoned in uncharted South America, for their monopoly of river-running commands high pay. No income accrued to Inchung from this source, to be sure, but nevertheless she was richer than any of her tribespeople—or, for that matter, than all of them put together. She did not advertise that fact; Inchung was not given to loquacity. Of her wealth she took what she desired, and let the rest lie. Her "dreams of avarice," if she had any, were very easily satisfied.

Now, for the first time, the lack of a second garment filled her with impatient regret. In that humid climate clothes dry slowly, and she did not wish again to appear in Jimmy's camp wearing a wet *camiseta.* This was not because soaked cotton cloth is semitransparent; that fact meant so little to her that it never crossed her mind. But a wet garment argued an informality not in keeping with certain cherished ornaments of hers, and she *did* so wish to look her best when Jimmy saw her again.

For the next two days there was a damp

mist that the sun, even at noon, could not wholly dispel. The clothes, including Inchung's *camiseta,* still were damp, and she began to fret. She was troubled about Jimmy. She had, as she thought, taken adequate measures for his protection. Every movement made by any one in his camp was reported to her. He and his men were prospecting that valley, as she had intended that they should. The gold they would find, though not enough—at least, according to her standards—for any one to become excited about, still would serve to furnish harmless amusement until her *camiseta* could dry.

Inchung laid the garment, rolled on its cane stick, in the hottest sunshine she could find. From the buried tin in which she kept them, she exhumed those precious ornaments, purchased at different times from company trading rafts. There were necklaces and bracelets for arms and ankles, all of cheap gilt. There also was a slender dagger, with a gilded hilt, originally intended for a paper cutter. After clasping a necklace around her throat, she twisted her hair into a heavy coil and skewered it with the blade of this dagger. In a tiny, round trade mirror she studied the effect; yet her mind was not really occupied with these matters of adornment. She could not keep her thoughts from centering around Jimmy.

Of course all those half-breed servants of his were creatures of the South American Rubber Company, which controlled all links of communication with the outside world. That company was in no way averse to taking gold as well as rubber, and would be glad enough to allow Jimmy to prospect the country at his own expense. But if any important strike should be made—why, those *cholos* undoubtedly had their instructions. If those instructions were followed, Jimmy would die, the *cholos* would earn a reward, the gold would accrue to the company and the episode there would end.

Those were the reasons why Inchung had arranged that Jimmy should be followed by unseen little savages, with their three-foot bows and seven-foot arrows, and to try and make sure that no gold of any consequence should at present be found. Yet, even so, she was troubled with misgivings.

Those savages were jungle people; they never would leave its thick cover to fight in the open should occasion require them to. Their weapons were suited for the jungle only; those long arrows, which would transfix a man at ten feet would not fly for as many yards. And then—though this she did not know — Inchung's standard of values, which had been established by the trading rafts, differed widely from those of the outside world. Those ornaments of hers, for example, each had been paid for with thrice its weight of gold dust, and it never had occurred to her that the price was exorbitant.

A slight sound made Inchung turn sharply, to see the old woman—the great-grandmother of the savages—who had come to make a report. Nothing had happened in the white man's camp, she said, save that he—the white man—had collected all the gold which had been found, and was examining it. What were the *cholos* doing? Nothing. Just talking among themselves. That was all.

That was all, but that was enough vastly to increase Inchung's uneasiness. Dismissing the old woman by a gesture, she twitched the *camiseta* from the cane on which it was wound and put it on. It must do as it was, wet or not; her visit to Jimmy's camp should be made as soon as she could put on her bracelets. She was snapping one of them around her wrist when the sound of a shot made her spring to her feet, and for a moment stand motionless, listening.

One shot meant nothing. Jimmy was forever firing at a pig, or something like that. But now another shot followed the first, and then two more. With a dry sob in her throat, Inchung ran toward the sounds. She did not go by way of the jungle—there was no time for that. Throwing herself into the backwater, where she washed her clothes, a few rushing strokes took her across. Thence she ran up the stony river beach, and so reached the camp. And there she saw what she so had feared to see.

The *cholos* had risen. Four of them, though, were down again, one moving feebly, the rest never again to stir until they

were carried away. Four of them were left, snarling like wolves, cowardly yet fierce, as they swarmed against Jimmy, who fought desperately, with his back against the only tree that the glade contained. Into the face of one man he flung his empty pistol, and with a heavy bag, held in his other hand, parried the thrust of a knife. The bag was ripped open, and a shower of gold dust glittered as it scattered on the ground.

"Back to the jungle wall! Go back!" shrieked Inchung.

Her hair streamed loose as with her left hand she snatched the little dagger from its coils. Stooping, with never a pause, she caught a machete from the wounded man and sprinted on as Jimmy left the tree and began to retreat toward the edge of the glade, still facing his enemies.

All this took place in an instant; an instant more and it all was over. Gripped in a hand practiced in its use since babyhood, Inchung's machete flashed and fell. One man dropped, his head nearly cut in two as she buried the blade of her little dagger in the throat of another. A third, who had come too close to the jungle wall, clawed frantically at his chest, from which the point of a long arrow protruded; then threw back his head, coughed horribly as he reeled, and sprawled sidewise. With a howl of dismay the remaining half-breed turned, and bolted desperately into the thicket.

"After him — and kill!" screamed Inchung.

There was a rustling in the jungle as her allies started to obey, and Inchung left the pursuit to them. She fell on her knees beside Jimmy, who lay senseless, with blood that flowed from a wound in his forehead making a pool on the ground.

With set lips, Inchung gathered him into her arms. Perhaps she herself had not suspected the reserve of strength upon which she drew, to help her as she carried him to his tent. There she laid him down, fetched water and tried to stanch the flow of blood, and after a time succeeded. Then she bandaged his wound with strips torn from her *camiseta*. She searched his stores for liquor, but passed over some brandy because she did not know what it was. So she took some villainous *cañaza* that had belonged to one of the *cholos*, and poured a little down his throat. He sighed, then opened his eyes.

"By Jove!" said he, faintly. "How lucky that I hid those cartridges!"

He spoke in English, so of course Inchung did not understand. But what did that matter? His senses had returned—he would live! A hot tear, perhaps the first that she had shed since childhood, fell and spattered upon Jimmy's forehead. He smiled up at her, then closed his eyes again. Apparently he slept.

Inchung stole softly out of the tent. Once outside, she flung herself prone, and cried as though her heart would break, as any other woman might do, for no reason at all that a man could discern.

It was long after nightfall when Jimmy awoke. He had a frightful headache, but was hungry, nevertheless. He found himself attended by a ministering goddess, who fed him on broth made of *chalona*—which is a species of dried mutton—flavored with wild peppers, who put him properly to bed, bullied him, moistened his wound with cool water and was altogether delightful. He heard those little savages squeal and jabber as they caroused in the jungle, but he did not know what the sound meant. Inchung knew; she had seen those savages when they came and carried away the fallen *cholos*. But she did not tell Jimmy.

Jimmy's wound was a machete cut that had nearly penetrated the outer table of his skull. The climate rendered it more serious than it otherwise would have been, especially as the attendant scalp wound, bleeding as only scalp wounds can, had left him very weak. On the other hand, his constitution was like that of a white-hickory sapling, and Inchung's devoted care was by no means amateurish. The women of her tribe have much experience with surgical cases of this sort. After a while, therefore, Jimmy began slowly to mend.

These first days of Jimmy's convalescence were very happy ones for Inchung. Except for one little cloud that lingered on the horizon of her contentment, they would have been perfectly happy. It was the surviving *cholo*—the one who had bolted into the jungle and who, by the way, was her

old acquaintance—who caused that cloud to arise. The savages sent in pursuit had failed to catch him, they reported. He had flung himself into the river, and aided by a log that he found stranded there—aided also by a miracle, as it seemed—he had succeeded in crossing. His pursuers could not cross.

Once having reached the far bank it was possible that the man might eventually reach the local headquarters of the South American Rubber Company, at Sorata. Accidents might, of course, befall him on the way—Inchung heartily hoped that they would—but if none did, it would be only a matter of time before representatives of that company would come down the river, prepared to deal with Jimmy as the half-breeds had failed to do.

Inchung knew, however, that at least three months must pass before this situation could arise. Actually it took rather more than that; nearly four idyllic months went by. Jimmy's normal strength had almost returned, notwithstanding a low fever that had attacked him in his weakened state. She believed that his affection for her also had increased; yet hardly dared to permit herself this belief because she so longed for it that a delusion in this regard would be infinitely more bitter to her than death.

Now, to remain wholly indifferent to months of self-forgetful devotion on the part of a beautiful girl, a man must be more than human—or less than that. Jimmy was very human. Of course, he was fond of Inchung—felt a warm and growing affection for her, that was quite apart from his gratitude. Yet, somehow he never thought of her as being really a woman. Rather she seemed to him a particularly bright and lovable child, who had been freakishly endowed, by the powers that rule such things, with the body and face of the fabled Diana.

Never had Jimmy thought to define this mental attitude to himself. He only felt it, and therefore could not realize its cause; and yet that cause was not far to seek. It was simply that young women, as he had known them, were so different from Inchung. Especially one young woman. In fact, there was only one—for Jimmy, but the fourth month of his convalescence already had begun before Inchung learned of her.

One of the company's trading *callapos* came down the river. It brought no news of the fugitive *cholo,* but that was not to be expected, for the man must of necessity have made his laborious upward way, if he made it at all, on foot, through jungle trails. But it did bring to Jimmy a packet of letters and papers, which Inchung took to him, as he lay in a hammock in the shade.

With eyes jealously observant, she watched his face brighten as he ran the envelopes through his fingers and selected certain ones. No word of English could Inchung read; nor, for that matter, of any other language, but her observation, for that very reason, was the more keen, and in any case that concerned Jimmy, it was especially so. The envelopes that he selected were of one shape and color; square and light gray. It was by no means the first time she had seen their like; Jimmy had a collection of them, all much worn, and from time to time he would take them, each in its order, and read their contents over again.

Even then she had seen his face brighten in the same way, though in a manner not nearly so marked as now. Even then she wondered why, but could not guess; her notions as to the nature of a letter were extremely vague. Now she sat and watched him as he arranged them in order and read them, always with that light on his face, though its expression changed swiftly as his eyes danced from line to line. She wondered why she felt a dull ache in her breast, as though a heavy stone had taken the place where her heart should be. Perhaps it was because she knew that for the time he had forgotten her very existence. But at all events the ache was there.

From the third envelope that Jimmy opened there dropped several snapshot photographs. With a joyful chuckle Jimmy examined them, then laid them side by side on his knees so that he could see them all at a glance. Inchung knew well enough what snapshots were; Jimmy had a camera. What the subjects of those pictures might be she could not tell, because their edges were toward her, and she wouldn't go and

look. Pride and innate good breeding, both of which are Lequo traits, intervened to prevent that.

So she sat and watched, with an infinite wistfulness in her face, until a sudden little breeze caught the pictures and whisked them away. Jimmy made a frantic grab for them, but he was too late; they went fluttering away like butterflies toward the jungle wall. Springing to her feet, Inchung ran and caught them as she might catch butterflies, using Jimmy's hat for the purpose. Then, as she brought them back to him and saw what the pictures were, she stopped short, gazing at them, her face set into a mask of tragic despair.

Being by no means a fool, she had realized from the first that the snapshots were probably those of a girl. That didn't so much matter; one found girls everywhere —but not such girls! Never until then had Inchung thought that there were any such girls. Never, in her wildest dreams had she imagined that things like those which surrounded that girl could exist in the whole, wide world.

A horse and a Persian cat were animals, evidently—but what kind, and what for? Other pictures revealed a piano, a tennis racket and a motor car. What could they be—and why? Then there were the more intimate things — shoes and stockings, gloves, a parasol and various hats, to say nothing of frocks. That pictured girl might as well, so far as Inchung was concerned, have come from another planet. It was the utter hopelessness of bridging the chasm yawning between them which brought that despair into the face of the Lequo girl.

"Is she yours?" demanded Inchung, tensely.

"Not yet," returned Jimmy. "But she will be, I hope."

His freckled face, as he spoke, reminded Inchung of a wild pomegranate that had been finched open, so that the brown seeds could be seen against its pink flesh. As yet, it seemed, Jimmy actually belonged to no woman. Therefore, Inchung's heart was not quite so heavy as it had been, nor so cold, for in it there smoldered a burning hatred of that other maiden, whose pictures she had seen. Of all this, however, Jimmy suspected nothing. He was counting and recounting the photographs.

"I've only got five," he complained, "and there ought to be six. Can't you find the other one, Inchung?"

Obediently Inchung went in search of the missing photograph, and very soon found it, partially hidden by a tussock of grass. With her back toward Jimmy, so that he could not see, she quickly rolled the bit of paper into a tight little cylinder, which she thrust into her hair, the only place of concealment about her person that was available. For a time she pretended to continue her hunt. Then, returning, she showed Jimmy her empty hands and strode away without speaking, leaving him to resign himself to the inevitable.

Upon reaching her hut, she unrolled the picture and bound it, by means of strands cut from her hair, around a quick-growing shrub by her door-post, muttering incantations as she did so. With her dagger, she carefully pricked a tiny hole in the breast of the pictured figure. There was a bud directly behind that puncture, and as the bud grew, penetrating the hole and enlarging it, so would a cancerous growth tear and rend the vitals of the picture's original.

That was the theory of this curse, handed down from mother to daughter through countless generations of Lequo women. Usually she who laid the curse was obliged to scratch the victim's likeness with a thorn on a pulpy leaf, as best she might; but surely a photograph should serve the purpose far better. Never had Inchung known, to be sure, of a case where the curse had operated successfully. Naturally not, because secrecy was one of its prime requisites. But then—for the same reason, though this fact did not occur to her—she had never heard of a failure. No gleam of doubt as to its efficacy ever crossed Inchung's mind.

It was done. She had intoned the incantation; had gone through all the ritual necessary to devote that girl of the pictures to a horrible death. Yet the act in itself seemed somehow to have satisfied the rage that had burned in her heart, so that its fire was dead, and nothing but that awful, aching hopelessness remained.

She sat down in her hut, trying to reason

with herself—to force her mind into a savage joy in the revenge she had taken, but her thoughts would work only in a circle, swiftly returning to their dismal starting point, that hopelessness. How long she sat there, staring at nothing, she never knew, but at length the darkening of her doorway recalled her to a realization of the outside world. She saw that monkey-like old woman, the great-grandmother of that savage herd, standing outside the hut, timorously peering in.

"Speak!" commanded Inchung, curtly.

"I tell of *him*," replied the old woman. "My people, whom you sent upstream to watch for his coming, have seen him; and with him are two others, beside the Lequos. Their *callapo* broke, so they have gone into camp. But to-morrow, while the shadows still are longer than the trees, they will be here."

As she uttered the last word, the old woman vanished into the jungle, apart from which she, like all her breed, was fearsomely ill at ease. But she had told enough: little need had Inchung to inquire into the identity of "him." The word, used in such a manner, meant a huge *cholo*, known on the river as *El Carnicero*—in English, "The Butcher." This was the man always sent by the company against any interlopers whom it considered to be dangerous or otherwise objectionable. Always a party, of varying strength, but always amply sufficient for its purpose, came with him. Now there were two men beside *El Carnicero*. What chance would Jimmy, still weak from his wound, have against three such men?

Not one chance in ten thousand—obviously—if events were allowed to take their normal course. But this would not be allowed. Now that Jimmy was in real danger, Inchung's mind was working smoothly and rapidly enough, and she would attend to that matter. But how could it be attended to? That was the question.

An appeal to her own people would be useless. What did they care about Jimmy? To the company, on the other hand, they looked for their pay and for all the luxuries to which they had become so wedded. The little savages were not to be thought of in this connection. To warn Jimmy was another notion that Inchung would not harbor for a moment. Jimmy would insist upon fighting—and he was not fit for that. What he must do was to go away—for the present, at any rate—so fast and so far that successful pursuit would be impossible.

To this end a plan flashed into her head. It was a plan that made her heart stand still for a moment, and caused her breath to come shudderingly. But then she shook her shoulders, as though to rid them of a burden, and laughed, rather mirthlessly. What did it matter, after all? The plan would work. For success of any kind, some price was demanded. Very well, then; she would pay that price—and that affair would be settled!

At once she began her preparations. First she went to her tribal village, and there arranged for a *callapo* to be in readiness before sunrise the next morning. Then she set out, almost at a run, for Jimmy's tent, only to meet him on the way. He had missed her and was in search of her.

"Come!" she called.

Wonderingly he followed her, asking questions that she would not answer. She led him into the valley that he had prospected, but only to turn aside, crawling among rocks, under vines and thorny bushes, where it would have seemed that none but a wild pig could make its way. At last they emerged into a glade, edged by a cliff, from which there spouted a jet of water. The jet was received in what evidently was a volcanic blow-hole, like a huge pot. Into it the water washed many pebbles, but only to wash them out again and roll them away, down the little channel through which it then flowed. Dipping her hands deep into this blow-hole, she brought them out overflowing with gold dust, practically pure, and emptied them into Jimmy's hat. Again she did this, and then for a third time.

"To-morrow there will be as much more," she said sadly. "Also the next day, and all days thereafter. We will take this, and I will bring you some that I have gathered, but for which I have no use. For you will come no more to this place until four full moons have grown and withered. You

must go—go down the river; not upstream. The way is longer, but by going in that direction you can buy rifles, and employ men who are not of *la compañia*, to the end that you may return, and make your title secure. To-morrow, at dawn, you must start."

"And you?" asked Jimmy.

"Me? Oh, for a little time I shall remain here. Afterward—who can tell? Perhaps I may follow you down the river. But if I do, I doubt if you will ever know it."

She laughed, and the laugh had so odd a ring to it that for an instant Jimmy was puzzled. Still, it was only some joke of hers, he supposed, and he had matters far more important than jokes to think about just then, so he turned his mind to them.

"How about raftsmen to take me down?" he inquired.

"They will be ready," she assured him. "Come; let us return."

There was a calm finality in her tone which, as he knew, was useless to dispute. He knew, moreover, that she was right. The lost Fortunatus mine is said to have been something like the one he had just seen, and Jimmy had heard stories of a similar formation in the Rand. Otherwise, so far as he knew, there was nothing in the world like this mine of Inchung's. It was well worth fighting for! Wild with excitement, he returned to his tent, and would have begun at once to pack for his journey, but Inchung forbade it.

"No. Now you are tired, and must rest for a while," she told him, decidedly. "After a little I will return and help you."

Once more she was right, and he knew it; his strength even yet was not what it had been. Obediently he sank into his hammock, where Inchung left him.

Inchung had returned to her hut, and was about to enter it when her eyes were caught by that shrub, and the photograph that was tied to it, close by her doorway. She was struck with wonder because so short a time had passed since she tied the photograph there, and yet it seemed so infinitely long ago. The whole world had changed since then.

She looked again at the pictured face, upon which the level rays of a setting sun were falling. It—that face in the picture—was smiling; and to Inchung's overwrought senses the smile seemed like a game defiance of certain death. Inchung admired and respected gameness. Besides, what did this girl—what did any girl or all girls—matter now? She felt that she had passed above and beyond all that sort of thing. Therefore, breaking the silky threads that held it, she again rolled the photograph into a little cylinder and tucked it back into her hair.

Then Inchung also rested, though she felt no need for rest. Afterward she took some salt bags that had been leaning carelessly in one corner of her hut, tied them together with a rope-strong stem of *bejuco* and slung them over her shoulder. Staggering under their weight—for there were nine of them, and they all were filled with gold dust—she carried them to Jimmy's camp.

There she helped him make up the light packs that he would take with him, and into one of them she slipped the picture that she had stolen. He had been working in his pyjamas, for the evening was stiflingly hot. When their tasks were finished, she tucked him into his hammock, as she had done so many times before. Stooping, she kissed him; then walked quickly away, and never looked behind.

Jimmy woke with the dawn, to find that his breakfast had been prepared, but that Inchung was nowhere to be seen. He called her, but she did not answer. He went in search of her, but his search was vain. At last, because his *callapo* could be kept waiting no longer, he was obliged to leave without seeing her. He felt bitterly hurt at this. Why had Inchung behaved in such a way? He could not understand it at all.

It was in no way remarkable that Jimmy could not find the Lequo girl. No being on earth ever would dream of looking in the place where she was hiding—nor guess why she had hidden there.

Half a mile above Jimmy's camp, well out in the stream, two huge rocks stood abreast, with a narrow space between them. The rocks themselves could not be seen; the rushing water broke over them in high, perpetual waves that fell below them on their downstream side. It was through the space

between these rocks that all *callapos* must come.

Inchung had gone to a point still farther upstream. There she stripped off her *camiseta,* and picking up a long stake that she had sharpened and hidden there, waded out into the current as far as its fierceness would allow; then threw herself in and swam. To shoot those rapids in this manner would have been certain and swift death to any one but a Lequo. For Inchung it would have been child's play—in fact, it had been just that, in former days—had she been unimpeded, but to swim and take that long stake with her was another matter. Nevertheless, she managed it. Unhurt, with the stake still within her grasp, she slipped neatly in behind one of those two rocks, where the current's force carried the water beyond it, like a miniature Cave of the Winds.

There she waited—and this was the hardest task of all. She could not look out; the rock shut her in on one side, and on all others she was encompassed by the water. That company *callapo,* bearing *El Carnicero* and his butcherly mates, would give no warning when it appeared. Therefore she must watch, ready for instant action. At last it seemed as though she could bear that suspense no longer—then her waiting ended.

Her eyes were fixed upon the smooth, green curtain of water that roofed the space in which she stood. On this watery roof, a little to one side of the rock, the shadow of a *callapo* flashed into view. It was as swift as the shadow of a swooping hawk, but Inchung's movements were quicker still. Already one end of that stake was set against the river bed; now she thrust its other point against those rafts. It sank between the logs, jammed there, and held. That was the pity of it—it held!

Inchung had been too anxious not to miss her prey. Had she waited for the veriest fraction of a second, the *callapo* would have made a nose dive, to smash into splinters on the rocks below. As it was, the stake had found its hold a yard too far forward. The three yoked rafts reared upright, while the Lequo crew leaped overboard like frogs in order to swim for safety, and the terrified *cholo* passengers, *El Carnicero* and his mates, remained behind on the *callapo,* with the current flattening them like smashed flies against the logs of which it was made.

Inchung must have known what would happen, with the tough stake bending like a straw as the river's mighty rush pressed against those upright rafts. Even then she might possibly have escaped had she let go the stake and sprung quickly aside; but this she certainly did not do. To make sure that a task had been completed was ever Inchung's way.

Therefore she stuck to her self-appointed post until the end—which was a mercifully quick one. The stake snapped, and its broken point transfixed her. So she—and the *cholos* also—followed Jimmy down the river.

But Jimmy never knew.

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TO LIVE

TO give myself—my smallest, deepest power—
That from the meager offering may spring
A thought, a word, a deed that seeks the light—
That were to live.

To hear a wild bird's song—to see a lovely flower,
To feel a young child's hand in mine, to know
Devotion like a radiance in the night—
And then to give.

Unresting soul, that longs for word and voice,
Give that thou art, and in the gift, rejoice!

Inez Walton.

The Ledbury Fist

By ELIZABETH YORK MILLER

Author of "The Greatest Gamble," "Diana the Hunted," "Doubles and Quits," etc.

CHAPTER XXV.

PIERROT OR PIERRETTE?

JIMMY produced Lois Loveday's fan, of which he had retained possession. "Look at that signature—'Periwinkle,'" he said.

"By Jove! Who wrote that?" Dick exclaimed.

"It's the Ledbury fist—what?"

"Beyond a doubt. But what makes you think it's Norwich's? And why should he be here, of all places?"

"I'll tell you," said Jimmy. "Suppose he managed to get out of that shop in Charpen Street just a skip ahead of the police: he'd be feeling rather desperate, wouldn't he? As though they were treading on his heels—what?"

"I should think so," Dick agreed.

"It isn't likely he's got much money. What would be the first thing he'd think of? How to get some, of course. You see, the Marchesa di Trevi ostensibly has paid no attention to his demands. He might have rung her up. They might have told him at her place that she was here. It might have occurred to him to come here and find her, if possible, and get her to help him. His first thought would be a disguise, of course. Karlson's would suggest itself. Everybody in the world has gone to Karlson's at one time or another. Very well. No doubt there are very few decent costumes left. While he is trying to find something to suit him, along comes the messenger from Watson Clinks returning the Pierrot outfit. 'Too long for you?' says old Johnnie Karlson or one of his underlings. 'We can fix that in two ticks by taking a reef in the legs.' No doubt Karlson mentions the fact that a whole masked

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party is going in this particular get-up. Do you follow me, Dick?"

"Yes," said Dick doubtfully.

"I take it that that is what happened. I don't know the fellow, and neither does our hostess. He's not been invited. I had a good look at him, and he's just about Norwich's size. Now I tell you what I want you to do, Dick. I'll get Lewis on the telephone and confide my suspicious to him. You keep an eye on the fellow. Don't let him out of your sight."

"I think that excellent champagne has gone to your head," Dick said moodily. "I am sure it has to mine. Do you know, there have been times this evening when I could have taken my oath that one of the girls of this party is Evelyn?"

"Could you?" Jimmy asked with an air of innocence. "Why don't you find out?"

"Jimmy—is she? It can't be possible! Evelyn would be feeling too unhappy—"

"*Would* she? What about you? You're here, aren't you? Now remember what I told you. Keep your eye on that fellow—the short one."

Jimmy Creigh hurried off, and Dick returned to the box just in time to see the girl whom he "could have taken his oath" was Evelyn jump down from the ledge of the box onto the dancing floor, and fox-trot off with the man she had been chatting with.

Then it was Dick discovered that there were two short men, and he didn't know which of them he was to watch.

If either or both left the box, what was he to do? He couldn't follow them both if they went in different directions; if one left and the other remained, it would be just as bad. Jimmy should have indicated which of the two "short ones" was the one to be kept under supervision.

There were signs that supper would soon be done with. The young people were not disposed to linger over it too long. Two by two they began to disappear, some by way of the door and some less decorously over the side of the box.

The music had become imbued with a livelier spirit. Hundreds of toy balloons were released and floated over the vast assemblage; colored streamers of tissue paper entangled the dancers and everybody started throwing little balls of brightly dyed cotton wool.

In and out between the dancers, attendants were darting with whisks and dustpans, trying to keep the floor reasonably clear of all this débris, but it was a hopeless task. The fun grew fast and furious.

And now the box was empty save for Dick Ardell and one other—one of the short ones. They sat at opposite sides peering covertly at each other from behind the shelter of their masks, maintaining a somewhat pointed silence.

Would Jimmy Creigh never come back? Dick divided his attention between the other Pierrot and the door, and occasionally his strained gaze sought to disentangle members of their party from the surging mass of color on the dancing floor.

He felt dazed with it all. If one could only be sure that Jimmy's idea was not altogether mad. There was nothing to go upon but that handwriting, the unmistakable Ledbury fist. Whoever the fellow might be, he was a Claveringian. That was the only certainty about him, except the fact that he was an uninvited guest.

Dick, pretending a greater interest in the floor than he really felt, swung himself onto the ledge of the box, and from that point of vantage looked out over the frothing sea of dancers; but he kept the tail of one eye for the undersized person at the back of the box.

Some little sign of self-betrayal, sooner or later, should tell him whether this individual was the Marchesa di Trevi or the man who had not been invited. Dick waited patiently for that sign. The hands gave him no clew. Like those of all the others, they were incased in orange-colored gloves several sizes too large and further covered to the knuckles with ruffles of black net?

The feet?

Ah! He should have thought of them before. The Marchesa di Trevi, by all the laws of sex and stature, should have tiny feet. This person's feet were smallish, but they were by no means tiny. No, they were a man's feet. Unmistakably so. The shoulders? So difficult to disguise a man's shoulders. Dick drew in a long breath.

Undoubtedly this strange Pierrot was a man. The shoulders and feet, once you had analyzed their character, belong to a man. This, then, was not the Marchesa di Trevi, but the uninvited guest—the man that Jimmy had convinced himself was Bruce Norwich.

Where on earth *was* Jimmy Creigh all this long time?

And then, just as Dick had convinced himself that this was the Pierrot to whom he must cling at all costs and hazards until Jimmy returned, the "man" whipped a vanity case out of a pocket and opening it began delicately to redden "his" lips with a stick of rouge.

"Hello!" Dick exclaimed with affected pleasure. "Didn't know you were a girl. A good idea, that, but you see it's in the little things we give ourselves away. Shall we dance?"

The Pierrot (or Pierrette) shook his (or her) head, and said in the Marchesa di Trevi's soft little drawl. "No, I thank you. It is so 'ot. I am going 'ome ver-ry soon. 'Ow clever that you should know I am a lady. It is great—what you call it?—the sport."

Dick's teeth closed over his under lip, and his eyes narrowed.

The Marchesa di Trevi's voice undoubtedly—yet was it not a trifle overdone, exaggerated? Absurd to think so, yet—

The door burst open and Jimmy Creigh appeared, quivering with excitement that was not wholly suppressed.

"Oh, there you are. I see that— Well, yes; all right." Jimmy's gaze darted to the corner where the mysterious Pierrot (or Pierrette) was now dabbing powder on its chin. His voice trailed off dubiously, then broke upon Dick with a sudden blast of fury. "Where's he got to? Why the deuce didn't you do what I told you to do? Look here, where's Angelo?"

Dick made a gesture indicative of despair. "How on earth do you expect me to keep track of a dozen people all at once—"

"There's only *one* I asked you to watch," Jimmy interrupted bitterly. "You're not a bit of good. There's going to be a high old time here in about two minutes. I got on to Lewis, and he's been getting into touch with Karlson's. That's what kept me so long. It's exactly as I thought; as I told you. The fellow's here, right enough. They're watching the doors. He can't get out. I've got a police pass for you and the marchesa and—and the others that I can identify. I was going to suggest that Angelo should take the marchesa home at once, but you'd better do it, Dick."

"Oh!" gasped the small Pierrot (or Pierrette). "What 'as 'appened? I am so afraid. Yes, I must go." She (or he) shrank back and began to edge toward the door, feeling along the wall of the box with timid gestures.

At the sound of that familiar voice Jimmy Creigh turned and laid a protective arm across the shrinking shoulders.

"It's all right, Justina," he whispered, using her name boldly. "Don't be frightened. Dick will see you home, and as soon as I find Angelo I'll send him along. Explain everything when we meet again."

He handed Dick a card, after hastily scribbling "Pass bearer and companion" on it.

"A plainclothes man at the door will stop you, but it will be all right if you show him this," Jimmy said, shoving the card into Dick's hand.

CHAPTER XXVI.

DOUBTS.

AS the two moved toward the door, a spasm of doubt assailed Jimmy Creigh. He could not give it a name. It suddenly came, racked him with the torture of indecision, and was gone. For one fleeting moment he had suspected—what?

He did not know. There was no *real* suspicion in his mind—not a vestige—that he was acting unwisely in sending the marchesa off with Dick. He wanted to get her out of the way. It would be too painful for her to stand by and see Bruce Norwich literally unmasked. The man might conceivably take some low method of revenge on her at the last moment. He was being desperately hunted, and he knew it. She might have been the means of saving him

had that money fallen into his hands. No doubt he held it against her that she had failed him. Jimmy had reasoned all this out, and that was why he had sent her off.

Somewhere out in that vast mob on the dancing floor was Bruce Norwich disguised as one of the Pierrots. He might, or might not, return to the box—but he could not escape from the Albert Hall without one of Jimmy's cards. Unless, of course, he had some method of changing his costume. The police would only question the orange-and-black Pierrots, of whom ten would remain in the Hall after Dick and Justina di Trevi had gone.

Detective Inspector Lewis had satisfied himself that it was, indeed, the wanted man who had gone to Karlson's at the last moment—long after everybody else had arranged for costumes—and been fitted out with the one returned by Watson Clinks. The description, as given by the assistant who served him, agreed perfectly.

And it was that old school handwriting which had given him away, the telltale "Ledbury fist."

Two of Lewis's men appeared at the door of the box, which Jimmy Creigh now had to himself. In order not to be conspicuous, they had provided themselves with dominoes and false noses. Yet to Jimmy they were ridiculously out of the picture, so obviously policemen that he marveled they had not created comment. He had a nervous inclination to laugh, but thought better of it.

"Come outside," he said. "This is a private box. That is to say it isn't my box, and I don't suppose you want my friends asking questions."

The detectives obligingly took up their position on a settee in the corridor directly opposite.

Jimmy paced nervously to and fro. His eyes ached from searching that seething mass of color on the ballroom floor. Now and again he would catch sight of an orange and black Pierrot or Pierrette, or even a couple of them dancing together, but almost immediately he would lose them again in the crowd. There seemed to be no individuals, except here and there a scattered fragment tossed off as it were from that pulsing, surging mass of glittering color. There was no appreciable cessation of the music. When the nerve-racking blare of the fifty-piece jazz orchestra left off exhausted for the moment, the more dignified, yet no less inspiring, band of the Irish Guards took up the burden. The dancers, themselves, having supped, had taken on a new lease of life. The screech of toy whistles and the wail of dying balloons added to the din. Jimmy Creigh suddenly visualized the scene as incredibly silly. Never again would he care to go to a fancy dress ball, he told himself.

He wondered at the patience of the policemen. There they sat in their soiled hired dominoes with their false red noses, as stolidly as though all eternity lay before them. Yet they were here to catch a man wanted in connection with a brutal murder. And that man was out on the dancing floor, mingling with honest—though possibly foolish—people: holding an unsuspecting girl in his arms. Perhaps, for all Jimmy knew, the fellow was dancing with Evelyn Harland. Yet the detectives were unmoved by such an idea. To Jimmy it seemed monstrous.

After ages had passed there appeared the tall Pierrot whom Jimmy suspected—nay, knew—to be the father of Lois and Margery. He threw a glance at Jimmy and remarked it was hot.

"Not dancing?"

Jimmy said no, he was a bit fatigued.

So, apparently, was Mr. Loveday. He had secreted a flask which he now unearthed and mixed himself a watery looking whisky-and-soda, explaining that champagne didn't agree with him.

"When do you imagine this show breaks up?" he inquired plaintively. "It's after two. I'd give a good deal to be in bed."

Jimmy said he hadn't the faintest idea. It would probably go on until five, anyway.

Mr. Loveday openly discarded his mask.

"I can't stand this thing any more," he said. "I don't care what the girls say. Everybody knows who I am, anyway. Why don't you follow suit, Creigh?"

Apparently he knew who Jimmy was.

"Dashed silly," said Jimmy, and threw his own mask into a corner.

They laughed at sight of each other's hot, flushed faces.

"Whew! Wish I'd thought of that before," sighed Mr. Loveday. "It makes a world of difference. Have a drink, Creigh?"

Jimmy said no, he didn't care about one just now, but he lit a cigarette, the first he had enjoyed in comfort that long, wearisome night.

He wondered if he ought to confide in Stephen Loveday, prepare the host of this little party for what was afoot. The door of the box had been left open to promote a current of air, and Mr. Loveday made a laughing comment upon the solemn, red-nosed couple in the turkey calico dominoes on the settee outside.

"Did you ever see such feet!" he exclaimed.

Jimmy craned his neck. The size of policemen's feet was proverbial, but that wasn't what Stephen Loveday meant. This couple had on square-toed laced boots. Not exactly the sort of footgear one selects to wear to a ball.

"Oh, I see, they're detectives," Mr. Loveday added.

Was it as obvious as all that?

"Do you think so?" Jimmy inquired guiltily.

"It's as plain as a pikestaff," his host replied.

"Well—er—hem!" Jimmy cleared his throat. "As a matter of fact, sir, they *are* detectives. I'm responsible for their being here."

Naturally Stephen Loveday was startled. Jimmy explained hurriedly.

"Do you mean to say—" Mr. Loveday spluttered, "—are you trying to tell me that one of this crowd, one of the people who's been here, in this box, is a murderer?"

The idea offended him horribly.

"Well, sir, I can't say as to that," Jimmy replied miserably. "Any way, he's wanted in connection with that unfortunate woman's death. But—" and this had something of compensation in it—"he went to school with Dick Ardell and me. Clavering. That's how we got on to him, really. Strange how things work out, isn't it?"

But Stephen Loveday refused to be cheered by the fact that Bruce Norwich was a swell school man. In his opinion, it only made the matter worse.

"Why don't they do something?" he fumed, but in a whisper. "Sitting out there like a couple of dummies. It's absurd."

"I dare say they're doing what they've been told," Jimmy replied. "It isn't as though they were the only two. Lewis has got his men at every exit. You wouldn't be able to get out, yourself, without a pass. Here, I'd better give you yours, now. I'll fill it in for all four of you—for Lois and Margery and Evelyn as well. I should collect them as soon as I could, if I were you, and get off."

For the past two hours Stephen Loveday had been longing to go home; now—human nature being what it is—he was not so anxious. That is to say, not for himself. For Lois and Margery and Evelyn, yes. They were women and with such an unpleasant business afoot, ought to be got away at once. But who was to take them?

"Oh, I can't go," Mr. Loveday said hastily. "Perhaps you can get one of your young men to take the girls home."

Jimmy had no great list of young men. There remained, besides himself, merely Angelo di Trevi. Well, Angelo could do it. His stepmother was safely out of the way.

If only he could get hold of Angelo, and of the Loveday girls and Evelyn.

Stephen Loveday, edging toward the door with a view toward engaging the patient detectives in conversation, stooped to pick something from the floor.

It was a small gold box which had fallen in a corner—a beautiful little gold box filled with white powder.

"Cocaine!" exclaimed Jimmy Creigh when they had examined the contents.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

"WHO on earth do you suppose dropped that?" Stephen Loveday demanded severely.

"Well, you needn't look at me as though you thought I was the one," Jimmy replied.

"Of course not—of course not," his host murmured. "I was only wondering. The idea makes me feel, well—apprehensive, to say the least."

He fingered the little gold box, turning it over and over. The outside was beautifully chased. In olden days it had been used for snuff. And now some decadent had degraded it to a receptacle for cocaine powder. The two men were not familiar with the stuff. It was the first time either of them had seen it, and Jimmy had thought for a moment that the fine snow-white substance was face powder. But venturing a trifling pinch to his nostrils, and taking a gingerly sniff, he was convinced that it had peculiar properties not generally associated with anything so harmless as the stuff into which a lady dabs her bit of swansdown and pats upon her nose.

"Do you realize," demanded Stephen Loveday, "that whoever owns this—this poisonous commodity—that whoever owns it, I say, is closely associated with my niece and daughters?"

He made Jimmy feel uncommonly guilty.

"Very likely." Jimmy ran over in his own mind the possibility of the little gold box being the property of either Lois or Margery. Not Evelyn Harland. No, she was really out of the question. But Lois Loveday was stage-struck and Margery wrote poetry. In Jimmy's opinion, some of their friends were very, very queer. But it was not an idea one could broach to a father.

The detectives in the corridor came to life and strolled across.

Mr. Loveday showed them the gold box and its sinister contents. One of them took possession of it, which Mr. Loveday thought a little high-handed.

"The man we are looking for is a cocaine fiend," the detectives said. "He probably dropped it. Did you, perhaps, notice him at any time sitting in that corner where you picked the box up?"

Stephen Loveday shook his head. This was the first he knew anything was amiss.

But Jimmy Creigh experienced once more that odd spasm of doubt which had assailed him when Dick and Justina di Trevi departed.

The little marchesa had been sitting in that corner.

Jimmy asked to see the box again. He examined it briefly and came to the conclusion that the workmanship was Italian. Could it be possible that Justina was addicted to the use of cocaine?

He went cold all over.

But there was no time in which to speculate upon the idea.

A common impulse had apparently seized most of the remaining Pierrots and Pierrettes. They came dribbling back, first Angelo di Trevi and Evelyn Harland. Seeing that Jimmy and Mr. Loveday had discarded their masks, the new arrivals promptly took off theirs.

Jimmy observed that Angelo seemed slightly taken with Evelyn. Poor Angelo! In the rôle of her temporary fiancé, Jimmy Creigh scowled at her.

"I'm so glad you've decided to unmask," she said, fanning herself with hers, and making a little face at Jimmy.

Then her tone changed. Something was in the air. "What's the matter? Who are those two men?" she asked.

Angelo di Trevi followed her glance and laughed uproariously. He thought the detectives frightfully funny. Their red noses and shabby dominoes made him think of home at carnival time.

Jimmy was fussily important. His manner said plainly there was some terrific mystery afoot.

"Never you mind. You girls have got to get out of this. Where are Lois and Margery?"

"How should I know? And what on earth do you mean, Jimmy Creigh? Uncle Stephen, what does he mean? Or is he only just being an idiot—as usual?"

"He says one of us is going to be arrested for murder," Mr. Loveday explained, with a sigh.

Evelyn shrieked and the young Marchese di Trevi hastily crossed himself.

Two Pierrettes sauntered in and promptly tore off their masks. They were friends of the Loveday girls. A third, who had been dancing with a man not of the party stood outside the door chatting with him. Her mask was already off, slung on her arm,

ready to be resumed the instant she caught sight of Lois, the martinet. But now, to her relief, she saw that it would not be necessary to resume it.

The newcomers were laughing and talking at the top of their lungs. They wanted something to drink. Lemonade or ginger beer. They were terribly thirsty. They made a dressing-room of the box, fluffing out their damp hair, mopping their flushed faces with powder puffs. One of them yawned. She wanted to go home.

"It's horribly late, and I have to get up at eight o'clock—" Wouldn't somebody see her to a cab?

Jimmy was counting over and over again, adding, subtracting—even multiplying.

How many still were missing?

Three, unless he was wrong—and he might easily be wrong—Lois, Margery, and the uninvited guest. Perhaps Norwich wouldn't turn up. That is to say, not here.

Evelyn kept plucking at Jimmy's sleeve, whispering in fearful accents.

"What did you mean? What did Uncle Stephen mean? Who's going to be arrested for murder—"

"*Oh, be quiet!*" Jimmy cried, turning on her furiously. "Can't you see I'm busy?" He went on with his counting—all over again, because Evelyn had put him out. "Dick and the marchesa, gone—that's two; and two's four—and two more is six—seven, eight, nine." Yes, he was right. Lois, Margery and the uninvited guest were still to be accounted for.

Stephen Loveday was leaning over the ledge of the box, shouting, gesticulating. He had caught sight of Margery waltzing with a troubadour. The couple flashed by under his very nose. Had Margery heard?

Jimmy pressed over Mr. Loveday's shoulder.

"There's Margery," he said, imparting perfectly superfluous information. And Margery had taken off *her* mask.

A moment later she appeared in the box with her troubadour.

"Oh, I say, Lois will give it to us!" she cried. "But it got so hot. One simply couldn't stand the beastly thing."

She, too, joined the clamor for something thirst-quenching, borrowing a powder puff.

It was a big box, plenty of room for them all. They sat about on the ledge, on the step, some of them even on chairs. A waiter had brought a great tray of glasses filled with ginger beer, in which floated blobs of ice and lemon.

Delicious!

Angelo di Trevi and Evelyn whispered apart. The others were happily ignorant that anything was impending, but somebody remarked that Jimmy Creigh looked cross.

Angelo was worried about his stepmother. Who was she dancing with? Where had she got to? She was so irresponsible. He hadn't been told as yet that Jimmy Creigh had sent her home with Dick.

"Hello, there's Lois!" Margery cackled. "Oh, what a look she's given us! Now we're in for it. I could feel her eyes simply blaze."

Yes, there was Lois. Jimmy winced. Dancing with the uninvited guest. Tall Lois and—it must be—Bruce Norwich. Jimmy flew a signal to the men in the corridor, and then leaned out of the box determined to keep the couple in sight.

Lois had seen the boxful; all, in defiance of her orders, unmasked. She and her partner were the only two who had observed the rules. Lois would be in a fine temper. She was one of those managing people who insists upon everything being done by rule of thumb—her own thumb. Oh, yes, she would be furious.

Jimmy leaned far out of the box and very nearly overbalanced.

Yes, the couple had moved out of the thick mass of dancers and were making for the nearest aisle. Jimmy could see Lois's chin wagging with indignation. It seemed to him that her partner hung behind as though unwilling to accompany her. Or was that merely imagination?

Once again he was assailed with that feeling of doubt. What a slight girlish figure Norwich—if it was Norwich—made beside Lois.

They disappeared up the aisle, and Jimmy rushed into the corridor, followed by Stephen Loveday. The detectives were strolling to and fro.

"Your man's coming," Jimmy said.

Lois and the little Pierrot hove in sight.

Lois began to call out to Jimmy.

"I think you're just hateful—all of you!" she exclaimed. "I think it's perfectly horrid of you, Jimmy Creigh. I'll bet you're the one that started it—"

Her companion laughed. The low thrilling sound of it froze the blood in Jimmy's veins.

"Take off your mask," he said tensely.

And the little Pierrot took off "his" mask.

It was Justina di Trevi.

Jimmy ran a wild hand through his hair.

He had sent the wrong one off with Dick. Bruce Norwich had slipped quietly through the net helped by no less a person than Jimmy Creigh himself.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

UNMASKED.

YES, Jimmy Creigh had decidedly overdone the business of being clever. For some little time he was the only one who realized what a mess he had made of things in his zeal to be of service: and for one wavering moment he thought of keeping still about it.

The detectives came into the box, closed the door, and looked everybody over. They were all entirely visible from the dancing floor, but who was to guess what was going on?

It was explained sketchily that the police were looking for a man who had joined their party unbidden, and had dressed himself in a costume similar to theirs. The girls were all thrilled.

But the wanted man was not there. They were rather disappointed. Just for the moment they rather expected the good-looking young Italian, a stranger to them all but Jimmy, would prove to be the culprit. But he, it seemed, was a nobleman.

The detectives looked at Jimmy Creigh. Had they been fooled by him? Was it merely hysterical nonsense on his part? But no. Evidence procured at Karlson's corroborated his story.

The excitement was falling flat. Mr. Loveday told Jimmy—with severity—that a practical joke could be carried too far. He began to marshal his girls for home. It was time they all went, he said.

The Marchesa di Trevi shrugged her shoulders and smiled at the unhappy Jimmy. A curious way to treat one's guests, eh?—that was what her shrug said.

Jimmy got his detectives outside and privately explained to them his humiliating position. They questioned him closely, and although they might look very funny in the turkey-red dominoes and false noses, there was nothing at all humorous about them now, to Jimmy's way of thinking. They were severely businesslike.

He told them that he had had no doubt whatsoever but that the Pierrot he had sent off with Mr. Ardell was the Marchesa di Trevi. The person was about her build and had spoken with her voice and accent.

One of the detectives reminded him that Bruce Norwich was an actor, that he probably knew the marchesa was of this party, and that he was familiar with her manner of speaking.

So it was no news to the police that she had once been engaged to the fellow!

Jimmy's thoughts raced off to Dick. What had happened when the two left the Albert Hall? It was impossible to answer that question on speculative grounds.

Jimmy returned to the box and made his adieux. He had to go with the detectives, he said. Several people jeered good naturedly at him.

"Oh, it's you, is it, Jimmy?"

"Poor old Creigh! What's he been and done?"

"Have they got handcuffs for you?"

Jimmy hurried out and slammed the door after himself.

He had to wait while the men from Scotland Yard called off their pickets. Then the three of them found a telephone booth, and one of the detectives rang up Jimmy's flat.

No reply.

"Try again," Jimmy urged. "There's sure to be some one there."

This time central said that the telephone was out of order.

The detective got hold of the supervisor and made known his identity. Inquiry revealed the fact that the first time the num-

ber was called there was, as reported, "no reply"; and the second time, the circuit had been cut. As they figured it, between the first and second calls somebody in the flat had made sure to clip the telephone wires.

A taxi was summoned and the three got into it, the detectives discarding their ridiculous disguises on the way. As fast as possible they were driven to Whitehall.

Meanwhile what of Dick?

The last we saw of him he was piloting the bogus Marchesa di Trevi toward an exit from the Albert Hall.

He asked the "lady" if she had anything to fetch from the cloak room, and was told that Angelo had her ticket. It didn't matter. If Angelo forgot, the wrap could be sent for to-morrow. The main thing was to get home.

All of this, of course, in the marchesa's voice. Like Jimmy, Dick Ardell had been convinced by that voice. Yet—also like Jimmy—some half lingering question remained in his mind.

He took off his mask as they threaded their way toward the main door, but his companion did not follow suit. There was a great crush at the door, people still coming in; a few leaving. Somebody touched Dick on the shoulder. It was a "plainsclothes man" who seemed to have sprung up from nowhere. The "marchesa" clutched Dick's arm and pressed close to him.

"The card—the card!" she whispered.

"Oh, yes!" Dick produced the card, and the detective touched his hat. "Right, sir."

"'Ow most awfully clever they are!" murmured Dick's companion. "Now we must 'ave a taxi. I will wait 'ere, while you find one."

But that was unnecessary. Plenty of cabs were rolling up, discharging passengers. Even at this hour more people were arriving than leaving. They were able to step directly into a taxi from the door. Perhaps the marchesa hadn't counted on this. She hopped in and held out her hand in its floppy glove to Dick.

"Good-by—it's all right. I 'ave no need to trouble you further," she said quickly.

"Oh, no, Jimmy wouldn't forgive me if I didn't see you home," Dick replied. "Let me see—what is your address?"

The marchesa thought just a wee trifle too long.

"It's all right," Dick said. "I remember."

He gave a direction to the driver and jumped into the taxi.

The "marchesa," quite unnecessarily, shrank away from him. She leaned over and began to fiddle with the fastening of the door on her side of the cab. Dick pulled her hand away.

"Be careful," he admonished. "That might fly open and give you an unpleasant shock."

"I was only seeing that it was secure," the "marchesa" replied irritably.

"Why don't you take off your mask?" Dick asked. "It must be very uncomfortable."

But the "marchesa" made no move to follow his advice. She sat tensely. There was something in the attitude which suggested a cat about to spring.

The taxi was flying down the Kensington Road, taking full advantage of the complete absence of traffic.

Dick asked permission to light a cigarette. The "marchesa" granted it, and again fumbled with the door fastening. It seemed that she wanted the window down. Dick lowered it.

He threw her a sidewise glance when, at Hyde Park Corner, they turned to the right toward Constitution Hill, but she seemed not to notice. As the cab rounded the Victoria Memorial, however, and swung into the Mall, Ardell's companion evinced some slight uneasiness.

"Where are we going?" she asked.

"Home, of course," Dick replied. "Don't you know where you are?"

The "marchesa" reminded him that she was a stranger in London. Just for a moment Dick wondered if he had not made a mistake in his sudden conjecture concerning her.

Well, it wouldn't matter vitally if he had. The little "marchesa" would be the first one to laugh with him. According to Jimmy, she had the soul of a very nice ad-

venturess. However, there was a test to be made.

From Charing Cross they swung down Northumberland Avenue and drew up before the big block of flats where Jimmy Creigh lived, and where for the time being Dick lived also.

Dick had the fare ready. He jumped out and gave it to the driver, at the same time offering the "marchesa" his free hand. Indeed, he did more than offer it. He reached into the taxi and literally hauled her out. For some inscrutable reason she was trying to get out on the other side, but the door had stuck.

Dick kept hold of her arm. At the entrance to the flats she made a determined effort to free herself, but he held on the more tightly.

The night porter stared at them, touched his cap to Dick, and opened the door of the lift. Dick forced his companion in ahead of him. The car ascended solemnly, and nothing was said, but the "marchesa" was breathing like a winded runner.

"Let us in, Parkins, will you? I can't get at my key," Dick said, when they stood before the door of the flat.

The night porter let them in.

Dick fairly flung the "marchesa" ahead of him. She sprawled clumsily along the waxed parquet floor, regaining her balance with difficulty.

"Now, take off that mask," Dick commanded. "I've brought you here, you miserable little worm, in order to hear your story before I send for the police. Take it off, I say. I know who you are, Norwich."

The bogus marchesa did as bidden, revealing the pale, twitching features of Bruce Norwich.

CHAPTER XXIX.

SOME THINGS EXPLAINED.

"SIT down," Dick ordered.

The sight of Norwich roused in him all the cold fury of old days at Clavering, when he, as head boy of Ledbury's house, had been obliged to give this loathsome creature a well-deserved thrashing. Norwich had disgraced every tradition of Clavering, and except for the rigid secrecy observed by those who knew might have succeeded in giving the school a black eye from which it would have been slow to recover.

Norwich obeyed, just as he had obeyed at Clavering when caught in his iniquities—sniveling, half defiant, and with hatred in his mean little eyes.

"Oh, you think you're very clever, don't you? You think you're going to put a rope around my neck, but I'll put one around yours. I saw you come out of Alma Stern's house that night—you were blind, reeling drunk. I followed you for hours. I didn't know the poor thing was dead then. I watched you while you were sitting on that bench on the Embankment, and I saw you take the jeweled cross you'd stolen from her out of your pocket and look at it, and then put it back quick when a policeman came along. And then I followed you to the Savoy."

Dick was considerably surprised, not to say startled, by this explosive confession. It had a curious ring of truth; and if it were true, then Bruce Norwich had not murdered the Stern woman.

There was something sickening in that ghastly white face with the darting eyes. A crumpled heap the creature lay, like a broken toy tossed into a chair. The legs dangled and sprawled, the arms gesticulated loosely, a spineless creature it looked to be, incapable of ordered movement. Eyes envenomed; little ratlike eyes, beady and bright.

"Oh, my God!" it groaned. "Give me something. I can't find it—my little gold box. I'm dying. Give me brandy."

Dick went to the sideboard and poured out a stiff drink, which he handed to his guest.

"Now tell me the rest of it," he said steadily. "You say you saw me come out of Miss Stern's house that night, and that I was drunk."

"Ha! I should think you were," Norwich sneered. "You reeled all over the place. Why, I picked you out of the gutter once myself."

"That was kind of you," Dick said.

"How did you happen along so conveniently?"

"Oh, you are clever, Ardell. Just as clever as you always were—"

"We'll admit that. Answer my question."

"I was there so conveniently, as you say, because Alma was my girl—the woman I meant to marry, the only woman I ever loved. I knew she had a crowd of mugs playing cards, and I had to wait until they were gone. I saw them drive away, and you and another man separate at the corner. Then you went back, and Alma let you in herself."

"You saw me go in, as well?" Dick was getting interested.

"Yes, I did." The thin voice rose to a screech, as though defying contradiction. "And I waited and waited. It was nearly an hour before you came out again—"

"And was I drunk when I went into the house?" Dick interrupted.

"Very likely. But you were worse when you came out. My God! I didn't know she'd been killed. Give me another drink—quick!"

He clawed the air with skinny fingers. The grotesque yellow gloves lay on the floor. He tore away the Pierrot's ruff and threw that on the floor also. A series of choking coughs shook him and some of the brandy poured over the rim of the glass and dribbled down his chin.

"That's better," he gasped.

"Why did you follow me, if you didn't know Alma Stern was dead?" Dick asked.

"Why? Why? What would you have done? If you saw a man sneak back to the house of the woman you loved, after everybody else had gone, what would you think? And mind you, she didn't know I was coming that night. She said it would be so late, I'd better not come; and I said all right, I wouldn't. But I'd begun to get suspicious. She'd been acting queer, trying to throw me over. That sister of hers, Rosslyn Bates, put her up to it. I didn't know it was you when I first followed you. It was only when you fell into the gutter, and I helped you up, that I saw you were my dear old school chum, Dick Ardell—"

"Yes," Dick interrupted. "We got as far as the Savoy a little while ago. You followed me there and picked my pocket—"

"Oh, no, I didn't. I got Blount to do that. He's a friend of mine. I could trust him."

"I see." That was what Dick had already thought. "And what gave you the idea of sending the cross to Miss Harland?"

"I thought of it when I heard that Alma had been murdered. I found out that you were engaged to be married, and it was easy enough to get the girl's address. In fact, I remembered her. She used to come to Clavering to cricket matches when she was a kid. Her brother was at school with us, too."

"You've got a good memory," Dick said. "And where, may I ask, did you get my card? The one you sent with the cross?"

"Oh, *that!*" Norwich laughed in an unpleasant fashion. "You'd given it introducing a fellow to somebody I knew—years ago. I picked it up in my friend's place and kept it. You never know when a thing may be useful."

Dick made his unwilling guest go over the story again, elaborating details, repeating important points. If he had hoped to trip Norwich up he was disappointed.

Of course, the story might not be true, at least in some respects, but there was a disconcerting air of general truth about it.

"Why haven't you told the police what you've just told me?" Dick asked. "Why have you done your best to keep yourself hidden?"

"Ha! That's good, from you. You weren't any too quick to come forward yourself, were you?"

"No, I wasn't," Dick admitted.

"Well, perhaps my reason was the same as yours. I didn't want them asking me questions—see? There are lots of things they imagine they have against me."

"And I suppose you think I killed the woman," Dick said.

The broken bundle roused itself.

"Think! Think!" it screeched. "If you didn't, who did? Why the police haven't collared you I can't guess."

"For one thing—because I've placed myself in their hands. For another—there's the matter of the strand of hair which was

cut from the unfortunate woman's head after she was murdered. They don't seem to be able to connect me with that."

He watched Norwich closely, but there was no sign of self-betrayal.

"What? What lock of hair? Was there anything in the papers about it? I must have missed it. Was some of her hair cut off?"

Dick told him that this was the case, and that the police regarded it as the most important clew of all. So far, there was no trace of it.

"By this time they've searched my room in Charpen Street," Norwich said slowly. "Well, they won't find it there."

He began to collapse again. Evidently brandy was not a sufficient stimulant for him.

"You haven't got any cocaine, I suppose? I'm dying, Ardell—I tell you, I'm dying. I must have something. I'll be a raving maniac in another moment. Give me something—some more brandy—and not a mere drop of it, either."

To Dick it did look as though the wretched creature's life hung by a breath or two. He went to the sideboard again, but the decanter was empty. A mere drop! Norwich had already had a good half tumbler.

"I'll have to open another bottle," Dick called to him.

There was a wine cupboard off the dining room, where Jimmy Creigh kept his small stock of liquids. As Dick hurried out, it never occurred to him that the wreck in the armchair was capable of translating any daring thought into action. Where was there a corkscrew? He had to hunt for that. Meanwhile the telephone began to ring. It started when Dick had a bottle of brandy between his knees and was trying to draw a more than usually difficult cork.

He muttered to himself, gave a vicious tug and the cork came out. Simultaneously the telephone stopped ringing.

He hurried through the dim hall carrying the bottle.

Something lunged at him.

He had a quick vision of what it was before sinking into oblivion—Bruce Norwich holding a pair of sharp scissors clenched in one fist like a dagger.

Something struck Dick in the breast, and then came a crashing blow on the head that knocked him senseless.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE TRUTH AT LAST.

BACK at Ravenstoke!

Summer in full swing—that is to say, real summer, with July melting into August; hay-making; the air filled with a haze like fine gold dust; backward young birds being coaxed and scolded to fly; cool streams hiding under the willows—and Dick Ardell sunning himself in a long cane chair on the terrace at Ravenstoke.

Well, here he was and had been for some weeks now. Restored to health, and, he hoped, to sanity.

A little way off—having chosen a shadier spot—sat Jimmy Creigh. Jimmy was dressed becomingly in tennis flannels, very neat and natty, sporting a new tie in the somewhat startling old Claveringian color scheme, a soft white felt hat tilted over his eyes, a cigarette drooping from its accustomed angle, a whisky and soda within the usual reach of his hand, and plenty of newspapers distributed near by.

"Well," he called out cheerfully, "you'll be pleased to hear that the execution went off without a hitch—"

Dick twisted uncomfortably and screwed a finger between his throat and his collar.

"And Bulstrode made a full confession last night," Jimmy went on.

"Did he, by Jove!" Dick was interested.

One may ask, who is Bulstrode?

"Read it—no, tell me. Don't wade through the whole thing. I'm fed up with it, anyway," Dick said.

Jimmy laid down the paper.

"Well, it seems that he was married to Alma Stern. They'd been dancing partners or acrobats together—something like that—before Bruce Norwich crossed her path. And she chucked him and he followed her to London. She told him she was engaged in some big scheme to make money, and in order to keep him quiet, let him live in her

house as a butler. (That was rather cool, wasn't it?) And the fellow naturally got jealous. What husband wouldn't? I don't think they ought to have hung him—"

"Go on, for Heaven's sake!" Dick demanded. "Where did I come in?"

"At the front door, you silly ass. Just as you said. Bulstrode knew she'd been letting some one in late at night, and he'd determined to end it. When she went upstairs to fetch your cigarette case the supposed butler was lying in wait somewhere. He gave you a good old bash on the head and then he followed her upstairs and—well, finished her. He put the cross in your pocket to make it look as though you'd robbed her, and then he went through all her possessions, thinking that he'd clear off. Which, if you remember, he did do—only the police caught him and held him on a charge of robbery. He was strangled, as you might say, by that strand of hair. Curious, that having killed the woman, he'd want a souvenir to remember her by—isn't it? Well, that's what put the rope around his neck. Lewis found it in a trunk he'd sent to a safety-deposit vault."

There was a brief silence. Then Dick said: "I always thought Norwich didn't do it. Wouldn't have had the strength, for one thing. What's happened to him?"

"Oh, he's got off easy. Three years for assault on you, and six months for conspiracy and theft—sentences to run concurrently."

"It doesn't sound so very easy to me," Dick remarked. "Still I dare say he deserves it—the swine."

"He'd have got more, only the defense proved that his health wouldn't stand it. There's not much chance of his living out the sentence as it is. Poor devil! I'm inclined to be a little sorry for him, Dick. He can't help being an out-and-out rotter. Look at his antecedents? Mother a South American music hall dancer of the lowest type, father a so-called English gentleman who'd been railroaded out to the Argentine for the good of his own country—and this wretch, their offspring, sent back to school here and left to his own devices when Clavering got too hot for him. All this came out at the trial, Dick. He didn't know Alma Stern was married, and he loved the woman. It was the only honest thing about him. That, and the fact that he really believed you'd killed her."

Dick heaved a deep sigh.

"I'm glad it's over," he said. "What time are your friends coming down?"

Jimmy looked at his watch, which was a merely mechanical action. It was now only a little after two.

"At four—they should be here in good time for tea."

"You don't look very pleased," Dick observed. "Perhaps you're not as keen on the Marchesa di Trevi as I thought you were. Yet you wanted me to ask her and the stepson down. It was because of you that I asked them. What's up, Jimmy? Can't you tell a pal?"

Jimmy Creigh winced.

"Nothing's up," he said a little sulkily.

"You liar! Ever since we came here you've worn a haunted air. By the way, I hear that the Harlands got back from Dieppe last night. I wish you'd take a message to Evelyn from me."

"Eh? Yes, of course." Jimmy twisted uncomfortably. "What is it?"

"You'll just have time to run across before going to meet your friends. Tell her I want to see her—*very much*. That's all. I'd go myself, you may be sure, if the doctor would let me. In fact, I started this morning, but I 'came over faintlike,' as the saying is—"

"Yes, and you'd better move out of that sun," Jimmy interrupted in a loud voice.

He got up, shaking himself free of newspapers.

"All right, I'll go," he said gloomily. "But I don't suppose Evelyn 'll pay the least attention to anything *I* say."

"It isn't what *you* say, you donkey," Dick replied with a cheerful little chuckle. "Evelyn's not in love with you."

Jimmy threw him an apprehensive glance. How self-satisfied Dick was; but if only he were right!

Jimmy borrowed a bicycle of one of the gardeners and propelled himself through the heat to the home of the Harlands.

The situation for him was by no means

pleasant. The master of Ravenstoke had received him under false pretenses, for all this time Evelyn Harland had held him mercilessly to their secret "engagement."

But he hadn't seen Evelyn recently; only once since the night of the Arts' Ball, and on that occasion he had been too occupied to pay her very much attention. She had written to him, however—beginning her letters "Darling Jimmy," and urging him to join her and her parents at Dieppe. Needless to say, Jimmy had plenty of reasons for refusing that invitation. In his replies he dwelt heavily upon his duty to stand by Dick; everybody's duty, in fact. He also, rather foolishly, made frequent mention of Justina di Trevi. Couldn't Evelyn take a hint?

Arriving moist and pink at the Hawthorns —which was what the Harlands called their modest country estate—he was asked to wait in a dim, cool drawing-room while Evelyn took her time over appearing to welcome him. When she finally came in he thought she looked overbright and overtired. There was a strained expression about her eyes, and a forced, unnatural smile sat on her lips. She greeted Jimmy as though the drawing-room was a stage and she the heroine entering to welcome her lover who, off the boards, was an old married man with five children. No audience would have been deceived into thinking that the heroine loved this particular hero. Even Jimmy wasn't deceived.

She held out both hands, but the gesture was as much defensive as anything else. It enabled Jimmy to kiss her hands instead of imprinting a more intimate caress upon cheek or lips.

"My *dear* Jimmy! How good of you to come over at once—just as soon as you heard I was back. How perfectly sweet of you. Do sit down and tell me all about everything."

She set him an example by choosing a chair somewhat removed from its fellows. Jimmy was glad she hadn't chosen the couch.

"Well, what I've principally got to tell you is that Dick wants to see you—*very much*. Those are his words. He sent me over. He can't come himself. The doctor's forbidden him to move about in this heat."

A flash of pained annoyance crossed Evelyn's face.

"Really! I should think he had—or will have—all the company he requires," she said coldly. "Isn't the Marchesa di Trevi coming down this afternoon?"

Jimmy gave a guilty start.

"How did you find that out?" he asked.

"My dear Jimmy, if ever you live in the country—I mean if *we* lived in the country after we're married—you'll learn not to ask such silly questions. *Everybody* knows that Dick's invited them, the beautiful marchesa and her stepson."

"He invited them because I asked him to," Jimmy said sulkily. "Look here, Evelyn, how long are you going to play me up like this? If Dick ever finds out, he'll kill me; and as for Justina—well, if I don't propose to her this week-end, Angelo will want to know the reason why."

CHAPTER XXXI.

CHOOSING PARTNERS.

EVELYN turned a fiery red and gasped like a poor little fish suddenly jerked out of water.

"Jimmy Creigh, what on earth do you mean!" she demanded.

Jimmy was in for it now. Nothing to do but go through with it. He simply *had* to jilt Evelyn.

"Well, you know you're not a bit in love with me." He began with a noisy offensive. "You know you only bagged me like this because you thought Dick didn't care for you. And all he was thinking about was that maybe he was a murderer. Would it have been decent of him, in such circumstances, to keep you tied to him, whether you liked it or not? You don't know old Dick—"

"You said something about the Marchesa di Trevi," Evelyn interrupted hastily. "You said she expected *you* to propose to her—"

"How can I propose to her?" Jimmy inquired, his voice almost whining in its plaintiveness. "They're going back to Italy

next week, and Angelo says there's a very rich man in Rome who's mad about Justina, and she's just the sort of woman to rush off and do something in a hurry that she'd repent of all her life. That's what would happen. Meanwhile you'll dangle me as long as it suits your purpose—and then, when you get good and ready, make it up with old Dick. That 'll leave me high and dry, won't it? Oh, yes, I shall be left in a very comfortable position."

"Jimmy Creigh—" Evelyn jumped up and caught him by the shoulders, giving him a rough shaking. "Are you telling me that—that the marchesa is in love with *you!*"

"You needn't be insulting. Of course she is."

"I can't believe it—"

"Oh, can't you? What's the matter with me, anyway? I'm not such a freak that some woman wouldn't be deceived into finding me agreeable. Really, Evelyn, you go a little too far sometimes."

"Of course you aren't a freak—you darling, darling Jimmy! And any woman would fall in love with you—any woman. It's terrible to give you up—"

Jimmy regarded her hopefully.

"But you will, Evelyn?"

"I'm afraid I'll have to." She sighed, but there were dimples at the corners of her mouth. She didn't look tired any more, nor overgay. Just herself, jolly old Evelyn. "Wait until I get my hat," she cried. "I'll go back with you. I—I'd like to see the Marchesa di Trevi. I know she's charming."

Jimmy grinned to himself. He must write to Lois Loveday. If she ever told anybody such a monstrous lie as that he and Evelyn had once been engaged, he'd mop the floor with her.

And Evelyn's first words upon rejoining him expressed the same thought, though a little differently.

"We can trust Lois," she said. "She's the only one who knows, and she's the soul of discretion."

"Humph! What about yourself? One of these days you'll take it into your head that you ought to 'confess' to Dick. I know women."

"You don't know me," Evelyn said loftily. "I wouldn't tell Dick on your account. He'd be so furious to think you'd taken advantage of his trouble, that it would probably break up your friendship. And I want you always to be friends with Dick—in spite of everything."

"Well, I'll be—"

But he saw that she was laughing.

"It's all right, Jimmy. I can't help teasing you. You take everything so seriously. Come on. We'll go across the fields. One of the men can take that funny old bicycle of yours back."

Protesting that it was not his bicycle, Jimmy trotted along in her swift wake. She was over the first stile before he could offer her a helping hand.

Jimmy had gone to meet the Di Trevis. He was very, very happy. A free man who meant to lose his freedom again just as soon as it was humanly possible.

Dick and Evelyn sat in the old summer house, and the maids—beautifully starched and trim—fluttered about the lawn setting out the tea things.

"Jimmy Creigh's rather a dear," observed Evelyn with a sidewise glance at her lover.

"One of the best—of the very best," Dick agreed heartily. "I don't know what I should have done without Jimmy during this rotten time."

She let him take her hand. "You weren't very kind to me, Dick."

"My darling! If only you knew how I suffered—how I hated being what you call 'unkind'! But, Evelyn—suppose that I had really—"

"Oh, don't—oh, don't! And I knew you hadn't done it. Everybody knew—even that dreadful inspector."

"Everybody but me." Dick said quietly. "Ah, well—thank God it's over. Are you real, Evelyn? Is it really you sitting here beside me? Look here, when are we going to be married? We don't have to wait for anything, do we—if you don't mind spending the honeymoon at home? In less than a week the doctor promises me complete liberty, unless somebody takes it into his head to knock me about again."

"Poor Dick! Oh, my dear—my dear! I do want to look after you, and of course my wedding dress and trousseau have been ready for ages. If mother doesn't object—"

"Are we going to let her?"

Evelyn smiled. "I don't think so. Anyway, I don't think she'll mind. I've been rather a bother to her lately. I was perfectly horrid at Dieppe."

The toot of a motor horn interrupted them just as Dick had convinced her that she, of all people, couldn't be horrid to anybody, even to her own mother.

"Here they are," he said a little disconsolately. "Well, anyway, old Jimmy's in the seventh heaven."

"Is he keen on that Italian woman?" Evelyn asked self-consciously.

"Keen!" Dick whistled. "She bowled him over the very first time he saw her."

"Really?"

"I never knew such a case of love at first sight," Dick went on. "She's a pretty little thing, very nice and all that—but nothing to rave about the way Jimmy does."

Evelyn sighed pensively. She was quite happy, but at the same time slightly—oh, very slightly—annoyed with Jimmy.

"He's not very constant, is he?"

"What do you mean?" Dick asked.

"Oh, you know. Jimmy's always crazy about some girl—first one and then another. Some of his affairs must overlap in a dangerous fashion."

"Pooh! This is the first time he's been serious," said Dick. "He's going to marry this one."

"Has he asked her?"

"I believe so. But come, my dear—here they are."

The Marchesa di Trevi swooped upon Evelyn "like a little brown bird"—to use Jimmy Creigh's favorite simile—and pecked her sweetly on both cheeks.

"Ah, Angelo, is she not charming, Mr. Ardell's financée? Such a lo-ovely Engleesh girl. I, too, am fiancée, Miss Harland. I, too, am to be Engleesh lady—but not so lo-ovely as you. Eh, Jimmy?"

Jimmy blushed furiously.

Somehow, with Angelo on the front seat beside the chauffeur, he had managed to get in his proposal between the station and Ravenstoke.

Angelo looked melancholy. He had met Evelyn Harland before. She was the girl he had danced with so much at the Arts' Ball.

She welcomed Dick's guests in that charming way which later on was to earn her the reputation of being the perfect hostess. He was very proud of her.

"Shall I go with the marchesa to her room and see that she has everything she wants?"

Dick smiled and nodded.

"Don't be long. They'll be bringing out tea in a moment."

The two young women strolled toward the house, their arms around each other. The men's gaze followed them. Angelo continued to look melancholy. He felt a little left out of things. Jimmy beamed, but somewhat sheepishly. (What a hypocrite Evelyn Harland was! Good thing old Dick didn't know.) Dick was just merely happy; a contented young gentleman farmer who was going to be married very, very soon to the girl he had waited for since she wore pigtails.

"I say, Jimmy, we're lucky—what?"

Jimmy Creigh nodded.

"Ra-*ther!*" he replied.

Tea—tea! The maids were surging across the lawns again.

Angelo sniffed the air. He was hungry and he liked English teas.

Presently the marchesa and Evelyn reappeared, and they all gathered around the table, chatting merrily. Even Angelo brightened up. After all, there's nothing like a cup of tea when one feels slightly depressed.

"Very good health," he said, toasting the happy quartet.

THE END.

The Argosy of Regeneration

By LIEUTENANT C. DONALD FEAK

WHEN the clean-limber hull of the clipper ship Barker P. Jackson had sunk in thirty fathoms of water, she carried with her the hardy soul and spirit of Captain Jerry. Deep down into the muck and slime she took it, and buried it where none might see.

Once he was known as Blackjack Heminway, skipper o' the Barker P. Jackson. Now it was Wine Leg Jerry. Of his seamanship remained only the doubtful ability to splice the main brace, and that depended on the generosity of the tipplers that frequented his haunts.

A whisky-guzzling mate had piled his ship upon the reef, and he, Captain Jerry, as her master, had taken the blame. The descent had been rapid, complete. Officially he was cleared of all responsibility. The inspectors had permitted him to keep his license as master mariner, but his fame as the man who lost his sixteen-hundred-ton vessel on the rocks preceded him.

First had come a defiant attitude toward the steamship owners who had blackballed him. After three months of searching for a ship this defiance had changed to a sullen regard for even a third mate's billet. Down and down he went in the estimation of seafaring folk; from bosun to deckhand; from deckhand to barge skipper; and at last had come the water front and the cuspidors of the saloons.

From the stern, upright carriage of a master-of-sail to the whinings and cringings of a water-front "wine leg"; from clear, shining eyes to bleary, watery blue that blinked in the sunlight owlishly.

Far and wide he was known. Wherever the fo'c's'les of a thousand ships on the seven seas had gone he was spoken of as "Wine Leg Jerry, the imitator of the dance of Frisco Fannie."

Men saw it once and laughed, tossed the wreck of a man a coin or bought him a drink. To-night the dive of Lugger Louise

gleamed pleasantly. From the open door came sounds of boisterous laughter, a sudden cackle of maudlin entreaty, and the clink of coins striking the floor and rolling against the walls.

It was Jerry performing for the assembled men. He had the center of the room; round him were the flushed faces of his audiences hurling new variations for his dance routine at him. Jerry slowly, and with an earnestness approaching absurdity, coiled his arms upward, rolled his eyes, did the hootchee-ma-cooch, leaped and pranced, a red bandanna handkerchief tied carelessly around his waist. As Frisco Fannie did it, Jerry shamelessly interpreted it to the men. He was the sole imitator of the dance. Possessed of a few variations of his own which he added *ad. lib.*, he strutted pompously, writhed snakily, shivered, and then burst into a whirling finish.

"Sink me," bellowed the voice of a drinking mate, "it's old Wine Leg Jerry. Drink up!" He held his glass aloft and toasted, "Down the hatch!"

The dance of Frisco Fannie's, stolen bodily from the Barbary Coast, had earned him another night of pleasant companionship.

A tinny piano, jangled discordantly by a waif of the sea, burst into tune. A dozen gruff, hearty voices took up the strain of "Blow, blow, blow the man down."

The tops'l halyard chantey flirted for an instant the curtain of his past aside, and Jerry winced inwardly. His befuddled brain refused to retain it, and he shrilled in a cracked voice the words that appeared automatically on his tongue:

> "She's a Chinatown gunboat,
> Going out with the tide,
> Blow, blow, blow the man down."

Men who for years before would have hesitated to speak to him now clapped him familiarly on the back. His toast was, "Down the hatch."

The noise and mirth grew louder. Glasses smacked the bar heavily or tumbled over and spilled their contents. Boarding-house runners mingled with false goodfellowship among the seamen. Here and there a bluff, red-faced, prosperous shipowner held whispered conversation with the bartender.

One by one the men dropped out of the evening's hilarity and were dragged across the floor to the empty room in the rear and then flung in the corner.

A few staggered out in search of other entertainment.

The last survivor was Jerry. He clung perilously to the slippery bar.

He blinked owlishly with a dignity only an inebriate can assume, swung his battered felt hat in a semicircle, bowed deeply, and then sat down heavily between the bar and the footrail, where he remained tightly wedged.

A rough hand grasped him by the scruff of his neck and dragged him to the rear room. "In you go, you dirty dock-walloper."

A dory lay tied to a mooring bollard on the dock under the back room. A door in the floor was lifted, and twelve sailormen, stanch, drunk and true, lay on the bottom boards of the craft.

Twelve sodden snores whistled approbation of the new cruise.

II.

THE clipper ship Red Jacket surged along. Aloft, like a cloud of white-winged gulls, her high kites gleamed. Her bellying skysails, stuns'ls, and her water sails drew her over the ocean's surface like a thing alive.

Her smartly painted hull careened through the smother of white-maned charging seas that thudded, broke and whirled in a flying sheet over her wet, shining decks, then gurgled noisily through her roomy lee scuppers.

Every inch of canvas, every inch of running gear, served its purpose, strumming like living creatures. Bowling off a clean twelve knots, she represented a shining example of the American shipbuilder's art and Yankee seamanship.

Hidden away, deep in the fo'c's'le of the Red Jacket, a prone figure stirred uneasily. The mate, Red Hazen, stood over it. He prodded it with the toe of a heavy seaboot and a bellowed curse.

"Heave out, ye leather-necked marine! Show a leg!"

Out of the rumpled bunk peered Jerry, his bleary, water-shot eyes staring in unbelief at the canting decks.

Red Hazen cast one look at the "wine leg," then burst into a guffaw of mirth.

"Look!" he gasped. "We have old Wine Leg with us!" Then, with a straight face, he demanded truculently: "What d'ye think ye're gonna do—dance fer yer pay?"

"Dance?" questioned Jerry belligerently. "I'm a better seaman than you'll ever be. Red Hazen!"

Red strode forward threateningly, shook a hamlike fist under the "wine leg's" nose, and hissed: "Then prove it, you drunken bum! Get out on deck and tail on that mizzen skys'l halyard. Quick now, or I'll dismast ye!"

Jerry staggered uncertainly to the ladder and mounted to the deck. He understood thoroughly; he had been shanghaied. He laughed mirthlessly at the joke. He had been dumped through the hatch in Lugger Louise's back room with the rest and in the dark mistaken for an able seaman. His vanity suffered no jolt. It was a mistake. No one wanted the wine leg aboard his ship; least of all the crack clipper ship Red Jacket. Crack clipper ships were made with the bones and blood of the sailors who were unfortunate enough to sign the indentures. Crack ships were crack only because bucko mates drove their men mercilessly.

Jerry's appearance drew a round of mirth from the men at the skys'l halyard. The wine leg made a pitiful attempt to square his shoulders and do his share of the heaving. It resulted in a backbone that threatened to break or remain permanently bent.

Mistakes cost him many a whole-souled curse, and, strive as he might, he made them. He stumbled over the fore clew garnet and capsized a lot of paint. He fell through the ratlines, cast loose the wrong brace, and then the patience of Red Hazen ended, and Wine Leg's troubles began.

Red Hazen, a bucko mate of the old school, as hard as nails and a sound believer in the effect of the cat-o'-nine-tails, inaugurated his reign of terror. He broke out the middle watch at two bells in the morning watch and trimmed the yards. He cursed and clouted his way forward and aft, a marlinspike for the unruly and a fist for the meek. None escaped his tyranny; none found such a thing possible.

Dirk Waters, a crafty-eyed, misbegotten son of a Liverpool fishwife, turned like a snake and lashed back at an undeserved beating.

Red Hazen vented his spite on the cockney Englishman. He smashed and battered his face to a bleeding pulp, and then flung him down the fo'c's'le scuttle and stamped his way aft, to explain plausibly to the skipper, Duck Dolan, what had happened.

Clumsy hands soused him with sea water and patched him up. From the edge of his bunk Dirk glared his hatred, his face convulsed into the image of the ancient gargoyles.

"Damn 'im, 'e blame near killed me, 'e did! The stinkin' son of a square-headed centerboard sea cook! Remember," he hissed through thick lips, "I'll do fer 'im, I will, s'elp me."

"Better shut up," advised one, "or he'll do fer you. Keep yer trap shut, an' when we gets to Hongkong we'll all jump ship. If ye don't she'll be a reg'lar madhouse."

"Like 'ell I will," sobbed Waters in a frenzied rage. "W'ot kind of men are you—are you like galley slaves on this bloomin' left-handed hooker? If you are, I'm not!"

He had sown the seed of dissension in fertile ground.

For two weeks the mate's savagery continued unabated. For two weeks the men took the abuse stoically or gave birth to frenzied mutterings as another shipmate was thrown down the hatch. Even the miserable topper Wine Leg Jerry mustered enough drunken courage to mutter occasionally.

It had spread to the entire crew. None was immune. All had scars of the mate's brutality.

Dirk Waters stood under the swinging lamp in the fo'c's'le and stripped the remaining rags of his shirt off. There glowed a dozen angry welts over his back and shoulders. Blood dripped where the Matthew Walker knot at the end of the cat-o'-nine-tails had bitten deeply.

"'E took me to the gratin', 'e did, blast 'is soul! Duck Dolan went below w'ile 'e beat me," sobbed Waters.

Redoubled curses, the clenching of hard-balled fists and muttered threats escaped from the enraged men.

Jerry remained silent. The cruelties had awakened a spark of long dormant courage in his wasted old frame. The men paid no attention to him and his bruises. He was merely the "wine leg." What he thought and what he did did not interest them. He entered none of their card games, but sat alone on a sea chest and stared ahead at nothing at all, or gazed at his master's license that his ill fame had canceled for him. It awakened no feeling of self pity. He had renewed it from year to year; occasionally it drew another round of drinks; sometimes a bed. Sunken as he was in the dismal quagmire of depravity, he felt no compunction at open beggary.

The men were fast approaching the limit of human endurance. He could see it. Twenty years a master of a deep water craft had taught him to read the minds of his men. He cherished no special hatred for Red Hazen; he was used to kicks and clouts; he who haunts a waterfront saloon must accept them as part payment for his drinks.

It was the heavy, insistent mutterings of the men that stirred him to occasional outbursts. He cursed Duck Dolan for a fool. Couldn't the man see he was sitting on a boiling pot of hatred? Wasn't it plainly evident that all hell would break loose before long?

Jerry crawled angrily into his bunk and turned his back on the whispering men. To the devil with Duck Dolan. If he wasn't sailor enough to see what his fool of a mate was doing he deserved to lose his ship.

III.

STILLNESS.

The lunging creak of the vessel pitching easily into a bow sea disturbed Jerry's sleep. Following the creaking came confused mutterings. The rise and fall of the speaker's voice held his attention.

It was hissing, sibilant. Snatches came to him at intervals. He knew what it meant. The line between endurance and retaliation had been crossed.

The voices sounded more clearly. It was the hate ridden tones of Waters that stirred Jerry to action. He slipped from his bunk and crept forward. Through a crack in the chain locker he saw a yellow beam of light and a circle of men grouped around Dirk Waters. Then, out of the blackness, a heavy form struck him and he sank to the deck.

Enormous clutching fingers found his throat. He attempted to yell, then to break loose; the fingers sank deeper. He could hear the heavy breathing of his assailant. Tiny pin points of light began to rocket before his eyes. Then a match flared and the fingers relaxed. Some one jerked him to his feet and shook him.

He heard a voice whisper, "It's old Wine Leg. Thought he was down there with us."

"Naw, who wants him. He ain't got any sense," a disgusted tone answered.

"Bring 'im along," commanded the heavy whisper of Dirk Waters. "Don't be a bloomin' idjit!"

Down they went to the bottom of the chain locker again, Jerry on the outskirts of the circle.

Waters was speaking. The men clung to his every word. He talked rapidly and jerkily.

"A bloomin' lot o' good men—we lead a dorg's life for a miserly, stinkin' fifteen a month. For why? To be brained by han hindividual who 'adn't any brains his own-self? For why?" he demanded again, his voice rising. He talked as if inspired by the devil. His picturesque, filthy loquacity filled their ears and stirred their troubled souls. His beady little eyes danced like the eyes of an attacking cobra. The men listened in grim silence.

"Brain 'im, brain 'em all, then sell the stinkin' hooker to a ship chandler. I knows o' one in Rio. We can hall skin hout and none will hever be the wiser."

"We ain't in Rio, though, Waters. How the hell are we gonna get there? Tell me that," queried another.

"Don't be han ass; hain't we got old Wine Leg wi' us?"

"Him?" scoffed the voice. "He don't

know one end o' the sextant from the other."

Jerry rose to his feet defensively. "Hell I don't, mebbe I can't haul as good as you can, Curly, but I can navigate. Damn my eyes, I can do that." Then as an afterthought he added: "I'm not going to though. It'll be runnin' bow-line on a cross-jack yard for those who does. Mebbe a slug o' lead in the mid-riff an' a hand spike tween wind and water. Ye can go ahead; I'll stand by." This with no thought of duty toward those that had once been a part of his life, but only with a careful regard for his skin.

"You'll stand by, hell!" snarled the men as if of one voice. "You'll do the navigatin' or we'll do fer you right here an' now. What is it goin' to be?"

A glance around the circle of angry faces and Jerry nodded his head in the affirmative. A knife glittering dully in the candlelight disappeared in a waist-band and the tensed forms relaxed.

"Sense'll git yer further with us than stubbornness, Wine Leg. We'll do the dirty work. You do the navigatin'. Once agin ye 'll be a skipper o' a clipper ship."

The barbed gibe struck home. Jerry had supposed he was dead to the sneers at what had been; perhaps it was the feeling that once more he might be the skipper of a ship that had exposed his heart to the jeer.

The men disbanded and began a shuffle for the after-cabin.

Waters had done his work well. Like a general he would lead them now while their minds flamed with passionate anger against the after guard.

Jerry wanted to run and tell the mates. The crew were insane. It meant the galleys for them or worse. Mutiny was punished with death. The abuse of authority gave no man the right to murder and remove from command the vessel's master. To usurp the authority placed in a skipper meant a running bowline from the tip of the cross jack yard. One thought remained paramount. He was master-o'-sail; he had his papers. Gone were the days of drunken splendor, the filthy spit-kids, the dance of Frisco Fannie.

He hesitated momentarily, then slid in a crouching run for the starboard side of the deck. For a moment he was Blackjack Heminway, a member of the after guard. Somehow — some way — he must warn Hazen before the mutineers arrived. He heard the rapid slap of pursuing feet and then came blackness as a hand-spike struck him down.

He had faint recollections of sliding flat on the deck—a sudden stop—and no more.

"Damned traitor," panted the pursuer stealing back to his mates on the opposite of the deck. "It was Wine Leg. You can't trust even an ex-mate. They're all alike—damn 'em."

It was characteristic of Waters to steal aft and blackjack the second mate as he paced the deck behind the helmsman. Characteristic of him to chuckle as the boy fell at his feet.

With the second mate prone on the deck, they stole softly down the hatch, led by Waters. Out of the blackness came a voice, bitingly sarcastic.

"I suppose you've come to borrow my thimble. Well, by Heaven, here it is, a thimbleful of hot lead." It was the mate, Red Hazen, awakened by the falling body of the second mate. Twin flashes of fire spurted out; and behind him, Waters heard the thump of a crumpling form striking the deck. Then a flying body struck him. Down they went in a scuffle of flailing legs and arms. Muffled curses, heavy breathing, the thump of struggling bodies. Duck Dolan stuck his head out of his door and cursed savagely, then flung himself at the struggling mass, pounding heavily with a mahogany sextant case. Some one clutched his legs and threw him to the deck.

Waters felt a sudden nausea attack him and he let go and sagged in a sodden heap at the foot of the ladder.

Quick, savage thumpings, curses, groans, and a mass of clawing, fighting animals snarling and gouging, choking and biting, rolled over and over in the darkness.

The narrow confines of the passageway sounded with heavy blows. The bulkheads threw back rebounding bodies. Some one lit a light. It was Curly. His shirt was a mass of tatters.

One by one he pulled them apart: the

still forms of the skipper and the mate. One man held his bunkie pinned to the deck with strangling fingers. Another had knifed a fellow mutineer.

The Red Jacket, left to herself, had come up into the wind; a slight roll and the sails slapped the masts in gigantic, mighty flaps. The ship shook like a huge, neglected dog. Her tackles, loose shackles, rattled and banged furiously. Chain sheets jingled.

Some one yelled: "The weather forebraces! Flatten in the head sheets!"

Like sheep they obeyed, running forward.

The courses, drawing again, they went aft.

Waters was talking to Jerry, shaking emphasis with the handspike that had felled him. "Take this ship to Rio, and no more shenanigans, either, or you'll find the crown o' yer 'ead stove in." His beady eyes glittered with distrust.

Jerry drew out the mate's sextant and shrugged his shoulders, then squinted through the telescope at the almost invisible horizon. As he went below to prepare his work book for his morning sights he heard the bodies of the mates and the skipper being dragged across the deck.

A sudden silence and then the voice: "Over with 'em!"

IV.

WATERS came down into the cabin, followed by the men. As he gained the deck he whirled on them and bellowed: "Git for'd; while I'm marster 'ere, you'll do as I say. Git out an' go to yer bunks." He coughed. A thin stream of blood speckled his lips. He wiped it away with an oath: "Williams, take the wheel and hold her on the old course."

The men backed off in sullen obedience before his bloodshot eyes.

The sound of their feet died away overhead, and Waters, with unerring instinct, found the skipper's wine locker. He tipped a bottle to his mouth and drank deeply. The fiery liquor gave him renewed vitality that the wound in his side had slowly sapped.

Jerry mulled over the chart, striving to recall his navigation.

The logarithm tables puzzled him. Long years of unfamiliarity with them had almost sponged the thing from his memory. Bit by bit it came back to him. The familiar touch of the dividers; the parallel rulers awakened in him old impulses. The compass error and its application caused him to squirm with bewilderment. His pencil he grasped tightly as if it might fly from his stiff, stubby fingers.

After several hours of intense driving he managed to clear his liquor-numbed brain sufficiently to grasp the first rudiments. When the first sign of daylight came he was out on deck with his sextant, striving to recall the stars and their names. They eluded him with a persistency that was baffling. "No use in shootin' stars you don't even know," he muttered.

From the lip of the great Dipper he traced Polaris, the pole star.

A figment from a mind long dead told him that at the other end of the handle and thirty degrees from Benetnasch he would find Arcturus.

He took his altitude and then his own time from the chronometers instead of calling on Waters, who lay in a drunken stupor on the cabin deck.

He had collapsed trying to bandage the wound in his side. Captain Jerry completed the job and rolled him into the bunk, took a deep swig himself and went to his navigation. An hour later he gave the helmsman a new course and watched the vessel fill away on it.

The Red Jacket continued her voyage to the southward under full sail. The men went about their duties as usual, bracing the yards, and reeving off new gear.

The red dawn, like a great fire over and beyond the horizon, loomed warningly ominous. The barometer stood very high, under the center of high pressure that precedes a storm. Small, isolated clouds appeared in the upper regions of the atmosphere—seemingly piled up on the blue vault of heaven and drawn in the direction of the impending tempest. The wind had died to a mere breath, the sails slatted drowsily on the yards.

Braces were hauled taut in an effort to coax a few more miles out of the vessel. Jerry called the bo'sun to him and told him

to bend the storm canvas, and to put extra lashings on the spars. The fellow insolently stared and laughed aloud.

"Look! Look who's givin' orders! Wine Leg Jerry tells me to bend the heavy courses. Ho! Ho!"

Waters, from the poop deck, snatched a handspike and hove it straight at the bo'sun's head, bawling: "Take yer orders as is give to yer; I'm marster 'ere. D'ye want ter spin rope yarns with Davy Janes?" He turned away and spat a mouthful of blood overside and went below to the wine locker.

The bo'sun retreated, casting dark looks at the figure on the poop.

The tense expectancy aft made itself felt forward among the men. Anxious faces looked toward the southward, the birthplace of the West Indian hurricanes. As if losing control of themselves the men took to drinking heavily. The sky had assumed a hard sheen, covering up the soft, luminous clouds.

Jerry was at the wine locker when Waters came down. He shoved Jerry aside, snarling: "Get out! Keep yer snoot out o' this locker, an' git up on deck where yer belongs; understand, yer only sailing marster. Don't forgit it!"

Jerry's eyes flamed quickly, then died to the old hang-dog look of utter dejection. Since his enforced abstinence his eyes had taken on a clearer sheen. His brain functioned better and the cobwebs of years of dissipation were slowly passing away.

A heavy swell came without apparent reason from the southward. The ship dipped easily into the black, curling waves that seemed to freshen into a confused, sloppy sea.

The rays of the sun gleamed cold on the lashing curls of the white-maned billows. The cirrus veil was gone. In its place was the heavy, sodden, cotton clouds of hurricane hue.

It began raining violently; wild, crazy squalls ushered in by blasts of thunder and lightning. The barometer started to fall steadily. There was a hearty rush to shorten sail when Captain Jerry bellowed the order down the fo'c's"le.

Like children the men obeyed his every command, as if fearing chastisement from the elements. They stepped out on the swaying yards dripping wet with the pelting rain and furled the skysails, leaving only her two lower courses drawing for steerage way. Of her head sails remained only the fore-topmast staysail. She was scudding along leaving behind a rolling wake that trailed far astern over the tumbling, uneasy waters.

The men were uneasy, casting cautious glances aloft, speaking in fits and starts.

Some inner, insistent call seemed tugging at Jerry's senses. The tumult outside rapidly drawing to a climax, affected him with a feeling of confidence; of cocksureness that was unnatural. He almost strutted his way behind the helmsman.

His shoulders were thrown back while his arms swung low and were held taut in a swagger.

He even bellowed a curse at the helmsman. When that "worthy" bent lower over his work and scowled, Captain Jerry smiled. The strut was more pronounced; he snatched a handspike and hurled it far down the deck at an unoffending seaman coiling down some running gear.

He wanted to bellow, rage, and generally give physical vent to the exhilaration within him.

The Red Jacket plunged deeply into a heavy sea that ran with the speed of an express train. Spindrift slapped Jerry in the face. He licked at the salty taste with a gusto he had heretofore reserved for an unusually deep draft of liquor.

His mental intoxication increased. He had been cherishing a desire to clout the helmsman over the head with a boat stretcher to see how it felt.

No boat stretcher handy, he hauled off and smacked the man against the binnacle, following it up with a well-placed boot and a deep, deep-water curse.

"You yellow-bellied horse marine, don't look at me like that!"

As a matter of fact, the man had not glanced his way until the unexpected fist that had jarred him to the deck.

For some inexplicable reason the man withheld an answer and only muttered to himself. Perhaps it was the same thing that had given Captain Jerry his courage that had sapped the helmsman's.

Captain Jerry paraded up and down the deck, bouncing on his toes, and swinging at the end of his path with a vigor that surprised even himself. Certainly the men forward regarded him as a maniac. They stood in the fo'c's'le and stared aft.

The wind grew with each passing moment; it whirled whole tops of green seas over the weather bulwark, and slapped them against the deck houses with short, spiteful cracks.

Captain Jerry, master mariner, plainly saw that he was in the right semicircle and the most dangerous in the northern hemisphere. He hauled by the wind, and ran before it. Into the helmsman's ear he screamed, in an effort to make himself heard.

"Steer no'th-no'theast."

Somehow they managed to wear ship and run before the eye of the storm. He sought to escape the whirling center behind him. His sterling seamanship showed itself by its strategy.

The vessel canted and dipped, shipped huge seas against the galley door and washed the cook out on deck, then piled all manner of galley gear around him.

Another broke over the stern and surged forth carrying the cook on its crest and dashing him against the mainmast. The sea lashed and spat at the struggling ship with a hatred that seemed unappeasable. The wind shrilled through the rigging like a wild, raving thing with treble-toned whistles.

A gigantic pop and the lower main topsail broke adrift, fluttered a moment, then shredded itself into flying streamers.

Higher and higher shrilled the wind; it rocked Captain Jerry to and fro, whipping his coat-tails behind him. He stood clutching at the standing rigging, gazing to windward. When the stern of the ship canted high in the air, he balanced himself and clung to the weather rail.

Plunging down into a deep, green hollow, she scooped a towering giant out by the roots and flung it aft.

Twice running, as if tired of the struggle, the Red Jacket put her nose into the seas that mounted her bow and swept the decks clear from end to end. A surging maelstrom of gear seethed about the ship. The men hovered in lee corners, shivering, yet fearing to go below. Out of the screeching darkness came a pelting rain of hailstones that pounded like an army of hammer-handed pygmies on the decks.

A moment later it had passed. The very vault of heaven itself seemed to lower in an effort to see the last struggle of a doomed ship. The tall, lofty spars towered up and appeared to pierce the cloud of hovering fury.

Captain Jerry, hard-lipped and stern, felt the warring forces of confidence and fear struggling in him. His face streamed with salt water. For a moment the fact that he was once a water front sot was cast into oblivion. The fury of the elements had whipped the last shred of his old self away. In the center of a howling hell of wind and water he was born again; from the womb of battle came a man straight and stern; stripped of all the characteristics that had branded him as Wine Leg Jerry.

The elements drove a new courage into him; opened his eyes to a new world. The very sounds that frightened others, awakened the dormant strain of bravery that had given him the name of Blackjack Heminway.

His coat, buttonless, flapped behind him like pinionless wings. The wind shook him furiously, snatching at his beard and wrapping it around his neck.

Then a black, raging night rushed in—a fitting end to the dismal remnant of a fading day.

One by one the sails parted their clews and broke adrift. Reef tackles swung wildly in mid-air, wrapping themselves about the shivering masts.

Great, towering walls of water rushed up behind the vessel and pooped her. Captain Jerry had lashed himself to the weather-rail. The seaman at the wheel had a preventer lashed about his waist.

At every gust the men gathered in the fo'c's'le scuttle, glancing at the figure on the poop. They began unconsciously to admire his sterling seamanship; grudgingly they admitted his worth. Noticeably among the first evidences of his new status was the lack of the soubriquet "wine leg."

Now it was Jerry, or the "Old Man." Whether they used the term as a sailor does to his superior officer or just as an impersonal name did not matter.

Curly, his eyes shining, relieved his feelings with a curse.

"Damn me, the old boy's a sailor! Lookit 'im there on the deck! Look! An' we calls 'im Wine Leg Jerry! He's a sailor, he is, blast my eyes, he's all o' that!"

The men lowered their heads and puffed at their pipes. A low-voiced mutter of agreement made itself heard. They looked at one another curiously as if seeking the speaker.

Somewhere, back aft, an object had torn itself loose and was crashing to and fro. The men swore, drew their oilskins about them, and started aft. Seas washed about them, flinging them into absurd heaps of flesh and bones. They sprawled and crept their way aft against the demon at their faces. They secured the heavy scale that had broken adrift and fought their way to the fo'c's'le again.

The men huddled in the wet, soggy fo'c's'le, drawing on their pipes with quick, jerky puffs. The oil lamps swung in long, unworried arcs, from chains overhead.

One moment she was rushing down a steep, glassy incline, driven on by the rush of angry waters behind. The next, poised on the crest of an enormous valley that faded from under her keel and left her wallowing in the trough—only her topgallant masts showing above the smother.

She drove her bow, skewer-like, into the passing seas; the hurricane had stripped her masts of canvas and she scudded along under bare poles.

The intensity of the wind shrilling through her rigging sounded a high treble monotone above the angry roaring of the seas collapsing on her decks.

Captain Jerry had taken the wheel, sending the exhausted helmsman below. Purged of the festering pit of hopeless decay, the rookery of despondency, he rose once more to the estate of clean, clear manhood. Like the specter of death he clung, dogged, indomitable, his knees hooked in the spokes of the wheel, his chin thrust out.

Through the dancing, howling inferno the Red Jacket plunged her way. All through the night she labored heavily, and when morning came, in the gray ghastly dawn could be seen the weary figure of Captain Jerry, framed in a waste of dismal rolling waters.

The wind had died to a gale and the Red Jacket ran before it, her standing rigging salt-incrusted and hanging in loose bights from her truck-heads. Her mizzen skysail mast drooped over, the skysail stay whipping in the breeze.

The wind died slowly, as if reluctant and thwarted of its purpose. At noon the sun broke through in a long, golden glance that bathed the battered ship with a coat of gold.

The sea, weary of strife, passed into that long, rolling swell that follows an upheaval.

The danger past, Captain Jerry left the wheel and set about spreading new sails. His lower courses were gone, ripped to shreds. He bellowed down the hatch:

"Rise and shine! Heave out, you swabs, on deck, or I'll hand-spike the whole blasted crew of you!"

He hoisted the last one out from the scuttle with a well-placed boot. The man turned to snarl; when he saw the light that danced in Captain Jerry's eyes he slunk off.

From aloft the men regarded him, a puzzled frown on their faces. Where was Wine Leg Jerry of dancing fame? Surely this fiery, clean-eyed skipper was not the old Jerry.

"Aloft there!" he bellowed. "Are you tinkers, or sailormen? Belay the gab, or by the gizzard of Drake, I'll rake you fore an' aft with a salvo of marlin-spikes; chop-chop, you tar-feet!"

"Aye, aye, sir," floated the voice of Curly from the top-gallant shrouds. "Chop chop it is, sir!"

Out of the tangle of stays, pendants, sheets, braces and general confusion, Captain Jerry drew some semblance of order. By nightfall the Red Jacket was under her lower courses and reeling off the knots.

Dirk Waters stumbled out on deck, his eyes blood-shot and shifty. Captain Jerry had removed the liquor and flung it overboard. It was temptation removed from

them both. Waters found Jerry at the compass, his back turned.

"Wine Leg," he snapped viciously, "what the 'ell yer do with that booze?"

Like a shot, Captain Jerry whirled; a corded fist flashed out and Waters staggered and fell to his knees like a poled-ox. Into his ears poured a voice—deadly in its intensity, menacingly distinct.

"Captain Blackjack Heminway, you swab. *Captain* Blackjack Heminway, don't forget it!"

The sullen soul in Waters came to the surface. The men, seeing the action aft, had drawn around the foot of the mizzen-mast. To these Waters appealed, in a voice tinged with fear.

"You 'ear, 'e's gonna send us to the gallows; 'e'll 'ang us." 'E isn't goin' to Rio. 'E's—"

"You're right," interrupted Jerry. "We ain't; we're goin' to our regular port as is stated in our clearance papers. On her reg'lar run and with a reg'lar skipper. Furthermore, your goin' in double irons for the rest o' the v'yage as the leader o' this mutiny."

To the men gathered about him he spoke. "You men have had your brains set afire by this whelp o' hell and you were mixed up in the murder o' her three officers with a dash o' mutiny on the high seas. I can't let you go free, but I can, as master o' this ship, promise clemency, which 'll be a mite better than swingin' by the neck from the cross-jack yard. Now will you iron Waters an' take your reg'lar duties or will you listen to him? You can take it or leave it; but if I goes as skipper o' this vessel she goes to port reg'lar." He delivered his ultimatum and stepped back.

A moment later Curly stepped forward and said: "We'll iron him, cap'n, and work the ship to port. Wot say, mates?"

"That we will, cap'n; we'll iron 'im now."

Waters flung a curse at Jerry who stepped closer, and in thin, even tones spoke: "I've never taken a man to the gratin' yet, but by the livin' God I'm goin' to! If you give me any more o' your slack, the cat-o'-nine-tails 'll taste blood again! Now, men, put him in double irons an' stow him away in the lazarette, then go forward where you belongs. Git!" He flung at their feet a set of irons that he had put into the coat of his pea-jacket for just this emergency.

They bore Waters to the deck, kicking and struggling, and clapped him in two sets of irons, then started forward with him.

Captain Jerry heard him remonstrating with the men on the way and heard Curly answer flatly: "Shut up—an' stay shut, an' remember, when Blackjack Heminway says *git*—son, you better git! He's a he-man. What's more, I remember when—"

The voice faded away. Captain Jerry smiled and squared his shoulders, then sauntered away to the taffrail.

Out of the searing fires of unconquerable hates, straight from the lash of furious elements had come—regeneration.

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DESTINY

CAN you believe your road and mine are one
Because we met
And mingled for an instant both our lives?
We loved. And yet,
Our ways are different. What is done is done
Without regret.
My body's yours. It is my soul that strives
To find its place
In this great universe. A path untrod.
Like comets, we have crossed and blazed a space
But each must make his path *alone* to God!

Dorothy Caruso.

Anything Can Happen

By GEORGE B. JENKINS, JR.

"AND so she put the poison on her husband's tooth paste," Eddie concluded. "Next morning hubby fell on the bathroom floor, dead as a can of sardines. Alice collected his insurance, married Roger, and—there you are!"

"What 'll I do with it?" I asked. "I can't use it that way! Do you realize that I've got to have a happy ending to my stories?"

"A happy ending?" he repeated, taking a gulp from the heavy china cup that stood on the table before him. Eddie is a drummer at the Palace Theater, a vaudeville house on Broadway. Like most of my friends, he has "a peach of a story that you can write and make a lot of money."

"Yes—a happy ending," I repeated. "What do I care if it really happened? I couldn't sell that story the way you've told it to me. A woman kills her husband, and marries the man she loves. Why, she deserves—"

"Handsome, but stupid," said Eddie mournfully. He looked at me closely, as though we were meeting for the first time. "On second thought, I'll take back the handsome part. You're not handsome, but you sure are stupid!" His voice rose a note higher. "I'm telling you that Alice put poison on her husband's tooth paste, and—"

"Let it lie, and don't get excited," I entreated. "We'll admit it. But if I put that story on paper, and send it to a magazine, the thing will come back so fast the envelope will be warm. You've got to give them the happy ending!"

"Writers," he said solemnly, "are boobs. They don't know—"

"You can tell me any story you want," I interrupted, "and I'll believe you. I know of a dozen things that have actually happened, but I wouldn't believe them unless I told them myself. Why, they're not plausible! They just couldn't be! And yet—"

"The same old growl," Eddie glared at

me. "'It must be plausible.'" He mimicked my voice. "'It must be convincing.' Listen! You and I know that anything can happen—anything! Get me?"

"Yes," I replied, rather feebly, I'm afraid, "we know that anything can happen. But the editors, and the readers of magazines—"

"They're wise. They know. The readers, and the editors, they know that anything—*anything*— Take Juanita Sawyer, for instance. There's a story that has a happy ending, maybe. She says to me yesterday, when she was giving me change from a nickel, 'Eddie, I'm the happiest woman in the world!' she says; 'I've got everything!' Would you like to hear about it?"

"Roll 'em," I answered. "You've got the dice. But don't forget the happy—"

"When I was playing the pictures in Fort Lee," he began, hitching his chair closer to the marble-topped table, "I had the idea that Eugene O'Brien, and George Arliss, and all those actors, were cheating the public. I was just waiting for a director who had two good eyes, so that he could see what a beautiful profile I had, and could recognize genius. And I wasn't the only extra on the lot who knew that he and she had all the makings of a star. We wanted to find a director who could roll us into shape—we were the makings, all right.

"How did I make out? Not so good. I hung around, day in and day out, and weeks ditto, and the first month I counted twenty dollars income. The second month, ten dollars. So, the beginning of the third month, I decided that Art had died with Richard Mansfield, and stopped competing with Sarah Bernhardt and the Barrymores.

"Well, Bert Martin had just finished a picture, and he was beginning another. You know Bert—he's a wizard. That man 'll even take a suggestion from an extra! And he knows movies backwards. He had just finished a money-maker—"

"Skip to Juanita, will you, Eddie?" I requested. "I've a date with a dizzy blonde a week from Tuesday."

He ignored the interruption, for he had the far-away look of the story teller in his eyes. Slumping deeper in his chair, he continued the tale, while Broadway roared outside, its muffled humming merely a soothing buzz to Eddie and me in the automat.

"Bert had just finished a money-maker. He turns out three pictures for Cohen to fatten the bank roll, and then Bert goes blooey. He gets artistic and temperamental, and like that.

"So Cohen charged fifty thousand on the wrong side of the ledger, and told Bert he could be happy, and play around with Art for three months. So the best director in the business decided to film a symbolic allegory—whatever that is—knowing that it wouldn't bring a postage stamp to the box-office windows. Maybe you saw the picture. It was released. Called 'The White Dove.'"

"Did I see it? Why, man, 'The White Dove' was the greatest artistic success ever—"

"Art hell!" Eddie snorted. "It never made a cent. Fifty thousand shot.

"Well, Bert started picking the cast. First, he beckoned to Myrtle Patterson, and second, to Juanita Sawyer. And from the beginning it was a toss up which would play the lead.

"Juanita had been hanging around for over a year, and sometimes she had one meal a day for over a week. When she didn't have the cash, she didn't eat. I know, because I've offered to loan her money. Why? Because I hate to see a woman starve. No, she wouldn't accept a cent.

"'Thanks, Eddie,' says she, looking me straight in the eyes. 'Buy yourself a deck of smokes instead.'

"And next week she gave me a tie she had knitted herself.

"Nobody could say that Juanita was pretty, like the girls on the magazine covers. She screened all right, but she had a pinched look, as though her skin wasn't large enough, and had been pulled tight. And she had a cough that left her white and gasping. But—you know the beauty that kind of people have—a pale skin that you can almost see through, and—that knowing look in their eyes, just like they knew what would happen soon, and—some

of them try to be jolly, but they can't be, really—but the real ones are just patient, and hoping they won't have another coughing spell soon. That's Juanita.

"The other girl, Myrtle, was a slick little devil. I don't believe she ever missed a meal. She was too wise, though, to overfeed. In fact, she was the wisest little devil I've ever met. Did she look it? No. She looked innocent and sweet. You'd swear she'd never heard a cuss word.

"Myrtle was slender and slick; she had the kind of figure ancient goofs rave about. She knew what was what and why and how. Particularly how."

"Keep it nice, Eddie," I suggested softly. "Keep it nice and pretty."

"I heard you. You won't have to touch this story after I've finished. And talk about a happy ending!

"Well, I had a job then, instead of being an actor and having a future, and being paid five a day when I could get it; I was an assistant director at fifty a week every Saturday. It was a blow to my pride, and my career was ruined, but the job was easy. My duty was to take the hell that was raised when the director, or the star, or anybody, made a mistake. It was a nice job, but too many people made mistakes.

"Anyway, I was in the office when Juanita and Myrtle were told they were hired. Juanita almost fainted, and she had a fit of coughing that made her chair shake like it had a chill. What did Myrtle do? She wrapped her arms around Bert's neck and kissed him.

"You know the movie game. The director is the king pin. Bert Martin could take any script, and make it sure-fire. If you were in one of his pictures, you made good. Afterward, you had a reputation. You said, 'I worked with Bert Martin' like you'd say 'I've met the King of England' or some other well-known guy.

"Both Juanita and Myrtle wanted to cinch their jobs, and I watched them get in their sassy work. Juanita was just herself, and she couldn't keep the fear from her eyes. Her big ambition was to do something really good and fine; this looked like her chance. But she wasn't sure she had it cinched.

"For Myrtle was a devil—a perfumed, sweet-voiced, enticing devil. A beauty, a wise one—she knew her way around! She had more experience than Juanita, for she'd once persuaded a boob millionaire to star her in a film. Boy! That was a picture! Oh, what a lot of ruined celluloid! Myrtle's millionaire was stung by everybody in the gang, extra people double rates, taxicabs by the month, all hotel bills charged to the picture—sweet gravy while it lasted!"

"Eddie," I murmured, "will you confine your remarks to Juanita and—"

"Myrtle met Bert outside of the studio that night," Eddie continued, shaking his head as though to dislodge an annoying mosquito. "and asked him to go home in her machine. Bert accepted, and the next morning she brought him to the studio in her car. And the next night, and the next morning. For a week. And I thought—"

"Keep it sweet and pretty, Eddie," I entreated again. "Keep it pretty."

"Leave me tell this story, will you?" he growled. "I'm telling you what happened, and you can draw your own conclusions. Myrtle started wearing a smile like a Follies doll, and she shook her hips when she walked. You know what I mean?

"Every time she saw Myrtle, Juanita had a fit of coughing. Then one morning she stopped Bert as he was on his way to look at some scenery.

"'I've been coming here every day, just like you told me,' says Juanita, looking frail and delicate. 'When will you be ready to use me?'

"'Next week,' Bert says. 'We'll start grinding. You're being put on the salary list to-day.'

"Juanita didn't care much about the salary, though it was keeping her alive. Of course, she still looked half starved, nourishing food didn't seem to help her. But she wanted to play one big part before the end. That was her big ambition. And the end was coming closer every day. She had something in her eyes, and something in her ways, that was—was unearthly. And the way that girl coughed!

"Of course, Myrtle acted like she owned Bert, and that made Juanita uneasy. Myrtle had that 'He's mine' look in her eyes—

you know how women can put over to another woman that a certain man belongs to them? Sometimes it's just by friendly kidding, sometimes it's just a way of behaving. A woman enjoys making another woman suffer. If they don't, why do they?"

"Don't talk psychology to me, Eddie," I implored. "I don't know why women do as they do. It's all too subtle for me."

"Me, too—whatever it is. Anyway, Myrtle would put her hand on his arm, and gush over him, and tell him that the sets were lovely, and all like that. With Juanita standing around, wondering whether she'd be used in even one short scene before—exit, finally.

"Anybody could see that the strain was getting Juanita, she was—she was thin! She stood around, with her eyes burning with fever, and waited, and waited. I didn't like to look at her. She never was pretty, because there didn't seem to be anything between her skin and her bones. But she had a look on her face—the kind of look a T. B. has just before—just before—

"And Bert came to the studio every morning in Myrtle's car, that she got nobody knows how, and Juanita there eating her heart out—

"Well, he had given me a copy of the script, so I could look out for the properties, and so on, and one morning I stopped him.

"'Bert,' I says, 'who is going to be *Innocence?*' That was the name of the fat part in the symbolic allegory. 'Who's going to be *Innocence?*'

"'I've got her picked out,' he says, and so I didn't get any kick out of that talk. Since Myrtle looked like the only child of an old country minister, I knew she could look pure and everything enough for the big part. But there was Juanita, waiting and waiting.

"'How about Juanita Sawyer for this *Innocence* thing?' I says to Bert the next day.

"'I told you I'd pick my cast,' says Bert.

"So I quit bothering him.

"And the next day Bert told me that his wife was visiting her mother in Nevada. She would be gone two months, he said. You know what that means. Reno's in Nevada, and there isn't any more."

"Eddie," I said, tapping one finger on the table, "you've been handing me a large collection of gloom. I've listened this far because I thought maybe something might be done with the story, but—what's the use? You're like all the people who want to write my stories for me, you don't know everything—and neither do I, but—

"Let me tell you how this yarn's going to end," I continued while he scowled and consumed the rest of his cup of coffee. "Bert's wife is going to divorce him, Myrtle plays the part of *Innocence* and makes a hit, and Juanita dies offstage. Am I right?"

"And you don't see any happy ending, do you?" he grinned. "Calm down, and let me finish the sweet story of Juanita and the permanent cough. You writers make me wan and weary. You've got the intelligence of a subway guard. You'd believe a press agent. Say—

"Bert started fumbling with his watch fob. That was the 'all ready' signal. He sat in a chair, propped up against the wall of the studio, and fumbled with that watch fob for an hour. He was doping the whole six reels out one more time in his mind. When he was ready, things would break.

"Juanita was in the studio, so was Myrtle. Everything was all jake for the start. Then Bert called Juanita over. I thought the girl would never reach him. My, but she was weak! Her knees barely held her up. She looked like curtains to-morrow morning. And she wasn't pretty, remember—never had been pretty—but there was something in her face—something—just a shadow of a girl with burning eyes and—"

Eddie looked into his empty coffee cup for a moment. "Maybe you'll laugh like a damn fool, and if you do I'll smash this armor-plate cup on your face. Juanita looked like—when you've said something nice to your best girl, and she thrills, and closes her eyes, and offers you her mouth. You know how you feel? Well, Juanita made me feel that way, only—only different. Get me?"

I nodded. I had not the slightest desire to laugh at Eddie, though his face was scarlet, and his voice was curiously muffled.

"You imagine Juanita looking like that," he continued, "and then think how she'd

look when Bert told her she would play the lead in the picture. Did she register happiness? Man, it made something deep inside of me laugh and cry at the same time. I have that same laughing-crying feeling every time I think of Juanita's face.

"Bert worked day and night until he had filmed all the scenes that Juanita appeared in. He was a cold-blooded fiend when it came to work. He had that practically dying girl on his hands and he took most of the picture while she had that other-world look.

"Afterward he told me that he had planned from the first to use Juanita for the lead. You see, Bert was an artist, and he held up beginning on the picture until Juanita was beginning to see angels, and to hear their wings."

"That sounds like the artistic temperament to me," I remarked. "Bert Martin is the greatest director in the business—"

"Save that song until later," Eddie interrupted. "Now you have your happy ending, haven't you?"

"No. Didn't Juanita die? Of course she did! And Myrtle—well, she got hers—"

"Your memory is as long as a gnat's elbow," he snapped. "Listen to the facts. Myrtle was starred in Bert's next picture, and she made a hit. Why shouldn't she? The girl is a hard worker, and a fast worker, too. She married for the third time last week. Myrtle married the first two guys for money, but she's in love with her present, and he hasn't got a cent. She's earned every dollar she has, I'll say.

"Now about Bert. His wife got a divorce when she was in Nevada. Nobody was happier than Bert was. His ex-wife had a vile temper. Bert was nice to Myrtle so that Mrs. Bert would get jealous. It worked. Perhaps you don't think that's a happy ending for Bert, but if you have ever seen that dame when she was peevish—wow!"

"What about Juanita? You've left her out."

"I've left her to the end. Come on down the street a moment."

We rose and strolled out on Broadway, where the dinner crowd elbowed and shoved their way along. We walked south, and stopped at a news-stand.

"This," said Eddie, indicating the charming young lady who offered him a newspaper, "is Juanita."

She was a rosy-cheeked lassie, dressed smartly and neatly. Health glowed in every line of her body, her eyes were clear and bright, and she had a brilliant, flashing smile. I thought her charming, and noticed that Eddie monopolized her complete attention. We chatted for a bit, and then he drew me aside.

"I thought Juanita was right on the verge—" I began.

"She was," Eddie said. "She was right on the verge. I suggested that she cut the movies, and get out in the open air, where the rain and sunshine could get in their good work. She took her salary and bought this news-stand. She's husky now. Completely cured. Strong as raw alcohol, or bootleggers' booze. Well, does the ending please you?"

"Fairly good. She's a dandy! I think—"

"No, you don't, either." Eddie whispered in my ear. "Listen, I haven't told you all the facts. Juanita and I—next week—Municipal Building—license—alderman—married and everything! Get me?"

"Sure! Congratulations!" I gripped his hand. "That gives the story a real happy ending!"

Well?

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THE CHESSMEN OF MARS

BY EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS, author of The Tarzan Tales

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The Shriek

By WALTER J. ADAMS

I DON'T as a rule get mixed up in my neighbors' business, and when I do I usually find that the very people you set out to help are the ones who least appreciate it. Ed, that's my husband, says that it served me right when we had all the trouble over Mary Ellison and Paul Herrick, and even to-day when I suggest trying to be helpful when some one is in a difficulty, he gets sarcastic and tries to head me off. But I always say that all's well that ends well—just as in the case of the pair that I just referred to.

There would have been no need for me to get mixed up in the affair at all if it had not been for that movie called "The Sheik," which Joe Demming, manager of the Morgan Hill opera house, ran last summer; and Mary Ellison was as sensible a little woman as you'd care to meet up until then.

In the first place Mary would not have gone to see the performance at all if it had not been that she was a member of the Morgan Hill branch of the Purity League which had just voted a resolution of censure for these scandalous goings on which are reported all the time as taking place in Hollywood. Being one of this band of workers for antiseptic entertainment she just had to go and see "The Sheik." Especially did she have to go when Joe Demming advertised the picture as being one to which he would not admit children and one that was not for prudes. Mary wanted me to go along in order to help her make a report to the Purity League on the brand of immorality that Joe Demming was offering the theatergoing public; but I told her that the last time I fell for one of these "for liberals only" pictures I saw nothing more depraved than a young man rescuing a lady in a nightgown just before the villain had carried her off to his mountain home back of La Jolla, and that I could get more real spice out of hearing Mrs. Henderson tell of some of the neighborhood goings on.

Well, after Mary had heard Henry Kimball, who plays the pianola at the opera house after his work is done in Moll's bookstore, tell the boys at choir practice that here was a picture that he'd not want his sister to see, there was nothing for it but

that she must go—all in the interest of morality.

That's what started all the trouble, and what caused her to lose interest in Paul Herrick.

Paul was a nice young fellow, single and only forty. He has a nice place down in the valley near Coyote Creek and is one of the leading members of the prune and apricot growers association. He was not exactly the handsomest man in town, but even at that he was good looking, especially on Sundays when he used to call on Mary in his Ford car. And, as I've told Mary a dozen times, when a woman gets to be thirty-five or six there are a lot of things she has to kind of slur over when it comes to picking out a husband.

The trouble with us women is that while the men folks are getting older and losing their hair we proceed to forget that maybe we are also showing the wear and tear of time. Why even now I sometimes find myself thinking that Ed—that's my husband—hasn't quite got the style he had when we were married thirty years ago.

Anyway, to get back to Mary and Paul, she went to see the picture that evening, and as far as I can see, was delightfully disgusted. She told me all about it the next day and asked my advice about making her report to the Purity League. The *Sheik* himself, apparently, was all right; but the leading woman was the cause of whatever immorality there was in the film.

"Why, Aunt Effie," Mary said, "she was brazen. How any woman could be so common as to act such a part! A really good woman could never do it—even in acting. She positively threw herself at him. Not that she didn't act coy and reluctant at times, but any one with half an eye could tell that she was leading him on to do just what he did."

Then she began to tell me the plot of the story.

It appears that this untamed son of the desert, the *Sheik,* had abducted the heroine while the latter and her wealthy widower father were making a trip to the pyramids. Originally his idea was to hold her for ransom, but later he discovered that she was his soul mate, sent by Allah to his desert. He took the desert all for his own, so Mary told me, and was quite haughty about it, referring to it in a way that would make you think he was a Los Angeles real estate dealer talking about "Our City."

All this was well enough and on a strictly cash basis, according to Mary, until the *Sheik* began to realize that the heroine's presence in the desert was more essential than a well to an oasis. Right there he began some hectic love making. He was positively insistent that she be his, and finally carried her off to his private tent. There he forced his unwelcome attentions upon her until she finally came to love him. Then after she was all ready to take up a life of light housekeeping in the desert, the *Sheik* discovered that her father was a brother Elk or something, and, overcome with remorse, returned her to her folks, who were still camping at the foot of the pyramids.

That's a brief outline of the picture. Some of the details I couldn't get from Mary, for she seemed to think they were too fervid even for a woman old enough to be called Aunt Effie by half the county.

I found out afterward, though, that Joe Ahern, who hasn't missed a chorus show at the opera house in twenty years in spite of his being a deacon in the church, slept through the whole performance, so I'm glad I didn't go. It couldn't have been much.

That was all I heard about Mary and "The Sheik" until later, except that at the time she showed me a piece of music she had bought that afternoon. It was a song that Eddie Boyden had sung during the most emotional parts of the film, to lend color to it like they do in the big theaters in San Jose. She said she bought the song for evidence for the Purity League, and it had a lot of stuff in it about desert loves and all that sort of thing.

It was just about a week later when Paul Herrick came to see me. I knew he had something on his mind when he came up to the porch; but I waited for him to unload it. I have found out from thirty years of married life that the best way to get information out of a man is to act like you don't care whether or not he has anything to tell you. He puffed away on his pipe for a while and then broke out.

"Aunt Effie, what is the matter with Mary?"

"I don't know, Paul," I told him. "Is she sick? Funny I never heard of it if she is."

"She's sick in the head; that's what she is," he said. "Ever since that picture came to town she has been treating me like dirt under her feet. She's gone crazy over the ham actor that took the leading part. She says now that she's going to take her savings and visit Egypt or some such place and search for the love that every woman should have. She wants a love that burns fierce as the rays of the desert sun. She says that when she finds the oasis of happiness she'll give all for her soul mate.

"I told her that she'd never like it in those hot countries and that, anyway, these Egyptians are just like Mexicans only they wear clothes that make them look cleaner. Then she asked me if I ever felt like carrying her off to my tent against her will and conquering her spirit.

"I told her that I felt like carrying her off to the woodshed and giving her a licking like her old man used to do when she went off swimming with the boys and she got angry and ordered me out of the house and told me that we weren't engaged any more and never had been, and that she would never marry a clod.

"And she knows darned well," he went on bitterlike, "that I just sent to Chicago for a diamond engagement ring."

He went on in this strain for some time before I could get in a word, and when he finally quit I had already made up my mind to try to help straighten matters out.

"Paul," I said, "if she wants to be Sheiked, why don't you be one. The best way to cure a woman of anything is to give her plenty of the thing you want to cure her of wanting. Now if she craves a lot of this burning desert love, you give it to her and it will be just a short while before she tires of it."

"But I don't know anything about desert love," he complained. "The only time I ever went near the desert was that time I took the trip to Phœnix, Arizona, with the Shriners, and Phœnix is no desert any more.

"And, anyway, if a woman can't get along with a neat prune orchard love, with plenty of alfalfa on the side and an income that will give her anything any sane woman could want, what can I do about it. I'm not an Egyptian, and never will be. Thank God I'm an American and white."

I was forced to agree with him about his not being any type of sheik. He's tall enough, but I've never heard of any sheik being partly bald-headed or wearing spectacles. Most all of the Arabs I've read about were swarthy parties whose eyes held the penetrating look of those who have gazed afar over the burning desert in search of wandering backsheesh.

So I tried to soothe Paul down as much as possible, and told him to come back that night at eight o'clock and I'd have a plan to offer him. After he'd gone I went to the phone and rang two long and three short for Mary. I asked her to come over. She got there about an hour later, and I wasted no time on being polite.

"Whatever have you been doing to Paul Herrick?" I demanded. "The poor man thinks you've lost your senses."

"Oh, is that so?" she snapped. "Well, if anybody has lost his senses it's him. Why can't a man understand that a woman wants more than a chance to cook for him, tend his house, and raise a lot of children? Why doesn't he realize that there is something nobler and higher than just a living together of two people until they die and relieve each other of the strain?"

She would have kept on that way for an hour, I know, for if anything Mary is a mite talkative, so I cut in on her rather sharply.

"Mary Ellison," I said, "you are a poor fool. First thing you know you'll get so tiresome to Paul that he won't want you. There are lots of other girls who would be mighty glad to cook and mend for him. There's Addie Decker, for instance. You know as well as I do that she's been angling for him ever since she came back from the College of the Pacific with her certificate as a singing teacher."

I knew that this would kind of sink home, because Addie, if anything, is younger and more popular with the men than Mary, although it's common knowledge that her

singing course hasn't given her as much sense as a canary, even though it gave her the voice. Mary kind of hesitated and then burst out strong.

"Well, I'm sure that Addie is welcome to him. She can have him and settle down to a life of raising prunes and babies, and talking over the alfalfa crops and taking trips to San Jose once a month. As for me—I want to be loved with a higher love. I want romance. I want a love that burns like the sun on the desert wastes—that pains while it warms my spirit—"

I knew that she was off again with a quotation from the subtitles of that picture, so I cut in with a catty remark:

"Mary Ellison, a woman of your age should have better sense. When you get to be thirty-eight years old you should know that it's pretty late in life to start getting sunburned."

"My age is my own business," she snapped back, "and, anyway, thank Heaven I've not reached the age where I take an old womanish interest in other people's business."

This was not right of her, because I never meddle except in unusual cases like this one, and so I called after her as she went flouncing down the walk:

"Well, while you're running around looking for an Arab in a kimono to vamp you, you'd better keep an eye on Addie Decker. She may be simple, but while you're searching for a sand-dune sweetheart she will be getting ready to grab on to a regular husband with overalls and a prune orchard that can be sold to-morrow for better than fifty thousand dollars."

I forgot to tell you before that Addie lived right across the road from Mary, and that when their houses were built Ed Lord, the contractor, built them on the same plans, he having just one set when he opened up in business after graduating from the architecture course in the correspondence school. And that is the main reason why my scheme muddled up—although it all came out right in the end.

At any rate, Mary went on home, mad as a wet hen, and I sat down to figure out a way to be fairy godmother to two darned fools.

At eight o'clock, when Paul arrived, I was all ready for him.

"Paul," I told him, "there's only one thing for you to do. You have to give Mary the kind of romance she wants. You've got to Sheik her. She craves this desert love, and so you've got to act it out until she tires of it. What do you know about the habits of sheiks?"

"Only what it says in this song," he replied. "I took it off Mary's piano when she ordered me out of the place. I was going to tear it up, but somehow I couldn't—it belonged to her," he finished, looking sheepish.

I took the song from him and it was the same one I told you about, that Eddie Boyden sang during the emotional scenes in the picture. It seemed that Mary hadn't sent it to the Purity League as evidence after all. Here's the way the chorus went:

> I'm the Sheik of Araby,
> Your love belongs to me;
> At night when you're asleep,
> Into your tent I'll creep,

and a lot more of that sort of thing. I asked Paul if he knew the tune and when he said yes I told him of my plan.

"She wants you to be a sheik," I told him, "so you go ahead and be one. I'll rig you up in a desert costume and you go out and serenade her with that song. She's just old maid enough to take it seriously and then you walk right in and abduct her. Carry her off to the justice's court and marry her. I'll call Judge Miller on the phone and have him waiting for you. Then it 'll all be over and she'll soon forget this desert love business."

Paul kind of objected to this program, and made a lot of fuss about singing under her window like a drunken Mexican serenading his corazon, and said that he'd be this and that if he'd dress up like an Arab and make himself the laughing stock of Morgan Hill for any woman. He raved on until I told him that it was either be a sheik or lose Mary, and that anyway he needn't sing loud, and that by eleven o'clock all the neighbors would be sound asleep anyway.

He finally was convinced, and agreed to do as I told him. I got a long white robe

for him, one of my husband's nightgowns, but in the dark it looked spooky like a burnoose or a Ku-Klux uniform, and would pass anywhere for an Arab outfit. Then I took a sheet and wrapped it around his head like a turban.

Next I got Ed—that's my husband—away from a book he was reading in the kitchen, long enough to tell him what I wanted him to do. He hadn't known about our plan, so he was kind of surprised when he saw Paul dressed up that way, and burst out laughing. Paul got kind of peevish and was going to throw up the whole affair. Finally we told Ed what was up, and he began to laugh again and said that there was no fool like a lovesick old fool, and I had to tell him that I'd read Paul some of the love letters he, Ed, wrote me thirty years ago, before I could shut him up. Finally he agreed to do all he could.

So when it was almost eleven o'clock Ed went out and cranked the Ford, and the two of them set out. They had a ladder in the back seat, and I will say that they looked rather funny as they went out the gate and headed for Monterey Road. When Paul got in the car we had to help him, because he'd left his glasses behind, owing to the fact that no son of the desert that we'd ever heard of had worn them, even though frightfully near-sighted. Right then I might have known that something would go wrong unless I went along, but I never guessed.

Most of the rest of the story was told me by Ed when he came home that night and I put arnica salve on the places where the birdshot had hit him.

They drove down the road and stopped between the two houses where Mary and Addie lived respectively. Ed got out, and, seeing that Paul could not see without his glasses, put the ladder up for him. I haven't found out to this day whether he did it on purpose, or because he was so excited, but he put it up to Addie's window instead of Mary's.

Up until then all was quiet. Ed led the sheik to the foot of the ladder and said: "Climb and sing, you desert bulbul. I'll be waiting for you in the road—with the motor running."

Paul began to sing in a medium soft tone, and a light appeared in the window at the top of the ladder. Paul could see a form in the patch of light, but on account of his eyes could not make out who it was. He took it for granted that it was Mary, and began to climb the ladder. It wasn't; it was Addie.

"Sweetheart," said Paul, following the speech I had told him, "my desert rose—" He got that far, and then his foot slipped and he yelled: "For the Lord's sake, come down and let's get married before I fall off this damned thing."

That's when the ladder fell down, and he was left hanging by his hands to the window sill. Addie must have thought that her nightly prayers had been answered, but anyway she wasn't taking any chances. She reached out and helped pull him through the window. So there was the tableau, as Mrs. Stillwell, the dramatic elocutionist, says.

Paul stood there in the middle of the room, still thinking it was Mary's, and looking like the leading man in one of these French farces, except that his turban had slipped down over his nose; while Addie was acting timid but enthusiastic over this invasion of her boudoir. It was lucky that Paul had left his glasses behind, for if he had seen Addie in her curl papers he would probably have jumped out of the window and broken his neck.

As it was, he stood there muttering, "Come, my dear, fly with me, fly with me, fly with me," but making no move to take wings.

Finally Addie seized the initiative. She wasn't taking any chances at all.

"I'll put on my things," she said; and just then dawning intelligence came to Paul. There was something jarring about the voice, you see.

"Good Lord, I'm in the wrong house!" he said, and began rushing around to find the door.

"What's the matter, dear?" she asked him. "Don't you recognize your Addie? Here I am, dear."

Just then he found the doorknob, and with a wild yell that woke up all the neighbors who hadn't already been brought out

by the clattering of the ladder as it fell, he started down the stairs for the door.

"Stop. It's all right!" she yelled at him.

Just then there was a loud bang and a harsh voice roared out:

"I'll stop the blankety-blank this-and-that!"

It was old man Decker, who used to be a sea captain, and who has had a terrible disposition ever since prohibition went into effect. He was opening up with his old shotgun, and if it wasn't that he was the poorest shot in the Morgan Hill Blue Rock Club he might have wounded Paul. As it was, he only hit Ed, who started away, cursing like a trooper.

That's all Ed could tell me of the affair, because he came tearing home in the Ford and was real disagreeable when I wanted him to go back and find out what happened. However, everybody had the story next day.

Paul went tearing down the walk and into the road to find Ed and get out of danger, but on account of his eyes, and Ed's being halfway home by that time, he missed him and ran, blind like, into Mary's yard. Addie was just a few steps behind him, and old man Decker was laying down a barrage of birdshot still farther in the rear.

Paul ran smack into Mary, who was just coming down off the porch to see what the excitement was. She grabbed him, thinking he was a thief or something of the sort, then when she saw who it was, and recognized Addie, she became just plain mad.

"Hide me, Mary!" Paul begged her.

"Hide nothing, Paul Herrick," she said. "What are you doing in this fool get-up? Why make such a disturbance at this woman's house? Go right back over there if you want to have any drunken carryings-on!"

"He's not drunk. We're eloping," snapped Addie.

This brought Paul around with a jar. He could even see trouble ahead.

"We're doing nothing of the kind," he roared. "It's all a mistake."

"I'll say it is," Mary told him—"a big mistake. Why don't you two go and elope if you want to. Why elope, anyway? Nobody is going to stop you."

"We're not eloping, I tell you!" Paul raved. "I got into her house by mistake. It's all the fault of that meddling old woman and her husband." He was referring to Ed and me that time, although Heaven knows I couldn't see how things were going to turn out.

"It's you I came to see," he told her. "That's why I'm dressed this way."

"Came to see me—at eleven o'clock—in a nightgown!"

Mary screamed, and for the first and last time in her life fainted dead away. The neighbors helped to carry her into the house, and old man Decker led the weeping Addie home. He still thought it was an attempted burglary, and was flourishing his old duck gun and bragging that he'd winged the three of them even if they did get away.

When Mary came to she found a near-sighted sheik bending over her; and when she opened her eyes he chased everybody out of her sitting room. He even threatened to throw rheumatic old George Ludloff off the porch bodily if he caught him listening at the door.

"Paul," Mary asked, "why did you do it?"

"You wanted a sheik, Mary, and I tried to be one, even if I made myself look like a fool. I deserve to be laughed out of town for this—embarrassing you this way. I'll sell out to-morrow, and you won't be bothered by me any more."

"You'll do nothing of the sort," she said. "I never knew you cared so much. You're a fool, but not so big a one as I, and I don't want a sheik anyway; I want you. Tell me honestly," she finished; "it was me and not Addie you wanted, wasn't it?"

Evidently his answer was all right, because George Ludloff says that they were quiet for a minute and then Mary said: "Oh, Paul, you're a perfect scream."

"No," he answered—"a perfect shriek."

And that's the end of the story, except that Mary and Paul have been real uppish with us ever since. In fact, they never even speak when they see me and Ed—that's my husband—at the Grange meetings in Yeoman's Hall. But that's the way it generally is after you put yourself out to do anything for anybody.

IZZY KAPLAN'S KOLUMN

Received via W. O. McGEEHAN

BEHAVIOR FOR NEW BEGINNERS

I CHUST been reading a nice book on how a feller should ect when he is out in company with nice people. It is a fine story, but it is kind of hard for beginners. The name of the book is the " Blue Book of Social Usage." It would told you how you should ect when you are out in a big dinner and which side you should walk from the loidy when you are getting marritched. Of course this part wouldn't be no use to me, on account I ain't got no intention of getting marritched unless business would pick up a whole lot, and there ain't no signs of nothing yet.

The reason this here blue book don't give a feller no good prectical information about how he should ect is because it is by a loidy and from my obserwation loidies don't know how to behave no more since they are wearing skoits which they come up to the knees and they are smoking cigarettes right out in public where everybody could see them and wonder what kind of a broughten up they got from their folks, anyhow.

Also when you are just commencing to start ecting polite a feller wouldn't want to know right away which fork he would catch the fish with and what kind of a knife he would use to carve his oysters and whether or not the sparrow gress should be tackled with the bare knuckles or you should sneak up on it with a fork. The best way is like the rassling which they call it cetch-as-cetch-can, and if you should drop anything you should oxcoose yourseluf in a nice way and watch your het and coat without letting anybody suspicion that you think they would take them. Fellers is sensative, which I am wery sensative myseluf.

The book which I am writing is for new beginners on politeness like them fellers which they threw me out from the photografters' dinner which I could told you was a bed break in a social way. What they should have done was to esk me to beat it in a nice way instead they should kick me downstairs.

Neturally I never knew what they meant by it, so I came beck to the benquet by the elewator. Then they went and threw me down the elewator sheft, which they nearly broke my neck, and my pents was tore so that I was almost ashamed of myseluf to be seen in public. As soon as I could pick myseluf up I came beck to the benquet by dropping through the trensome, and they threw me out again, and this time they told me to get out and stay out, so of course I seen that I wasn't inwitationed to the affair, and I got sore on them and staid away.

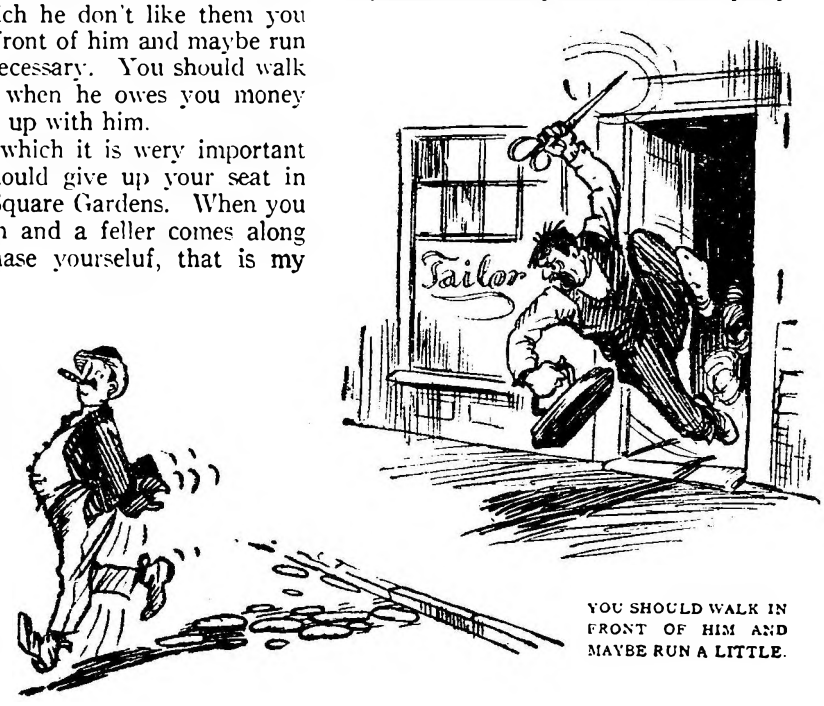
You see how it was. If they said they never wanted me in the foist place I wouldn't hired the suit, which it put me out that much money, and I hed to buy my dinner on the outside anyhow. That would be the first rule in my book for new beginners in politeness. When you are giving an affair which you want it absolutely oxclusive you should send out notices to all the fellers which you don't want them to come and tell them that there would be a politzman at the door to knock them for a goal if they try to bust in. In that way nobody would misunderstend nothing. Otherwise, excidents might happen from some of them holding on to the table when you are trying to put them out in a nice way without calling up the Central Office, which it is busy most of the time, anyhow, and outsiders is likely to be all through dinner before you could get a cop.

Politeness comes netural with me, but there is lots of people who got to loin it by taking lessons like them fellers which they gave the photografters' dinner. If a feller is neturally polite he wouldn't make no bad breaks nowhere and it would be easy for him to get along with nice people. Loafers, nobody could get along with them, and the fellers which they gave it that benquet was a lot of loafers, and you couldn't loin in no book how to get along with it excepting maybe in the book by the Marquis of Queensberry which it says you shouldn't bite or hit them in the clinches except you got one arm free. That is a nice book on manners for fellers which is taking an adwanced course. Chon L. Solomon, which he mixed in all kinds of society and got along wery well, told me personally it was the best book on etiquet which he ever read. on account the Marquis of Queensberry had a lot of high-toned friends and never made no bad breaks nowhere.

Personally, it don't seem to make no metter on which side of a loidy you should walk if you are only a beginner. But if you are walking with a box fighter it is a good adwice that you should walk on the side of him which they cauliflower ear ain't. Neturally, if you are walking on the cauliflower ear side you would be looking at the feller's tin ear, and that makes a lot of them sore, on account it ain't a politeness, anyhow, and you are not supposed to pay no attention to it.

Another thing in the adwanced book on politeness is a lot of adwice about when you should walk in front of a loidy and when you should walk behind her. That wouldn't make no difference to me. But it is my adwice after you have sold a party some goods which he don't like them you should walk in front of him and maybe run a little if it is necessary. You should walk behind a feller when he owes you money and try to cetch up with him.

One thing which it is wery important is when you should give up your seat in Maddenstein's Square Gardens. When you are sitting down and a feller comes along and says: "Chase yourseluf, that is my seat," it is important you should know how to ect. Foist you give a good look at the feller. If he is a little feller you don't pay him no attention, but if he is a big Irish loafer, which nine times out of ten it is the



YOU SHOULD WALK IN FRONT OF HIM AND MAYBE RUN A LITTLE.

case, you get up and give him the seat and don't make him no argerments, neither.

Many people has been ambarressed by argerments in Maddenstein's Square Gardens. Before I loined about politeness I got it a blue eye and I lost it a tooth. So you see I got my politeness by ectual experience, on account I never had a lesson in my life.

When beginners is inwitationed out to dinner they should always be ready in case of accidents. When I foist come to this country and was out at a dinner I had a bad accident. I was eating a duck and it slipped off my plate into my lap. Some new beginners might try to pass it off with a funny remark like: "Slips, trials over."

Maybe you could get away with it in some kind of society, but it would be wery ambarressing to the hostuss. The hostuss is the loidy which she cooked the dinner, and neturally she gets sore if anybody makes any bed breaks or pulls any crecks about the way the food is cooked.

When the accident heppened I kept my head about me like I always due when anything is heppening. I picked up the duck and put it right beck on the plate. I said right away to the hostuss: "Loidy, it ain't the fault of the duck, on account you cooked it wery tender. The metter is with the knife, which it ain't sharp enough, and like my friend Sir Thomasshefsky Lipstein said it: "There is many a slip between the duck and the lip." That pessed everything off in a nice way, and the hostuss was spared from ambarressment, though she did send me the bill for the grease on the carpet, and I hed a good mind to sue her for the grease on the dress suit which it cost me two dollars and a haluf to get it out, but if a feller goes out in society he has got to expect them things. Nepkins is so small these days they wouldn't cetch nothing if you should heppen to drop something.

Another thing which is making manners complicated is this here Eighteen Amendments which this feller Volstead is responsible for it. When you are inwitationed out and they pess you the bottle for the sociability you wouldn't know exectly what to do. The best thing to say is: "Take a drink yourseluf foist." Then you wait a haluf an hour and if the host or the hostuss don't get sick then everything is all right. If you make a bed break and the stuff is bed you needn't worry. You wouldn't make no second break. If you should be going to an affair where they are serfing strange slivowitz you are expected to have your own hearse call for you. Also you shouldn't never forget to oxcoose yourseluf for dying on the premises, otherwise you ain't likely to get inwitationed again.

So many things would come up when a feller is going out in society that it is almost unpossible to give a feller so much adwice that he wouldn't make a few breaks. The best educationed fellers is bound to do something wrong when they are inwentioning new kind of knifes and forks all of the time and making eating out such a hard chob that nerfous people is likely to starve themselufs to death on account they don't know the latest way to grab their food. The best way is to eat a little something before you should go to a benquet. Then when a food which you don't know how to teckle it should come up, you could say in a nice way: "I pess the soup, also the oysters," and so on until the food gets familiar.

All I got to say in conclusioning is that politeness is pretty hard for new beginners unless it comes netural like it done to me.

It's a funny thing that fellers which they wouldn't belief the Battle of Waterloo was on the level would take it a shoelegger's woird when he tells them a case of sympathetic gin was chenuine.

Next week Izzy Kaplan will get FRESHER AND FRESHER WITH M. CUKUE.

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"She bent over him lower—lower—and yet lower—until he could smell the intoxicating perfume of her hair. With every nerve in his body he could feel her nearing presence. . . . She kissed him on the lips. . . . Again she laughed with wicked, eerie glee. . . .

"Something in his brain was prompting him—prompting him to gather this witch to his breast; to return that poisonous, that vampirish kiss, and then to crush out life from the small, lithe body. . . ."

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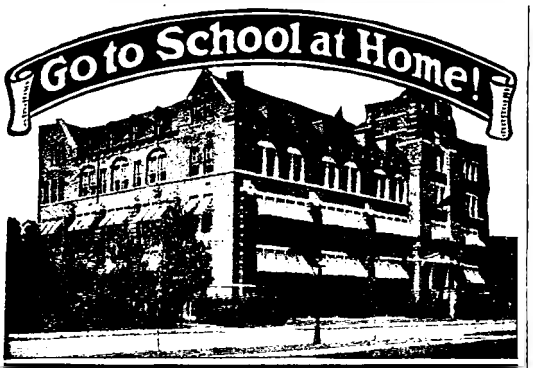

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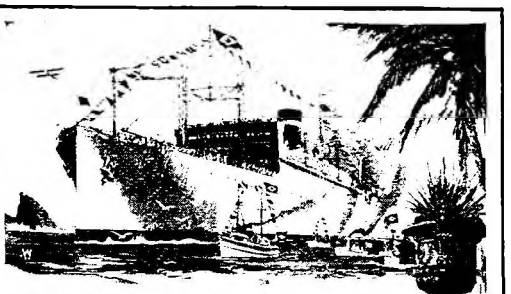

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Fumed Solid Oak

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Large Divan provides extra seating capacity. It is an unusually massive, comfortable piece with beautifully designed back. Arms are broad and comfortable. Measures 46 inches wide outside and 36 inches long inside. Thickly padded seat is 19 inches deep. Height of back is 22 inches. Posts are extra massive.

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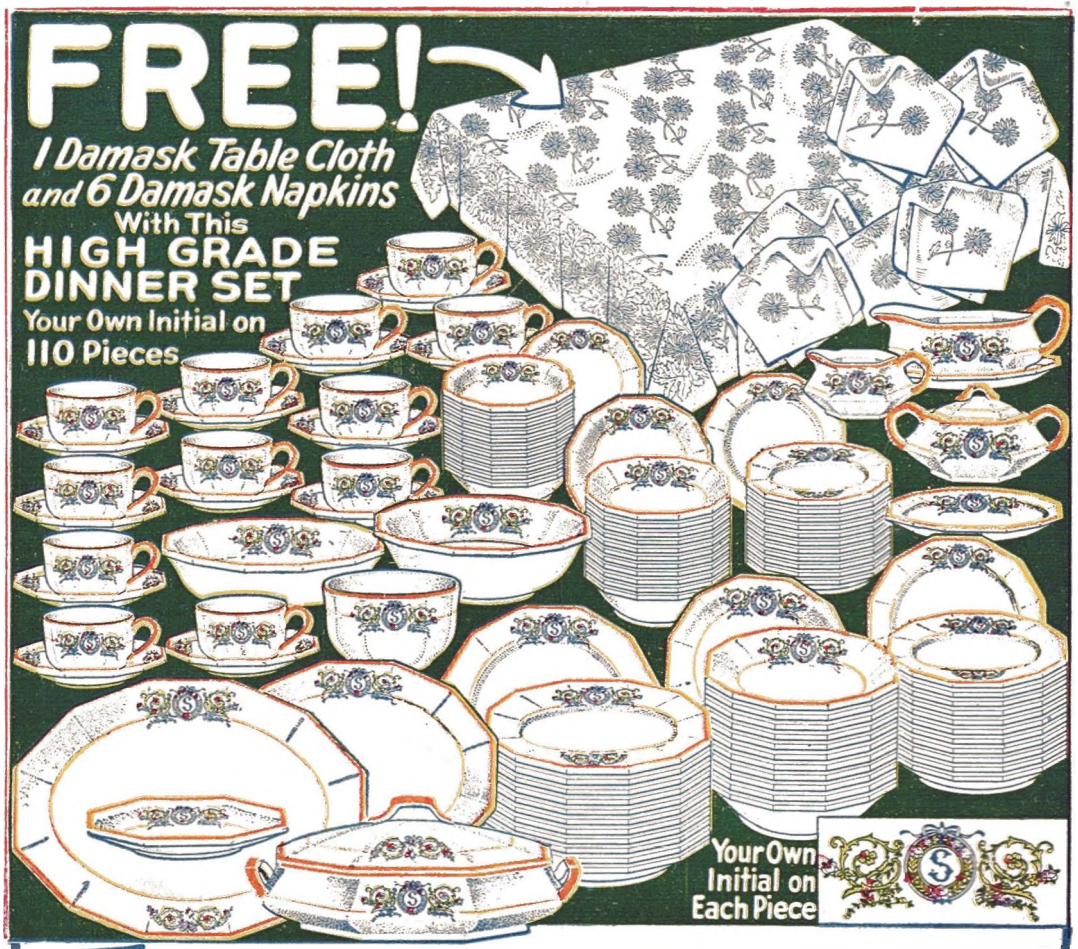

Martha Washington Initial Dinner Set

110 PIECES

No picture, no description can do justice to this beautiful dinner set. I want you to see it on your own table. I want you to know the Attractiveness of its Aristocratic Colonial Shape, the Beauty of its refined Gold Border and Orange band. I want you to see with your own eyes how the big, wide, gorgeously brilliant gold handles enrich and beautify the set. Then I want you to know the Pride of Possessing a fine, high-class dinner set that has your initial on every piece. I will gladly send you the entire 110 Pieces, **on 30 Days' Free Trial.** The picture above shows, in reduced size, the attractive initial design. This design is in 6 harmoniously blended colors. SUPREME QUALITY. The best materials are used in the manufacture of these dishes. Extreme care is taken in all of the different operations. Everything that high class materials, manufacturing skill, art and design can do, has been done to make this beautiful Dinnerware a Remarkable Bargain. All the decorations; the initial, the wreath, the scroll of roses in natural colors, the gold edge, and the inner line of orange, are absolutely put on to stay. We guarantee against breakage in shipment. **Each piece is wrapped separately in tissue paper.**

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This Dinner Set is only one of my Astounding Bargains. I have Thousands. All my prices are Down—Away Down! My Big Free 30th Anniversary Catalog is jammed with these Big Bargains. Write for it Today without fail. It shows Savings of 30 to 50% on **Furniture, Bedding, Springs, Mattresses, Bed Spreads, Rugs, Carpets, Linoleum, Lace Curtains, Portieres, Dishes, Baby Carriages, Glassware, Stoves, Ranges, Lamps, Enamel Cooking Sets, Aluminum Ware, Refrigerators, Washing Machines, Sewing Machines, Guns, Silverware, Clocks, Cameras, Victrolas, Luggage, etc.**

I want to send you the complete set, 110 pieces, on 30 Days' Free Trial. I want you to see the dishes on the table with your own. If your satisfaction is not complete, return the set. I will refund your first payment and all freight charges. The trial will not cost you a penny. **Be careful to state the initial you desire. Order No. PA2940. Terms: $1 with order, $2.50 Monthly. Price $29.95.**

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