October 15 Cents

Adventure

The WOMAN with the WOLVES

A Novelette of MYSTERY

M·LEONE BRACKER

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ADVENTURE

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Some Real Adventurers

NOT long ago a sun-tanned, alert, sturdy young man walked into our office and sent his card in to ADVENTURE. Except for his bronzed face and his "young eyes" (if you don't know what "young eyes" means, read "The Skipper with the Young Eyes" in this number), there was nothing about him much different from thousands of other presentable young men here in New York. That is, there were no signs of death by starvation anywhere on his person; no beast or reptile of the jungle had left any visible marks upon him; nothing to indicate that he had ever fooled around with cannibals or eaten rats and monkeys and dogs.

Yet the card he sent in to me bore the name "Russell B. Huffman" and he had come in reply to a letter saying we were much interested in an article he had submitted, entitled "Through Perilous Peru." That is, he *had* eaten rats and monkeys—and been very glad to get 'em, too—and had done all the rest of it.

I brought him back into our own room and we talked to him a long time. Partly because we wanted to make sure he was writing from his own experience, and partly because he was interesting and wholesome and jolly and we couldn't help ourselves.

Yes, it was all true. He had been the engineer in charge of a preliminary survey for a big American company that is now actually building a railroad into a piece of South America several times bigger than Pennsylvania that had never been even seen by a white man till Mr. Huffman and his companions starved their way into it and—some of them—out of it again. He gave us references and wanted us to decide about using his "stuff" as quickly as we could, because he was expecting to go out again into the far Unknown Places almost any day.

Well, we decided. (You'll find "Through Perilous Peru" in this number.) He came in to see us once more, a few days later, and then—he vanished. He's gone from civilization once more. The Atlantic, the Pacific, the Gulf of Mexico, the mountains of Peru? I don't know. But he'll come back again—it's a way they have, these world-prowlers—and walk in some day with another story of what he's been doing in some out-of-the way corner.

We never get tired of meeting them, these men who have "done things" and are still doing them, these real-in-the-flesh Adventurers from the far places of the earth. But sometimes when, here in New York and in our comfortable offices, I find myself greeting these men from the Great Out-of-Doors, shaking a hand whose fingers have pulled a trigger in an African war or grasped a knife somewhere in the South Seas or strangled a throat in some forgotten corner of Asia, a certain envy and restlessness come over me. The Spirit of Adventure, I suppose it is, that calls now and then to all of us and makes us a bit dissatisfied with our quiet, sheltered existence.

But they're fine fellows, all of them. And interesting? You should have been in here one day last Spring and seen three of us standing (we forgot to sit down) for about two hours listening to Captain Fritz Duquesne's experiences in the Boer secret service and how he escaped from a British prison at eight in the morning when he was sentenced to be shot at nine. You see, his jailer came in with a basin of water and a towel—but there's no space for that now.

By the way, there are some more of them in this number you're holding in your hands—Wolcott LeClear Beard, for example, who knows the South American Andes himself, to say nothing of the wilds of Mexico and other places; Thomas Samson Miller, who knows what he's writing about when he tells us stories of the inside of Africa; Frederick Arthur Dominy, who has served with the Life-Savers of our stormy Atlantic coast. Others, too, in this and every number.

And they make good reading in the magazine, these real adventurers, don't you think? All of us, no matter how bookish and cultured and refined, like a fresh breeze across our face and a few minutes with the men who have left our commonplace, humdrum life and gone out into the mysteries and distances of that other world where real adventures happen.

THE EDITOR OF ADVENTURE.

George Graham Rice

The next article in Mr. Rice's "My Adventures With Your Money" will appear in ADVENTURE for November. Watch for it. It's worth it.

Adventure

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VOL. 2 OCTOBER, 1911 NO. 6

THE FREAK

BY JOHN I. COCHRANE, M.D.*

CHAPTER I

TRAINOR CHANGES HIS LODGINGS

HARVARD had a lot of freaks in our day, and most of them flocked to the new boarding-club. Our table comprised the choicest collection—we gloried in our collective reputation for insanity—but by enthusiastic consent we accorded the palm to Trainor.

Six and one-half feet of big bone and steel muscle, he had come out of the West and landed in our midst with a whoop; and where he was, things were always doing. His boyish-grim face, with generous thin lips and nostrils, ever shone with clean vitality; and his presence was like the strong north wind, crackling with electric energy.

When he loped along the street, in the driveway for choice, where he towered above the horses, people perforce turned to look. Strong men smiled in sympathy, women looked frightened, boys whistled on their fingers, and his few friends said, as they shook their heads: "That Trainor certainly is cracked!"

Perhaps because I stood over six feet, perhaps by reason of the attraction of opposites, he had chosen me for a friend. Trainor said that it was because I alone had the stomach to stand him.

And he was no companion for a retiring invalid. To be with him was to be conspicuous always, in trouble frequently, but never unoccupied or dull. For instance:

It was a warm May afternoon when it was an effort to breathe. On my way through the Yard I heard a long stride on the gravel behind me, and stepped aside to let the big fellow come abreast.

"Come to my room, will you?"

He always spoke in a low vibrant bass, and flushed when our eyes first met. Without a word I turned to walk with him across Harvard Square. He expressed his satis-

*Dr. Cochrane is the author of "The Crook and the Doctor" and "Cupid and the Crook" which appeared in earlier numbers of ADVENTURE and received much favorable comment.

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faction at having captured me, by a contraction of all his muscles in an ecstatic shiver; humped his broad shoulders up about his ears and, with hands in pockets raising his trousers to his shoe-tops, he walked with huge bobbing strides through the grinning crowd at the transfer-station.

When we had reached a clear space in the street beyond he looked down into my disgusted face benignly: "Do you good!" said he: "Stretch your hide!"

I did not answer, and in silence we came to the house where he rented the third floor front, from a fat, snooping widow called Littlefield. He motioned me to wait, let himself in and disappeared.

I was conscious of Littlefield peeping through the closed shutters, and of other peeping eyes in the houses adjoining, for Trainor was a godsend to the gossips of the neighborhood and they seldom peeped in vain.

Presently his window opened, his head and shoulders protruded, and in his hand he waved a cattleman's rope. When the noose opened, he twirled it circling downward and roped me neatly under the arms. Then he pulled in his head and braced his feet on the window-frame. Then the breathless spectators were treated to the spectacle of a six-footer walking up Mrs. Littlefield's house-front at an obtuse angle and pulled into the third-story window by the collar.

"This is about the limit!" I expostulated as I scrambled aboard. "What the——"

He silenced me by clapping a hand over my mouth and jabbed a ghostly thumb over his shoulder indicating the door. I listened; there was wheezy breathing at the keyhole of that door, and Trainor rushed upon it with much stamping clatter. With hand on the knob he stopped to listen.

There was a hurried retreat across the hall, a door was opened, then a jangling crash shook the floor. Trainor then broke silence: "That was Littlefield!" Again one of his characteristic repressed shudders shook his large frame. He drew his face down soberly and met my accusing look.

"What if I did put a washbowl and pitcher on the floor in there? Her eyes are put in up-and-down, to fit keyholes. Anyhow, she was tempted and she fell. Just one month more and I could break Littlefield of this vicious keyhole habit. But I must leave her—I'm going to move."

Meanwhile I had noticed the closed packing-cases and the dismantled room.

"Where are you going?"

"That's the point! That's what's keeping Littlefield and the Tabbies awake nights; though I've told Littlefield in strict confidence, and all the Tabbies can tell you, that I am going in town to live with an eccentric millionaire named Jerome Spunk as his private tutor. He lives in the Dome of the State House and his grandfather was killed by falling through an open door down two flights of stairs. So he has a vow in heaven, Jerome has, not to use door or stairway again—reaches his rooms in the Dome by rope-ladder or balloon—and——"

He listened, clapped one long forefinger against his nose with a wink of acute slyness and tilted his head toward the door.

Littlefield was emerging from her lair. The landing creaked, once, twice, and once more Trainor descended upon the door savagely. This time he tore it open, just in time to admit the sounds of a fat and frantic getting-down-stairs, then of a crescendo—*"Br-r-r-rip—Thump!"* as Littlefield slipped and struck bottom.

Craning his neck over the banister, Trainor emitted a bass roar that made glass jingle:

"Ha-a-a-a! Foiled again!"

"Narrow shave—that," he said, with a grim shake of his big tawny head. With severe gravity he returned to his seat.

"You, of course, are impersonating Spunk, the millionaire, and your entrance just now was in character."

He bent to inspect the tracks in the flour sprinkled on the bare floor. "Yep! She has been up to read the labels on the boxes."

One of the labels faced me—it read:

John Trainor,
Care Jerome Spunk,
Dome of State House, Boston.

"But the expressman?" I asked.

"Oh, he's primed. I taught it to him by heart."

And he grinned the grin of modest achievement.

IN SUCH childish scheming he wasted the time and energy that should have earned him a degree with honors, while his standing approached the suspension-mark. But these seemingly futile plots served the double purpose of giving outlet to surplus vigor and concealing

morbid sensitiveness. As big emotionally as he was physically, his hatred of stupid curiosity was extravagant, and expressed itself in Gargantuan farce. A few of us knew that trouble at home had half embittered him; but only little Bill Wertz and I knew that his grotesque mask covered a mind of broad sweep and keen penetration, a spirit of tenderest sympathies and beautiful dreams.

In this instance, moreover, he had other reasons for obscuring his trail. What time Littlefield was busy with the arnica-bottle, he told me about it.

"I have some cousins here in Cambridge, North Avenue, and they have kept bothering me to come to stay with them. There's an old couple and their old-maid daughter. The old man has been crazy for some time, but now he's getting violent, and the women are afraid. They don't want to send him away, but they want some one to keep him in order. So I'm going out there to succor fair ladies and spank the old hyena the first time he starts anything. I shall take half a bed-slat, whittled to a handle, and use it where it will do most good to the greatest number; then I'll shut him up for a few days on bread and water. I know how to handle 'em—just watch me."

"You'll get in big trouble, one of these days."

"Sure!" And his grin was irritating.

When I had been lowered to the sidewalk, I made my way back to the Yard, reviewing the facts and the situation just presented to me. I had a clear mental image of Trainor with an aged lunatic across his lap, applying the bed-slat; for his mania was to keep his promises and purposes to the least detail.

I still nursed a sprained thumb which was a souvenir of an apparently rash promise given by him to three burly Irish street-cleaners. One of them, tempted by the sight of Trainor's gigantic height and long shambling gait, had playfully tripped him with a shovel.

"Did you mean to do that, neighbor?" Trainor's frown was benignly reproachful.

"What av I did?"

"I should be obliged to lick you," he said mildly.

"Thin ye'll lick the three av us!" another piped up.

"That," said Trainor, removing his coat, "is axiomatic!"

They took that as an insult. The ensuing debate involved a dozen students beside us twain, as well as a score of muckers, three officers, an ambulance and the Fire Department before it was finished. But the contract went through as advertised, and only Trainor's mysterious popularity with the Cambridge police prevented several arrests.

CHAPTER II

THE COUSIN FROM KENTUCKY

THE moving to North Avenue was accomplished to the complete frustration of the Tabbies, and it was some days before Trainor showed up again. It was a cool afternoon when I sat before my grate in Hollis 16 and heard his long bounding stride mounting the stairs. A heavy thump on the door, and in burst John, breezy as always and obviously full of affairs.

One hand bore a shotgun, the other a pair of hand-cuffs, and the paper bag under his arm was sure to hold oranges. With his usual salutation, "H'are yeh? How's yer liver?" he put gun and hand-cuffs in the corner, and lay down on the rug before the fire to attack the oranges. Knowing that his enjoyment of the fruit depended on my demonstrating anew that I could eat only one to his three, I began my hopeless task.

"For the deranged gentleman?" I asked, nodding toward the hardware.

"Bracelets for the Old Hyena!" he said in a rich fruity tone. "Gun for the pigeons, by Gravy!"

"Pigeons! What pigeons?"

"Nutting's pigeons." He filled his pauses by stoking large sections of orange. "Nutting lives next door—raises fancy pigeons—pigeons scratch up old folks' garden—Nutting's been warned—tells 'em to go to —— won't shut up pigeons—I shall shoot Mr. Nutting's pigeons, me!"

"You'll wind up in jail," I opined. "You!"

He ate oranges savagely and gave no sign of having heard. When he had thrown the last peel and the bag in the grate he grinned at me seductively and proposed: "Come out and stay with me to-night! Old man's due for a tantrum this evening. Pigeons scratch early in the morning. Continuous performance, not a dull minute! What?"

I regarded him suspiciously, "What's the answer? Reads too good! Why is the old man due to go on the war-path to-night?"

This time his grin was guilty, "'Cause he'll hear about the cousin from Kentucky coming to take Summer courses."

"In the Annex?"

"Yes—but——"

"Ho! Ho-ha-ho! Oh, I'll come out!" I broke out with harsh sarcasm, "with only this old suit to my back—you'll recall that I pawned my best ones so we could see Mansfield and you could get your shirts from the Chinaman—I'll come out to meet a girl from Kentucky—not! You're scared, you coward!"

I slid down in my big chair and picked up the book in my lap, "Go on! You don't dast face anybody but old cripples! Shoot pigeons, if you dare, and get licked to a plumb frazzle! But you can't hide behind me when it comes to facing girls! Go 'way!"

"Say!" He sat up, pale with terror. "You don't mean it? Now see here!" He rose to his almost seven feet, cleared his throat and gave his trousers a preparatory hitch: "Where's your nerve—your Mayflower blood? Imagine a girl meeting me! She'd go into hysterics on the spot, and light out for Kentucky 'cross lots! Moreover, she's probably hump-backed and dyspeptic, with overshot front teeth and spectacles—searching for 'trewth'! She won't get here until to-morrow, anyhow."

I sat tight and grinned sardonically, but I knew I should go in the end. Ten minutes later we were on the way to the Square to get a North Avenue car, Trainor hugging himself with an occasional suppressed spasm of delight.

I DESCRIBE our trip in detail, because it illustrates the statement, elsewhere paraphrased, that Trainor was always either asleep or strenuously getting into trouble.

Our car having just left the Square, the only sensible thing to do was to wait for the next one. So we didn't do it. As Trainor was wont to say, "Any —— fool could do that!" So we started a wild stern chase after the car dwindling in the distance, Trainor waving his accouterments over his head and yelling like an Apache. Sundry small boys helped by advice and piercing whistles; and other business on the avenue was at a standstill until we swung aboard in triumph.

Trainor entered the closed car in an expansive mood, and instantly took his cue from the amused smiles of the occupants. Exaggerating his ungainliness, he blushed, stepped on his own feet, poked the gun into a fat waistcoat, reversed it and jammed in a stiff hat, finally dropping into a seat and doing such intricately embarrassed stunts with the firearm that one nervous gentleman fled to the rear platform, where he could be seen expostulating with the conductor. Then Trainor settled himself with a satisfied grin, and winked at a pretty shop-girl opposite.

There he made a mistake. She was not as intelligent as she looked, and she tossed her head angrily. Next to her happened to sit a virtuous Y. M. C. A. store-clerk, who felt it his duty to administer stern reproof.

It was not the time of the moon for reproofs. Trainor's reverence for womankind was tenderly profound, and he was cut to the quick by the girl's misunderstanding. His eyes were wet, his lips and nostrils working rabbit-wise, when he became aware of the existence of the virtuous young man.

Now I had seen him look like crying once before, and the other fellow's appearance subsequently was not appetizing. Signalling the conductor, I got a grip of his collar and by a desperate effort managed to drag him off the car just as it came to a stop.

Oblivious of all else, he came to the ground growling imprecations—"Did y' see the —— mucker? Did y' see him? Thought I was trying to insult that—— Why, say! D'you suppose he would stick in that window?"

He made a sudden lunge at the open window of the car where the back of the virtuous neck showed temptingly. One instant more and the severe young Christian would have come through the window backward; but I got the gun-barrels between Trainor's legs just in time—tripped him into the fat man who had got off after us, while I swung to his coattails and shouted:

"Look out! Can't you see a man by daylight? Hold up—and apologize to the gentleman!"

It was an inspired thought. His apology was sincere and abject. The car moved on and he looked down at me with an admiring grin.

I lost no time in heading him for the sidewalk, and, as he was more than likely to run

down the car even now, attempted a diversion: "Are you sure the girl doesn't come until to-morrow?"

It was an alarming success. He got a firm grip on my arm before he shouted with well-done alarm: "Say! Is this Thursday?" As if he did not know it was Friday.

To recount the recriminations that followed would be useless. At length I agreed to go on with him, on two conditions: if the girl had arrived, I would stay to meet her if she were not too alarmingly young and pretty, provided he would explain that my clothes had been pawned to redeem his laundry. He swore solemnly, and we walked the few remaining blocks.

He was pointing out to me the house where he now lived, when we were struck dumb and staring by the sight of a carriage stopping before it.

When the driver opened the door, there emerged a foot and ankle, then the rest of—— But what's the use? It has been tried too many times. Can man be more futile than when he tries with pen, brush or crayon to limn in a few seconds the eons-wrought masterpiece of the Creator? The vision that descended from that carriage was not only an American Girl of the Twentieth Century, but a Girl from Dixie in New York clothes! I defy the everlasting universe to beat it!

She swung gracefully up the walk. There was a feminine welcome on the porch, the driver staggered in with a trunk and drove away looking well paid; while we leaned weakly against a fence in the shelter of a friendly bush, staring at each other with sightless eyes.

The primitive functions were the first to revive. With the first pangs of returning consciousness my legs began to bear me in record time toward Harvard Square and my safe fireside. Behind me was a clatter of gun and handcuffs, then long strides in pursuit. Two blocks covered, there was a drag on my coat. I wriggled out of it and made two blocks more before a low tackle brought us both to earth.

"No you don't!" came from Trainor like a cork from a charged bottle, as we struck the turf together.

We sat up and grinned at each other foolishly, and Trainor had a new argument,

"You'll have to come with me now! That fence was fresh-painted, and the nearest benzine-bottle is in the bath-room at my place. If you go back, the paint will dry and you won't have any clothes to wear!"

He was right. We both presented a bright yellow western exposure. So the shades of evening fell upon two long figures stealing up the avenue, gathering hats, coat, gun and bracelets on the back trail.

Through the back way we gained the bath-room unseen in the dusk. As we worked at the paint in airy attire, he pointed out the bed-slat standing in the corner, beautifully whittled to a handle and with the corners rounded. He introduced it as his "Nerve Sedative."

THE paint was almost finished when from somewhere down the hall came a chorus of feminine screams that set us wildly scrambling into our fragrant garments.

"The old hyena! Sure! This is where I eat. The handcuffs! Where—where?"

Trainor was the center of a whirlwind of wearing-apparel, from which he emerged decently clothed, and disappeared waving bracelets and "Nerve Sedative" long before I was able to find my belongings. When at last I was visible to eyes polite, I stepped gropingly into a strange darkness. Two steps in the direction of a smothered tumult, which then seemed to come from quite another place; two more steps in the new direction; then the lights were turned on and I shaded my eyes before the gorgeous Vision that confronted me.

In something soft and richly purple, over which the heavy bronze ripples swept to the curve of her hips, the rose-cream curves of neck and arms were not so wicked as the violet of her frightened eyes.

"Pardon me!" I stammered. "Please don't be frightened! I'm not anybody—I—You—Look out!"

For a door behind her shook to a crash from within. She recoiled toward me, withdrew a light touch on my arm, and, like scared children, we stared at the door that hid the increasing turmoil.

There was a shuffling struggle, scraping and panting; a table spun across the floor to the wall with a crash. Then a heavy weight landed on a bed and, with the sound of beating carpets, came cracked squeals of, "Help! Murder! Police!"—quickly smothered in a pillow. Then, following rhythmic spanks, accenting the admonition, came, "Not—

nice—to frighten—women! Not—nice—to frighten—women!"

The silence that ensued was broken by two clicks of the handcuffs. Then the deep fatherly voice continued, "Now you will be good, and very quiet!" and heavy steps shook the floor.

"Burke! The door!"

When I threw it open, high up in the doorway appeared the kicking legs of the old man, borne baby-wise in Trainor's arms. Striding to the bath-room, he placed his burden in the tub with a warning, "Now if you yell, I'll come and turn on the water." Having locked the door outside meanwhile, he commented, "Two days on bread and water will calm his troubled spirit. And——"

Then he caught first sight of the Girl.

The change in him stunned me. He was not embarrassed—he was too big and clean for that—but the big enveloping chivalry of him made him look bigger than ever. He held out a hand, with a gentle reverence in his deep tones that made his "Cousin Margaret!" sound greater than all proud titles, and looked down at her in a manner that would make any woman his to command, because of its sheltering adoration.

He said, "Were you much frightened?"

"Not much, Cousin John." She gave her hand with a child's utter confidence; and I knew the sweet Southern speech was balm to the sore spirit under his great strength. "But—are there any mo' big men to come boolging out of places 'round here?" (almost "raound hyah.")

The glance of sweet terror that she threw over her shoulder at once shocked me to self-consciousness and rendered me dumb. Truly she was the most dangerous of the daughters of Eve.

That was an evening—there is no space for it here. It marked the beginning of many things, and made clear much that had been obscure.

At the very start it was plain that all three women had back of them at least three generations of refinement, and their home was a place of broad outlook where any man could breathe deep and free. That Trainor was perfectly at ease in this atmosphere should have been no surprise to me. But I realized that I had been influenced by the attitude of indulgent amusement assumed by his classmates—fellows who, in these surroundings, would appear awkwardly cheap and provincial.

Into this rather rarified New England air the Girl brought the kindly intoxicating glow of the Southland; Trainor opened vistas of the wide wind-swept prairies and eye-straining canyons; while I held my peace, for the most part.

CHAPTER III

BANG! BANG!

THUS Trainor and the Girl were brought together, and the result was the same old result of the same old cause. Only Trainor had it harder, as was the nature of the man.

Here let us step aside to record that the treatment of the deranged gentleman was successful. He never again raised even his voice in the house, and always referred to Trainor in an awed whisper as "The Devil." With this notice, he passes out of this narrative.

To return to Trainor: Now he had a new purpose in life, and he gave himself to it whole-heartedly and selflessly. He did not neglect the pigeons, to be sure. He shot them whenever they scratched in the garden—he had said he would—and he kept accurate record with diagram of exactly when and where he killed each bird. But with a new dignity of manner, he lived now unto the Girl, and made no secret of it.

His attitude was not that of a lovesick swain, but of the one to do things.

"That girl wants a good time, and she's going to have it," said he. "A girl's idea of a good time," he further stated, "is to have a lot of men around." So he went after them.

Among his Exeter acquaintances there were a lot of fine fellows, whose pace had been too expensive for him to keep up; but he looked them up now and introduced them at the house on North Avenue. The Girl did the rest—it is born in them down there in Dixie. The old maid, as chaperone, began to have the time of her life, and the porch soon showed signs of wear.

Through it all, Trainor, in his one suit of clothes, but with his person and linen always radiant, was his big, extravagant, unconscious self. He did his best to entertain overflow meetings on the porch when the Girl was happy on the river with another fellow, and

the more admirers she had the broader was his grin—speaking generally. For there was an exception, and we'll call him Kinyon.

We call him Kinyon because his real name is known now to you who read. Even then he could write stuff that got next to you. Moreover, he was a lovely talker—one of the men who require only a few minutes' start of the handsomest man living to win with women—and somebody had introduced him to the Girl. Neither Trainor nor I was responsible, for we didn't like him; but there he was on the porch—and what to do about it?

Seeing that he was getting a hold, I proposed various crude "alleyby" schemes (like the elder Weller's) for his abatement, but Trainor vetoed them as lacking subtlety and finish.

"No! No!" he protested vigorously, "not for a minute! Make a martyr of him, and he'll win in a walk! What you want to do is to make a bore of him." [Note how newly woman-wise.] "You want to defer to him—ask his opinion! Listen reverently to his long words! It's the only way, and it's his weak spot."

But Mr. Kinyon saw us first. He slumbered not nor slept; just let one of us say, "Now, Mr. Kinyon, as a student of philosophy, should you say——"

And we would be left staring at Mr. Kinyon's wide-spaced tracks leading to the tall timber. It was annoying. Mr. Kinyon was fast making good as the fascinating villain of the piece, for all his blond whiskers; and it seemed as if he had the luck.

For instance: It was a lovely Spring evening. On the North Avenue porch Kinyon, little Bill and I were talking to the Girl; and Trainor sat on the end of the porch with a gun across his knees, watching for marauding pigeons.

After a long space there was a break in the talk, and Kinyon turned to Trainor with a gleaming-teethed smile. "Well, Mr. Trainor, how are the pigeons?"

"Some still scratching—some dead!" Trainor answered cheerfully, without turning.

"Ah-h!" [rising inflection] "Then you have shot some?" [in a good-little-boy tone].

"Yes, sir! Thank you, sir!"

The Girl smiled, and it looked like an even break; but who can see as the high gods? (You'll notice all best-sellers mention the high gods at least once.)

"You've not met Mr. Nutting yet, personally?" Kinyon's voice was velvety.

The Girl sensed trouble, and her gracious tones were a relief: "But you just ought to have heahd him cussin'-out somebody when he found two dead birds in his yahd last evenin'."

"Why? What about it?" Trainor turned steely eyes on Kinyon for the first time, as if he had not heard the Girl.

"Oh, nothing! Nothing! I was thinking that a personal interview might be——"

Bang! Bang!

The whir of wings had caused Trainor to turn and fire from the hip, and two birds dropped dead in the yard, just at the edge of the garden.

The smoke had hardly blown away when out of the next house burst the irate Nutting, about ten inches ahead of a wildly excited cur. Trainor had stepped into the small side yard. The cur was under the low fence, at Trainor's legs, and kicked over the fence in a yap-yowling parabola in about the time required to do a drop-kick from the field. Then the two men approached the fence and each other, walking stiff-legged like scrappy young roosters.

Nutting, though not over six feet, was noted as a two-fisted bully. He leaned over the fence to shake his fist in Trainor's face and make statements. He had just got going smoothly on the high, when Trainor drew air into his lungs and *spoke!*

The sheer force of his utterance drove Nutting's words back down his throat:

"See here! I shot your pigeons because they were a nuisance! I kicked your dog over the fence because he was a nuisance! If you will come over that fence——"

"Hold on!" I shouted with all the power in me, and started for the spot on the run.

Too late. Nutting had vaulted the fence, emitting purple language.

"You —— —— ——"

There was a dull *smack!* And Nutting lay on the green turf, white as marble, and his muscles twitched in a fine tremor.

I got before him, to hide the sight from the porch, but a glance over my shoulder showed the Girl standing with hands clenched and a fire in the dark eyes.

"Of course there wasn't anything else to do!" came in a purring voice from behind her; and she turned with a quick flush. There was an instant of silence, then she bit her lip and hurried into the house.

Trainor stood, lax hands at his sides, looking after her with bitter pain in his deep-set eyes, his lip and nostrils working rabbit-wise.

Little Bill dragged us into town that night, in a well-meant attempt to "drown the memory of it"; and the result was that for the first and last time we put Trainor to bed in my room.

CHAPTER IV

BIG ODDS

MORBID fits of the blackest blues were no new thing for him; but they were not at all like this. For three days he sat in my room and would not eat. When I urged the anxiety of the people on North Avenue, he said he was not needed, now the old man was quiet, and he would say no more.

It was at dusk of the third day, and the glee-club was singing on the steps of Holworthy. We sat listening to the soft music, than which I have heard no sweeter since, and his head was in his hands.

In a silence, while cries of "More!" echoed across the quadrangle, he burst out, "That Girl is thoroughly disgusted!" His strong white teeth fairly mangled the words. "And she has reason, for she has seen the Beast!"

The bitter pain in his face then lightened slowly to something like a grim smile as he went on broodingly: "And that snake, Kinyon! I can hear him now—'I assure you, Miss Barbour, I esteem Mr. Trainor highly, and at bottom he is really courageous!' I'd like to take him by the heels and snap his —— head off!"

I judged it best to keep silence. Again he listened to the singing until it stopped; then he groaned, "God! Why did I—why did she have to see Nutting looking like a corpse? I shall see his face twitch until I——"

"Aw, break away!" I could hold in no longer. "That's all rot! You have stewed yourself into a morbid mush of melancholy! You can't see the woods for the trees. She didn't see what you thought she saw. And there was nothing tragic about it. Nutting got his—just a plain knock-out; you've been there, and so have I; and save for two black eyes he is none the worse for it. Go home!"

But he would not move, so I broke my vow and went out North Avenue to reconnoiter.

There was nobody there but little Bill, and the Girl made no pretense, but came to the point, "What does ail Cousin John?" (By the way, their mothers married second cousins.) "We have not seen him fo' days and days!"

I had promised not to tell, but little Bill came to the rescue. "He thinks he is disgraced," he drawled, "because he thumped Nutting in your presence."

"How mawbid! He just had it to *do!* Any man I know would be disgraced if he didn't beat a man fo' usin' such language befo' a gyehl! I think he was mighty fine!" She flushed slowly, but finished bravely, "An' I cert'nly do want to see him!"

Little Bill got up and made his graceful little bow, with something sad in it, "We'd all be giants, if we could, Lady Fair! Good night!"

"You'd better stay—just gentlemen," she said softly. And he flushed, that once, anyway—over the little hand she gave him.

We came away together and went straight to the sulking hero. "You large lobster," Bill began in his husky drawl, "what did you take that girl for, a New England school-marm, with an anemic soul and a hypertrophied conscience? Man, she has Cavalier blood in her! I'd like to build a fire under you!"

Then he went to sit in a window-seat, and looked out into the tops of the elms; while I gave Trainor an almost verbatim report. All guards down, he listened with that odd rabbit movement of lips and nostrils, and said no word until I had finished.

Then he heaved himself up and expanded his great lungs until he seemed to fill the room. He came to where I stood watching, gave my hand the least little timid pressure, and clattered out of the room.

I watched his bare tousled head disappear, and turned to Bill, "What'll he do now?"

"The most improbable and extravagant thing you can't imagine."

WHEN Bill wandered in the next morning, I knew from his specially bored and blank features that there was news.

"Well," he daintily removed one glove, "old Bird-of-freedom's pinched!"

"I expected it. For what? Assault?"

"No, Nutting's not advertising his licking. It's for pigeons."

"H'm!" I had stopped in my dressing.

"The papers were waiting for him just outside the Yard when he left here last evening. But he's out on his recognizance, or some such legal tommyrot, and he has disappeared."

"When and where will the case be tried?"

"Thursday, in Municipal Court." Bill went to the window and looked down into the Yard in deep thought. "I'm thinking there'll be funds needed, for there will be a fine, to say nothing of a lawyer's fee."

"The money can be had," said I, "but would he take it?"

"Oh, I've got the cash," for Bill was rich, "but he won't take money, even from his folks. There was some kind of a row that left him soured, except from that old aunt in Salem who gives him his starvation allowance." He faced round, and his sleepily half-closed eyes meant inner excitement, "It would be just one of his tricks not to let anybody pay his fine!"

"That would mean the workhouse!"

"At thirty cents a day!"

It was no joke from any point of view. Bill's stolid exterior concealed vigorous thought as well as fine feeling. "I'm going in town to see this loafer, Nutting, to see if he can be bought off. I'll meet you out North Avenue at four this afternoon. He may have turned up by that time. I knew his foolishness would get him in trouble."

"Right! Do your best! Imprisonment would mean ruin all round for him."

Lectures had no meaning for me that day. At four o'clock I found Bill waiting on the porch; also Mr. Kinyon talking to the Girl, who was unflatteringly distrait.

Bill answered my look by a hopeless shake of the head. The Girl met me with open worriment: "What *has* become of Cousin John? And what *will* become of him? Will he be put in prison?"

"Not if his fine is paid."

But as I said it, I saw Kinyon cover his smile with a hand.

"Have you *any* idea where he is?" She looked up appealingly.

As if it were his cue, just then Trainor swung off a car at the corner and came striding up the walk. He wore a new Spring suit (he always went to a good tailor for his one suit) and straw hat, and was as fresh as an apple, glowing with surplus virility.

It was his first meeting with the Girl since the knockout episode, and his eyes shone deep with the marvel of her sweetness as she came to meet him at the steps.

"Why did you let us worry so about you?" she asked softly.

"I am sorry, very sorry!" He swallowed hard, but his incredulous eyes could not leave her face.

This was not sweet to Mr. Kinyon, who now spoke in his velvety tones: "It is one of the—ah—eccentricities of genius, to be a bit unmindful of the comfort of others."

"Ah! Good afternoon, Mr. Kinyon!" Trainor's grin was instantly ironical. "Does your conscience hurt? What have you done now?"

"We wander from the point," said Kinyon, smiling toothfully. "The question is, what have you been doing?"

"I," said Trainor, "have been standing in line all night to get the best seats to see Jefferson in 'The Rivals' Thursday night. Will you go, Miss Margaret? I may state," some of his bitterness peeping out, "that I have clothes fit for the occasion."

"Now that's not kind! You know I'd go with you in anything, anywhere!" She flushed slowly, but finished bravely, "And I *neveh* expected to see it—*neveh* wanted to see anything so much!"

By the working nostrils of him, I knew that Trainor was bursting with the battling-protective instinct, and his eyes fell on Kinyon's smile. "What was that about my being a wild beast, or egoism of genius, I suppose you'd call it?"

"Not at all—unless the cap fits!" Kinyon could not conceal his exultation. "You must be conscious of some shortcoming!"

"Now you," Trainor's level look was ominously cool, "in your tidy, well-arranged intellect, have labeled me 'Maniac—Possibly dangerous,' and in public you look upon me as a rather amusing child. Now, Mr. Kinyon, your game is subtle diplomacy, but let me point out that my methods, though they may be farcical and extreme, *get there!*"

"Which means," Kinyon spoke slowly and seriously, "that you would prove your sanity by the fact that you prevail in your environment. Now to judge the sanity of an action by the nice adjustment of means to end is sound doctrine; I accept your standard. But by that measure was not your abatement of the pigeon nuisance a bit drastic? Nutting has shut up the birds, but isn't it probable that your trial is liable to cause your relatives more trouble and expense than the original nuisance?"

"All right! I got you!" snapped Trainor savagely. "Make that a test case! Now you hear me!" He raised an impressive forefinger. I had been laboring to find a means of interfering with Kinyon's obvious purpose. Now I was disgusted that Trainor had fallen into his trap so blindly, and could not speak. The big man went on solemnly, "I have ten dollars left out of my quarter's allowance. I shall keep five for Thursday night, when we see Jefferson, and I shall pay all expenses of the trial with the other five, including fines and all!"

"That's all foolishness!" I broke in, for the Girl's eyes had appealed to me. "There will be lawyer's fee, witnesses, and the birds were worth a hundred."

"Surely you will let your own people help you, when you were doing this fo' them!" The Girl watched his face wistfully. It softened as it turned to her.

"I *promise* I shall take you to the theater the very evening after the trial."

Trouble cleared from her face, with the slow flush that mounted to her bronze hair, and her eyes dropped. "Then I shall not worry." And she meant it.

But I couldn't see it all. And Kinyon was as positive as Trainor. "I'd like to bet something that, if you stick to that, you'll be doing lockstep Thursday night!"

"You're on!" Little Bill's husky drawl startled us. "As far as you like!"

"It is robbery," once more Kinyon's smile was working, "but it is too good a thing to lose!"

"Is this right? Ought you to let him risk it?" the Girl asked Trainor soberly, though she was no Puritan.

"He's made of money!" But the deep-voiced tenderness was not all for the girl. He turned to Kinyon, "I want in on this. If I lose, you have the tickets for Jefferson; if I win, you bring that last manuscript of yours here, right after the trial, and give it to me. Does that go?"

"With pleasure—and with Miss Barbour's permission."

But Miss Barbour was studying Trainor's face so intently that she did not hear.

IT WAS all over Cambridge in twenty-four hours, and in the Boston papers the third morning. Trainor was more than ever pointed at on the street, and betting ran high, with prevailing odds of three to one that Trainor would do time.

Bill took so much of the small end that he created a zone in which it was hard to get even two to one. But I was so worried that I did not care to bet, even missed meals and some sleep.

"Don't take it so hard," Bill expostulated lazily, finding me alone in my window-seat. "Do you suppose Trainor would let Kinyon go to the theater with the Girl?"

"He can't help it, if he is locked up. He's not so crazy as he looks usually, but Kinyon got him angry and, now he's made his promise, nothing can budge him. I tell you those pigeons were worth five to twenty dollars apiece, and——".

Here Trainor burst in, waving a letter. "From that bully old aunt who pays my board! Listen!" He read, "'John Trainor: If you count on me to get you out of your foolish scrape, you will be disappointed!' That means she would try to persuade me to let her pay the fine? Don't think it! If I land in the work-house, I have seen the last dollar of her money!"

He was as happy about it as if she had sent a check.

"Do you know," said Bill, "that this Nutting is a sort of a politician, has some pull with the machine, and that he has boasted that he will have you fined *and* imprisoned?"

"Yep!" producing his eternal bag of oranges and beginning the slaughter. Casually taking my big chair and putting his feet on the desk, he continued, "But the magistrate who hears the case is not a machine man, he's a scholar and a gentleman, and I've read his decisions."

I opened my eyes. Bill got up and took his hat.

"Where are you going?"

"After more easy money."

He was already in the hall. Trainor grinned as he looked after him.

"The little cuss!"

"But I'd give something to be sure you are not going to ruin yourself," I said. "I may be a fool, but I don't see the joke."

"The joke," said he, stoking a large section of orange, "is on Kinyon and Nutting."

He said no more until he had thrown the empty bag in the grate, then he came to look down at me with fatherly concern. "You old plaster elephant,"—flushing slowly—"you *have* got bowels, but don't you worry! You will see to-morrow!" and he departed.

CHAPTER V

TRAINOR'S DEFENSE

THE court-room was packed with a well-dressed crowd that seemed to think the scene set for a comedy. But the Girl was waiting at home, and among the students on the front seats one at least felt mighty sick and shaky.

"Will you look at all the coons!" I said to Bill. "Where did Nutting get 'em? I suppose they will swear to anything."

"Sure! So much the better!"

Just then Kinyon climbed over the benches and squeezed in with us. He looked really haggard. He said, "Can't that lunatic be persuaded to go back on his word?" His voice was shaky. "This thing started in fun, but he's sure of a big fine; it will mean his leaving college, and you know how things are with him—he's had trouble at home—and to go back in disgrace! He takes things so hard, I—I'm afraid it would be suicidal!"

"This is a pretty time to talk like that! You knew all that when you egged him on to it!" I was not touched by his repentance, but he wasn't half bad at bottom.

"Here he comes!" Bill nudged me.

Never had I seen Trainor look so well-groomed nor so big-manly. As he took his seat at the bar he whispered something to the officer beside him, and that worthy got red in the face. Then he coolly searched the room for us, and with impassive face winked his off eye at Kinyon. Kinyon choked with a hysterical giggle, and I pitied him.

"He must have a card up his sleeve," I whispered.

"I'd give a fortune to be sure of it!"

The case was called at once, and the questioning of witnesses began. Nutting was his own first witness, and made his testimony as damaging as he knew how. Pigeons had been shot at all times of the day and night and all over the place; he had been injured in pocket and in his feelings.

Money would be no balm for his wounded sensibilities, but he had lost more than a hundred dollars' worth of pigeons, and every one on the place had lived in terror of sudden death from this Western desperado; servants had left and his wife had been made ill; his once happy home had been the scene of carnage and slaughter, etc., etc.

The really good lawyer whom Nutting had employed at great expense made the most of the testimony, and when he lowered his three hundred pounds into his chair the smiles had left the faces of the spectators.

Trainor had listened intently to the testimony. Twice he had said, "I object to the question!" and his objection had been sustained. Now he quietly waived cross-examination, and the judge cast at him a sidelong look of perplexity.

Then the "col'ed gentlemen" were called in turn. They more than bore out the statements of their employer. In fact, with the fear of cross-examination removed, they thought to help the cause along; and their wild exaggeration forced the pompous attorney to cut their protestations short.

Trainor maintained his silence, except for a few more objections, which were always sustained. The judge seemed to want to give him a square deal or a little better, but when the last witness had stepped down, his fine old face wore a worried frown.

For all the childish contradictions of the colored witnesses, it was clear that the big fair-haired student rested under a serious charge. The intelligent onlookers already seemed to sense his desperately earnest emotional nature, and to feel sympathetically how ruinous would be the results of defeat. One or two women in the low gallery broke out into sudden hysterical laughter, smothered as soon as it attracted their own startled attention. Then in the strained hush the pompous lawyer rose.

He began in a gravely colloquial tone, but quickly rose to strenuous tragic denunciation. He painted in vivid color, the deeds of bloody slaughter: "This depraved being has shot the little innocent birds in wanton, savage cruelty—shot them on the earth—as they soared aloft in the pure air of heaven—as they cooed their love to their mates—to gratify a morbid thirst for revenge, in a spirit of reckless and brutal contempt for life and property!

"This Wild Man from the West has imported the lawless and primitive customs of the Plains, to terrify and despoil his virtuous and peaceable neighbors! Who can estimate the damage he has done, the evil he has wrought by his vicious example?" His voice trembled with righteous anger. "The very least that can be done is to make of him an example and a warning to potential malefactors; anything less would be an affront to decent citizenship, an open incentive to ruthless destruction of life and property, to disregard of law!"

For half an hour he exhausted the possibilities of pathetic appeal, righteous wrath and dignified contempt. Finally, with a graceful eulogy upon the dignity and beneficence of the magistrate's office, and a tactful assertion of confidence in the wisdom of the luminary there occupying the bench, he left the case in his Honor's hands.

BENEATH all the bombast and superlative adjectives there was enough basis of apparent fact, as shown in the evidence, to drive the last smile from the faces in the court-room.

The judge meditated for a moment with eyes on the desk; then asked, "Has the respondent anything to say in his own defense?"

As I looked at the big fellow, I felt I never had known how much he meant to me and how much he might mean to the world. With the realization came a hot anger at the injustice of it all, and at the indecent haste of this mummery. I wanted to jump up and shout, "Stop right here! Do you know you are going to ruin a powerful man, whose only offense has been to take the part of weak old age? To punish this man will ruin and embitter one who might be a tremendous force for good!"

The only thing that prevented me was the power of Trainor's presence. He rose quietly to his full height and faced the court. He stood easily relaxed, empty hands by his side, level gaze on the judge's face. There was nothing grotesque in his bigness seen there; it was simply right and satisfying at that distance and his large clear features made others seem small and weak by comparison.

Overwrought, I saw in an instant what it meant. He was a born leader of men. Such may seem out of drawing at close range, irritating in everyday intercourse, by reason of their very size and strength. But a crisis comes, men must be moved in mass, and your big man is where he belongs! Up at the front, on a flower-decked stage or the head of a barrel, he stands for the Want of the People. As his big presence fills the eye, as his big voice fills the ear, the big heart of the crowd beats with his words; he sweeps men on to fulfil their destiny and makes history.

This I felt, in a moment of prophetic insight, and with it the conviction that such a man could not be allowed to fail, tripped by so trivial an obstacle.

There was a whispering stir in the room, stilled, as Trainor rose to his feet. Easily relaxed, empty hands quiet at his sides, he faced the court and I have never seen anything finer than his air of gentle respect when he addressed the judge,

"Your Honor! Ladies and gentlemen!" His distinct enunciation made the low words fill the room. For a few seconds he stood still and the hush deepened.

"One serious charge has been made against me, the charge that I have wantonly defied the law!" The judge's eyes came up to Trainor's face and rested there, intent. More slowly and distinctly the big man went on:

"That charge is false! I shall not insult the intelligence of the Court by reviewing the evidence, but I shall tell the truth! I shot eight pigeons in the garden they were destroying, in defense of that property, because it was the only way to protect that property.

"It was the only way, because the owner would not restrain the birds, and he could not be forced to restrain them. *That is my offense and defense.*"

Again he paused, and leaned slightly forward as he drove home the last slow words, "The reason why he could not be forced to restrain the birds, and why I was forced to destroy them, is also the reason why this complaint against me will be dismissed!

"I refer you to pages —— and —— of the Decisions of the Supreme Court of Massachusetts, where it has been held that——"

In the instant's interval, he rested his hands on the rail before him and paused between his words,

"*Flying birds—unrestrained—are—not—property!*"

In a dead silence he sat down. Before his last sentence, swift comprehension and relief had flashed into the penetrating face of the judge. Now, while the people in the room were looking at one another in a daze and whispering, "What was that? What did he say?" his Honor moved some papers on the desk and rapped for order.

Again there was strained attention.

"So far as defiance of law is concerned," he said slowly, "I am convinced from the young man's manner that he has spoken the truth. Further, his point in law is well taken. Unrestrained birds are not property; therefore no property has been destroyed and I have no choice—I must dismiss the complaint!"

Here he saw portents in the eager faces before him and raised his hand, "One moment! As soon as I have finished speaking, court is adjourned until to-morrow. On payment of a nominal fine of one dollar, for firing a gun in city limits, the respondent is discharged!"

CHAPTER VI

OUT NORTH AVENUE WAY

IT WAS wise to adjourn thus, for there were doings. Trainor never got as far as the clerk's desk to pay his fine. He was struggling mightily to get down from the shoulders of a yapping mob of students.

George Washington Kinyon was one of the most disheveled of the maniacs who tried to form a parade with a street-band, to bear Trainor in triumph to the Yard. But their victim escaped by violence and came to hunt me out of my room, where I had gone to sulk.

My first thought was that he might have saved me all this worry, but I had decided that it was just punishment for my private doubt.

The first sight of his glowing face showed that he was another man. No human being, however great, can be entirely indifferent to the attitude of his fellows. In the moment of his triumph he had lost his bitterness. He had tasted power and it was sweet. He had felt the kindly response to the reins in his strong hand. The new warmth and charm of the big fellow were irresistible.

"Well, Old Oracle, did y' ever see such a pack of fools? Come on out and witness the unconditional surrender of George Washington! For all his stiff dignity, he has got to admit that he was a fool and he's got to hand over that last story of his, the one he's so sensitive about that he won't send it to be published! You wouldn't think it, but I've found out that he would rather be skinned by inches than have anybody poke fun at that story!"

It was his day entirely. Things came his way with a rush, as they do only in life and history, for fiction will not stand for it.

When we reached the house, a fine old lady with the Trainor nose was taking her leave. She marched straight up to him, standing dumb.

"I was there and heard you, John. You *can* take care of yourself, I admit it now. Finish your A. B. course, or enter the Law School, as you please. Here's your checkbook. But the less you use now, the more you'll have when I die. Come out to see me. Good-by!"

And she left him still dumb, with working nostrils.

But even that was not enough. The Girl and little Bill were behind the vines on the end of the porch, and now she came forward, most deliciously pink.

"I think it is splendid, Cousin John!" And she said no more, seeming to be relieved at the arrival of Kinyon.

"I am a fool!" he called from the sidewalk. "More kinds of a fool than anybody but me will ever know!" The Girl flushed red under his gaze. Then he seized Trainor's hand and pumped vigorously while he looked straight into the steady steel-blue eyes. "But no man can congratulate you more entirely, old man!"

"How about that last story of yours?" Trainor growled.

"I've got it here—now what?"

"You are going to read it to us, right now!"

YOU have read it, and if you are human you have finished wet-eyed and choking, but I mustn't tell you its name. It was an audience keyed to high feeling that heard it on the porch that evening, and when it was finished, little Bill wandered off into the dusk without saying a decent good-night. Then Kinyon followed him, after a husky murmur, hat in hand.

I looked at the black clouds in the west, while I heard Trainor's voice behind me say, "Just think! To be able to write like that——"

"It's still finer to act like that—to have power to move men—and to use it generously!" the Girl said.

She spoke so low that I knew it was not meant for me to hear. I got up from the edge of the porch. A rain-drop splashed on my bare forehead.

"What's the matter?"

Trainor spoke very low, as if he were in church.

"I may be most kinds of a fool," I said, holding out a hand, and another drop fell on it from the lowering clouds, "but I know enough to go home when—it's going to rain."

A BIT OF LOCAL COLOR

BY FREDERICK FERDINAND MOORE

"SHE'S a story-writer, that's what she is! Was a schoolma'am in a New Hampshire town—Fifield, I think she said it was, wherever that is. Never away from home before until she took this trip to the Philippines. Came out the Suez way."

That settled it. We knew Presho would solve the mystery before we tied up in Jolo. Presho was a geologist—is, I should say, because he is still at it in South Africa somewhere if he hasn't fallen down a volcano by this time. So Presho, being a geologist, bald-headed, a bachelor and of the inquiring turn of mind necessary to a scientist, was the only one likely to learn why Miss Foote was in the Philippines, or rather in the Celebes Sea in a Singapore steamer, without escort.

So that was it! Story-writer hey? We snuggled comfortably into our grass deck-chairs and looked at the stars and moonlit Celebes, or the particular part of it our stumpy little steamer was in, some seven degrees or so above the equator, where it gets hot and stays hot. We were on our way to Jolo, the capital of the Americanized Sultan of Sulu, from Singapore by way of Borneo ports and up the Macassar strait.

Now people who are jamming around in the Celebes Sea are not doing it for the fun of the thing; the personally conducted tours don't do any touring there and that's why we wondered what Miss Foote's motives were for being in a vile Singapore boat. Not that we thought Miss Foote was the personally conducted sort of tourist—we knew she wasn't, because the unmarried among us had volunteered for the job all the way from Singapore—in fact, from the time she got out of her 'rickshaw on the jetty.

We—the smoking contingent down aft under the awning that night—were all there because we had to be. Presho wanted to get some data on volcanic formations in that part of the world and had theories about the Philippine Islands being either the tops of mountains that had sunk into the sea in ages gone, or the tops of mountains that had been pushing themselves up out of the ocean in the same past ages. He could tell us about sea-shells and skeletons of fishes being found on the tops of mountains there, and such things, and we argued with him about them, more to forget the heat and canned butter than to help elucidate scientific puzzles. That's enough about Presho, except that he was a handsome chap in white duck, had tried to flirt with Miss Foote all the way from Singapore, to our disgust, and trimmed his mustaches in a way that made you think he was German when you knew all the time he was English.

Lieutenant Halsey was an American army officer stationed in Jolo and could tell some blood-curdling tales about Moros running amuck with long knives. He was bringing his wife back from Paris.

Denhard was a coconut-planter in Mindanao, returning from Singapore, where he had closed a coconut deal. He was red-

headed and sunburned beyond belief—that's all I remember about him, and I tell about him to prove he had an excuse for being on that steaner in the Celebes Sea.

There isn't any necessity to tell why I was there, but I was, if for no other purpose than to tell about it all. Anyway, it serves to refresh your geography and to make you remember where the Celebes Sea is, which is a handy thing to know if you are going to pass an examination or draw a map of Malaysia for an Atlas of the World.

So there we were, twisting ourselves through the water toward Jolo, and the mystery that had bothered us all the way from the Straits Settlements and across the equator, where it gets hot as Billy-be-Hanged, was solved. We had hinted and asked questions and Mrs. Halsey had gone through a regular campaign in the major tactics of satisfying curiosity, but Miss Foote had held out. Denhard had rechristened her "The Spinks." Denhard knew more about coconuts than Egypt or pronunciation, and one can't find fault with fellow passengers in a Singapore steamer, because fellow passengers are scarce on those boats and a man would make friends with a bearded Malacca monkey after the first day out.

First we thought she was going to teach school in the Philippines, but when Mrs. Halsey said she knew several American lady teachers in Mindanao, Miss Foote raised her eyebrows and said "Indeed" into her canned soup.

Then we discussed the possibilities of her coming out to get married. Mrs. Halsey skirmished with that idea until Miss Foote came out point-blank, so to speak, and declared she never intended to marry, and her tone closed the subject, and poor Mrs. Halsey, who had been egged on by Presho and me, fell back on finding fault with the Malay stewards, who *would* get their thumbs into the gravy.

Presho kept telling me that he wasn't the least curious about Miss Foote, and proved it by seizing every possible chance to talk with her. I told Presho I wasn't concerned about Miss Foote's private history or her business in the Orient, and hated him with a tropical seven-degrees-above-the-equator hate because he had the next seat to her at table. Denhard didn't care much about her, but he'd like to know why she was out in that country and where she came from and if she were rich. Then Mrs. Halsey refused to have anything more to do or say about the whole scandalous lot of gossip and asked why we men couldn't mind our business. We couldn't see why she should refer to it as gossip or scandalous.

That's the way the affair stood that night Presho came down aft to where we were burning our tongues with Singapore cigars, and, with almost as much satisfaction as if he had solved the mystery of the origin of the Philippines, said "She's a story-writer."

"Well," said Denhard, after he had sucked at his cigar a minute, "Why did she come out here?"

"Local color is what she is after."

"What's local color?" asked Denhard.

"Out here," replied Presho, with some asperity, "it is natives and palm trees and chaps like you."

"Why didn't she stay back in New Hampshire and write stories about turpentine camps and persimmons, instead of coming out here?"

"They don't have turpentine camps in New Hampshire," said Presho.

"Don't they? Nohow, she won't get no stories out here to write about—she can't put palm trees and natives in stories."

"She might, at that," said Presho, puffing rapidly at his cigar in an effort to control his temper. Then he turned to me, as if he would exclude Denhard from the conversation.

"Local color is what she is after. She has no relatives, so she saved up what money she could from teaching school and is out here to write stories about the Philippines. She thinks she can Kiplingize the Philippines—'do for the Philippines what Kipling did for India,' I think she put it."

"That's a big contract," I said.

"Who is Kipling?" asked Denhard, and never knew how near we came to pitching him into the Celebes Sea; but of course a person can't know all there is to know about coconuts and know much of anything else.

THEN the conversation shifted to other things. That's always the way with a mystery. You lose interest when you have worked out the puzzle. Presho began asking Denhard about volcanoes in Mindanao, craters, lava and so on, which was too hot a subject for me, considering my duck coat was stuck to the back of the chair.

I strolled forward. It was a beautiful night, the moon was so close to the edge of the deck-awning you could almost reach it. The "promenade deck," wide as the way into a rabbit-hutch, was a mosaic of fantastic shapes, shifting lazily with the roll of the vessel, and the moonlight did kaleidoscopic tricks with your shadow when it got under the awning.

Miss Foote was leaning over the port rail, looking out over the sleek liquid mirror of sea. Several islands were in sight, all about us, easily transformed into sleeping gigantic marine monsters floating past, if one had a lively imagination.

I think I have overlooked stating that Miss Foote was young, slender and altogether a lovely woman; until I saw her there alone I hadn't admitted it to myself, for Presho had out-maneuvered me from the beginning of the passage by giving the Malay steward four Straits dollars to get the seat next to her in the saloon. You see, he had seen her on the jetty as much as ten minutes before I did. That fool steward could have doubled his money if he had consulted me about where she was going to sit. That's why I had been reluctant to admit she was a very pretty woman.

"This is a scene good enough to put in a story," I said to her, claiming a section of the rail as near her as I dared.

"Mr. Presho told you." She didn't look at me. Her face was between me and the moon and I couldn't help noticing her exquisite profile.

"Presho told me to put this in a story! Absurd! I hope I know what to put in my stories without asking Presho."

"I mean Mr. Presho told you I wrote stories—and he promised he wouldn't."

"Do you? So do I."

"You do? Why are you—do you spell your name with a 'y'? Are you Randolph Burrell Smythe? R. B. Smith is the name on the passenger list."

"R. B. Smith is good enough for me on a Singapore boat, and it is too hard to make that purser spell any way except his own."

"I remember now—I should have recognized you—I saw it in a magazine."

"What?"

"Your picture. I read the literary magazines. I write myself, you know, if Mr. Presho hasn't told you, and I am sure he has."

"This is a night for confidences—do you write under your own name?"

"Yes. I haven't become so famous that I have to travel incog. to avoid the questions of my fellow passengers. I've sold a dozen stories or so, and I am spending the money. Going round the world, and then I'll perhaps try my hand at a few more New Hampshire stories. I love the tropics—they are so romantic!"

"They are, until an elephant steps on you or you get the prickly heat. What particular things do you like about the tropics?"

"Oh, the color and queer characters—pirates and fighting savages and such things. I just love adventure stories! I think one has more of a chance to have adventures in the odd corners of the world. I love the tropics!"

I couldn't help it, so I said: "The tropics are lucky," and then I was sorry, for she turned on me with frigidity almost equal to one of her own New Hampshire's March blizzards.

"Mr. Presho proposed before you came, and I believe he did it just to give me an idea for a story. That's how I came to tell him I couldn't marry anybody. I've got to make a name in literature."

"I'm not."

"Not what?"

"Doing it so you can put it in a story—proposing, I mean."

"That's the best you could expect to have it used for, if you really mean you are proposing," and then laughed at me. You see, she understood me a little, for our deck-chairs had been together a good deal. I rather suspect she knew I was feeding Straits dollars to the steward.

"Presho?" I asked.

"What about Mr. Presho?"

"Accepted?"

"Rejected. If you insist on keeping up the literary metaphor, 'Declined without thanks.' Why, he parts his hair with a towel, he's that bald!"

"So Presho proposed, did ——"

I never finished that question. As the steamer rounded an island we unmasked a schooner drifting under a slatting foresail, for there was little air stirring. She wasn't more than five hundred yards away, and as she popped into view from behind the black point of the island men began to yell aboard her. Then a red Coston light, a signal of distress, flared up on her poop deck.

A bell jangled somewhere in the inwards of our steamer and the engines slowed and wheezed complainingly. A black face alongside the Coston flame hailed us in Malay and the mate hurled questions across the shining waters.

"They've been boarded by pirates, sir, and want us to take off their wounded—that's all I can get from him," Mr. Jenkins, the mate, explained to our Captain who had come from somewhere, clad in pongee pajamas and heel-less slippers, obviously disgusted at the breaking up of the monotonous routine. As the steamer slowed down, the smoke from the funnel dropped down on us and curled under the awnings, hot and strong with coal-gas and making us cough.

"Ask the bally fool if he's got any white men aboard. We can't be bothered with turning ourselves into a blasted hospital-ship for a lot of blacks!" growled the Captain. The mate made a trumpet of his hands and jabbered through to the man in the schooner who jabbered back.

"Yick Foon and his gang cut 'em up, sir—chopped the head off the Dutch mate and left the master for dead with a bazaar door cut in his chest, but alive from what I make of the lingo."

YOUR Malay crew set up an excited jabbering. Yick Foon happened to be a Chinese pirate well known in those waters. He made a business of waiting for pearlers and other small craft, and to be boarded by his gang of Moros, Malays, Chinese and other native renegades was as good as giving up life without a struggle. Yick Foon never left anybody to tell the tale. We were in his front yard, for he made his headquarters in some of the islands about us, but was never at home when a gun-boat called.

"Put a boat off and bring the whites off," said the Captain. "You better go yourself, Mr. Jenkins." He stretched himself and climbed wearily to the bridge.

"Some local color," I remarked to Miss Foote, while the boat went clicking away from us.

"How lucky we are, only I'm sorry for those poor men."

Down aft we could hear Denhard telling the others at the rail about some former piratical raid of Yick Foon.

"Yes, sir," he said to Presho, "I got it from one of the Chinks that they caught. Was coming up from Torres Strait with a fortune in pink stones, when——"

A deep-throated bellow came from the schooner, followed by the sound of blows. The boat was alongside and Mr. Jenkins and two sailors had gone over the side of the schooner, leaving two sailors in the boat. We heard Jenkins swear and—*one, two, three, four, five*—a pistol was fired five times, the reports coming regular as the striking of a clock! Black shapes rose from the bulwarks of the schooner. The men in the boat tried to push off, but the fiends in the schooner jumped down on them and we saw two bodies dumped into the sea.

"Mr. Jenkins! What's wrong, Mr. Jenkins? What's wrong aboard there?" shouted our Captain.

There was confusion aboard the schooner, suppressed yells, much running about the decks and clashing of long knives. Soon two boats pushed off and came toward us, one the boat we had sent, both packed with black men.

"Mr. Jenkins!" the Captain yelled frantically, stamping up and down the bridge. "What the —— is wrong, Mr. Jenkins?"

We watched the two boats race for us, wondering what it was all about and asking each other why Mr. Jenkins didn't answer and relieve our anxiety. A terror-stricken cry came from the starboard side of the steamer. I turned and looked across the engine-room skylight. A figure in white, which I recognized as the Malay chief steward, came scrambling over the raised ventilators. He drew in his breath with a hissing gasp and dropped over the rail. Then everything seemed to go topsy-turvy and a pleasant evening turned into a nightmare.

A score of naked feet pattered past, and the native sailors scurried aft or jumped down the engine-room ladder, like a lot of children hunting cover in a game of hide and seek. A fire-door clanged musically in the stokehold below us. The Captain remarked that he'd be ——, grabbed the engine-room telegraph viciously and made a gong below demand full steam ahead. His pajamaed legs tobogganed down the handrails of the bridge ladder and he landed at my feet on all fours, after the manner of a schoolboy sliding the bannisters on his way to breakfast.

"What's up, Captain?" I asked. Miss Foote was clinging to my arm.

"Boarded, you bally fool, by Yick Foon and his cutthroat gang," he answered, diving into his cabin under the bridge. He came out with a rifle and a belt of cartridges thrown over his neck. He shoved a big pistol into my hand, with a heavy sack of ammunition.

"Keep 'em off this side," he said quietly, and began firing steadily across the engine-room ventilator. The heat arising from below blew the smoke from the muzzle back in his face. Black, half-naked bodies were coming over the starboard rail from another boat which had sneaked out on us from another island while we watched the schooner.

Mrs. Halsey, twenty feet behind us, screamed. Lieutenant Halsey told her to keep close to him, and his automatic revolver sputtered lead, ten shots at a time, in a deadly blast across the skylight, between the calm, methodical shots from the Captain's rifle.

I gave the sack of ammunition to Miss Foote. "Hand me the cartridges, one at a time, as quickly as you can, and, whatever you do, keep close to me!"

I emptied the pistol into the nearest boat, which was almost below us and getting out boarding lines. Six big leaden slugs were a good deal of an annoyance to them and upset their plans.

"Six, one at a time," I reminded Miss Foote, dropping the cylinder into the palm of my hand. She passed the cartridges, saying, "This is the sixth," at the last one of that lot, evidently to warn me the cylinder was full and I could resume firing. I gave them to the other boat.

The Captain was loading from his belt. He swore freely because the rifle-barrel was getting hot, and then said "Beg pardon" to the man he fired at; I assumed he was asking Miss Foote's pardon, rather than his black target.

The chief engineer, Scotch, of course, was sitting on the coaming of the skylight on the starboard side, not ten feet from where the blacks were coming over the rail. He was using a shotgun, that said *Boom-boom* every five seconds or so with its double barrels loaded with duck-shot. Presho was firing some sort of pocket rifle with nickel plating at the breech which shone brightly in the moonlight. Denhard was using a pistol, close by.

The boats on our side fell astern and didn't attempt to chase us. The big war proa on the starboard side, which had engaged the attention of the Captain and the others, let go its grappling lines, leaving the hooks on our rail, and a mess of black men tangled and squirming on our deck.

We kept pot-shotting at the big proa as it paddled away out of range, now and then getting a squeal out of its crew to give us a hint at the quality of our marksmanship.

The schooner that had hailed us was gone, probably hidden among some of the islands.

POOR Jenkins! We couldn't find him if we were to look for him. He got his when he went over the side of that schooner—nice trick, that, too, after he palavered so much and worried his head about saving those dying white men! How was it? That was their game. Hail us with a cooked story about being helpless and split our force, while the proa made for us on the other side. There must have been forty of 'em in that schooner.

We went down on the foredeck and began knocking down Malay sailors, efficiently and artistically, with pieces of rail-chain, stopping at times to breathe and call them names in their native tongue, while they skulked and tried to get back to their hiding-places.

Halsey and Denhard were heaving black bodies over the side, making pretty splashes illumined by the phosphorous in the Celebes Sea.

"Perhaps you'd better come below and get a cup of tea or a little stimulant," I suggested to Miss Foote.

"Perhaps," she said. "Those bullets were covered with grease and I've ruined this duck skirt. Wasn't I right about this country having lots of color? We don't have any such evenings in New Hampshire!"

I admitted she was right, especially the New Hampshire part of it.

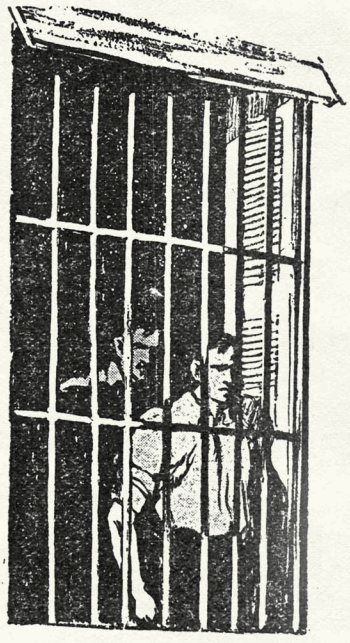
"Now I suppose you are going to use all this in a story, after my trouble and expense to come out here and get it! That would be just like a man."

"I hadn't been regarding it as copy, but I think I see a way to avoid trouble over the literary rights of the evening's work."

"What's that?" she asked innocently. "What do you mean?"

"Collaboration."

She said I had dirty old powder on my hands and her waist was ruined now as well as the skirt. That's just like a woman.



A LEDGE OF SAFETY

BY WOLCOTT LeCLÉAR BEARD

JOHN CALTROP, C.E., stretched his slight, wiry limbs as he sprawled on the broad window-seat, leaning against the heavy bars through which he had been looking out over the plaza of a little Andean capital.

"Tell the Secretary of State to go jump on himself," he said indifferently.

"He wouldn' do it, son," smiled old Mr. Grey in his soft Texan drawl, "not if yo' tol' him to fo' a thousan' yeahs. He's jus' that awbstinate."

A tall young man, whose figure gave promise of future portliness, stopped short in his nervous pacing of the room.

"But—hang it all, don't you both *see?*" he cried. "Modesto Angel Borja is——"

"Which means, Modest Angel Borgia," chuckled Jack Caltrop. "Isn't that the peachy combination of names, though?"

"Hang the name!" cried the tall young man.

"By all means!" assented Jack heartily. "And hang the man at the same time. It may come to that, yet."

"Don't, *please*, make more of an ass of yourself than you can help, Caltrop," begged D. Webster Stowell, counselor and attorney-at-law—this being the tall young man's name and title. "Borja is acting well within his legal rights. He's not only Secretary of State of the so-called republic, but also chairman of this Government investigating committee. Having called you both as witnesses, he expects you to come, and without any more words."

"That man Borja has an awful lot to lea'n," observed old Mr. Grey, shaking his head pensively as he leaned back in his chair and rolled another cigarette.

"But listen—do listen for a moment!" implored poor Stowell. "Here we are, with a general election just coming on. Of course Henning, and all that opposition crowd back of him, don't want us to get the concession we're after. Then we'd be a power,

here in the country, and they don't want rivals. Also, the country is trembling on the verge of a civil war. Peralta, who wants to succeed himself as president, fears it may break out any minute. And he has reason to fear, for Prado——"

"*Vivan Prado, Echeverria y libertad!*" yelled a shrill voice outside.

"*Vivan!*" shouted fifty other voices, in chorus.

"Them's my sentiments!" cried Jack, turning to the window again. "*Vivan!*"

Five or six rifles cracked, throwing sharp echoes from the old stone houses. With a vicious whine, something flew in between the window bars and, striking a crystal chandelier, brought a shower of broken prisms on Stowell's head and shoulders before burying itself in the opposite wall. Impatiently the young lawyer shook off the fragments of glass, but paid no other attention to the shot, thus earning a nod of approval from old Mr. Grey as he rose and sauntered to the window.

The sound of the shots had hushed the shouts, for the moment, and a confused murmur of voices, which previously had arisen from the little park and the streets surrounding it. Many men gathered there, for the most part standing in sullen groups, talking together, all of them apart from the police who, with army rifles in their hands, were stationed in pairs at short intervals.

One policeman, however, stood alone. He wore the chevrons of a corporal, and it was he who had fired at the house, for he still held his smoking rifle at "ready" and was peering at the window to see the effect of his shot.

Then, from one of the many other houses that overlooked the plaza, another rifle cracked. The corporal of police fell limply, his piece crashing to the pavement.

"It's a horse to a hen that Tommy Westlock fired that shot!" cried Jack.

"I don' know who Tawmmy Westlock is, but I'm suah glad he did fiah it," remarked old Mr. Grey.

"Why, in heaven's name?" asked Stowell in amazement.

"Why, because othahwise I'd have had to do it myself," responded Mr. Grey, mildly surprised at the simplicity of the question. "That man heard Jack yell, an' he knew who it was. He'd have made trouble, likely, if he'd been allowed to go scot-free. It isn't wise, Jack, to hollah fo' the opposition like that, while Peralta still holds the reins. But what was it you were sayin' when the interruption came?",

"This. Peralta is determined to remain in power, and probably he'll succeed. He's a soldier. Prado isn't, and neither is Echeverria. The only leader of military ability that the Pradists have is old General Torrenegro, and he's done nothing, so far as any one can tell. He can't; he's too closely watched, and would be arrested instantly if he should try to leave Santa Maria."

"Doubtless," agreed old Mr. Grey. "Still, Danny, I don' jus' see how——"

"I was just going to show how this applies to us," the young lawyer went on. "As Peralta will doubtless remain in power, it's to him we'll have to look for our concession. As soon as this uneasiness has passed and he's safe on the job once more, his need for the Henning 'push' and their support will be over. He'd sell his soul for money, if he could find a purchaser. So then all we'll have to do is to 'slip' something over to him and get our concession without any more fuss or worry."

"Won't do, Danny," replied the old man, shaking his head. "Peralta wouldn' stay bought as long as it would take him to pawcket the money. That sawt of dawg nevah does, suh. What we have tuh do is tuh kick Peralta out an' put Prado in."

Stowell looked at Jack, who nodded hearty assent. Then the young lawyer gave them both up as hopeless. Going to one of the windows, he stood looking with listless indifference at the scene on the plaza. Then, of a sudden, his indifference vanished and he straightened as he stood.

"By Jove, what a pretty girl!" he exclaimed. "And—hang it—she blushed! She must understand English and have heard what I said."

"If being born and largely brought up in New York would teach her English, she probably does," agreed Jack, who was running around the room in a wild search for his hat. "Her name's Helen Westlock. Her brother, Tommy, was a classmate of mine at college, and a chum. Their mother is the wife of old General Torrenegro. Married him when Helen and Tom were little bits of kids. Tom's been out of the city since before we came. Where in blazes has that lid of mine got to? She mustn't be out there in the street alone!"

He found the missing headgear as he

spoke, and dashed from the room, followed, more sedately, by Mr. Grey. In a few strides Jack was close behind the girl.

"Helen!" he called.

She turned. The color left her face and her eyes snapped. "Have you forgotten my request that our acquaintance might cease?" she asked coldly.

"Oh, Nell—don't be foolish!" he begged. "Won't you forgive me? After all, it was such a silly little quarrel."

"I don't agree with you. Will you let me pass?"

"At least, let me go to your door with you. It isn't safe in the streets, with things as they are now. I wonder your people let you go out—but they didn't know you were going to try, I suppose."

"You are impertinent," she replied, still more coldly, if possible, than before. "I much prefer to go home alone."

WITHOUT more words she went on her way, her head held high, leaving him standing on the pavement, looking after her. She had but a few steps to go. Seeing that she had entered the Torrenegro house, Jack turned, with a sigh, and was about to retrace his steps, when old Mr. Grey laid a detaining hand on his arm.

"I didn't mean to spy on yo', son," said the old man gently. "I came out tuh see that nothin' happened tuh you or that gyirl, an' I couldn't help but see that the way she received you caused yo' pain. Do yo' wish tuh tell me what's wrong? I don't ask from mere cu'iosity."

Jack had no fear that the handsome, kindly-faced old man would wish to pry into the affairs of any one. Mr. Grey, though he had been a famous "gun-man" in the old and lawless days of the West, looked on Jack with the fondness of a father and had practically adopted him. To no one would he tell his troubles more readily.

"We were engaged—and there was a quarrel," he said. "It wasn't anything, really. She admired the Boers—it was during the Boer war—and I didn't. She accused me of snobbery and all sorts of things, and then broke everything off. That's all."

That was all—and quite enough, too, so far as Jack was concerned; Mr. Grey could see that written on the young man's face. And, versed in the ways of life, he knew that no quarrels are more difficult to heal than those of trivial beginnings. He was about to speak, when a shout from the Torrenegro house prevented.

"Jack! Jack Caltrop! *Oh*, Jack!" called a voice. "It's me—Tom Westlock! Wait a minute, can't you?"

Jack stopped, some of the gloom leaving his face. Mr. Grey returned to the house as Tommy Westlock, a masculine and much magnified edition of his sister, came running out of the Casa Torrenegro.

"I've been out on the *hacienda*," Tommy explained. "I only hit town this morning—came with a rush when I heard you were here. Nell came into the house just now with her nose so high that she could nearly look into her own nostrils, so I knew she'd seen you. Sometimes that girl is more different kinds of an idiot even than the average female human of her age—and that's going some," he ended, with true brotherly candor.

"I came out to see that she got safely home," was all the reply that occurred to Jack.

"She hadn't any right to be out. Things are arranging themselves for a first-class shindy, if you want to know. Say, did you see me nail that cop? He isn't dead; I didn't want to kill him. But he was too blazing fresh. Who was that stunning looking old chap who just left you?"

Jack told him as they walked along toward the house.

"You don't mean to say that it's Graveyard Grey!" exclaimed Tom as his friend finished.

"He used to be called that—behind his back," replied Jack. "It makes him awfully angry to hear it. Come in and meet him."

"Sure, I will. And he won't hear the name from me," laughed Tom. "I value my fair young life too much, by far."

His "fair, young life" was in no danger, as things turned out. Both Mr. Grey and Stowell took the strongest of liking for the handsome, open-faced young fellow who in a few minutes seemed to have known them all his life. They were laughing and chatting when Jack, who had resumed his favorite perch on the window-seat, pointed through the bars.

"Look, Tom," he said. "Somebody's going to visit your house in state. Who is that gorgeous, brass-bound individual at the head of those three companies of infantry?"

The smile faded from Tom's face, which went very white as he sprang to the window and looked out. "It's the head of the police," he said. "They're after the only father I've ever known—General Torrenegro."

For a moment there was a sympathetic hush. Then Jack offered what he hoped might be a crumb of consolation. "Maybe not," he said. "If they were going after the old General, they'd hardly take those balks of timber with them, would they?"

"Yes. Of course they would. Our doors are very strong."

The soldiers and their ornate leader now had passed out of sight. The Torrenegro house, being on the same side of the plaza as that from which the four men were looking, could not be seen without leaning out of the windows, and that was prevented by the bars. For a moment they waited, hoping against hope that the destination of the hated police official was not the old general's house. Then, seeing their own concern reflected on the faces of those who stood in the street, they knew that what they feared was coming to pass. Then followed the resounding bang of timber against heavy planks. Already the battering-rams were at work. A few scattering shots snapped here and there. The crash of a volley answered them.

"My mother's still in the country, thank heaven!" cried Tom. "Helen's in the house, though, and when I think of her being at the mercy of that beast Borja—"

"At the mercy of Borja!" exclaimed Jack. "How at his mercy? They can't take Helen—she's done nothing."

"What of it? Of course they'll take her. Borja will see to that. He's crazy about her—always has been. Hang it all, I *can't* stay here! I must do something!"

He would have run from the room, but Mr. Grey, with kindly force, stopped him.

"Don' be foolish, lad," he said. "It would do no good to any one fo' you to run out theah an' be gathahed in by the police. Is theah no back way outah these houses? No path by which a man can get from one to anothah? Use youah haid! Think!"

"These houses are set right on the edge of the little level plateau that holds this part of the city," replied Tom sadly. "From the rear windows is a clear drop of nearly three hundred feet."

"That's true," admitted Jack, rising, his face set and determined. "Yet I think I know of a path that may serve. Come and see."

He left the room, the others following him, and went to the rear of the house, picking up a long coil of light line on the way. The back wall was pierced not only by windows, but by a door, through which merchandise could be hoisted from the lower level. Some six feet below this door, a ledge, three inches in width, ran along behind the entire row of houses.

"D'you mean to say you're going to try and crawl along that?" demanded Tom. "Well, I think not! If any one makes a stab at that stunt, it'll be me. It's my place to, and——"

"Tom, listen!" interrupted Jack. "There's no time to talk. You're twice as big as I, and weigh any number of pounds more. Besides, I'm used to mountain climbing, and you're not. I have a chance of succeeding—you wouldn't have."

"He's right, lad," agreed old Mr. Grey. "Heaven knows I'd not let him go if theah was any othah way! But if yo' want tuh help youah sistah an' the ol' Gene'al, do as he says, an' do it quick! Those doahs won' las' fo'evah."

Very reluctantly Tom yielded. "All right," he said shortly. "Is there nothing I can do?"

"Yes," replied Jack. "Take that coil and pay out as I go."

"But that little cord won't hold you, if you fall."

"I know it. It isn't intended to. Your house is the fourth from here, isn't it? The one where that heavy line, rove through a block, hangs down."

"Yes. It's used to hoist vegetables and stuff from below."

"Right! So long."

"So long, son," responded old Mr. Grey. "Good luck! Don't yo' get stahtled if yo' heah a shot. It'll be me who fiahs."

With a wave of his hand to show that he understood, Jack dropped over the door-sill, lowering himself cautiously until he felt the ledge under his feet. Then, inch by inch, he began his perilous journey toward the house of General Torrenegro.

It was terribly risky work. Flattened as much as possible against the masonry, his balance was most delicately adjusted. Anything—a crumbling bit of mortar, or even a sudden puff of the gentle breeze that was

blowing—might have disturbed it and sent him whirling through the air down into the stable yards and kitchen gardens three hundred feet below. With bated breath the three men watched him, Tom paying out the line with greatest care, that there might be neither strain nor slack, Stowell clutching the stone door-jamb as though he would crush it in his grasp, and Mr. Grey, leaning from the doorway, holding one of the old Colts that had done such terrible service in days of yore, ready for any intrusive head that might appear.

FORTUNATELY, however, none did appear. The attention of nearly every one was directed toward the front of their houses that day. And at last, after a journey which, to the watchers, seemed hours long, Jack reached the door of the Torrenegro house. By luck, it was open—but then, few people thought of closing doors that only opened on to vacant space. Jack pulled himself up so that he could throw one knee over the sill and gain the floor. Then, unreeving the heavy line of which he had spoken, he bent its end to the thin cord that he had carried with him.

"Haul it in! Stretch it as tight as you can and then make it fast!" he called, and ran into the house.

Once inside he had to stop and blink until his eyes became in a measure accustomed to the semi-darkness of shuttered rooms. There was no need for Jack to search for those whom he was trying to rescue. The sound of crashing timbers and the crackle of shots guided him at once to the great front doors.

These doors, of massive wood riveted to heavy boiler-plate, had stood well, but now, sorely battered by the heavy timbers which had unceasingly been hurled against them, they had begun to yield. They winked with each blow, letting in a gleam of sunshine, and then, as the battering-rams rebounded, shutting it out again.

Before these doors a table had been moved, and seven repeating rifles laid upon it. By the table stood old General Torrenegro, soldierly and straight, waiting for the fight to begin, which, doubtless, would be his last. Helen, white and trembling, yet cool with the coolness of desperation, stood close by, a tiny pistol, hardly more than a toy, clutched in her hand. Here and there Indian or half-breed servants crouched, whimpering, against the wall.

Taking in the scene at a glance, Jack wasted no time in greeting. "Come!" he cried, grasping an arm of each and pulling them toward the rear of the house. "There's a way out—if you hurry!"

General Torrenegro permitted himself only one astonished look at the sudden advent of a total stranger in his barricaded house while the authorities of the so-called republic were trying, thus far vainly, to effect an entrance. But he knew well that there was no time to waste in questions. Deciding with the quickness of an old soldier that this extraordinary person was more likely to be friend than foe, he picked up one of the rifles and, yielding, was led to the rear door. Helen, guided by Jack, came submissively, like one who walks in a waking dream of horror.

Even the old General, brave man though he had proved himself a thousand times to be, turned pale at the sight of the path he was to follow. The heavy line that had been stretched from one door to the other made the passage far easier and safer than it had been when negotiated by Jack, it is true; but still it was sufficiently appalling to one who had not made perilous "face-climbs" for pure sport. The General glanced at his stepdaughter.

"You go first, sir," suggested Jack respectfully. "The line ought to be tested. Slip it outside of you, and don't look down."

Without a word, General Torrenegro slipped over the door-sill and, with Jack's help, found the ledge. Facing outward, grasping the line with both hands and keeping his eyes tightly closed so as not to see the void beneath his feet, he sidled away. Jack turned to Helen.

"You see it's easy," said he, in a tone intended to carry encouragement. "It'll be your turn in a minute, now."

"I can't!" she replied, in a whisper.

"But you must!" he exclaimed in return. "Don't you see? It's not hard, if you keep your head, and don't be——"

"I'm not frightened," she interrupted. "That is, not in the ordinary way. But my body—not my mind—has a horror of heights. I can't help it! My knees tremble and give way. I can't do it. Rather than try, I'll stay here, and—well, do what I may to keep Borja from getting me. I *can* do that. The other I can't, that's all!"

Jack understood. It was not the first time that he had come in contact with this purely physical fear of heights, which, once roused, is so all-conquering. For the next few seconds he thought quickly. The doors, as he could tell from the sound of the blows upon them, were nearly down. Helen must not remain where she was; rather would he see her do what she "had to, to keep Borja from getting her." And he could think of but one alternative—a desperate one, it is true, but there was no other that he could see.

Glancing from the door, he saw that the General had made the journey in safety. Quickly casting loose his end of the line, he tied it around Helen's waist and, lifting her over the sill before she had time to realize what was happening, dropped her.

Jack's heart sickened in sympathy with her terrified scream as she shot downward; his head spun as she whirled at the end of the taut rope; every time her tender body touched the cliff his own seemed to feel the hurt, magnified tenfold.

Then a final crash of the doors told him that it was time to think of his own safety. Helen was being raised as fast as willing hands could take in the line as he lowered himself to the ledge for the return journey.

Hardly had he started when there was a scream of triumph from the house he had just left; then a chorus of excited voices broke forth as it was realized that the expected prey had vanished. But some one of the servants, probably under the well-grounded fear of instant death, must have betrayed the method of escape. A head peeped through the doorway, then another and still one more.

"Look out, Jack—steady, now!"

It was the voice of Mr. Grey, and the sharp report of his pistol followed it instantly. The weapon spoke thrice, with hardly a perceptible interval between the reports. Jack felt the wind of all three bullets on his cheek as they sped by. Glancing back he saw that but one head remained, and that this one hung limply over the door-sill, a small, round hole in its temple. The sight made Jack feel a sinking in his stomach for one second. In the next he was caught by Tommy's powerful hands and hauled into the door of his own house as though he had been a sack of the vegetables which ordinarily entered in that way.

"How's Helen?" he demanded, as soon as he felt the floor of the house under his feet.

"All right. A few slight bruises. She's fainted. But come on. The police know where Helen and Dad have gone, now, and there'll be things doing. There are windows flanking the doors in this house, so we can lam the stuffing out of 'em if they try that timber-ramming stunt, but Dad's afraid they'll have brought a couple of guns by this time."

"I wondered why they didn't use artillery, or at any rate, dynamite against those doors of yours," remarked Jack, as the two pulled in and coiled away the line that had been allowed to drop when Helen was taken from it. They hurried toward the front of the great house.

"There was no dynamite in the city, and no guns. We have friends who saw that everything that could be was sent away. Dad was watched so that he couldn't do anything himself, but he's been in communication with our people right along. They're due to drop in almost any time, now. Peralta just found it out; hence the police. There—what did I tell you?"

The report of a light field-piece, as Tom spoke, echoed from the opposite side of the plaza. Instinctively Jack listened for the sound of an exploding shell, but it did not come.

"What on earth can they be firing at?" he asked in amazement.

"At us—or rather at the front doors," Tom replied.

"But that can't be! They didn't even hit the house. They couldn't miss like that at a range of less than two hundred yards."

"Can't they? You don't know what these gunners can do when they try. They'll get the range later, though. Is this your rifle? Am I to take any of the others? Good. Come on!"

THE scene in the plaza had changed since Jack had left the room overlooking it, to which he now returned. No groups of sullen men were standing there. Save for two mountain-guns and a half-dozen platoons of infantry, the little park was empty of living men.

But, though the plaza was empty, the houses surrounding it were not. This fact was proved by several motionless bodies dressed in uniforms as gaudy as the flowers among which they lay sprawling, and by

three more lying under the guns. Against one of them a wounded man leaned wearily. Rifles cracked from windows everywhere, and two platoons of soldiers were firing at will.

Most of this fire was concentrated upon the house where lived the Americans, whose rifles now began to reply with deadly effect. For these people did not miss, as their opponents generally did, and besides, they were sheltered by stone walls. Even Stowell, his legal training utterly lost among primitive passions, was fighting like the rest—and shooting as straight as anybody.

"They didn't tell us to open the door; they just fired at us," was the excuse he afterward offered for this unwonted conduct. "There's absolutely no legal warrant for that. I wish there was a United States consul here."

But there was no consul. And what was more to the point, an artilleryman, who, with the rest, had been driven from his post by the concentrated fire, sprang forward, pulled the lanyard of a gun, which already had been loaded and laid, then escaped to shelter before a bullet could find him. Screaming across the little park, the shell struck the great doors and exploded, shattering one of them and driving both inward.

There was a yell of triumph. Infantry officers shricked commands. Some of them fell with these commands hardly spoken. But others took their places. Bayonets flashed and rattled as they were snapped in position, and with shouts of self-encouragement the infantry charged.

Mr. Grey spoke a few hurried words in the ear of General Torrenegro, who nodded emphatic assent. Then the old man turned to Helen, who, having recovered from her swoon, was standing near.

"Run up those staiahs, honey, an' out o' the way," said he gently, and as the girl obeyed, he spoke to the three young men. "We got tuh hol' these doahs. Stop firin' from the windahs now. The othah houses will 'tend to that paht o' the show; they crackle now, 'most eve'y one, like a cat's back rubbed the wrong way. Gene'al Torrenegro suah mus' have a lot o' frien's in this town, an' a lot moah outside of it. This is the bes' place fo' us tuh take the rush, boys. It's goin' tuh be like ol' times. Stan' steady—heah, it comes!"

Thoroughly in his element now, talking easily, with a grim smile of pleasurable anticipation on his face, the old man marshaled the three younger ones into line at the foot of the stairs. As he finished speaking, the portal darkened with a rush of men, each straining and eager first to reach the little party that stood waiting for them.

"Now, then—steady!" warned Mr. Grey.

"*Tiral*" added General Torrenegro instantly.

Four rifles crashed as one. The terrible six-guns of the old frontiersman blazed with two practically continuous streams of fire. The front of the enemy crumpled, but, trampling the fallen under their feet, the survivors still came on.

Jack's rifle was empty, so, clutching it by the barrel, he swung it back over his shoulder to strike at the head of a man who was about to thrust with a bayonet. The head vanished, but whether he had hit it or not Jack did not know—nor did he much care. Something had gone very wrong with him—in a languid sort of way he realized that. With mild surprise he found that he was lying on the floor raised on one elbow, while with the other hand he tried his best to empty his automatic pistol among the onrushing crowd.

But the work was too hard. Really, he couldn't see that it paid. All he wanted was to rest—rest forever. The faces of the enemy blurred and became blended in an indistinguishable mass. From outside he thought he heard cheers and also yells of consternation, but was not sure. It didn't matter, anyway. Then he sank gently back for his coveted rest, and with it, for the time, came oblivion.

A STINGING pain aroused him, and as it did so, he heard the voice of old Mr. Grey, speaking in Spanish.

"The chief surgeon, Colonel de la Vega, said that the bullet has touched no vital part," Mr. Grey was saying. "He has lost much blood, but, young and strong as he is, he will soon recover."

It was General Torrenegro who replied.

"God be thanked!" he said fervently.

"What has happened?" asked Jack, in a faint voice which, as it seemed to him, was the property of somebody else.

"Hush," replied the General. "The surgeons say that you are not to talk."

"But I want to know," he protested querulously. "Where's Peralta—and Borja?"

"Dead, both of them—they died against the churchyard wall. I could not prevent

it—I was not in time. But it is only an episode, my boy. They are common in this country, and this one now is happily ended. But we must not speak with you longer. Helen may come, and she——"

"She's coming now!" interrupted Mr. Grey, and like two schoolboys who feared to be caught trespassing, the old warriors tiptoed from the room as Helen entered it. But Jack's curiosity was far from being satisfied as yet. Seeing that he was going to speak, Helen laid a gentle hand over his mouth.

"Don't, Jack, you'll hurt yourself!" she begged. "I'll tell you all there is to tell. Our men came just after that bullet struck you. You're a popular hero; that rescue is known now from one end of the country to the other. And that's all, I think—except that none of us, except you, were hurt."

Raising a feeble hand, he dragged hers away from his lips.

"It isn't all!" he protested faintly. "It's hardly a beginning. Helen, have you——"

Gently, she replaced her hand; then her head bent down until her face almost touched his.

"I've been thinking that—perhaps—the Boers aren't such a very fine set of people—if you say so, Jack," she whispered.

"They're the best ever!" he whispered in return; then, smiling happily, fell asleep.

EASY GOLD

CARMELITA SOFIA McCANN, THE HERMIT AND THE POLITICIAN

by

CLARICE VALLETTE McCAULEY

CARMELITA SOFIA McCANN sat on the Arlington porch, her eyes on the mountain top, her mood a bit restless, her intelligence a little dissatisfied. It had taken her but a few days to exhaust the scenic possibilities of Hot Springs. She had cantered to the top of West Mountain and motored along the beautiful roads of the reservation; she had lost herself on the banks of the Ouachita and taken snap-shots of the Ostrich Farm; moreover, she had become the cynosure of all eyes and the amused imbiber of waters hot and cold to an extent unprecedented in her career.

Ostensibly at the resort to recuperate,

she was, nevertheless, more concerned with the effect upon her dwindling bank-account than upon her health. She had confidently expected to meet here—of all places—a gamester worthy of her skill, and thus far she had been sadly disappointed. On the previous evening, after one gossip-laden hour in which she had given the guests of the hotel the opportunity of enjoying her dancing and criticizing her costume, she had, it is true, at the invitation of a big person from Buffalo—a gouty ship-owner with an amorous eye, who was taking the baths as a slight sop to the Cerebus of the *bon-vivant*—trailed off to the card-room, only to find, however, that for once the McCann luck was pitted against an experience so thorough and a skill backed, or so she half suspected, by such questionable practises that, instead of trimming him easily, she had herself been trimmed; no pleasant matter for reflection on a beautiful October day.

So Carmelita Sofia, rocking idly on the Arlington porch, thought of her corpulent and none too attractive antagonist rather vindictively, as she grumbled to herself: "I'll have to stay, now. I'm too near broke to move on—unless I can sell the car; that would be a pity, considering I've had it only two weeks. No, I'm going to get my money back from that big mullet, or know the reason why!"

Half an hour later, the "big mullet," whose name, Morris Manahan, meant less to Carmelita than it did to his political henchmen, a lot of dock-wallopers in Buffalo, saluted the pretty occupant of a big, golden-brown car as it rolled swiftly down Central Avenue. Two days before, Carmelita Sofia, urging her own efficiency, had dismissed her chauffeur, claiming that his precautions bored her to distraction, and she had been obliged to endure some quiet chaffing from the Big Person relative to her suddenly diminished enthusiasm; so that it was with a little glow of triumph that she acknowledged his greeting as she passed. He took in the trim figure in its Frenchy suit of brown suede with something more than admiration in his greedy little eyes.

"By the Old Harry!" he muttered to himself, "she's a thoroughbred, all right! Never batted an eye-lash when she handed over that five hundred last night. Most women in her place would have squealed. I guess I taught her a thing or two about seven-up," he chuckled, not ill-naturedly. "I'll have to look out for her, though. I'd be willing to bet my hat she comes back at me."

Which was exactly what Carmelita Sofia was planning to do, the difference being that she had no intention of either descending to his methods of card-playing or of being satisfied with an equivalent for her losses.

BUT the day was too gloriously beautiful to be spent in resentful calculation. With the irresponsible joy of a child over a new toy, Carmelita swung around curves and steered perilously close to tree-trunks and fences, her heart singing to the rhythm of the engine. In a spirit of joyous bravado she revolved the possibilities of making Little Rock in time for dinner. Unconsciously she ran the motor to keep pace with her thoughts, and became aware of the speed at which she had been going only when from the crest of a hill she caught a view of the steep grade before her.

Carmelita Sofia uttered a startled exclamation in which there was more of excitement than fear, and, with a rapid review of the theories acquired on level ground, threw off the switch which shut down the engine, while with one foot hovering anxiously over the brake, she commended herself and her car to the Patron Saint of the amateur motorist. The automobile flew swiftly down on its own impetus, and in response to the exhilarating sensation Carmelita threw back her face to the cloudless Arkansas skies and, regardless of instructions, took one hand from the steering-wheel long enough to wave a friendly greeting to the surrounding Ozarks. She had about arrived at the conclusion that running an automobile was a mere matter of nerve, when she suddenly realized that, midway of a very modest little hill, her car had come to a dead stop.

"Oh, what on earth is the matter now?" exclaimed Carmelita Sofia vexedly. In her bewilderment she spoke aloud, and was somewhat startled to be answered from the side of the road.

A man who had been resting under a tree disentangled himself from among his numerous parcels and rose slowly to his feet. He was of medium height, loosely strung to-

gether, weather-worn and well past fifty, with a lean, studious face and the unsuspecting expression of a little child; and his address was a blend of the authority of the scholar and the diffidence of the recluse.

"Dere is somet'ing wrong mit der mechanism? Yes?"

"I'm sure I don't know," exclaimed Carmelita, frankly puzzled. "No doubt the fault is not in the automobile, but in the chauffeur. Do you know anything about motors?"

He shook his head with a gesture that seemed, nevertheless, to place himself at her disposal. Carmelita was already out of the car. She had pulled a brown linen apron from beneath the seat and was rattling on with a glibness that seemed to perplex, and yet amuse, the old man.

"I know it isn't the gasoline, for the tank was filled this morning, and I oiled the engine not three minutes ago. It can't be the battery—it's a new one. Thank goodness, it's not a puncture! I suppose," she continued, rummaging distractedly in the tool-chest, "that I'll now have the joy of deciding whether I need a jack-plier or a carbureter jet-spanner, unless you happen to know either of them by sight. I'm sure I don't. If it's the spark, I may as well prepare to spend the night. It's as mean to adjust as the tension on a sewing-machine —the more you fool with it, the worse it gets."

She was passing in front of the car as she spoke and, unconsciously and with no particular hope of success, caught hold of the starting-handle, pulled it over to the resisting point and released it sharply. Instantly, as though anxious to justify itself by prompt obedience, the engine started its reassuring "*chug! chug!*"

Carmelita stared at it helplessly, looked questioningly a moment at the puzzled old man, and then a whoop of joy and derision echoed among the hills and, laughing uncontrollably, she threw herself down at the side of the road.

The man stared at her, an amused smile on his kind old face.

"I switched off the engine on that hill, and became so absorbed in the scenery I forgot I had to switch it on again!" she explained, enjoying her own confusion.

"Dot is der vay, ven you are not used to machinery. Dere is alvays somet'ings you forget to do." He passed his hand affectionately over the tonneau. "It's a brand-new one, not?"

"Oh, very new; I've had it only a fortnight."

"Und you go like dis—alone?"

"To-day is the first time I've run the car myself. I couldn't stand the chauffeur who was teaching me! He was too cautious. At least, if I'm to break my neck, I'll do it my own way." She looked at the dusty, tired figure, standing hat in hand at the side of road, and on one of the sudden impulses which it was her boast always to follow, asked pleasantly: "Can't I give you a lift? Were you going my way?"

The old man's eyes scarched hers shrewdly. There was no hint of patronage in the cordial voice; the beauty of Carmelita's democracy lay in the fact that it was never assumed. It was part of her, bred in the bone, an inheritance from the good-natured Terry, whose bucket-shop had been the rendezvous for many a frayed-cuff inventor and collarless prospector who had since made his pile. As the old man stowed away his odd collection of bundles and German scientific magazines, she added casually: "I'm glad I happened along. You must have been loaded like a pack-mule, and I guess it's pretty hot walking."

HIS only reply was a nod, and for ten miles neither of them spoke. Carmelita, intent on doing herself and her instructor justice, bent her attention to her car and the road in front of her. The old man sat quietly, with thoughtful eyes fixed on the gauntleted hands on the wheel before him. On a long, level stretch of road that ran between oak and hickory trees, with now and then an ancient walnut, or some giant sycamore to break the ruddy masses of crimson and gold and leathery brown, Carmelita slackened her speed. Off in the distance undulated a line of purple hills, that wonderful, elusive purple that seems peculiarly set aside for late October and November days, melting into the blue hollow of the valley.

"It's beautiful, isn't it? All this, I mean."

He nodded his head thoughtfully. "*Wunderschön!* Ten years I haf lived there und nefer I grow tired of it." Carmelita's eyes questioned him, and he continued. "Look along my finger! Dot middle hill vot raises its head higher than der rest of dem. Ve

go past dot hill, und back of it is vot you call a ravine. On der oder side of dot little ravine is my home—der Eremit's Mountain dey call it."

"You live there alone?"

"*Ja.* Dot surprises you, *nicht?*"

Carmelita shook her head. Rarely in a mood of such treacherous softness had she felt so little necessity for bridling it. "Do you never get lonely?" she hazarded.

"I haf my vork; a scientist is nefer lonely."

"Oh!" ventured Carmelita.

"You t'ought I vas a tramp, *nicht?*" he asked good-humoredly. "My diploma gifes me de title of chemist; *aber*—in der olden time dey vould haf called me an alchemist."

"How perfectly fascinating!" cried Carmelita vaguely.

"Dot's right, it *is* fascinating. You haf heard of Paracelsus, *nicht?* Den, Glauber? *Nein?* Bonus? *Ach! mein Gott!* I should like much to know vot dey teach you in der public schools!"

Carmelita gave a low ripple of appreciation.

"Don't judge by me. I'm not a good product of the system. Who was this Bonus? Delightfully suggestive name! And this other party? Glauber, was it?"

The old man's forehead wrinkled a moment in pursuit of the jest he had not caught; then he dismissed it as an immaterial interruption.

"Bonus of Ferrara? Und Johan Rudolph Glauber? Interesting as curiosities —noddings of scientific value to our time. Here, I vill show you somet'ings. *Aber,* dis ist a first edition. Mark *die wunderschön typographie;* dot is fine, *nicht?*"

Carmelita stared gravely at the ancient, worm-eaten, calf-bound volume which he drew from his pocket, indicating with the whimsical smile of a tolerant parent a title-page that was almost falling apart.

"But, who—what did he write about?"

"Write about? Vell, for instance, the separation of metals, the transmutation of baser metals into gold."

"Oh!" flashed Carmelita, "I thought that was just a pipe-dream!"

"*Was für ein traum?* Dis Glauber, he vas a great character; *aber* Bonus, I like him not. He says dot der motif vich prompts dem all is an illiberal lofe of gold; dot der hearts are as hard as der flints vich dey vish to change into precious metals. Dot is a libel! Dot is *nicht wahr!* Der motif of a true scientist is"— he spoke slowly, oratorically, into the ear of the amazed girl beside him—"unity and perfection. All which we see springs from der one seed. All are children of de same parents, some mit more of der baser characteristics, oders mit more of noble qualities. *Alles* in der vorld makes for perfection. Gold is der perfectest metal. Also, *alles* in der metals must make for gold. *Ist das klar?*"

Although in his excitement he was growing more Germanic, Carmelita had followed his argument easily enough.

"It's beautiful! It's so perfectly logical," she hazarded.

"Ah!" exclaimed the old German, beaming approvingly at her. "You see dot, *hein?* Und der bizness vorld, der universities, der Gofernment vill not see id! Dey vill gif t'ousands of tollars for der discovery of an imaginary point on der surface of der globe—und not one mark vill dey gif to develop der greatest spiritual possibility in matter!"

Carmelita caught her breath. Her quick imagination was on fire, but the possibilities she saw could scarcely have been called spiritual.

"It would be very wonderful—if it could be done."

"It is only a matter of time!" interrupted the old German. "Und der time grows exceeding near!"

CARMELITA frowned thoughtfully. "Wouldn't the throwing on the market of a lot of easy gold depreciate its value as currency?" she inquired.

The old German leaned back in the seat and looked at her admiringly.

"You haf a fine mind! A goot mind, young lady, efen if you don'd know all dere is aboud machinery. Und you don'd do somet'ing presently mit dis automobile— Ah, dot's better! You make goot your point. It vould revolutionize all der gofernments of der vorld. It vould oferturn der monopolies, make de laborer rich, und de capitalist poor. In time, anudder standard vould be selected, bud for de present it vould mean anarchy unleashed. Undoubtedly de secret of alchemic gold—manufactured gold, dot is to say—vill shortly be discovered, but it is to be hoped dot der

scientist vill be a man of keen chudgment; he vill say nodding of his discovery—it vill die mit him!"

"But then— What good would it do to——"

"So! I puzzle you, not? It is because, naturally enough, you haf mistaken my work. All der alchemists want to make gold, und most of dem want to make it from der baser metals. Dis is no true economie. Silber, und lead, und iron haf all der proper place. To change all der iron in der vorld into gold vould be to deprive us of a useful metal, and to cheapen a precious one; flooding de market mit somet'ing dot nobody has earned, und nobody has any use for except to make chewelry und vatch-cases und such like trash."

Carmelita threw her companion a sidelong glance that was half-whimsical, half suspicious.

"But everywhere," he continued, "in common clay, in der dust of dis road, in der loam of yonder field, dere is gold—imperceptible particles of gold going to vaste! Now, could ve assemble dose particles togedder, bringing dem to a common center as der magnet attracts der iron filings, dot vould be a gread discofery, *nicht?*"

Over Carmelita's face crept a shadow of disappointment. She'd heard of such schemes before. She had, in fact, watched her father grow enthusiastic—at a cost of several thousand dollars—over an undertaking which proposed to distil the Pacific Ocean. Perhaps the old man felt her lack of response, for he relapsed into silence—a silence that was broken only as he pointed to a little wagon-road winding around the mountain, the base of which they were then skirting.

"Up dere I go. Ven ve reach de beginning of dot road I vill ask you to set me down. I vos not expecting to get home so soon. Perhaps you come und see me, not? Reindecker's my name. You find me easily. T'ree und a half miles along dot little road——"

"Would you like me to?"

"*Gewiss.* Usually I do not care for visitors. But to you I will show everyt'ing."

"I'll come!" said Carmelita briefly; and a moment later added: "I believe you'll make a success of this."

"*Danke!* Oh, in time—*Aber*—" he sighed, "it goes somewhat slowly, *Fräulien.*"

II

THAT evening Carmelita Sofia McCann played seven-up with the Big Person from Buffalo, and lost to him with commendable generosity, considering how little she had to lose. Moreover, she saw him deliberately slip the cut twice, and each time deal himself a card from the bottom, which she strongly suspected to be the ace with which he won the hand. Being not entirely ignorant of the manipulations of certain limber-fingered gentry, she broke up the game by feigning a head-ache, and, with Manahan sympathetically in tow, sought the breezy eminence of the observatory, where with the aid of the moonlight she purposed to turn her companion inside out.

But Manahan was more crafty than she had thought. The keynote of his nature was suspicion and, like many other suspicious men, it never dawned on him that he himself could be suspected. He studied Carmelita greedily; her type was new to him and attention from a woman so manifestly charming and so much his superior was a subtle flattery that went to his head. If he had thought to place her in an embarrassing position, she had so far given no sign.

In fact, to his clumsy sounding she responded naïvely enough. She dropped little hints of certain large interests that she had in the Ozarks, spoke in figures the size and number of which made the Big Person wonder whether she were bluffing, and otherwise conducted herself as unlike a person in need of his forbearance as possible. Thus, having lit the fires of cupidity and curiosity in the Big Person's brain, she tactfully excused herself.

She despatched a letter that night to St. Louis. It was characteristically brief:

> DEAR JIM: I've a hunch I'm going to need you. If you haven't got a hen on the griddle, wire me at once. C. S. MCCANN.

Carmelita was a habit; a very little of her whetted the appetite for more. When, therefore, on the following afternoon she ordered a horse, it was a source of sudden dissatisfaction to Manahan that he had long since passed a normal saddle weight. That he was obliged to content himself with a few words from her as he watched her mount was a tart incentive to the possibilities of the

evening. Of this Carmelita was mischievously aware; moreover, her artistic soul basked in the knowledge that the somewhat Oriental architecture of the hotel, with its Moorish towers and its graceful colonnade, set off her own warm and colorful beauty to peculiar advantage.

Two hours later she left the main road and, checking her horse to a walk, started her watchful way up the Hermit's Mountain. She held the plan in the palm of her hand, but unlike any other scheme that had ever emanated from her fertile brain, she had to deal with an innocent old savant whom she would have liked to help—at the same time that she helped herself.

The stalwart, conventional lines of pines and cedars stood out greenly black against the rich, Autumnal coloring; a squirrel darted chattering up a tree, a little chipmunk ran swiftly along the stones at the side of the path and disappeared in a panic among them. Far down on her right wound the road, white in the afternoon sunshine; ahead of her the woods darkened and the trees grew closer together. Then suddenly, on her left, smoke rose and a dog barked, and a flannel-shirted man, smoking an old pipe, looked out from around a little log-cabin and called:

"*Ach, Fräulein! Wie geht es Ihnen?* Tie up your horse to one of dose trees, und come up, *nicht?* I vould go down, but I can not leave my furnace."

It had a fantastic sound, this talk of a furnace in the heart of the primeval forest; and when she had followed his directions and stood beside him, the scene that met her eyes was weird enough. For Reindecker was removing what looked to Carmelita like a witch's caldron from the heart of what he explained was a wind-furnace. Presently he packed in some fresh coke, and with an air of suppressed excitement told Carmelita (who was standing among an orderly litter of scorifiers and cupels, tongs and crucibles) to go out from under the little shelter into the open air.

"I dis crucible vill charge, und der fumes sometimes are unpleasant. Afterwards, I join you."

Carmelita obeyed, and there was presently wafted out to where she stood an odor for which the word "unpleasant" was distinctly inadequate. Even the dog ran sneezing into the woods, to return later, wagging an apologetic tail.

NOT until the sun set did Carmelita mount and turn her horse hotelwards, and even then she did not hurry, but rode thoughtfully, as one reviewing and arranging a confused mass of facts for future reference.

The way seemed far from clear. To vague suggestions of a business nature Reindecker had been about as absorbent as a duck's back. To Carmelita Sofia such colossal innocence was irritating. The old man was well-nigh penniless, in all other matters his intelligence was acute, yet she had sought in vain to locate the cerebral tract of the scientific mind that would respond to suggestions of profit. She reviewed the situation discontentedly as she rode home in the rapidly gathering twilight. The moon came out and shed its silvery shafts into unexpected nooks and crannies, fantastic shadows fell across her path, and in the dimpled elbow of the Ozarks lay the city with its myriad lights.

As she reined up at the hotel a portly figure detached itself from one of the easy chairs and came forward to help her dismount.

"Where have you been all this time?" he asked reproachfully. Then, with a grotesque attempt at tender possessiveness: "I've been terribly worried about you—riding alone in the dark like this."

For one instant Carmelita stared haughtily; then, remembering her rôle, the heavily fringed eyelids drooped. "I'm awfully sorry," she murmured in the low voice that could be so delectably sweet. "I rode too far and forgot how much longer it would seem coming back. You see, I'm not used to having any one worry over me."

In her mail-box she found a telegram from St. Louis. It said merely:

I'm it. Put me wise. JIM.

This she promptly proceeded to do as follows:

DEAR JIM: As you have probably imagined, I've something doing here that needs your delicate, artistic touch. Naturally, I can't go into details until I see you; but any one who has been the howling success in providing eager buyers with gold bricks that you have, can't fail to make this scientific variation of "The Indian-behind-the-tree" a sure winner.

As for costumes and accessories, I am sending you a separate list of what you will need. Don't get frightened at the length of it. I enclose a check to cover the cost.

Wire me what train you will take, and stop off at Benton. I'll meet you with an auto.

As ever, your friend,

CARMELITA.

She wrote one more letter that night. It was to a girl friend, lately married to a Denver millionaire, and seemed to have some bearing on the situation.

. . . Of course, Nance, it's awfully good of you to worry about me, but I *must* live by my wits—it's in the blood. Any other kind of existence would bore me to death. And if, now and then, I can give some poor fellow "a leg up," as the boys say, that's my religion; and if I can puncture some other chap's dirigible—just as he thinks he's the indispensable Lord High Everything Else—that's my meat and drink. You know what Dad was—and I'm a chip of the old block.

Now, about doing something for me—and I know you mean it—here's a little trick all cut out for you.

In a few days I'm going to send you by express train a dear old German—well, let's be polite and call him a Herr Professor. I think he's crazy, but he's a darling just the same, even though he's horribly in the way at present. His particular bug is *making* gold—out of nothing, you understand—and between you and me, Nance, looking over the wide circle of my indigent friends, I know of no one who stands more in need of it and looks less likely to make any than he does. I want you to pose as the patroness of all the sciences. Keep him as long as you possibly can; Denver will interest him. He'll give you a lot of hot air about collecting gold out of the dust in Arapahoe Street, but he isn't dangerous. See that nobody locks him up; promise to interest yourself in his researches and give him a hundred dollars or so as an evidence of good faith.

By the way, his name is Reindecker, and I'll wire you when he leaves.

Lovingly,

CARM.

III

ON A BENCH high up on the mountain-side Manahan sank in an exhausted heap. He had begun by panting and protesting most horribly against being dragged on foot up the steep grade, but had gradually lost sight of his exertions in the story Carmelita was telling. She told it remarkably well; and then, having seated herself beside him, she opened her hand and disclosed—like the welcome period at the end of a well-rounded sentence—an oval-shaped button of gold in the pink and white palm. The Big Person bent over it breathlessly.

"It looks good to me!" he puffed.

"And when you think it was produced at a cost of about ninety-five cents—sounds like a bargain day, doesn't it?"

"It sure does! And he says it's pure gold?"

"Infinitely more so than is ever found in a natural state. I should think there's at least ten dollars worth in it, shouldn't you?"

"Easy enough, if it's straight goods," assented Manahan, hefting it knowingly in his hand. "Let me get it weighed and tested for you, eh?"

"Oh, will you? I was just wishing you would. You see, it would scarcely do for me to walk into a jeweler's with it; they'd begin asking questions."

"Let them!"

"Yes, but a woman is apt to give away everything she knows, and——"

"Is she?" said Manahan quizzically. "You don't appear to be afflicted that way; that is, not if I'm really the first you've told about this. On the level, now——"

"Oh, you certainly are!" cried Carmelita. "And I don't suppose I'd have told you," she added candidly, "if I hadn't felt that you could advise me right."

Manahan wiped the perspiration from his heated but gratified brow, and with his disengaged hand softly patted her shoulder. "You can trust Papa," he said with elephantine jocoseness.

"Of course I trust you," replied Carmelita sweetly, "or I wouldn't have told you. It's the other fellow I'm bothered about."

"The other fellow?"

"Yes, the man in Kansas City."

"Who's he? What's his business?"

"He's president of the Imperial Trust."

"Is that so? Well, what's he got to do with it?"

"Professor Glauber went to his bank one day to raise money on some gold he had. There was a good deal of alloy in it, and he offered it at so low a price the banker became suspicious, questioned him, and finally got the whole story. Glauber proved that he could produce gold, although at that time it was a slow, tedious process, unsuccessful four times out of five. The banker knew a sure thing when he saw it, so he tied old Glauber up with a contract, and from time to time has advanced him a few thousand dollars. Lately he's refused to help him, and Glauber would rather forget his formula than let the other fellow in for too much velvet."

"Well, what's he want to tell this Missourian anything about it for?"

"Because he can't help himself! What good is his discovery if he can't work it on

a big scale? And, once it got to be public property, it wouldn't be worth anything."

"I don't see why not!"

"Do you happen to own any Gold Bonds?"

"You *bet!* I've got a bunch of Havana 5's and New York & Jersey 6's."

"Just so. Now, suppose the New York & Jersey Company could pay off your bonds in a gold that cost them five cents on the dollar; and suppose that gold suddenly became so plentiful that your dollar wouldn't buy a loaf of bread! Just where would you come in?"

"That's where I'd go out of business!" admitted Manahan.

"So you see," smiled Carmelita, "why it's necessary to go slow and keep the whole affair quiet. Glauber is making the gold right along—he told me that much—but goodness! it's so tedious! And he's an old man. I do what I can for him, but just now I'm not in a position to help much." She laughed up into his face frankly. "That was cruel of you the other night at seven-up. It isn't often I have such rotten luck. But I do admire a person who plays a good hand, don't you? It's sort of foolish, I suppose, but I always judge a man's character by the way he plays cards."

Manahan got up puffingly and made her a grotesquely exaggerated bow. The roll of fat on his neck was a rich, deep purple; but, of course, his attitude might have accounted for the heightened color.

IV

A CARMELITA whose slender, graceful figure was sheathed in a gown of Persian blue, with threads of gold shimmering through its crêpe-like texture—a color-scheme the keynote of which was the dull gold chain she wore about her throat, with a beautifully carved scarabee of lapis-lazuli hanging from it—glided into the dining-room that night at the side of the wide-girthed Morris Manahan, his importance heightened immeasurably by the barbaric splendor of the woman who thus honored him.

"You've got every other woman in the place faded to a whisper," he grunted admiringly.

"Thanks!" drawled Carmelita. "I *am* feeling particularly fit, as our English cousins say. Isn't the air glorious? Are you quite rested from your long tramp?" she added solicitously, ignoring the buzz of excitement that was magnetizing the air-waves about them.

"Oh, yes. That is to say, I—I didn't feel tired."

"Shall we have another game after dinner?"

"Cert—I say! I had that gold weighed!"

"You did? Well?"

"Pretty near twenty dollars' worth!"

"You don't mean it?"

"And it's the real goods, too! Why, if he can turn out that sort of stuff, there's nothing to it! A bushel or two, and we could all afford to quit working!"

"I'm afraid poor old Glauber would die of old age before he could get even one bushel of it together," murmured Carmelita reluctantly.

"Oh, of course, I'll have to dope out some other basis for him to work upon," said Manahan arrogantly. "One thing sure, it's ridiculous for him to stay up in these mountains. He ought to be nearer his base of supplies. Besides, if he moves away from here he needn't leave any forwarding address. Then that smart Aleck in Kansas City can whistle."

Carmelita shook her head. "You'd never get Herr Glauber to leave the Ozarks."

"Why? Couldn't he do the trick anywhere else just as well as here?" asked Manahan suspiciously.

"I'm not sure about that. He claims that being near Hot Springs has already saved him thousands of dollars."

"Come again! I didn't quite get that."

"I can't explain it very well because I don't just understand it myself. But it's like this: For some time experimenters have believed that gold would ultimately be produced through the agency of radium; but good gracious! if Glauber had the price of a gram of radium he wouldn't have to look for gold. Now, of course, you know what they claim for the waters of these springs?"

Manahan nodded. He was too well acquainted with the phrase "radio-active gases," so often encountered in the literature of the place, not to follow her after a fashion.

"Well, Herr Glauber believes that not only the waters of the springs, but *all the soil* about here is permeated with radium, and to that agency he attributes much of

the success that evaded him elsewhere and had come so easily here."

"Gosh! That's queer! Funny things these scientific guys get next to, eh?"

"So you see there's nothing to do but stay here," continued Carmelita; "at least, till we get rich enough to buy radium by the pound," she added whimsically.

"Why not pay this other fellow his loan and tear up the contracts? There's always a way to get around those things."

"We're not as clever as you!" sighed Carmelita.

"I never saw the contract yet that I couldn't wriggle out of!" boasted Manahan. "You'd better engineer it so I can see them, eh?"

"I'll try," promised Carmelita dubiously, "but he's so suspicious of strangers. I'm afraid he'll tell me that he needs money more than advice."

"Hm! Well," said Manahan, drawing quickly into his shell at the innocent suggestion, "what do you say to a game of seven-up?"

Late into the night they played, yet long before sunrise Carmelita was galloping over the road to the Hermit's Mountain. When she returned, flushed and triumphant, she sent two messages, one to Nancy in Denver, the other to Jim in St. Louis.

Then she went up-stairs to dress for breakfast.

V

AT A DIRTY little table in the darkest corner of a small restaurant in Benton Carmelita toyed nervously with a cracked stoneware cup of muddy coffee and watched a tall, thin-faced young man wrestling heroically with an order of beef-steak and German-fried. As he helped himself to the fifth slab of soggy bread, he caught her shuddering gaze upon him and laughed sheepishly.

"Wait till you get so far along in your career of crime that you daren't go into the diner for fear of meeting some of your 'contributors,' Carmelita. Gee! but I was hungry."

"That's all right, Jim. I'm only sorry I can't treat you better, but——"

"Don't let that worry you. I know we can't afford to be seen together at a hotel. By the way, do I eat, *up there?*"

"Why, of course you do, you long-legged Indian! Don't worry. I'll grub-stake you for a couple of weeks."

"Wow! Do I have to play the hermit that long?"

"Not if it grinds you!" said Carmelita impatiently.

Jim speared several disks of slippery potato and regarded the arrangement on his fork with sobering face. He spoke this time without levity.

"What's wrong, Carm? I know you'd never send for me if you hadn't a good thing in sight; but I've had too many good things fall through to mind one more. Is the game queered?"

"Oh, no, not that. I've got my fish hooked, Jim, but I'm getting tired of playing him, and for two cents I'd let him get away with the line."

"Won't he land? Suspicious? Eh?"

"That's not the word! There's nothing in the dictionary mean enough to do him justice, the hateful old fat-head!"

Jim's eyes twinkled. "You don't seem to think well of this gentleman," he said slowly.

"I don't!"

"What's his particular graft?"

"He's a politician, and in the shipping business on the side."

"I see. And when will you steer him up against me?"

"The less he sees of you the better. That bum Dutch dialect and mongrel scientific dope of yours wouldn't fool a baby in the cradle," replied Carmelita.

"Don't get sarcastic, lady. I'll do better when I get made-up for the part. You know I'm no good at rehearsals; it takes scenery and costumes to warm me up to my gait," said Jim. "As for the suspicious boys, they're my meat! Anyhow, I'll bet a simoleon that this fellow's hands are so black he's never dare make a peep in court, even if you trimmed him down to a case ten-spot."

"I stand about as much show of trimming him, my friend," said Carmelita, "as you do of—beating a faro-bank!"

"Is it so?" grinned Jim, at the mention of his pet diversion. "Then, just so's we won't get into an argument, what's your 'spiel' and why don't he swallow it?"

"He swallows everything, except a hint for money. I haven't dared mention money in his presence for three days now, for fear he'd jump over the traces."

"Losing your nerve?"

"In the meantime," continued Carmelita disgustedly, "he's carrying around in his vest-pocket a twenty-dollar gold-piece I had melted down into a button for him. Actually, I don't believe he ever goes near a jeweler's that he doesn't have it weighed, to see if the last fellow was stringing him."

"Don't you care! He's got the button."

"As if I minded that! He might keep it and give me the laugh, if he was only a decent sort. But I can't stand him, and that's a fact."

"What's he done to you, Carm?" asked Jim, eyeing her curiously.

Carmelita flushed. Her professional pride had been touched. "Oh, not much!" she drawled. "He won fifteen hundred from me playing seven-up, for one thing," she added, pulling a wry face.

"Never! From *you?* How-did-he-do-it?"

"He cheated, the loafer! How else would you suppose? When he didn't palm an ace or a ten-spot, he begged—with High, Low and Jack in his hand. There isn't a single unclubby thing that fellow wouldn't do. His gallantry is of the gutter type, and he shakes hands like a jelly-fish! Ugh!"

"I can see that the Honorable Morris Manahan is 'in Dutch,'" said Jim. "And yet," he mused, "women wonder *why* their votes are not wanted!"

"You can cut that out, Jimmy! No one ever saw me crying for suffrage."

"Huh! You don't have to," grunted Jim meaningly. Carmelita's dancing eyes acknowledged the clumsy compliment, though she only said dryly:

"If you think you can last until you get a square meal, let's beat it before folks begin to drop in to dinner. Here! take this twenty and load up with bacon and beans, and the other items of that Alaskan à la carte you're so used to. I'll get the car and meet you at that store we passed—about a block down on this side of the street."

"Suppose your friend won't come through for a share in this Easy Gold Syndicate, what then?" whispered Jim as he helped her on with her automobile coat.

"Then," said Carmelita sadly, "we'll hand him the 'brick.' It jars my artistic soul to think of it, Jim, but, well, after all, the old games get the money quickest."

"Surest thing you know!" admitted Jim. "I thought when it got down to cases we'd have to come to it. I'm properly loaded for it, so whenever you're ready, just whistle."

VI

THERE never had been a minute since Morris Manahan's itching palm had felt the cool weight of the magic little button of yellow metal that he had wavered in his intention to keep on the scent until he located more. He had not doubted Carmelita's story, though he tested her memory and imagination sorely. Warily confident, however, she showed neither eagerness nor impatience; so, between them, they played a waiting game.

Not, indeed, until there came seriously disturbing letters from his friend and supporters at home did Manahan begin to grow restive.

"See here," said he one morning, "I've got to get back to Buffalo. What about this Dutchman of yours? I'm beginning to think he's a myth. When did you see him last?"

"About a week ago," said Carmelita. "He wouldn't even listen when I mentioned you, and told me not to come up again till he sent for me," she added ruefully. "Said he'd soon be able to get along without thanks to any one."

"Does that let you out, too?" asked Manahan, after considering her a moment in silence.

"No, I don't think he'd break faith with me," replied Carmelita. "Dad got him out of too many tight places years ago, and he's a grateful old customer, in spite of his surliness. But he seemed in a hurry to be rid of me and get back to his work. I shouldn't wonder if he'd hit on some way to produce gold in larger quantities."

"You'd better see him to-day," suggested Manahan. "Why not take me up there with you?"

"Oh, I wouldn't dare—not without his consent!" she said quickly. "We might drive up to a place I know, and leave the horse and buggy. Then, when I go up, you can follow me—say that you happened to see me from the road and came after me, thinking I'd like company. I'll introduce you and you can do the rest!"

"All right, that's good enough," agreed Mananhan.

Two hours later, Carmelita, switching the grasses and bushes in passing, and stopping

now and then to call to a bird or squirrel, made her way up the Hermit's Mountain, with Manahan not far behind her. When he reached the little clearing, however, he found her seated on a bench outside the cabin. The door was wide open. On the table the remnants of a meal were scattered about. In the little lean-to which served as the Hermit's laboratory, iron molds, tongs and crucibles were thrown about in confusion. Near the open door a mound of slag and another of rock helped to proclaim the activities of the man they sought.

"I wonder where he is?" said Manahan.

"Dear only knows! Maybe he's gone to Hot Springs to see me; only, in that case, we'd surely have passed him. Perhaps he's gone to Benton."

"I wish I knew how long he'll be gone," said the Big Person, poking about curiously in the litter on the shelf, smelling the contents of bottles and rummaging generally.

"Please don't touch anything," pleaded Carmelita. "I really think we'd better go. If he caught you, it would be as much as our lives were worth."

"If he don't want people to look at things, why don't he lock them up, then?" snorted Manahan wrathfully. "He's got something to sell, hasn't he? How does he expect to get rid of it, if a fellow can't see it? He had just ventured two investigating fingers into a dusty marmalade jar, and been rewarded by a sticky mass of something that smelt indescribably.

"Bah! Here, give me something to get this off with! That paper'll do." He reached for a sheet of yellow, thumb-marked wrapping-paper. Carmelita gave a little cry.

"Don't take that! There's writing on it. It may be a formula, or—Oh!" she finished softly.

"What is it?" said Manahan, sacrificing his handkerchief with a look of disgust.

"A letter to the man at the Imperial Trust. I couldn't help seeing the name. Oh, *Mr. Manahan!*" she protested. For Manahan had boldly picked up the letter and, ignoring her indignant surprise, was reading it carefully through. When he had finished, he gazed thoughtfully about the shack. Carmelita turned on her heel and started suddenly away.

"I'm going home," she called back over her shoulder. "If you want to stay here and get shot, you may!"

"Wait a minute!" cried Manahan. "I'm coming! Say! You're going the wrong way!"

"No, I'm not! There's a back-trail here that strikes the road a few minutes' walk from where we left the buggy."

MANAHAN trudged sullenly along, keeping to the center of the narrow trail, while Carmelita picked her way between the stones and weeds and shrubs alongside. She lingered a moment to pull some purple asters, one solitary clump of which caught her attention. The tough-stemmed flowers refused to break. Had Manahan turned he would have seen her find the cord she sought and give it a sharp pull. Almost simultaneously a distant rifle-shot, followed by the frantic barking of a dog, rang out on the clear mountain air. As Manahan started nervously, he felt Carmelita's hands upon his arm, drawing him to one side and silently urging him down behind some close-growing bushes.

"*Ssh!*" she whispered. "There's some one on the other side!"

Even as she pointed, the tall gaunt form of Johan Rudoph Glauber, *redivivus*, his back toward them, stood upright among the hazels, listening in the direction from which came the dog's bark. Then he stooped suddenly and the two breathless eavesdroppers heard the clinking of metal into glass. Once more the Hermit sprang up, coatless this time, but with a bird rifle in his hand. Throwing it over his shoulder, he crashed off through the underbrush in the direction of the dog, who was still barking furiously.

The two in hiding exchanged glances. Manahan's face was purple, Carmelita's pale with excitement.

"Pretty close shave!" wheezed the Big Person.

"Rather!" drawled Carmelita.

"Say! That sounded like *gold!* Here's where we find out whether he's really got any. Come on!"

Parting the foliage quietly, they slipped through into the little hollow. Fresh earth—disturbed, a deep hole—empty, and some foot-prints were all they found at first. Then Carmelita pointed to where, among closely growing roots, a coat had been shoved. Manahan stooped and pulled out a sleeve.

"Be careful!" warned Carmelita. "He's like an Indian, and knows if a leaf is out of

place. Oh!" she gasped softly, as Manahan drew out the rest of the coat and took from its folds two glass preserving-jars filled with small irregularly shaped yellow buttons that rattled noisily as he tried to unscrew the covers.

"Don't open them!" begged Carmelita. "You might spill——"

"I can't!" grunted Manahan, still struggling ineffectually.

Carmelita crossed nervously to the shrubbery behind which the Hermit had disappeared, just as Manahan, in his disappointment and impatience shook the coat roughly. Two large yellow pellets, glistening like dew-drops, fell to the ground. With his eyes on Carmelita he snapped them up from between his feet and slipped them into his pocket. He was hastily wrapping up the jars in the coat again, when Carmelita turned suddenly.

"We'd better skip!" she warned. "That dog's bark is getting nearer! Let's go back the way we came; it'll save time. Unless," she added dubiously, "you still want to stay and see Glauber?"

"It's too late to do it to-day," puffed Manahan, scrambling along behind her. "We'll come back to-morrow, You can come up in the morning and explain. It'll seem more courteous."

And the dog behind them still barked. To Carmelita the sound was Mephistophelian, truimphant.

VII

THAT evening a ragged urchin brought Carmelita a scrap of a note written on dirty, yellow paper. She read it, and without comment passed it over to Manahan. It said:

> MISS MCCANN: If dot feller you was talking with me about likes to buy some gold, you can bring him up to-morrow. I got some I vill sell for fifty cents on the dollar. You should bring your own scales; some son of a gun stole mine. Also—you should bring *cash*. To me checks is nothing.
>
> J. R. GLAUBER.

"There's a bright man, that friend of yours!" said Manahan. "Wants me to bring cash, and doesn't say how much gold he's got! How much do you suppose it is?"

"A small fortune, I should think," said Carmelita.

"Probably not so much as you'd imagine," said the Big Person depreciatingly.

"Well, if there was twenty dollars' worth in that first button, the one I gave you—Dear me!" Carmelita laughed helplessly, "it sounds like a Land Show puzzle, doesn't it? 'Guess the number of beans in a jar and get a fine orange grove in Florida!' I guess —*a thousand beans!*"

"In one jar? Nonsense! Not by half!" Manahan rose up heavily from his chair. "I think I'll just step down street for a minute," he said apologetically.

Carmelita nodded pleasantly and watched him waddle along the avenue, a mischievous glint in her eyes. "There he goes to have his stolen treasure tested—the old villain! I hope Jim didn't get rattled and make a mistake."

APPARENTLY, Jim had made no mistake, for on the morrow it was Manahan who seemed the more anxious of the two. It was mid-afternoon, however, before three heads bent over a little pile, yellow to the eye and fascinating to the touch, that lay on the table in the hermit's lean-to. As Manahan carefully weighed and set aside the contents of the first jar, he said gruffly:

"Well, fetch on the rest of it! I guess I can use it."

"Dere is no 'rest of it'!" lied Jim with stubborn finality.

"Huh! the way you talked I thought you had the United States Mint backed off the boards. On the level, now, is this all you've got?"

"'On der level'—no!" grinned Jim. "I got some more, but it is for anodder feller, a man in Kansas City."

"Oh, I see. He's expecting it, eh?"

"I haf der letter written, yes," answered Jim evasively "Und he gets dis." He pulled from his pocket a grimy envelope. "He vill expect it."

"But," argued Mahahan, "if you haven't sent the letter, why not let me take all you have, and let him wait for the next batch?"

"How long you t'ink it takes to make dis?" demanded Jim. "Twenty-four hours, huh? Vot you vant, anyhow? You got fifty cents profid on efery dollar in dot pile."

"Well, what of it?" retorted Manahan. "You get about ninety cents to the good on every dollar I pay you, don't you?"

"Py Chove!" said Jim, "you vas right! I nefer t'ought of it dot vay. How much money you got, *hein?*"

"Oh, just keep on bringing your gold!" said Manahan, smiling fatuously at Carmelita. "I'll tell you when I'm all in."

"Den it should be dat Miss McCann helps me carry in der chars, vile you look oud for de money. Come on, miss." And Jim led the way into the little shack. Once out of sight he turned to Carmelita and whispered:

"What do you know about that? He's been tampering with the scales!"

"Are you *sure?*"

"Sure? Don't you suppose I've been juggling this pickled lead long enough to know how much a Mason jar full of it weighs?"

Carmelita's eyes danced merrily. "Oh, the wretch!" she said. "We'd better hurry back before he eats off the plating!" and she started for the lean-to on a run, followed by Jim with the remaining jar.

It took the positive assurances of "Herr Glauber" that he had no more gold to offer to satisfy the acquisitive Manahan, and Jim writhed internally, wishing that he'd brought a barrel, instead of a box, of it. After the Big Person had counted from his bulging purse ten crisp, new, one-thousand dollar bills and handed them over in payment for what his greedy soul fondly believed to be thirty thousand dollars' worth of pure gold, he stood over Jim, fidgeting and fussing while that worthy nailed up the mineralogical specimens and trundled them down to the buggy in an old, broken wheelbarrow.

"SO PAPA really thought I went with the booty? Poor Papa! What a rude awakening he will have!" murmured Carmelita thoughtfully, as she watched the rapidly receding lights on the rear coach of the Night Express that was carrying Manahan and his precious box to Buffalo.

Late that evening a golden-brown touring-car, blazing its way over the silent country road, slowed down at the foot of the Hermit's Mountain just long enough to pick up a man and a dog.

"Well, here's your prize, Carm; though it sure beats me what you want of him," grumbled Jim.

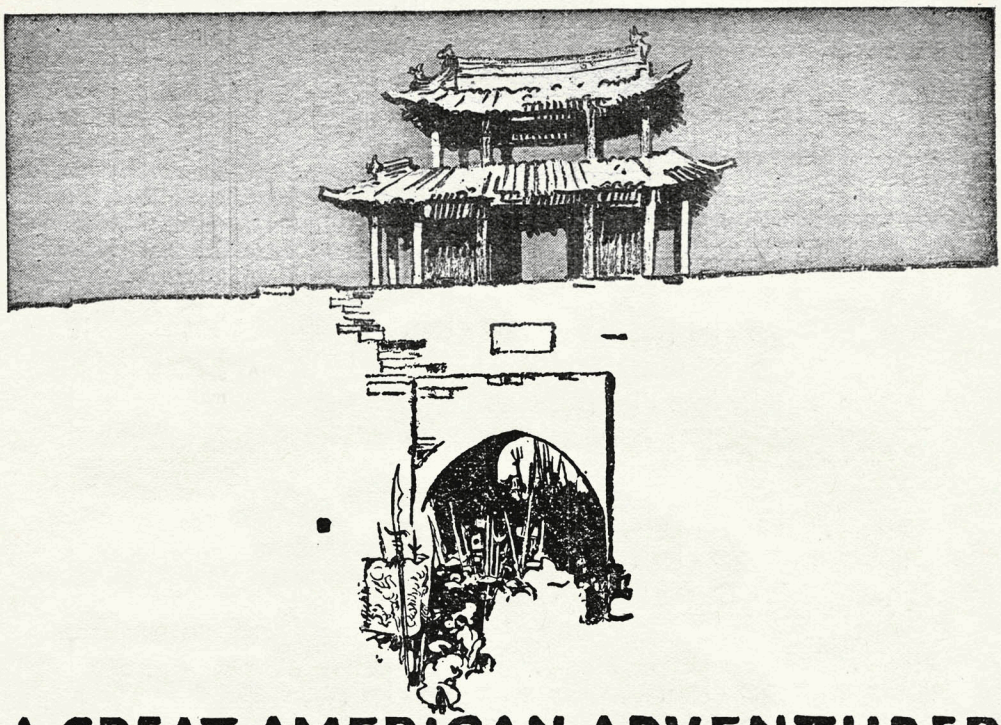
"He's one of the bunch, aren't you, Schnitzel, old fellow? I'll buy you the first delicatessen we come to, if you'll only keep quiet."

"There's one in Benton. Is that where you lose him?" asked Jim hopefully.

"No, that's where we lose you, isn't it?" laughed Carmelita. "Say, you might leave me those mangy whiskers and that bum Dutch dialect of yours. I'm thinking they'd be a grand basis for the scientific fund I'll be afther creatin'. Honestly, Jimmy, you were immense!"

"Thanks. May I ask where you and that mut are bound for?"

"Schnitzel? Oh, Schnitzel and I are going to hunt up Herr Reindecker in Denver, and persuade him that there are much healthier locations than this—for a Dutchman who wants to make gold."



A GREAT AMERICAN ADVENTURER

"CHINESE WARD," SOLDIER OF FORTUNE AND MAKER OF HISTORY

BY G·T·FERRIS

ON THE early Autumn of 1860 a New York merchant interested in the machinery and junk business received a letter from Shanghai, China, which interested him curiously. It was from an old friend and associate, whom he had believed to be another example of unaccountable disappearance, though not for the first time in this strange man's career.

Frederick Townsend Ward had gone to Mexico more than two years before to sell some old ordnance to the Government. Having accomplished this in due season, he had suddenly dropped out of ken, on the eve of supposedly returning home. Fancy, then, the surprise which greeted these words, if any act of so erratic a person could amaze his friends:

> I have entered into the Chinese Service, have very fine prospects at present and hope soon to have a comfortable fortune. I have been transformed from a Yankee into a Chinaman in good style, with a good establishment. I, a few days ago, took the second city of importance in the viceroyalty from the rebels. I have made a pretty good thing of it and hope in a few weeks to take another city.

This communication was a veritable bolt from the blue. A restless, almost penniless vagabond of a man, whom his friends had given up as lost, suddenly emerging in China as a master of men and a conquerer of cities! Our own bloody slaughter-house had not yet opened its shambles, but the newspapers were so absorbed in an extraordinary political situation that they gave scarcely a paragraph to such a curious piece of news when it was made known to them.

A few weeks later another similar letter reached the staid merchant:

I was then [referring to his first letter] about starting up country, but I have since returned, having been badly wounded while attempting to scale the walls of Sing Poo City, and was compelled to return to Shanghai for treatment. I got several shot-wounds, the worst one went through the cheek and down through the roof of the mouth. They, that is the missionaries and some English and Dutch merchants, talk very badly about me and my measures, I having used both rather unceremoniously when found having connections with the rebels; but, Jack, I am independent of them all and consequently do not care a —— for them.

With the Chinese I am all right. I have made, and am still making, money through them, and making it honestly, which is what very few in China can say. If my second in command had been a good man I could have been in New York inside of six months with $350,000. But whilst I was lying wounded in Shanghai he permitted himself to lose all the ground I had won and fell back on Shanghai; whereas if he had had pluck enough to hold out for twenty-four hours longer I would—and himself also—be in a quick way of a handsome fortune.

China is the country for a man who is able to take risks and is gifted with good common sense. I have made more money in a few weeks than I could at brokerage in New York in twenty years.

In this extraordinary and abrupt fashion a most audacious Yankee adventurer in the far Orient announces his ambition and his view-point, as if he had been a nineteenth century Sir John Hawkwood. There is no pretense of chivalry or of altruistic enthusiasm. It is simply the toss of an unknown man's gauntlet into a tremendous crisis of butchery, rapine and national upheaval—much as one would buy a hundred shares of stock in the bull and bear market.

Yet it was given to this desperado to become within three years an essential factor in the salvation of the Chinese Empire and to establish that initiative which utterly changed the history of the East.

THE TERRIBLE TAIPING REBELLION

SIXTY years ago American pulpits and church conventions rang with the glad tidings that a Christian movement had sprung, spontaneously as it were, out of Chinese soil. The future of missionary effort was thus assured, it was hoped, in the blossoming of a far-reaching native force that would speedily win the heathen to the banners of the Cross. These hopes, however, were blasted, as the rise of the religious cult of a Hakka schoolmaster developed into one of the most ruthless and devastating civil wars of history, and the nature of the outrageous travesty, which had perverted a few Christian doctrines into a grotesque blasphemy, came to be understood.

Hung Su Tsuen had sought in vain for that recognition before the literary boards at Canton which was the passport of official ambition. In Canton he had absorbed some crude notion of Christian doctrine from a Methodist missionary, and when he returned home, crazed by disappointment, to live as a humble pedagogue, he began to dream dreams and speak prophecies as one directly inspired from heaven. As time went on, his propagandism drew to its banner hordes from the ranks of discontent and crime, and an army of ragged desperadoes began to move from west to east in the early fifties to establish the claim of the crazy fanatic (who professed to be the younger brother of Jesus Christ and directly consecrated by the Holy Ghost) to be the imperial head of the Empire.

His vast following crushed all opposition and over-ran the most fertile and productive provinces of the Middle Kingdom, leaving a trail of murder and rapine with scarcely a parallel in the annals of Oriental barbarism. It was estimated by conservative opinion that in ten years this infernal régime known as the Taiping rule had cost the Empire some two and a half billions of dollars and the destruction of several millions of lives by war, starvation and wholesale massacres.

Hung Su Tsuen, as Tien Wang or "Heavenly King," was enthroned at Nanking and he practically controlled the great provinces of Kiang-Su and Cheh-Kiang, the heart of the richest tea and silk production of China. His robber bands indeed raided down to the very gates of Shanghai, and the foreign merchants there were sometimes hard put to it to defend the city, though nominally on amicable terms with the Nanking despot, on whom their trade so largely depended.

Another factor in the strange situation was the war the allied French and English were then pressing against the Peking authorities to enforce the treaties of 1842, which had stipulated the admission of resident ministers at the capital, but which had been continuously evaded by the Imperial Court. The attack on the Péiho forts and the allied advance on Peking, with the burning and looting of the Summer

Palace (at which Charles George Gordon, who was to consummate Ward's work by-and-by, was present) brought the Chinese Government to its knees.

It happened that while the Anglo-French force was grappling with imperial authority at Peking a detachment of the same force, Sepoys and marines, was coöperating with the Shanghai merchant volunteers in driving back the Taiping bandits who were devastating the Shanghai district and cutting out the tea and silk sampans and junks on the Yang-tse River. British policy was to remain passive, even friendly, as regards the pretensions of the "Heavenly King," so long as he respected the Treaty Ports and the commercial activities of the foreign merchants. When armed interference was necessary it must be barely to the extent enforced by self-protection.

ONE Autumn morning at Shanghai in 1859 a slight, dark-complexioned, insignificant-looking man called at the office of Tah-ke, a Mandarin of the Third Button, a banker and merchant well regarded by the foreign residents. Though he carried a card of introduction from Admiral Gough, an Englishman in command of a small Chinese gunboat, he was refused admission till he spun the porter on his heels and forced his way into the counting-room. Tah-ke, who spoke English well, resented the intrusion, but in the talk that ensued he got to know speedily that his visitor was either a genius or a madman.

It was Frederick Townsend Ward, who had just landed in Shanghai from San Francisco. He was rough and seedy-looking, with a sailor's roll in his gait, but with a glance of fire and a solid, square-set jawbone to redeem his face. Tah-ke was not encouraging when Ward spoke of his desire to enter the Chinese service as a free-lance, and answered that he could get a belly-full of fighting by joining the Shanghai volunteers.

"Thank you for nothing," said Ward, "but I can do that without your help. I didn't come for that sort of advice. I could make you help me and help yourself at the same time. You don't see it now, but you will."

He took a curt departure, but the merchant, impassive as he was, felt strongly impressed by the stranger with the black eye that pierced him like a gimlet and a panther-like movement that suggested a body strung with steel and whipcord.

FREDERICK TOWNSEND WARD, ADVENTURER

WHO, then, was Ward? Born at Salem, Mass., about thirty-two years before his arrival in China, he came of a race of deep-sea skippers, who had sailed on all the oceans, arctic and tropical, and been noted for their handspike and belaying-pin discipline. Daring and resolution ran in his blood. He had refused college, but wanted West Point. "No," said his obstinate sire, and young Ward took to the seas like his forebears.

At the age of nineteen he had won his first mate's certificate and in this capacity performed an exploit which was a tradition in the offices of A. A. Low & Co. of New York, his owners, for many years. Off the mouth of the Hooghly the ship was threatened with a gathering squall and the crew, which had been mutinous, skulked in the forecastle, refusing to take in sail. "To ——, then; you'll take your choice!" said he, and ran back to the ammunition-locker whence he took a keg of powder. Then, with open bung and lighted cigar, he stood among them. They quailed at the terrible boyish figure and promptly manned the yards. Thus this lad with a hero's heart—his captain lay helplessly ill—saved one of the finest clippers in the tea-trade.

But this merchant-sailoring was not to be his life-work. He took a turn in New York at the business of ship-brokerage and marine supplies. Thence he disappeared for several years and was heard of in Central America where he had joined Walker the filibuster, narrowly escaping the fate of that adventurer. Rumor also associated him with the ill-starred exploits of Wheat and Henningsen in the same region. He had been heard of also in the Crimea as enlisted in the French Zouaves, from which he managed to escape by desertion to save himself from drum-head court-martial after having slapped his captain in the face.

These and other adventures loomed in his background. Whether such performances were true or mythical, Ward kept a closed mouth always, but his friends believed them in large part true and the man fully capable of even more daring vagaries. He was one whose confidence it was not safe to force, yet there are still very old men

in New York who swear that Ward's extraordinary Chinese career was what they would have expected.

A few months after his return to New York in 1858 he tired of the sordid humdrum again, especially as Wall Street had quickly stripped him of his meager cash reserve, and he accepted a commercial mission to Mexico. It was afterward revealed that, having closed that transaction, he accepted a commission from Juarez and fought for awhile against bandits and insurrectos. He resigned as capriciously from that service as he had enlisted in it, and made his way from Chihuahua to San Francisco with a bag of doubloons, whence he sailed for China. A big, burning, overpowering thought had now obsessed his brain, which had for years been hungering to find the open gateway of some great enterprise that would astonish the world. He, too, like Hung Su Tsuen, dreamed dreams and blazed with prophetic confidence.

WARD COLLECTS HIS "ARMY"

NOT disconcerted by Tah-ke's cold reception, he took things into his own hands. He had enough money to hire a small force of rapscallions, native and foreign, the kind that infest an Oriental seaport like rats, and among them a few deserters from the British military and naval forces, who knew something about drill. The most important of these acquisitions was James Burgevine, a North Carolinian adventurer, who had severed allegiance to the "Heavenly King." Tah-ke had sold to Ward for a bagatelle a batch of condemned muskets and bayonets which armed this ragged and unreliable battalion. Ward and Burgevine whipped them into shape not only by camp drill but by skirmishing with the Taipings at every opportunity, for from their cities of Sung Kiang and Sing Poo, only two or three days' march from Shanghai, the rebels made constant irruptions.

Ward's primary object was to inspire his men with confidence in him and in themselves. He lived on the country and when he captured Taipings he converted them into recruits instead of refusing quarter as was the habit of the Imperialists. Very soon the exploits of Ward's irregulars began to make a buzz in the foreign clubs and counting-rooms. He had created his own standing and when he went again to Tah-ke that worthy received him with low salaams.

He went straight to his mark like a bullet, with the manner of one dictating, not accepting, terms. He proposed a formal contract, which Tah-ke was to negotiate with the Futai of Shanghai. Ward was to have $100,000 from the Government for every city he captured, of which $25,000 was to go to the Chinese partners. He was to have the first day's looting, after which the captured place would be turned over to the Imperialists.

One captured city, however, it was stipulated, should be garrisoned by himself as a personal headquarters, subject only to his oath of allegiance as a Chinese subject. The American General, for so henceforward we must call him, had already fixed his eye on the important city of Sung-Kiang, one of the seven holy places consecrated in tradition as sacred to Confucius. When it had been carried by the Taipings amid scenes of unspeakable butchery the shock to the religious heart of the Empire had been more appalling than the thought of the twenty thousand people who, after terms of surrender had been granted, had been massacred till the very gutters ran with blood. Possession of this great shrine, Ward estimated, would do more to give him permanent standing than any other single achievement.

Tah-ke was pledged to finance Ward for one year, furnishing him with arms, ammunition and stores, within a certain limit of cost which the other thought would suffice. The singular contract was duly signed by all three parties and sealed in the presence of witnesses, one of whom told the writer the details of the transaction.

Within a month Ward led his first expedition against Sung Kiang, which was garrisoned by about 5,000 Taipings under the command of an Englishman named Gardiner, an ex-officer of the British army. The attack failed, with serious loss to Ward's 500 assailants.

THE CAPTURE OF THE HOLY CITY

ONE thing, however, had happened which proved of vast import to him. He had taken a rebel prisoner of some rank, who confessed to him that one of the bastions had a choked-up subterranean sallyport. If he could make a secret entrance through

this, it would save the necessity of a desperate and bloody assault.

General Ward reorganized his little command and, with 5,000 Imperialists to cooperate, made his second attempt within a fortnight. He divided his forces into two detachments which marched only by night and by devious routes. They all arrived before the treacherous bastion before daybreak, the garrison having no suspicion of the hostile approach. The tunnel was successfully negotiated. In short space they were in possession of the bastion, and two heavy brass howitzers were reversed and turned on the fast gathering defenders of the city so rudely disturbed from their sleep. Grape and canister at short range and the fierce bayonet charges of the assailants filled the Taipings with panic, as they fled in every direction, throwing down their arms. So Sung Kiang, with its five-mile circuit of wall twenty feet high, was captured; and to Ward's great credit he prevented anything like indiscriminate massacre, shooting with his own hand a Chinese officer who had refused quarter to a Taiping. He received two flesh-wounds, but had a "close call" from a bursting musket, which flew to pieces at arm's length from him, for Tah-ke's war-tools were of the rottenest sort.

Leaving Sung Kiang with an officer of his own in command, he returned to Shanghai where his achievement had caused a tremendous sensation. After a short rest he made two successive attempts on the stronghold of Sing Poo, and in the latter met with a severe reverse from the attack of Chung Wang, ablest general of the Tien Wang, who struck his camp after a forced march by night, cutting the Imperialists to pieces. General Ward, who had been freshly wounded in half a dozen places, fought his way out with a small following. Suspecting the purpose of the rebel chief, he had himself carried on a litter to Sung Kiang, and so strengthened the defenses that Chung Wang saw that assault would be futile. So the enraged commander burned and slaughtered in the vicinity of Shanghai till the English and French forces there faced his lines and compelled him to retire.

THERE comes now an interim in Ward's fighting toils, for half a score of unhealed wounds compelled him to go to Paris for treatment, but we find him back again in the early Summer of 1861 where his presence was sorely needed. The foreign Powers still pursued their hands-off policy and allowed the Taipings to sound their drums and tom-toms within earshot of the swarming treaty port. In a diplomatic way, indeed, formal recognition of the "Heavenly King" as the substantially dominant power was in the air.

Ward's coming shattered that intention, which, if carried out, would have destroyed the Empire. He grasped the situation and, through the Futai of the province of Cheh-Kiang, obtained directly from the Peking authorities a commission to raise and command an imperial Chinese levy. His experience told him that, well drilled and daringly handled, the natives had plenty of good soldier-stuff and would fight and die in their tracks.

His old officers flocked back with many new aspirants. Burgevine, Forrester, Butler, all Americans; Wedderburn, Bostwick and Savage, ex-English officers, and the latter not long before in the Taiping service; Franz Tartol, a grizzled Hungarian refugee who had fought under Kossuth; Barclay du Tolly, a name of power in the East Indian records; Turnhysen, a famous Austrian swordsman, and Bemberg, a former Swedish guardsman—these and a score of other good officers were eager to draw blade under Ward's banner. As most of them spoke the vernacular, they were admirable recruiting agents and they got promptly to work. There was plenty of material. Chinese affairs had become as "hell's brew" of sordid and unscrupulous activities and attracted adventurers from all Europe. There are known to have been some fifty foreign officers in the Taiping armies.

As soon as General Ward's purpose of raising a levy of Chinese troops became known it evoked a loud clamor among the foreign authorities at Shanghai and Peking. Sir Frederick Bruce, the British Minister, Consul-General Medhurst and Sir Harry Parkes, Revenue Commissioner, with the concurrence of the French officials, made bitter protest to Lord John Russell in London and to the Tsung li Yamen against this "bull in the china-shop." Ward was pronounced an outlaw and forbidden the liberties of Shanghai. He scoffed at the threat and withdrew to Sung Kiang, which he looked on as his citadel of strength, for it had an imperial garrison, and the Peking rescript making him a full-fledged Man-

darin of the first button bent all knees in homage to his rule. The Chinese treasury, too, was now behind him and it was no longer a problem of Tah-ke finance. He speedily levied some three thousand natives and drilled them incessantly for three months through his trained officer corps. He was waiting for the psychological moment, which soon arrived.

The Shanghai authorities had made a fresh convention with the "Heavenly King" to the effect that his bands should respect a zone of forty miles about the treaty port. He broke this pledge, as he had done all others, but two transcendent outrages turned the scale. Chung Wang had been sanctioned by the British authorities in occupying Ning-Po, on the edge of this zone, and he instantly let loose a pandemonium of the most fiendish outrage and brutality. Advancing thence into Kiang Su, he stormed the large city of Hung-Chau and his hordes enacted scenes of massacre and rapine almost unprecedented even in Taiping chronicle.

The savage chieftain, drunk with success, now openly proclaimed his purpose of making Shanghai, where there were only a few hundred blue-jackets and marines, and Sung Kiang his next objectives. In this emergency English eyes were opened to the hopelessness of coping with the situation by diplomacy. General Ward watched grimly from his eagle's nest, and let his Shanghai enemies fry in their own fat for a while, a prey to suspense and terror.

WARD FINDS A "MAGIC" TALISMAN

A SINGULAR thing happened at this time. At the principal temple of Confucius one day he discovered in one of the consecrated niches a scepter-like staff of ebony with a curiously carved head of jade minutely inscribed. The effect on his native valet was remarkable, and he learned that it was one of the great talismans of the Empire. When he appeared with it before his troops the next day they fell to their knees in ranks. Thenceforward he carried no sword, only this magic baton attached to his wrist with a thong. In the eyes of the Chinese, even the Taipings, it made him an invincible leader. Shortly afterward, indeed, it saved his life.

A large detachment from the main force of Chung Wang camped too near his city of Sung Kiang. Sallying forth with two regiments, he struck their position like a thunderbolt at night, cutting the force to pieces. He pressed the fugitives the same night to the walls of Quanfuling, which he assaulted and captured, and with it seized several hundred transports loaded with supplies.

THE clock now struck twelve for Frederick Ward. A courier arrived post haste from the Futai of Shanghai, ordering him to report there for cooperation with the Anglo-French contingent. He obeyed with two picked regiments, leaving Sung Kiang strongly garrisoned under Colonel Forrester. Admiral Sir James Hope had arrived and had insisted that General Ward should be fully recognized as the most efficient factor of salvation.

The first move was against Kaschiaou, which threatened the supplies of Shanghai. Ward and his Celestials carried the defences in the most gallant fashion, leaving Sir James Hope's contingent but little to do except gather in two thousand prisoners.

All the English officers were delighted with the splendid dash and confidence marking Ward's attack, and when Sir James Michel, the British Commander in Chief, arrived from Hong Kong with Sepoy reinforcements he agreed cordially with Admiral Hope when these two reviewed Ward's forces at Sung Kiang. They united in recommendations to Sir Frederick Brice, the British Minister at Peking, urging an entire change in policy with reference to the Taipings—that they should be crushed by the most efficient agent for this difficult work.

It was advised that Ward be commissioned by the Chinese Government to raise from 6,000 to 10,000 men and be invested with a large range of authority; that for his expenses, a portion of the English revenues should be devoted conjointly with Imperial financial support; and that this army should be equipped with the best Enfields, six light batteries and a small park of siege artillery. With such a force as this to operate against it, the terrible rebellion which had wrought such woes to the Middle Kingdom would be in a sure way of extirpation and British interests be best assured. This was a different official attitude indeed from that which had shortly before stigmatized Ward as little better than a ruthless outlaw!

The result of this change of front was an extravagantly phrased rescript from Peking that commissioned General Wood to raise and command 6,000 men, named him Admiral-General, and made him a Mandarin of the "Peacock Feather." With it came the famous "Yellow Jacket," equivalent in China to the Golden Fleece or the Order of the Garter.

The new force was designated Chun Chen Chün, "The Ever Victorious Army."

The American General left the enlisting of recruits to trusted lieutenants and himself took command in the front with a veteran column, General Staveley, the new Generalissimo on that Station, sometimes marching with him with a small detachment of Sepoys and marines. Staveley took the game with the spirit of a sportsman. He said he loved to see Ward and his pigtailed champions dash at the enemy like a fox-hunter negotiating a stiff hedge. It was clear that the American was looked on as peculiarly fit for a hard job, and that it was to be left pretty much to his sledge-hammer hitting.

In the capture of the city of Wang Kadza about this time, early in 1862, Ward experienced the magic virtue of the baton. From the corner of a house a Taiping leaped before him with leveled rifle. Ten feet away meant sure death. Ward grimaced, raised his talismanic staff and uttered some words in Chinese, while the other stood petrified with terror till a revolver-shot fired from the hip tumbled him over.

It was in April, 1862, that a council of war was held at Sung Kiang. Sir James Hope, General Staveley, the French Admiral Potret, General Ward, and Viceroy Lich being present. It was here that Ward's general plan was fully sanctioned. This showed great grasp of military strategy. The proposition was to capture the cities of Kahding, Sing Poo, Najaor, Tsaolin and lesser fortified places within a radius of forty miles from Shanghai. The gradual advance of the Chinese lines, if the expanding circle of bayonets could be made good, would shut down the supplies of the rebels, for they would be cut off from trade and the seaboard and compelled to live on an already devastated country. By and by Ward's increasing army would venture to attack Fuchau and Nanking, the Taiping capital. It was thought that, as their resources diminished, thousands of the Taiping soldiery would desert their standards. Army movements would be supported by a flotilla of small gunboats operating on the canals opening into the Grand Canal and the Yang-tse, which made the region of operations a web-work of waterways.

IT WAS on the eve of departure from Shanghai in April, 1862, to open this big campaign that General Ward wrote the last letter ever received from him in America—a letter very bold and prosaic, reticent as to details of his life, yet eloquent in its simplicity.

> I am still getting along, knocking the Chinese rebels in a style that I hope McClellan will the Southern rebels. I hope by Winter to have a fine army in the field, something that will make people stare out here. The Chinese make splendid fighters and I am determined to make a power out of them that will be respected. They all like me and I am by far considered the rising man of the country. I have had no less than seventeen wounds within the last year and a half, but they can't kill me, and when I get a few more I intend to make a definite demand on the Emperor. I believe my destiny is about being worked out here in China.

Poor Ward! The forefinger of fate had already begun to throw its shadow upon him.

Another letter of his was a magnificent revelation of the man, if the account is to be credited. This, according to the statement of one of his officers and his most intimate confidant, was a letter to Abraham Lincoln, inclosing a draft on New York for $50,000 as a contribution to the Federal cause and a substitute for the personal services which circumstances would not permit him to give.

Needless to linger on the details of the successful issue, which attended the assaults on Kahding, Sing Poo, Najaor and Tsaolin. General Ward in each case, magic baton in hand, headed the assaulting column through the breach made by artillery, and his men charged as, under him, they would have charged to the very gates of Tophet, resistless in their ardor, mad with the joy of battle. In the Tsaolin affair the gallant French Admiral Protet was shot dead at his side.

The campaign, however, was not one of uncheckered victory. The viceroy Lieh, in an attempt to operate on his own account, approached too near Suchau, to which Chung Wang, the most intrepid and enterprising of the Taiping commanders, had retired. Lieh was terribly beaten and

the flying Imperialists were closely followed by the victor, who retook Sing Poo and threatened Sung Kiang with an overwhelming force. Disaster there was prevented only by a forced march of Ward, who threw himself into his favorite stronghold and held it with a grip of steel.

Fortunately Li Hung Chang, just then rising into distinction, was making a demonstration against Nanking from the north, and the fears of the "Heavenly King" compelled the rapid retreat of his ablest soldier to reinforce the rebel capital.

The minute Ward's scouts informed him of this retreat, the American General took the offensive again and within the fortnight had reduced both Sing Poo and the Imperial city of Ning Po, the seizure and sacking of which had been one of the most wanton episodes of Taiping ferocity. The clearing of the forty-mile radius, which had been the first part of the plan of campaign, was now accomplished with the exception of one small stockaded fort. That taken, Ward felt that he could rest a while in organizing the larger movement. He had already received authority from Peking to augment the "Ever Victorious Army" to 10,000 men or more and had been given fresh assurances, in the most flowery phrase, of the esteem of the Emperor and his counsellors. A broad highway, leading to the goal of his ambition, opened before him.

DEATH IN THE HOUR OF VICTORY

TZ-KI fell before his assault like a house of cardboard, but one of the last hostile bullets fired pierced Ward's chest with a fatal wound. He was taken aboard a British gunboat commanded by Lieutenant Roderick Dew and was brought down to Ningpo.

Before he died he stated that the Futai of Shanghai owed him 110,000 taels, and Tah-ke 30,000 taels. Many visitors had been admitted to see him, and in the confusion the coat in which he was known to carry all his financial vouchers had been rifled of his little account-book. One story was that the book had been stolen by one of Ward's own officers and sold to the Chinese authorities. At all events this man was stated suddenly to have sent a draft for $40,000 to the United States, though known to be poor. No clue to Ward's supposedly large fortune was ever found, and his alleged Chinese debtors denied absolutely that they owed him a dollar. The whole business was obscured in such a thicket of craft and intrigue that no subsequent investigation ever sufficed to disentangle it. Only a beggarly pittance came to light—nothing at all as compared with the great wealth with which he had generally, and with sound reason, been credited.

Splendid funeral obsequies at the temple of Confucius in Sung Kiang were held, at which all the foremost personages of that part of China, native and foreign, attested their grief and paid their homage to the deeds of the man who had practically arrested the disintegration of the Empire. Three memorial shrines were ordained for him at Sung Kiang, at Singpoo, and at Ningpo. He was adopted into the Chinese pantheon and in his honor rites were maintained through which favor was to be propitiated at the beginning of military enterprises. From the Emperor down to the humblest mandarin it was acknowledged that this American soldier of fortune had been a most powerful factor in the saving of the commonwealth.

Certainly the annals of modern adventure are starred by no exploits more unique than those of this man, daring in imagination and no less daring in execution. He arrived in China at a most critical time, a person of no distinction, insignificant of aspect, without backing or influence. He literally forced his way and created his own instrumentalities. In two and a half years he made himself the most powerful factor in the Chinese situation, compelled the fullest recognition from the Imperial Government and from the Foreign Powers, and was invested by these two factors conjointly with authority to execute a task in which both had failed.

Fate ordained that he should not fully accomplish this, but in blazing the broad and certain trail and in molding the method his was the greater part of the work. "Chinese" Gordon inherited the "Ever Victorious Army" which Ward had forged and tempered and led to half a hundred victories. Had the American lived, it is humanly certain that he would have finished that work as thoroughly as his able successor did. But had Fate granted him that, it would not have rendered his personality one whit more salient, his genius as a shaper of events more imperious.

A LEAK IN THE JUNGLE TRADE

BY THOMAS SAMSON MILLER

TO BE AGENT in charge of a Niger trading-station is no small thing; you're a sort of king over irresponsible dusky subjects, who may look on you as an interloper, intrigue against you and trick and plague you until the very smell of a native nauseates you.

But Mr. Marshall knew Africans like a book. He was always patient with them; he used to say that savages were grown-up children and had to be handled like children.

"Anyway," he said, "it is not the bushmen that make trouble, but the mission-schooled, near-educated, slick hybrid product of civilization's make-belief philanthropy."

Indeed, it was one of the hybrids that ruptured the peace at Igobo and gave Mr. Marshall such a sick time.

I was pretty lucky to be sub-agent to Mr. Marshall, for you know, there are some awful ruffians on the river, and you're sent up there alone with one of them, just the two of you, agent and sub-agent. They do tell awful stories of what happens when the green one and the Old Coaster don't hit it off together.

Mr. Marshall never got mad at me, though I did some mighty foolish things: He always took the trouble to post me up on native superstitions. When I like a fellow, I like him. That's why I was so sorry for Mr. Marshall when his trouble came.

You see, he was married and had a baby, which he had never seen. That sort of cuts a fellow up—makes him think too much of home, so that he doesn't get any fun out of things. He had a cottage and about twenty acres in the South Downs. He had bought it with his bonuses, which the Company give you at the expiration of your three-year contract. You see, they don't pay much—just about enough to tide you over the six months in the old country every three years, when you have a bully time getting real beef into you.

But if you have done three years good service, which means that you have avoided trouble with the local chiefs, sent down fat balance-sheets every quarter and not worried the Agent General with complaints, you get a fat bonus. That is the Company's way of getting round the fellows who go all to pieces when they find they are "on their own" and get the swelled head or just bum 'round shooting "hippos" and leopards, or take to *pombe*—native beer.

Perhaps it was because Mr. Marshall was so keen on his bit of farm that he went so strong on the bonuses. He had already sunk three of them in his few acres, one cow, chickens, fruit and vegetable-garden, but, as he told me, he wanted a fourth to put the dream on a substantial basis.

Every mail-canoe would bring snapshots of the place, and the very canoe that brought the letter from the A. G., that smashed his hopes of this fourth bonus, brought also a picture of his wife, with the little baby girl on her shoulder, and a letter, which he let me see—same as I let him read mine.

Do you recognize your own baby, Sidney, dear? Fancy, she is nearly three years old, and you have never seen your own child! Does she look as you think she looks, dearest? She is so like you, Sidney, that sometimes I can't bear to look at her. It seems that my heart will break with longing to see you and fear of that dreadful fever. Oh, I am so glad it is nearly all over and that I shall soon have you with me, never to leave me again! You will get that bonus, dear, and will never have to go back to that savage country. It seems too wonderful to be true. You will be home with the May and the cuckoo. I have set the front garden to daffodils and narcissus, so that the little home will look gay to you, for you should be home in early Spring.

Mr. Marshall was awfully cut up over the letter, for we already knew that the A. G. would be mad when he got the Igobo balance-sheets. And there was his letter, which Mr. Marshall hated to open. At last he savagely tore it open and read it out to me. The A. G. went over the mystery of the shortage, then finished up with very nasty insinuations:

I am obliged to accept your explanations—the explanations of an officer of the Company. But it does seem to me that were I in your place, I would, if only for my good name's sake, make a determined effort to discover and stop this leakage. I very much fear that the London accountants will refuse to O. K. your balance-sheets, but will debit the shortage to your wage-account.

He dropped the letter on the sheet that served us for tablecloth and his tired eyes rested on the photo of his wife and baby.

Suffering Moses! "Make a determined effort to discover the leakage!" Hadn't we *lived* the past months in determined effort?

I couldn't bear to see Mr. Marshall looking that way, so, just to keep his mind occupied, I went over the old, old ground—that it was one of the Sierra Leonese clerks in the barter store—they are a no-account mission-schooled bunch, to whom a little education is as oil to a snake's slipperiness. I opined that one of the rascals was passing out stuff to a confederate.

Mr. Marshall took me up irritably, "Yes, yes; but who and how?" And not waiting my answer, he smashed his fist to the table, exclaiming vehemently, "If I discover the filching fingers, I'll teach that native a trick that will furnish him nightmares for the rest of his unnatural life. I never had trouble before—I've always treated my blacks decently and been treated decently by them."

He stopped suddenly and threw up his head, listening to a shrill wailing that sobbed out above the nightly tom-tom dance in the compound. Then he flung out, "'Mammy palaver,' again," and caught up his cane and hurried out.

I snatched up my revolver and followed. We came on the negroes unnoticed, until Mr. Marshall's white figure pushed among them, when they fell back, like quarreling school-children before the head-master.

In the center of a ring of natives stood a girl and her father. The father was Ogo the tanner, who lived in the village just outside the compound. Before them were two suitors for the girl. One was Tiny, the giant whipper of the trading station; the other was a clerk named Mohara. Ogo was cunningly pitting one against the other, offering his girl to the highest bidder.

I looked at Attalia to see if she had any preference, for it didn't seem right that she should have no say. But she just stood there, her face a blank, her eyes looking down.

Tiny had exhausted his resources. All his worldly wealth was heaped on the sands before the greedy Ogo. There were trade cottons, cowries, a leopard's skin and a bottle of "trade" gin. His big, flat, homely phiz was set in an expression of sullen surrender. But Mohara's sleek features wore

a wicked smile of triumph, for he not only outbid his gigantic rival, but pawned his future wage-slips for an alarm-clock, or what Ogo called, "One dem ting-a-ling-tings what done tell you when de mornin' is come," and a harmonica.

Meanwhile the interested circle of mammies and negroes had split up into two factions and Tiny's faction had set up the wailing and shrieking that had brought us from the house. That's the way with them —you think some one is being killed, only to discover that it is some frivolous quarrel.

When Mr. Marshall appeared, he at once became the high court of appeal. He gave the girl to Mohara, though stipulating that he was not to marry her until he had paid over the clock and harmonica, for Mr. Marshall knew that once Mohara got the girl he would forget the obligations, which would make more "mammy palaver," and that's a thing you get to hate in Africa more than you hate fever.

"I'd rather make up Tiny's shortage myself than see the girl go to that slab-footed, slovenly, wheezing Mohara, who has two wives already," I said.

"What beats me," said Mr. Marshall thoughtfully, "is where Mohara gets all that stuff. There was a pot of that last shipment of pomatum in his pile on the sand and to the best of my belief I have not noticed any pomatum charged up to his wage-account. I've been suspecting that gentleman all along, but didn't like to let my feelings do an injustice."

MR. MARSHALL surprised me. That I should be his intimate companion for many months without suspecting this antagonism to the clerk—I had the feeling myself against Mohara—sort of depressed me with a sense of shut-outness. But Mr. Marshall explained.

"You will perhaps take the station over after me and it does not give a native a chance when you blacklist him at the start; besides, you'd find him out. That man gets on my nerves!" he suddenly flung out. "His shuffling carpet-slippers, shifty eyes and whining Christianity jar me intensely. But I wouldn't be unfair, so I sat down on myself."

That was Mr. Marshall all over and that was how he got along so well with the savages—by being absolutely fair and patient with them. I asked him why he didn't exchange Mohara with another agent or send him down to the Agent General. In answer he told me a curious history.

We had got back to the chop-room, where we fortified ourselves with a bottle of fizz against the malarial mists that drifted like vaporous ghosts over the compound after dark. Mohara was a political asset at Igobo. To my surprise, I learned that the clerk was twin brother to the fanatical Emir of Illorin—the fierce, turbaned, swarthy old warrior who came every third moon with his ruffian retinue for his lien of thirty bags of salt, which the Company paid him for their trade treaty. It seemed impossible that Mohara could be brother to such a fine-looking man. Mr. Marshall explained how one brother had led the outdoor, strenuous life of his forefathers, fighting, raiding and "razziaing," until the Company put him on their pension list; whereas Mohara had become semi-civilized, Christianized, dogmatized and trade-ginized.

It seems that when the twins were born, the late Emir, following the custom of the country, ordered one of the babes thrown into the execution pond, that being the simplest way to avoid future dissensions consequent on two claimants to the Emiralty. But there was in Illorin at the time a political officer of the Company in disguise. He bribed one of the harem attendants to steal the baby, whom he sent down river, thence to the coast mission-school. There the baby Mohara so thrived on the gin-bottle, filled with innocent goat's milk, and took so readily to collects and catechisms that he became the pride of the mission and eventually came into the Company's service.

About this time the old Emir of Illorin died, and the present peppery Haj Ahmed ascended the Emiralty. Being caught on a fanatical wave of Mohammedanism that blew from the east on the fall of Khartum, he started out at once to drive the whites from the Niger. The Company sent up a machine-gun and brought forward Mohara as a rival claimant for the Emiralty.

Haj Ahmed quickly signed a peace compact and the Company sent Mohara to Igobo as a sort of threat to hold over his brother. But, curiously enough, the fiery Emir developed a kind of pride in his brother's civilization bluff, so that Mohara's presence at Igobo helped to keep things quiet.

"But you had better read up the treaties," said Mr. Marshall. Then he told me to go out and stop the tom-tom dance in the compound, as otherwise we wouldn't get any work out of the natives tomorrow.

I went across to the dancers. I went quietly, for I like to watch the pirouetting forms, to watch the mammies' twistings and bouyant tip-toeing, and to listen to the throb of the tom-toms by night. So it was that, as I was sneaking toward the torch-lit group, I heard chesty sobs coming from a giant baobob that stands in the center of the compound. I jumped back, for the tree has all kinds of superstitions woven round it. The sobs sounded like the expiring breaths of some wounded monster. Then I saw a great black shape huddled at the gnarled roots of the tree, and peering close, I saw Tiny, the whipper. I could just make out his badge of office, which was a vicious "hippo" thong, stuck carelessly in his loincloth.

I felt sorry for Tiny, but I told him it was his own fault that he lost the girl; that he should save up his wage-slips, instead of blowing them in on *pombe*. I told him to quit sulking—said there were plenty more girls in the village. He shook his great bullet head.

"I done hab feelings for dat gal, an' she done hab feelings for me," he groaned, and added impassionately, "I sure done go kill dat Mohara."

And that is just what he would do, not in jealous rage or viciousness, but simply because it seemed to his unimaginative mind the easiest way to gain his end. Of course I gave it to him sharp.

"Get up!" I kicked him in the ribs. "Be one big man. Forget it! Get up! Shake yourself!"

He got up and shook himself literally and listlessly. It was most comical, only it was tragic, too. I tell you, it made me feel bad; and there was the girl, too, who "done hab feelings." I suddenly made up my mind to help him out. You see, Mr. Marshall had said that Mohara was not to have the girl until he was able to deliver all the purchase goods, which could not be until he got his monthly wage-slip. So I told Tiny that if he would get me a blue-and-gold butterfly—I've got a rare collection—I would give him the goods by which he would beat Mohara to it.

"O-o-h aye, massa!" he cried out. "I sure done get you dat butterfly!"

"All right," I said, "That's a trade." Then I went over and scattered the negroes to their huts and returned to the house, putting my head into Mr. Marshall's room to call out my discovery that Attalia did have a preference. I said, "Oh, Mr. Marshall, that girl *does* like Tiny."

"What girl? Oh yes, of course."

But I knew he was thinking of the photo under his pillow and trying to feed three people on the products of one cow, a few chickens and a truck-garden, which in turn led to intricate figuring of balance-sheets. I could see his bent head all the morning from where I worked with my Kroomen, lightering three Illorin trade canoes into barges, ready to ship to the delta when the rains came and the river rose high enough.

Every now and then I found myself looking over to the big store and wondering if one of the rascally clerks was thieving at that moment. And it was fun to see the crowds that accompanied any negro who was the fortunate possessor of a trade-slip, just as the kids at home dance round a boy with a penny to spend at Mother Jones' sweetshop.

So it was that I saw Ogo come out, wearing a plumed helmet and a frock coat with a collar and dicky. I called out to Mr. Marshall that his hoodoo was gone, for we called the frock coat his hoodoo because it had been sold scores of times, only to be traded back each time at a discount, which was the Company's patient way of dealing with the negroes' changing fancy.

But suddenly I noticed that the tail pockets bulged. I acted on an instant's inspiration; I yelled to a watchman to close the gates and dashed for Ogo. He started running for the walls, but a mental vision of the mother-and-baby photo gave speed to my legs and I caught him just as he was about to climb the wall. I caught him by the coat-collar, and next moment I held the coat in my hand, while Ogo clambered over the wall in his dicky and nakedness. I took the coat up to Mr. Marshall.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

For answer, I began emptying the tail-pockets on the chop table. There were two razors, one alarm-clock, three gilt rings, two packets of fishhooks, one glass of pomatum, two harmonicas and a mammy's

scarf! And that coat had been out on scores of such journeys!

Mr. Marshall took it very quietly.

"Come," he said. "We'll hold palaver right now."

We walked over and entered the barter store, where a deep and guilty silence held. Mr. Marshall held up the coat.

"Who issued this?" he demanded.

Four ebony clerks yelled with the glee of innocence, "Prince Mohara, sah!"

You see, Mohara had always insisted on his title of prince from his fellow clerks, but he didn't look very princely now.

II

IF THERE is anything I hate, it is holding palaver. You don't learn anything, but you do get awful headaches. The African considers lying an accomplishment. Through all that afternoon the argument went back and forth, with wholesale accusations, factional lying, sworn alibis and invective, until the sun flamed down the jungle and the river turned to leaden gray.

Mr. Marshall dismissed the negroes to the supper-pots, all but Mohara, whose guilt was the one established fact. He ordered Tiny to lock him up in the adobe. Mr. Marshall was afraid of punishing Mohara, lest his brother the Emir take offense. That would mean the loss of the Illorin trade, which would destroy Mr. Marshall's recovered hope in his fourth bonus, now that the thefts were stopped. Yet, he was too angry to let Mohara escape altogether, so when I told him how, when I came up river, I saw the agent at Abutshi punish a thief by having his hands wound up in crude rubber until they resembled two stumps and then set a saucy piccanniny to feed him before a jeering crowd twice a day for two weeks, Mr. Marshall called to the watchman to bring Tiny.

He instructed him to bind Mohara's hands in gluey lumps. He had some trouble in making the giant understand, but when Tiny at last said, "I savvy, sah," we thought he had, both of us for the moment forgetting the personal trouble between the clerk and whipper. But I noticed a broad grin on Tiny's flat phiz.

Presently Mr. Marshall sniffed and said, "Who can be boiling rubber at this time of the night? Are there any rubber-traders in?"

At that instant a fearful yell throbbed above the night-singing of the crickets, to end in as sudden and fearful a throttling.

It came to me in a second what was happening. "Tiny—Mohara!" I gasped, and ran out and across the compound to where a group of blacks danced excitedly round something on the ground. When I got there, I saw a scene that did not seem human.

The naked, dancing figures, looked like demons in the smoky light of flickering torches. On the ground, sitting on his big haunches, was Tiny, with the wretched Mohara held in a vise between his knees, the giant's dirty loincloth stuffed into his mouth, where it had throttled the yell that startled us. While Tiny's huge paws held the wrists, Mohara's hands were plunged into individual pots of boiling rubber. And Tiny's tongue teased saucily:

"You tink you done get Attalia. Bera well, I done teach you sometings!"

I kicked the pots into a thousand fragments and then I saw Mr. Marshall haul Tiny off his victim and heard him call to a native to go to the cook for lard or oil. He had the clerk carried over to the barracks, then sent for his own mattress for him, and himself dressed the tortured hands. Then he left Mohara to the care of his two unintelligent wives. We walked soberly back to the house. Mr. Marshall slumped into his seat.

"There goes my ghost of a chance in that bonus," he said dejectedly; then, "My heavens! what luck!"

Presently he raised his head listening, as I, too, was listening, to a tom-tom drumming a message over the swamp—you could pick out the Morse-like taps and pauses. The tom-tom was evidently in the neighboring village. Then down the swamp came an answering tom-tom, a faint drumming, almost drowned by the crickets and at times lost altogether in the cackling half-laugh of a hyena.

"There goes the news to Illorin, from tom-tom to tom-tom, down plains, skirting forests, to the palace of Haj Ahmed," said Mr. Marshall. "He will be down on us like a whirlwind in about five days!"

"Does he think so much of Mohara as that?" I asked.

"Any excuse for a palaver if he is spoiling for a fight."

"How will you receive him?"

But he merely shrugged his shoulders

and fell into a brooding study that lasted the whole five days—such tense, taut days, with the natives in the village and the negroes in the compound turning their beady eyes toward Illorin with tragic expectancy, and a group of thumb-sucking piccaninnies camped solidly before Mohara's hut for a glimpse of the "thief prince."

The only unconcerned being was Tiny, the unintentional author of the whole mischief; he spent all his spare moments hunting the blue-and-gold butterfly that was to get him Attalia.

ON THE fifth day the drums were talking again, and it was not necessary to ask the interpreter what they were saying, for suddenly the village was as quiet as a rabbit-warren when a hawk shows in the air. The laborers in the compound worked with cocked ears.

It was sundown when he came. A flash of steel accouterments showed far off down the mimosa scrub; then we saw the Emir's pennant and presently his white horse and then the ruffian himself, for all the world like a robber-knight of medieval times.

I called Mr. Marshall and asked whether I should issue guns.

"No," he said, this wretched business will make noise enough as it is. I'll receive him open-palms and dash, which means in friendship and with presents. Bring me my sporting rifle; he has often coveted it."

I got the rifle reluctantly, for I looked to get it myself when Mr. Marshall went home. A frightened watchman ran up, shouting, "O-o-h, here comes Haj Ahmed! Give us guns, massa! Let us shut the gates!"

"No, let there be no offense," said Mr. Marshall. "Leave the gates wide!"

So we fixed the chop-room for palaver and then seated ourselves at the table, where we could see the compound and the plains. We saw the Emir's party stop and off-saddle for sundown prayers. Their cry of "Allah il Allah!" snapped on the evening quiet like threats. Then they all sprang into their saddles again.

Mr. Marshall rolled a cigarette and passed the tobacco-jar to me, but I was ashamed lest he see my shaking hands. I was listening to the jingle of swords against iron stirrups, which suddenly ceased as the Emir drew rein at the compound gates. His black eyes were two live coals. The aigret on his turban was as steady as a cathedral spire. He made a motion with his right hand and half a dozen ruffians, dismounting, advanced with broken steps to the tinny blare of seven-foot horns.

They headed directly for Mohara's hut. Mr. Marshall understood now that the Emir was carrying out some play of his own and had no intention of entering the compound personally. So he called to a negro to go and bring Mohara. "Go and tell Mohara to come look me one-time."

But the negro shook his head, saying, "Mohara no live, sah."

"What do you mean by 'no live?'"

"Him all-same dead." The man actually grinned.

Mr. Marshall said nothing more, but got up and went over to Mohara's hut. I, too, went along.

Mohara was stretched out on Mr. Marshall's mattress in sham death.

"Come, Mohara, quit this nonsense! Get up!" commanded Mr. Marshall. He put his hand to the rascal's shoulder and shook him, the body rolling limply this way and that. Mohara was acting out some play fixed up over the tom-toms. He played 'possum like an Indian. Then Mr. Marshall made the mistake of appealing to the negro's better nature, which wasn't there. He coaxed: "Come, Mohara, you know how I regret your injury. Stop this foolishness and I'll see you do not lose by it." At that moment he was pushed aside by the Emir's ruffians. I saw him flush at the insulting push of those black paws, yet he stood quietly and unresentfully aside, absently watching the men spread out a Sudan cloth and lift Mohara on to it. They shouldered him and retreated with funeral steps to the rest of the party in the gate, where they swung the clerk into a litter and rode away.

"What does it all mean?" I asked.

"A sham death to wipe out the insult to the Emir's blood! The man is utterly frivolous."

"This is the finish!" said I dejectedly.

"To my bonus, yes," he replied.

But I had not meant that. I was wondering if the Emir would fight. Mr. Marshall, forgetting the Emir, had dropped into a seat and taken out Her letter. Presently he dropped sentences that let me into his thoughts.

"This life eats into one—takes the snap

and go out of one. The Company has us by the throat.—If I could go home and get back into the old rut—rising to set time—snatching breakfast as if seconds were hours, then rushing to the city, to browse all day in steam heat—day on day the same faces, same little worries, same lunch-counter. I tried it once—the year I married. But it was like a madhouse. I found myself, the very blood in me crying for the open skies, the sun and still-growing palms, the sheening river, the call of the forest-birds and the appointless days. Oh, no, the Company has us body and soul—unless my farm and independence goes through. My God! it has got to go through! I'll drum up trade, to make up for the Illorin loss. I'll try the Iddah district—there's rubber out that way, if only I can tempt the natives into gathering it."

HE TOLD me to stock a canoe with barter goods. When this was done he got in the craft.

I watched the bending naked backs of his score of negroes until the canoe was lost in the jungle haze, then turned to walk up the compound, but found myself looking into the face of a little, caved-in negro whose million-wrinkled skin must have withstood a thousand years of sun. His little black eyes were pin-point holes to wells of cunning. He wanted to see the "big white massa." I pointed to the canoe, now a faint smudge against the distant jungle green, and asked him what he wanted. He said he came from Haj Ahmed with a message for the "big white massa," and that it was, "no fit to tell any one else."

I "dashed" him gin and tried to coax it out of him with beads, but he stubbornly refused to give me his message. So I held him until Mr. Marshall should return.

The rains that the crickets had been heralding for a week past now came. By the time Mr. Marshall returned they had become steady torrents and the sun was but a reminiscence.

He had had bad luck, striking the apathy that falls over the natives with the rainy season, so that not the gaudiest of his trade cottons nor the most smelling of his pomatums could entice them to any effort at rubber-gathering. But he puckered up when he heard of the messenger from Haj Ahmed. He sent for him and an interpreter to come to the chop-room right away. The interpreter translated into trade-English.

"Him, Emir Haj Ahmed, say him fit to mak' ivory trade. Him say him hab more ivory dan you count three times on you two hands. Him say you fit to go look him at Illorin and mak' trade."

Mr. Marshall said: "Where does he get all this ivory? You know the elephants have long since been killed off in the Illorin district."

"Him say him Emir's father done hide dem tusks when dem Arab devils done *razzia*."

"It's a trap to get you into his power," I told Mr. Marshall. But Mr. Marshall's eyes were afire—I could just see his soul reaching out to those thirty tusks, which would put the quarter's balance-sheets in such fine shape and would, probably, retrieve the bonus.

"It's a plot to get you into his power," I repeated. "If he wants to make trade, why is it that no Illorin trade has come in since Mohara's punishment? Besides, if he had all that ivory we should have heard of it long ago."

"I have heard of it," said Mr. Marshall. "It used to be common talk that the old Emir buried his tusks when he fled before a party of Tippo Tib's slavers, who came down the Niger, burning, pillaging, slaving, and left that hatred of Arab blood that is still the theme of the local minstrelsy. Oh, yes, the ivory is there." Unconsciously he turned his face toward Illorin, gazing out at the mimosa scrub as if he were looking into the Golden Gates of Heaven. It may have been just fever.

"You won't go to Illorin?" I begged.

"Why not?" he scoffed.

I was ashamed to tell him what I feared. I looked at the little old negro and said I wouldn't trust him.

Mr. Marshall looked at me. "I don't mean to, not more than is necessary. I'll chain him to a porter, and he'll know what to expect if there is any treachery."

I argued that the negro was about the least important person in Illorin and the most likely selection for sacrifice.

"Sacrifice?" said Marshall.

"Yes, if he leads you into ambush."

"Oh, that's the bug in your head, eh?" He laughed. "You'd better forget that, or you'll have two weeks' worry while I am gone. Have thirty men ready to march

at dawn—that's giving them a forty-pound tusk apiece."

When Mr. Marshall spoke like that there was nothing more to say. I asked if I should issue guns.

"No, this is going to be a moral tussle between the Emir and me. But you can see that a tom-tom goes along. I've known its throb to eat a couple of miles out of every march."

But though his eyes were shining, his face was thin and tired. Suddenly I gulped out, "Let me go, Mr. Marshall, please!"

"No; your inexperience would make trouble where I shall slide round it. Have the men lined up at dawn. I think eight days' rations apiece will do."

I had the men lined up next morning—thirty naked, smelling, irresponsible savages, shedding the rain from their oiled bodies like ducks. Mr. Marshall came down, wrapped in his big raincoat, with a sou'wester tied to his head with a mammy's neckerchief.

I asked, "Can't I keep in touch with you from day to day?"

"Don't worry," he said, and felt in his breast pocket to make sure he had not forgotten the photo. Then holding out his hand, he bade me good-by and turned to the negroes. "March, you rascals!"

I stood in the rain until the column and its tom-tom were lost in the drenched plain.

III

HOW quiet it was at Igobo! How wretchedly the days dragged! I got the hatches on the barges, ready for their leisurely crawl to the delta port, and then there seemed nothing more to do. There was no trade, for the people shivered in their huts, without heart for anything. Even Tiny's nuptials passed off without dancing; for he brought me in the butterfly and I fulfilled my promise, debiting my wage-account with the required articles for Attalia's purchase.

But on the fifth night, as I was playing solitaire, I heard the watchman challenge, then Mohara's familiar wheeze in reply. The cards were instantly forgotten; I swung round to approaching shuffling steps and saw Mohara standing in the open entrance to the chop-room. He was dressed in a long indigo-dyed burnoose and white turban, which gave him a superficial dignity and remarkable likeness to his throned brother. But the eyes held the old shiftiness and his salute was obsequious.

I teased, "Ah, ah, Mohara! Come back to life?"

"Oh, sah," he said, "that was all make-believe. My brother, sah, is barbarian not acquaint' with civilized customs," he crowed. "I come back, sah, because it is not possible for educate' man to live all-same bushman; a score wives has my brother, and not in all Illorin is there such necessity commodity as clock or trade gin. May I have lil gin, sah, for stomach pains consequent on barbarous foods?"

Mohara's English was a burlesque of fourth-reader and "Markham's Complete English Phrases."

"So gin brought the lamb back to the fold, eh?"

He protested such a "'sinuation," adding that which brought me to my feet on the instant.

"I come dutifully to inform plot against Mr. Marshall," he whined.

I caught him by his dirty throat, and his story came in gulps and choked gurgles—such a story as I had feared. Haj Ahmed had laid out to ambush Mr. Marshall and give his hands a boiling-rubber treatment, and then—what did Haj Ahmed do to his prisoners? What didn't he do!

There leaped into my mind a vision of the farm in the South Downs, then the mother-and-baby picture. Sentences from her letter stood out like scare headlines in a cheap newspaper. It came to me that if anything happened to Mr. Marshall I should be the one to take to her the story.

I had to go to Mr. Marshall's help; some force took possession of me—drove me. I sounded the muster alarm—three sharp strokes on an old ship's bell that hung on the veranda. The negroes mustered like crows on spilled corn. I shut down the station as far as padlock could secure it, then scared up every flintlock, rifle and machete and took up Mr. Marshall's trail.

The rain and the gloom and the silence and fear of those marches! I'd ask Mohara about his brother, very cautious to hide the fear that prompted the curiosity. Mohara had not hit it off with his brother; their ways had diverged too much and Mohara had a

hunch that the Emir had cunningly trapped him to Illorin to expose his gin weakness, physical degeneracy and hated Christianity to the contempt of his ruffian court, and thus lay forever the Company's bogey claimant to the Emiralty.

Then the forest gloom closed in on us and the naked feet of my poor men were cut with hidden poisoned stakes, or a brushed bush would release a weighted spear. Cold chills chased down my spine like wind-wavelets over hay grass and I knew I was a coward. We entered a narrow "wady," with precipitous basalt walls, sentinelled with grotesque cacti, which took on fiendish shapes. These might have been the enemy leering down on us. The negroes huddled together and said the place was "ju-ju." Then one night a gun was stolen from the camp-fire circle, right under the sentry's nose. It was as if a doctor had discovered an incurable insidious disease in my body. And the next day the enemy showed himself on the top ridges and bawled insults at us all the way. I did not then know that insults were often the sole offense of African warfare.

Suddenly the *wady* opened out in a crater-like dip that nursed a verdured plain. In the distance were two score sheepskin tents, the largest of which flew the Illorin flag. Now the enemy swarmed like roaches down the precipices and massed in the ravine. I could go forward, but not back. And I was afraid to go forward, for fear of what I might find.

Then my nose was shocked by a pungent stench of rubber. Searching the brush, I found two pots of rubber swung over dead fires. And then, a hundred yards distant, was cigarette evidence of Mr. Marshall's camp and ambush. I did not know what to do. I tried to think, but the black, cruel eyes of Haj Ahmed, as I had seen them that day at the gate, pierced my brain and confused thought.

Then I saw my negroes waiting my orders and looking at me curiously. The poor fellows had learned to lean on Mr. Marshall and in their simple faith they judged all whites from his fine example. I caught breath and then rage flamed through me. I pointed to the Emir's flag and stepped out, the men docilely following. I wondered that none of the Emir's men came out to oppose me, or that those in the *wady* did not assail our rear.

I WAS looking straight ahead, asking myself what I ought to do, when my heart suddenly leaped into my throat, for there, in the open flap of the Emir's tent, stood Haj Ahmed and Mr. Marshall. Mr. Marshall was smiling at me. I ran forward, my feet obeying an impulse.

Mr. Marshall greeted me with, "Hello! What brings you here?"

I stared at him—I tried to speak—then I pointed back to Mohara and mumbled out the story of the Emir's intended ambush and rubber torture.

Mr. Marshall looked puzzled at first, then his face cleared and he smiled. "Oh you ——." He was going to say "simpleton," but checked the word. Instead, he held out his hand and said, "You've had a bad time of it, old man."

He spoke in dialect to the Emir, then linked my arm and led me away to a tent, where he let me down gently.

"You don't size up the negroes' frivolity," he said, and then, to my unspoken question, "Oh, yes, he probably meant to have a little sport with these hands of mine—anyway, it was touch-and-go, only I chose my own battlefield and defeated him. Fight the native on a moral battlefield and you win out every time; go to him open-palms, dare and surprise. That's what I did. While his ruffians were doing funny stunts around the rubber-pots and boasting what they were going to do to the 'Christian Dog,' I slipped away from my men through the scrub, passed the Emir's sentries and popped up before the rascal himself as he sat before a whole-roasted sheep. 'Emir,' I said, 'I've come to make ivory trade.' Don't stare so, boy, remember he is twin brother to Mohara, and twin soul. You wouldn't balk at tackling Mohara.

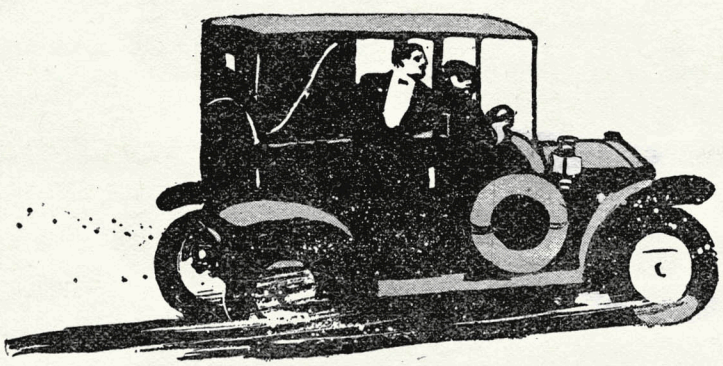
"The Emir nearly choked on a piece of smoking meat, and, before he knew it, had invited me to eat, after which it is religion with a Mohammedan to be on his best behavior to his guest. You must get posted on these little things, old man—they're worth a whole lot more than machine-guns in getting you out of scrapes. Lord! it has been feasting, and arguments as to whether Allah made the stars before He made the moon, or *vice versa*, and ivory palaver ever since. To-morrow we start for Igobo with over a thousand pounds of ivory to go in this quarter's balance-sheets!"

He wrung my hand and told me I had done a plucky thing in coming as I had, though I think he just said that to ease me.

How different the return marches—the throbbing tom-tom that livened the twinkling black legs, and the negroes' chant about the "big massa." Mr. Marshall came out of his silences to talk about taking down the balance-sheets himself. He said that he would speak the word to the A. G. about giving me the agency; that he would take Mohara down, as, since his exposure at Illorin, he was no longer a political asset. He "dashed" me his sporting rifle, and promised to send out some golf-sticks when he got home.

But when he held my hand, down at the bottom of the trading compound, one foot in his canoe, the balance-sheets wrapped in tarpaulin and gripped under his left arm, and his heart reaching out to white faces and cities of stone and chiming cathedral spires and the bit farm, I looked at the sheds and the sodden thatches of the village huts, listening the while to the wizardly incantations to the thunder-god and I tried ever so hard to say, "God speed." I tried to send my respects to Mrs. Marshall, but I hated that he should hear the pebble in my throat.

I stood there, looking after his canoe, until his handkerchief had become only a little white dot in the distance; then I walked up to the empty chop-room.



THE ADVENTURE OF THE FRENCH CAPTAIN

A TALE OF THE ADVENTURE SYNDICATE, LIMITED

by GEORGE BARTON

"AND Bagdad, in the days of its greatest glory," said Bromley Barnes, gazing reflectively from the bay window of his Washington Square apartments, "never possessed half the possibilities for mystery, romance and adventure that are to be found in the large cities of these United States."

Forward looked at the old man with a trace of skepticism in his big brown eyes.

"They're human bee-hives, all right," he admitted, "but I can't see much in it beyond a frenzied struggle for wealth and pleasure."

Barnes gazed out at the green of the park with its big white marble arch before replying.

"You're like most men in the legal profession, Forward," he said finally; "much dabbling in the intricacies of the law has made you a skeptic."

A low, self-satisfied chuckle came from the corner of the room. Cornelius Clancy, faithful factotum of the master of the establishment, winked mischievously at the limb of the law.

"We have no Grand Viziers," continued Barnes, ignoring the muffled interruption, "and we may be a little short on Caliphs, one-eyed Calenders and Royal Mendicants, but we have men and women whose actual experiences cause the make-believe stories of the Turks and Persians to seem pale and prosaic in comparison. Here's the recipe: Pour a million human beings in the seething cauldron which you may call New York, Chicago, Boston, or any of our large cities, stir them up with hate and love, make their interests and ambitions clash, and if the result doesn't spell romance and adventure, then my hair has grown gray in vain!"

"Perhaps there's something in what you say," conceded the lawyer.

"Something in what I say!" Barnes retorted explosively. "There's everything in what I say! Bully stories bump up against you every day in the week and you don't know it! The man that sits beside you in the subway train may be an embezzler; the smiling woman you pass on the street probably has a heart-affair, which, if properly told, would melt a hardened first-nighter into tears. Why, the chances are that I couldn't throw a stone out of this window without hitting a person whose life would furnish a plot better than anything you read in fiction."

Forward smiled feebly. He spoke softly: "I'll grant you the possibility of an adventure, but you speak of them as if they hung on every bush."

Barnes rubbed his hand across his bald head with unnecessary vigor.

"Forward," he cried, "you're the most persistent doubter I ever met. But you can't phase your Uncle Bromley. I'll go out for a dozen nights and bring you back an adventure every time!"

"I thought you retired from the detective business, Chief," ventured Clancy.

"So I have," was the prompt rejoinder. "You couldn't drag me back into that sort of thing with a double team of horses."

The others exchanged smiling glances.

"And you wouldn't even go out to solve some of those knotty customs cases?" insinuated Forward.

"Not if I knew it," replied the old man. "But I'm willing to convince you youngsters that all the poetry and romance has not been squeezed out of life—that is, if you'll help."

"We'll accept your challenge," shouted Forward, "and we'll call ourselves 'The Adventure Syndicate—Limited!'"

"Sounds good," smiled the old man, entering into the spirit of the sport, "but why the 'Limited'?"

"Oh, that's just a business word put in for your sake."

"For my sake?"

"Yes," laughed the lawyer, "it means that your responsibility in this scheme is limited. If you don't make good, we're going to be magnanimous. We'll think as much of you as if you hadn't entered on this Don Quixote enterprise."

"All right, boys," agreed Barnes.

"Now, what about the first adventure?" asked Forward.

The old man smiled blandly. "I don't know," he said, "but the other day you told me you had been living in New York over twenty years and had never been on the Bowery. You said that, for all you knew to the contrary, there wasn't any Bowery, except maybe a myth invented for the benefit of song-writers and vaudeville artists. You're the first New Yorker that ever admitted ignorance of anything. You deserve consideration. I'll go to the Bowery with you right now."

"But," objected the lawyer, looking at the immaculate evening dress of the Chief, "I thought you were going to the Opera to-night?"

"So I was, but I'm willing to swap it for something of human interest. The Bowery for me."

Clancy sighed.

"I'm afraid you're both going to be dreadfully disappointed. The Bowery's perfectly respectable. It's like any other business street in New York."

IN SPITE of this warning they made the trip to the once-famous thoroughfare. As Clancy predicted, they were completely disillusioned. They passed one of the modern moving-picture shows. Barnes shook his head sadly.

"Nothing the same; since Tony Pastor died, the whole town seems different."

Just as he spoke a ball of crumpled paper fell directly in front of the old man. The others kept moving, but Barnes halted them.

The next moment he was pulling out a

piece of narrow tape which had been enclosed in the paper and which made itself apparent as the ball was torn apart. The tape was about two feet in length and it contained a message written in a rather shaky handwriting. The Chief moved under a convenient electric light. Forward and Clancy each held an end of the tape while the old man read as follows:

"I have been kidnaped and locked up in the garret of this house like a rat in a trap. If the person who finds this note will notify the police he will earn the prayers and the everlasting gratitude of Henri La Rue, Captain of the French merchant steamer known as the *Mermaid*."

Barnes turned and looked at the front of the house. It was an ordinary four-story dwelling with an attic. A store on the ground floor was used as a delicatessen shop. A private entrance on the side showed a sign that proclaimed "Apartments to Rent." Clancy spoke to the old man.

"What do you think of it, Chief?"

"I think it's a bit fishy," interjected Forward, who seemed out of sorts.

"Well, it does smell of the sea," admitted Barnes laughingly.

"You're not going to bother with it, are you?" asked the lawyer in surprise.

"I'm going to investigate it, if that's what you mean," answered the old man good-naturedly.

Without any further ado Barnes hurried to the private entrance of the house and, finding the door unlocked, walked in. He ran up the narrow stairway, followed by Forward and Clancy. They soon found themselves on the top landing. A door confronted them on either side. The Chief tapped on the one facing the street.

"Hello," he shouted, "is Captain La Rue there?"

"Yes!" cried an eager voice. "Who is it?"

"A friend who wishes to help you," was the reply.

"Thank heaven for that!" was the fervent response. "Have you a key?"

"Clancy," directed the Chief, "find the janitor and bring him here at once. Tell him if he don't hurry we'll smash the door!"

Before many minutes the janitor appeared. At first he was insolent and threatening, but when Barnes made known his identity his manner changed.

"The room was just rented this afternoon," he said apologetically, "and honest, gents, I ain't got no right to let yer in."

"You're detaining a man there against his will!" snapped the detective.

"I ain't doin' nothin' of the kind," was the sulky rejoinder. "He was put there by his brother!"

"His brother?"

"Yes, Mr. James, who rented the room. He said his brother'd been drinkin' heavy and that he didn't want him to get out till he got back."

"That's false!" roared a muffled voice. "I was drugged and thrown in this hole!"

"Open that door at once!" demanded Barnes sternly. "Or you'll make your explanation to the Captain of Police."

Without any further delay the janitor put the key in the lock and threw open the door. The three men crowded into the room. The reflector from a smoky lamp in the hall cast a dim light into the apartment. It was almost bare excepting a bed, a cheap washstand and a couple of broken chairs. On the edge of a bed sat a bewildered sailor staring at them like a man who had lost his wits. A closely cropped beard covered the chin and jowls of his sunburned face. The sudden entrance seemed to have deprived him of the power of speech. Barnes, in his jerky way, told of finding the message.

"Now," he concluded, "tell me your story."

Instead of complying, the frightened-looking creature called out in frenzied tones:

"The time! the time! For God's sake, tell me the time!"

Forward was about to make some angry retort when the Chief checked him. He glanced at his watch.

"It is half-past seven."

The man on the bed gave a wail of despair, buried his face in his hands and cried like a baby.

Barnes, who had the faculty of adapting himself to all sorts of circumstances, permitted the Frenchman to exhaust his grief. Then he said gently:

"Now, if you'll tell me your story I may be able to help you."

The man shook his head with a gesture of despair.

"You're very kind, but I'm past helping now."

"You don't look like a drinking man," was the suggestive remark.

"I'm not—that's the meanest part of it."

"Why the meanest part of it?"

La Rue looked at his questioner dumbly

for a moment. Presently, he got off the bed and took a turn up and down the room. Then he turned to Barnes.

"I might as well tell you the story. It may relieve me to do so."

"There isn't any doubt about that. Go ahead now and don't omit any part of it."

The sailor smiled grimly.

"I'm not likely to forget any part of it. My name is Henri La Rue, Captain of the *Mermaid* and a native of Bordeaux, though my mother was English. I've been on the sea all my life and have had charge of this ship for the past six years. Ten days ago I sailed from my home port with a cargo of French champagne consigned to Bunn and Company of New York."

"You got in with it safely?" interrupted Forward.

"Oh, yes, I got in with it all right!" he said bitterly.

"Then why——"

"Forward," commanded the Chief, "please keep quiet and let the Captain tell his story in his own way."

"THANK you," acknowledged the seaman, the flicker of a smile on his disturbed countenance, "that's what I want to do. Well, to make the story clear I should say that your new tariff law increases the duty on champagne from $6 to $9.60 per case. Now, under the commercial treaty lately existing between the United States and France, this new tariff could not go into effect until after certain preliminaries had been complied with. One was a proclamation by your President. After that, it was agreed between the two countries that the treaty should be abrogated on a certain date —which date was to-day. Now, to win the benefit of the old—the lower duty—on my cargo of wine, it was necessary for me to get the *Mermaid* in port and to file my manifest at the Custom House before the closing hour to-day."

"And the closing hour?" interjected the lawyer.

"The closing hour," replied the Captain, "was at half-past four this afternoon!"

"What time did you arrive in port?" asked Barnes.

"At half-past three."

"Then it was all right," cried Clancy.

"So I thought," resumed the Frenchman, sadly, "but it proved to be all wrong."

"How?"

"Well, the minute we touched the wharf I jumped ashore with my manifests and other ship's papers and started for the Custom House. A big, broad-shouldered fellow standing on the pier came forward and shook hands with me, congratulating me on my success in getting in on time. That pleased me, naturally—you would have been pleased yourself under the circumstances.

"The fellow said, 'Captain, you're a game sport and if there's anything I admire it's a game sport. If you'll jump into my automobile, I'll run you up to the Custom House in no time.'

"I was so crazy to file my papers so as to make the transaction complete and legal that I accepted the invitation. On the way up he pulled out a flask of brandy and invited me to have a swig. Now, I'm not a drinking man. In fact, I'm so abstemious that you might almost call me a total abstainer, but I was nervous and excited from the strain of the voyage, and I thought a few drops would merely act as a stimulant. I took it and when I recovered consciousness an hour ago I found myself a prisoner in this room!"

"A plot!" ejaculated Clancy.

"Beyond a doubt," wailed the Captain, "and the worst part of it is that all of my papers are gone. But what difference does that make? I've lost the race, and Bunn and Company will lose a little fortune."

While he was talking, Barnes stooped down and picked up a newspaper that lay on the floor.

"What's this?" asked the Chief.

"Oh," answered the other wearily, "that's to-day's issue of the New York *Journal of Commerce*. I always get it when I'm in port to read the shipping news. But it has no interest for me now. There's nothing in life for me now. I'm a broken man!"

"Did you have your manifest in your pocket?" queried Barnes, ignoring the note of dejection.

"No; I had it with the other ship's papers in a little red leather portfolio. It looked like a music-roll."

"Even if you were in time," said the Chief, "you could not do anything without your papers."

"No; I'm helpless without them."

"What did your obliging automobile friend look like?"

"Broad shoulders, big, round, red face and hands like hams."

"A professional bruiser engaged for the purpose," commented the old man.

He walked over to the window and gazed out at the street lights. After what seemed an interminable time, he turned suddenly to the Captain.

"You had a race across the ocean?"

"Yes, sir; with the *Swan* under Captain Jules Lefèvre. We left Bordeaux at the same time, but I passed him on the fifth day and he won't be in for at least twenty-four hours. But he'll be better off than I am. He'll have his ship's papers."

Barnes had pricked up his ears with interest.

"His cargo was champagne?"

"Oh, yes."

"And who was it consigned to?"

The seaman hesitated and scratched his head with the air of one who is groping in his memory. The Chief waited anxiously for the reply. Finally, Captain La Rue spoke, slowly, as if he were not quite sure of himself:

"I think his cargo was consigned to Feldspar and Feldspar."

Barnes threw his hands in the air with a cry of delight.

"Clancy," he shouted, "go to the nearest drug store and beg, borrow or steal a business directory! Look for dealers and agents in wines. After that, get the names and home addresses of all the Feldspars you can find."

The young man departed on his errand. The detective turned to Forward.

"Get a taxicab and bring it to the door at once. I think there will be something doing before the night's much older!"

THE cab and the addresses from the directory came at the same time. There were many Feldspars. Barnes sifted them and discarded all but two—one located on Fifth Avenue, the other on West 149th Street. The machine whizzed to the Fifth Avenue address first. It was dark and deserted. No one answered the summons.

"Just as I expected," commented Barnes. "Now we'll try the junior member of the firm."

Not a minute was wasted in making the trip up town. Indeed, the chauffeur was twice threatened with arrest for exceeding the speed laws, but each time his air of injured innocence won his liberty. In due time they reached their destination. Barnes halted the cab at the corner of the street.

"This part of the game calls for a little discretion," he said. "It means the observance of one of my cardinal rules. You boys understand it very well. Prudence in preparation and boldness in execution!"

The house, which stood alone, was brilliantly illuminated. There was a clatter and a buzz of voices in the rear of the dwelling. Here a number of musicians, clad in gorgeous raiment, were tuning up their instruments. Four or five waiters were preparing to serve a dinner.

"You and Clancy go to the back of the house. You may be useful later in the evening," whispered the old man to Forward.

"Where are you going?"

"I'm going in the front door."

"What then?"

"After that I shall be guided by circumstances. If I'm thrown out I hope I shall take it philosophically."

Barnes did not go in immediately. For ten or fifteen minutes he reconnoitered. He ascertained, at the risk of breaking his neck, that a banquet was in progress in the beautifully decorated dining-room. The Chief glanced at his own immaculate evening dress with a smile of satisfaction. He had come prepared at any rate. He gave final directions to Captain La Rue, who was posted at the front door, in case of need, and boldly walked into the hallway. A servant opened the door of the vestibule. Barnes tossed him his hat and coat with an air of confidence. The man smiled obsequiously.

"You're late, Mr. Cozzens," he said.

"How did you know my name was Cozzens?" asked the Chief sharply.

"Why, I just heard Mr. Feldspar say that Mr. Cozzens was the only one who had not arrived."

"Bright mind," smiled the detective, and he slipped the man a dollar.

He felt that it was worth that much to be furnished with a name when he was about to enter upon such an uncertain adventure. The servant was delighted. He became extra officious. He rushed ahead of the Chief and, parting the curtains leading to the dining-room, called out in a rich, sonorous, English voice:

"Mr. Cozzens."

A half-dozen men in evening dress were seated about a round table. One of these,

a man with a red, smooth face and a bull neck, arose to greet the newcomer.

"Welcome to our midst, Mr. Cozzens," he cried with mock ceremony.

Barnes smiled his acknowledgement and seated himself in the only vacant chair. He gazed curiously around at the members of the dinner party. They all bore a resemblance to the host; that is to say, they all had very thick necks and very red faces. Their cheeks were so puffy that it gave them all the singular appearance of having little, round eyes. In short, there was an air of dissipated shrewdness in each of their faces. Barnes made a guess at their identity and he hit the bulls-eye the first time. They were all wine-agents.

Feldspar revealed this fact himself before many minutes.

"How do you do, Mr. Cozzens," he said, shaking hands. "We're glad to have you with us."

"Thank you," was the reply; "I am glad to be able to be here this evening."

"Mr. Cozzens," said the host, with a patronizing wave of the hand, "is our Canadian representative. This is the first time I have had the honor of meeting him."

The bogus Mr. Cozzens bowed in acknowledgement of this unexpected dignity and was presented to his associates in an informal way. Every now and then he glanced slyly at his watch. He had much to do and time was fleeting. Besides, the real Mr. Cozzens might appear to complicate the situation. Finally, much to the relief of the Chief, Feldspar arose to "make a few remarks."

"Gentlemen, I greet you and wish you the compliments of the season. When we invited our principal agents to meet the firm, we thought to furnish you with a surprise. The *Swan*, loaded with a cargo of wine for our house, left Bordeaux ten days ago. We thought it would reach here in time to take advantage of the old tariff rates. Unfortunately, it failed. However, every cloud has its silver lining. The *Mermaid*, which was carrying a cargo to a rival house, arrived here early this afternoon. That looked as if we had lost the race. The Captain of the *Mermaid*, however, paused to celebrate his victory and failed to reach the Custom House. His manifest and the other ship's papers were lost and some wag has sent them to me as a trophy of the occasion. So that, instead of a defeat, the game is simply a draw."

Amid the buzz of excitement and conversation the papers in the red portfolio were passed around from hand to hand. When they reached Barnes he examined them critically and then thrust them into his inside pocket. Feldspar noticed the action. He laughed.

"No tricks on travelers!" he said. "I'll have those papers back."

"They don't belong to you!" retorted the Chief.

"Nor to you!" returned the other, with some surprise.

Barnes smiled blandly. "I'll see that they reach their rightful owner."

Every eye was on the old man. Feldspar rose in his chair, white with anger.

"What's the meaning of this nonsense?" he shouted in tones husky with rage. At this critical juncture the curtains were parted and a voice announced: "Mr. Cozzens!"

A short, stout, thick-necked man, with a red face, hopped into the room, puffing like a porpoise. He looked enough like the other diners to belong to the same family.

Amazement gripped Mr. Frank Feldspar so suddenly that he was denied the power of speech.

He pointed a stubby forefinger at the newcomer and finally spluttered,

"Are—you—you Mr. Cozzens?"

"So me mother and father says," was the flippant rejoinder.

"And you?" cried the wine merchant, wheeling around to the Chief.

"I?" was the response. "Here's my card," he said, handing a pasteboard to the host.

"Bromley Barnes," he read, "Formerly Special Investigator of the United States Customs Service!"

"At your service, sir," said the Chief, with his profoundest bow.

"Give me those papers!" cried Feldspar.

"Not to-night," said Barnes.

"You'd better!" cried the other. "It's six to one! No one here will help you!"

"I will!" piped a shrill voice from the rear.

Every one turned to look. It was a waiter who spoke. He had a napkin carelessly thrown over his arm and was in the act of removing a plate. The detective gave one glance and uttered a cry of joy.

"Clancy! You darling boy!"

Feldspar gave a sniff of disdain. He spoke bitterly:

"A waiter! Much good he'll do you!"

Unexpectedly another voice was heard: "Maybe I can help some!"

The sound came from behind a cluster of ferns. The next moment a red-coated person emerged, carrying a trombone. Barnes was amazed. The musician laid down his instrument and stepped into the light. The old man gave another shout of delight.

"Forward, as I'm a sinner!"

To complete the picture, Captain La Rue pushed into the room. Feldspar sized up the quartette in silence for some moments. He meditated fight. Discretion proved to be the better part of valor. He spoke in a husky voice.

"Things have come to a pretty mess," he said, "when a crowd of ruffians can break into a gentleman's house in this fashion! Get out of here!"

"We're going to get out," retorted the old man, "but I may have more to say to you later. Abduction and larceny are serious crimes under the New York law."

"Don't hold *me* responsible," answered the wine-man, his voice trembling in spite of himself. "I had nothing to do with it!"

THE four men hurried out of the house and jumped into the waiting taxicab. Barnes looked at his watch. He spoke sharply to the driver.

"To the Battery as fast as you can get there."

The machine started off at a rate of speed that menaced life and property. It swung into Broadway and went humming down that thoroughfare. Fortunately the street was deserted and there was nothing to obstruct their progress. Very little was said.

Forward and Clancy were all at sea but forbore to question the Chief. They felt that there must be method in his madness and that this was not the time to bait him with unnecessary interrogations. Presently, the old man awoke from his reverie. He glanced shyly at Clancy.

"Con," he said, "you certainly made a model waiter."

The Irishman laughed.

"I'm glad to hear it. But my work was nothing to the way Forward blew that fake trombone. He got purple in the face. I thought once he was going to blow his head off."

Everybody laughed. Suddenly the Chief thrust the red portfolio into the hands of Captain La Rue.

"Here are your papers, Captain. Don't lose 'em again."

The old seaman winced but said nothing. When he looked up, the Custom House, with its big white columns standing out in the moonlight, hove into view.

"What's this mean?" the Captain gasped.

"Follow me," said Barnes enigmatically.

The members of the party hurried up the high steps in single file.

A messenger in the hallway called out, "This way, gentlemen."

Captain La Rue found himself in front of a deputy collector's desk. Mechanically, like a man in a trance, he handed in his manifest and the other ship's papers.

"You swear that the statements contained herein are correct and true?" droned the Deputy in a sing-song voice.

"I do," murmured the Captain feebly.

At that moment a big bell in the neighborhood began to toll out the hour of midnight. The Deputy Collector smiled briskly.

"Congratulations, Captain; you win by a nose!"

As they gained the street again, La Rue turned to Barnes expectantly:

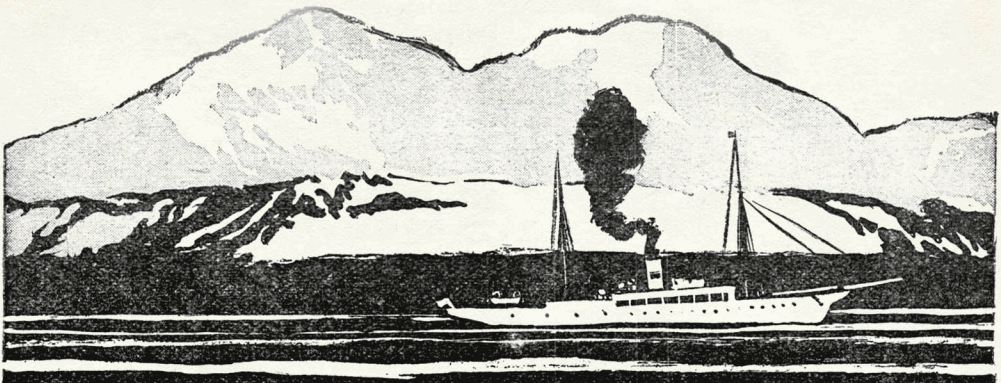
"How—how did you know?"

"By the newspaper you dropped in the room in the house on the Bowery. It contained the dispatch from Washington, ordering all Custom Houses to remain open until midnight in order to comply with the provisions of the French-American commercial treaty."

While La Rue, between tears and laughter, was protesting his eternal gratitude, Clancy exclaimed with flashing eyes, "I think that was a rotten plot on the part of Feldspar. Just because he lost was no reason why——"

Barnes halted him in his whimsical way.

"Boys," he said, "it was simply the manifestation of a trait in human nature which is as old as Adam—a trait that has been ably depicted by one Æsop in his justly celebrated fable called 'The Dog in the Manger.'"



FORBIDDEN TREASURE

by

BEATRIX DEMAREST LLOYD

& ESHER MARTIN

SYNOPSIS: Mark Stuart, on a geological expedition to Iceland, finds there an American yacht with its millionaire invalid owner Mr. Lee, his daughter Nora, and his physician Dr. Berwind. At Haldr's inn Nora treats Stuart with undue haughtiness, and keen hostility arises between them. A treasure bloodily stolen by ancient Vikings from a Sicilian abbey had been cursed by the dying Abbot so that when brought to Iceland the curse made an ice-desert of a once fertile part of the island (a phenomenon unexplained by science). An Icelandic family, the Olafsens, murdered the surviving Vikings and the curse falls on them, the last of them dying of small-pox in the ruined "Olaf's Tower" shortly after Stuart's arrival. Stuart climbs the tower and throws down the ancient bell, whose inscription concerning the treasure is deciphered by Mr. Lee. An irritable outburst by the erratic millionaire causes a breach with Stuart, who has become friends with Dr. Berwind but remains at odds with Nora Lee. Stuart explores the desolate coast of the Vatna Jökull where the fatal treasure is supposed to be and is left to die of cold and hunger by his deserting crew. Though ignorant of this, Nora, with secret thought of Stuart, suggests it might help her father's health to take the yacht to the Vatna Jökull and search for the mythical treasure. The yacht's captain is washed overboard under suspicious circumstances, and Healy, the substitute mate, assumes command.

CHAPTER XVIII

RESCUED

ALMOST motionless beside her father at the rail of the deck, Nora Lee stood, erect and silent, a nameless fear tearing at her heart.

Mr. Lee, wrapped up to the nose, was training his glass upon the mountainous western wall of the fiord.

The forecastle rail was crowded with leaning, watching sailors, not a man of whom did not envy those who had been told off to take the launch ashore. From the bridge, Captain Healy also watched the proceedings intently.

Nora spoke at last in a dry voice, her straining eyes fixed on the spot her father covered with his binocular. "Do they not seem to be coming back?" she asked.

"Yes, they have started down. Confound these lenses! There! Yes, I can see them quite plainly, Berwind's gray fur coat shows up against that black rock."

The little hands in the deep pockets clenched themselves and she took a long breath. "And—and you can see if the—what they are doing?"

He was silent a moment before answering. But at last he said slowly: "Yes—they are carrying something. I am sure of it. They have turned a little now and I get a side view. You were quite right, my child. Fancy your having eyes sharp enough to see that, Nora!"

"It was something white and it moved," she said mechanically. "Everything in this place is so motionless and still, I think I could see a beetle cross the cliff."

"It must be a man, I suppose," said Mr. Lee. "Probably some castaway fisherman. Ill of exposure, I dare say. You don't suppose——" he almost lowered the glass as the unwelcome thought came to him—"you don't suppose—— But nonsense! He signalled a little while ago; he can't have died since then."

Nora wet her dry lips and set her teeth again. "It was something flapping in the wind," she said.

"Dear me, dear me!" said the nervous man fretfully.

"We shall know very soon now," said Nora quietly. But in her heart still ached the sickening dread. Somehow she had felt sure from the first moment. She argued against it while the men were toiling down the cliff carefully disposing their burden to their best strength. She prayed against it when they put off the launch from shore. She smothered the very thought of it as the boat neared the side of the yacht. Yet wild as the conjecture was, remote as the chance of it might be, she was sure of it when she and her father crossed the deck to the steps. Berwind lifted a white, unsmiling face to hers and made a faint motion with his hand toward her father.

Instantly she had turned to him. "Dear, you can see—it is something serious. Had you not better go below?"

Mr. Lee bent eagerly over the starboard side where, beside the steps that dipped themselves rhythmically toward the water, the launch was grappled and drawn up by the boat-hook of the waiting seaman.

"What news, Berwind?" he cried. "What have you there?"

The Doctor, bending over the motionless rug-wrapped form, had no time to reply.

With a prompt obedience that fairly snapped matters into place, the davits were manned and a canvas hammock slung. Mr. Lee and Nora drew back out of the way of the unresisting figure, which appeared gigantic in its supine length, swung for a moment in its cradle, swaying helplessly between the sky and sea.

"It is a man," said Mr. Lee nervously.

"Yes, dear, it is a man," repeated Nora tonelessly. That the man was dead she had no doubt.

Then, giving directions as he ran, Berwind dashed up the steps and in a moment more was kneeling beside the shrouded form, which the men eased down upon the deck.

Mr. Lee, unconsciously clutching his daughter's arm, leaned forward.

"Is the fellow dead, Berwind?" he asked in a trembling, excited voice.

But the Doctor, who at any other time would have considered his employer first, had for the moment forgotten all about him. Without replying, he laid back the canvas fold and, springing open the case of his watch, held the polished golden surface before the lips of the rescued man.

WAXY and motionless, with eyes half closed, and white teeth that glistened in a red barbaric scrub of beard, was a face that, even in its sunken placidity, retained the outlines of features that they all had known.

"God bless me!" cried Mr. Lee in a violent explosion of horror. "Young Stuart!"

Dr. Berwind, snatching the brandy from the hand of Levine, the steward, who at this moment managed to force his way through the circle, dropped his watch on the length of its chain and, pressing open the limp jaw with his hand, poured in a few drops of the potent liquid.

Nora Lee had drawn nearer and she bent above Berwind and watched his hands as he repeated the dose of brandy. At the third time the answering constriction of the throat, though faint, was unmistakable. The lips twitched slightly, the nerves in the eyelids faintly stirred.

Her whisper was fraught with a very torture of amazement and relief. "He is alive! He is alive!"

Even in that tense and flying moment Berwind's quick glance had time to question the source of this deep, unconcealed emotion; for the girl's words, statement of incontrovertible fact though they might be, were uttered in a passionate thankfulness. The outstretched hands, the wet, wide-open eyes, the trembling mouth—all these were

of a woman touched not in her ordinary humanity, but in the quick of her heart. Then, as for the flash of an instant her eyes met Berwind's, her face blazed crimson and she turned away.

But he bravely called her to his aid. "Miss Lee," he said, "while we are getting him below, will you help me?" He snapped a bunch of keys from his pocket, jerked one off and held it toward her. "The medicine chest in the surgery," he said, without looking up at her, "the little drawer at the left of the box—I want the digitalis and the hypo.-case. You understand?"

Nora took the key and turned. But her father, following her, laid a hand upon her arm. "My dear," he said, "this is the place for a man's help. Go to your cabin. I'll see to this."

Nora, shaking and faint, gave in gratefully and he led her to the door of her cabin.

CHAPTER XIX

THE BELL ONCE MORE

THE WEEK that followed was the most agreeable that the ship's company of the *Blessed Damozel* had yet spent on their Icelandic cruise. Even Mr. Lee, delighted to find himself promoted from the position of invalid to the guardianship of a patient in more pressing condition than himself, hustled about Stuart's cabin, watching the Doctor's careful apportionment of the patient's food.

Then, as the days went by, the strength, returning by leaps and bounds into Stuart's healthy young frame, brought him first out into the cabin and at last upon the deck. Mr. Lee was continually at his elbow with a paraphernalia of rugs, stewards and beef-tea, which, had it not excited a profound gratitude, might have aroused amusement in the recipient of his superfluous attentions.

"As a matter of fact," said Berwind, "what we may have done for you, old man, in the way of rescue, is as nothing compared to your service. Mr. Lee is marvelously changed for the better. You have been his salvation."

"If I provide diversion for Mr. Lee," Stuart said, weakly—it was his first day on deck—"it is little enough. You think he is better?"

Berwind nodded emphatically. "Better? I never saw such an improvement! From the very hour that you were carried aboard he seems to have taken a new lease of life." He fixed Stuart suddenly with a penetrating glance. "You have guessed, I suppose," he said abruptly, "what it is that ails him."

Stuart flushed. "Upon my word, Berwind," he responded with some heat, "I hope you don't think me the kind of chap that pokes about in his host's private affairs."

The Doctor raised his hand. "Oh, rot!" he said good-naturedly. "I don't want you to think things worse than they are, that is all. Poor Mr. Lee! You remember my telling you back there in Reykjavik how he had led the strenuous life till he came to smash?"

"Railroad president,—archeologist——" Stuart ruminated. "Yes, I remember. You said he made no end of a hit with a paper on early Gothic survivals and engineered a big railroad deal at the same time with the other hand; then came home and went to pieces, poor old chap. Upon my word, it is an honorable record. He came home upon his shield at any rate."

Berwind nodded. "You see, the pain was most acute. They had to remove a section of the fifth nerve and all that. So, in order to give him relief, they had to resort to hypodermics——"

Stuart shot a quick glance at the speaker. "Morphia?" he asked softly.

"Morphia," answered the Doctor with a sigh. "And there you have the whole matter in a nutshell.

"DR. CURRIE—you have heard of him—recommended the South Sea Islands. But I had been working up a theory of my own—arctic air with its purity, stimulus, that sort of thing. Dr. Currie was good enough to pick me out. I had been one of the assistants in his private hospital and when I left to put up my shingle, he knew that——" Berwind paused and the flicker of a grimace passed over his harsh face. "He knew that the amount of practise I was scraping together after five years was not exactly of the colossal dimensions to detain me in New York. You see, I am not the kind that the ladies take to, and the children. So, as my outlook was not exactly dazzling, I was glad enough to take this chance.

"But he is better," responded Mark heartily.

Berwind nodded in regretful affirmation.

"He is getting better, thank the Lord! You see, we have been lessening the quantity of drug these past few weeks and just now we are getting down near the minimum dose. Upon my word, Stuart, just fancy how you would feel if you solved all the geologic questions of this enigmatic wilderness before us and you will have some idea of what it means to a young physician, who has never been any too successful in the past, to find himself on the threshold of performing a cure that his seniors and betters have given up in despair. But this drop in the temperature is odd!"

Stuart glanced up at him as his tone changed and, seeing Mr. Lee and Nora, understood and smiled. They were coming toward him with a steward in tow, who carried the forgotten bell. At the sight of it Stuart smiled and stretched out his hands.

"There it is," he said. "I have dreamed of it!" He laughed and half rose from the chair where he lay rolled like a chrysalis in rugs, but Mr. Lee put out a quick imperious hand.

"Sit still!" he cried with impatient kindliness. "Heavens, young man, if you did not have me to take care of you, you'd be dead of cold and over-exertion long before this. Now, Levine, put the bell down on Mr. Stuart's knee. Is it too heavy? No? And wrap that blanket properly about his feet."

MARK STUART laughed up into his host's face. Nora, pursuing her policy of balancing her father's solicitude for their guest by a pointed inattention on her own part, turned away with a little remark to Berwind.

"It is cold! Captain Healy was telling me the thermometer has dropped thirty degrees since yesterday. He thinks there must be ice in the offing."

"It is probably a bit of the Greenland floe," said Stuart, quite as if she had not excluded him from the conversation. Nora bit her lip and looked out across the fiord. Whereat Stuart, resolutely putting her whim aside before his interest in the subject broached, turned to Mr. Lee.

"You may have heard, sir, this is the season when the Greenland ice breaks up and comes careering South to search for trans-Atlantic liners. There is a twist in the Arctic current that brings them down around this very corner of Iceland. More of your curse, if you like."

Mr. Lee nodded soothingly. "No fear, young man, no fear! We have a good harbor, a good ship, if I do say it, and, best of all, a good captain. That fellow Healy—a lucky find he was, upon my word! There is no danger of his taking us out till your friends the icebergs have sailed by. And meanwhile, here we are where we longed to be. Do you make anything more out of the mystery of that bell, Stuart? It does seem as though here under the very shadow of the High-Gone Hills themselves some inspiration would be vouchsafed us."

Stuart lifted a glowing face. "It is strange, isn't it, to think that we are really here on the spot—within a possible hundred miles or so of where the whole far-off tragedy played itself out, somewhere in the mists of long-dead ages." He turned his face again dreamily toward the far end of the fiord. "'Let the old wo step on the stage again,'" he quoted below his breath. "The betrayed guest, the repentant, despairing murderess, the icy, crawling fingers of the curse. What a tragedy, and what a setting!"

CHAPTER XX

THE RED ROCK OF HALF

HE LOOKED at the high-piled fantastic wilderness about them and smiled. Mr. Lee was likewise staring away at the barren hills of the fiord.

Suddenly Stuart caught his breath. "By ginger!" he said. He sat upright. "Look!" he cried. "Look! Do you see?" He was staring at the bell.

The two men leaned over him. Nora, behind his chair, bent down in a self-forgetting excitement. Stuart could not see her, but he was aware, even in that moment, of her light breathing that came and went near his cheek and the soft unconscious pressure of her little hand upon his shoulder as she leaned over him. Even through the heavy fur-lined coat that he wore, it seemed to him that her touch, airy though it was, stole with a sweet and pervasive warmth. For the first time she spoke to him in tones natural and unconstrained.

"I see the chalices, Mr. Stuart, yes, but you are looking at them upside-down!"

"Upside-down?" responded Mark quietly. "I am not so sure, Miss Lee. Look!" With his finger in its clumsy glove, he traced the

outline of the inverted figure on the bell and then pointed outward to the shore.

On the right hand rose a black truncated peak, whose sheer, dark walls were capped with a flat table-land of snow. Confronting this dwarfed and headless hill, on the other side of the fiord, towered a serrated double-cratered peak whose twin streams of lava, cooling, had hardened themselves in two lofty twisted spires.

"You see?" asked Stuart, and his exultation was in his voice. Nora's grasp tightened on his shoulder.

"It is the same!" she cried, thrilled with excitement. "You may be right, Mr. Stuart. Father, could it be a picture, a picture of the mountains themselves?"

"By George!" cried Mr. Lee. "I believe ——" He looked back and forth from the bell to the mountains. As the heavy treasure lay upon Stuart's knees the outline was photographic.

Stuart's breath came short. "You see, the Bull? What could it be but the two-horned monstrosity on the left there? And opposite—Sigurda!" He sank back. "I say, do you suppose that thing we took for the handle of a cup—do you suppose that could have been the Red Rock of Half, the beak jutting out?"

Berwind took a long breath. He glanced at the grotesque hill forms beyond the harbor waters, then back at their facsimile, rude but unmistakable, upon the bell. "You are not stupid, Stuart," he observed briefly.

THE thermometer continued to fall during the night and the next morning registered a more intense cold than they had yet endured. But Stuart in his new strength was awake and about early, urging a shoreward expedition. The mere idea that he had happened upon the grave of the forbidden treasure set him a-tingling.

Mr. Lee was eager as well. And Berwind —well, Berwind and Stuart were both poor men and could not look wholly unmoved upon the prospect of being released in one hour of glorious excitement from all the tyranny they had endured under the reign of Wallet the Lean. But beyond the intrinsic value of the treasure glowed the adventure, as they were both boyish enough to feel keenly.

They were the first on deck, these two, wrapped in motor-coats.

"If we had not," said Berwind, "agreed not to go on exclaiming and conjecturing and protesting on the subject, I should be very much inclined to say something more about the providential change in our plans that brought us here, of all places and of all times, where and when you most needed us."

Stuart made a helpless gesture. "We might have had an appointment, you and I and the Archangel," he said.

"As I remember now, it was Miss Nora's idea," said Berwind. "She thought perhaps it would interest her father and keep his mind from dwelling upon his present illness. Yes, I remember quite well, she suggested it. She was quite confused for fear I should think it a silly idea and she blushed and half refused to go on once she had told me the beginning."

"It was her idea——" said Stuart softly. "Berwind, if you have any notion of a hot hell dismiss it. I tell you hell is covered with snow and ice, and there isn't a blade of grass to comfort the soul of the dying!"

The Doctor sent an oblique look at him from the corner of his eye. "You don't by any chance feel any repugnance toward setting foot again on the 'accursed place?'"

"None whatever, in such company," replied Stuart. "Though I am afraid nothing could tempt me out on it alone. Is Mr. Lee going to be able to go with us?"

"Indeed, nothing could persuade him to stay on board, I am certain. From the moment when we first broached the subject of coming here, he has been enthusiastic. The change in him is really remarkable. I—" he glanced about near them—"I reduced his dose this morning sharply, but he made no comment. I don't believe he knew the difference!"

"Good!" said Stuart heartily, though his eyes were on the mountains. There was a pause. "And Miss Lee——" he added at last hesitatingly. "I dare say she will not undertake the tramp?"

Berwind smiled at him. There was a kindly twinkle in his eyes, but a certain painful constriction at the corners of the mouth. "My dear fellow, she will indeed. I asked Captain Healy to detail us a sailor to carry our rugs and some refreshment. And I think I will ask for another, just in case we contract a case of sprained ankle and need more assistance."

Stuart drew his brows together. "Don't you think one man would be enough?" he

ventured. "After all, we don't want to spread around the news of the adjacent gold mine. Did it ever occur to you, Berwind, how wholly at the mercy of your crew you would be in this deserted and lawless sea?"

"Oh, the crew is all right. I say, Stuart, you know, you almost succeed in prejudicing me against Healy and the rest of them without the slightest foundation of a charge against any one. You really have a beastly disposition."

Stuart grinned genially. "That's all very well, but it doesn't get you out of trouble when your crew gets the gold fever. Just consider," he went on gravely, "here we are, the two of us alone. Mr. Lee could not be counted on in any emergency. Miss Nora and her maid would only be a graver anxiety than anything else. I never was a croaker or a prognosticator of disaster before, my dear Berwind, but I have had a recent demonstration of what a very mutinous crew can do when it tries."

The Doctor put a hand on his shoulder. "That's just it. You have become misanthropic just because those tow-headed pagans left you in the lurch. You are forgetting that this crew was gathered in good old Manhattan!"

"How proudly you say it!" laughed Stuart. I'll lay you a wager, Berwind, that when you get back I will pick up a crew in New York that will make the pirates of the Caribbean look like an old ladies' tatting circle. Have it your own way. I still think one able seaman quite enough to take into our confidence. But surely, if either Mr. Lee or his daughter need help we can give it."

Doctor Berwind's hand dropped again to his side. "I dare say you are right," he said very slowly, "if they need help we can give it."

Nora came on deck with her father and almost immediately Captain Healy appeared laden with rugs and a basket of provisions. Berwind faced him with some hostility in his kindly face.

"What seaman have you detailed——" he began, when Mr. Lee interrupted him.

"Captain Healy has offered to go with us himself," he said, rubbing his nose and coughing. "It is most kind of him."

As he and his daughter turned away, followed by the Captain, Berwind turned a smileless face to Stuart. "You have the most malign influence over me," he said. "I used to have an unsuspicious, open-hearted nature, but now I am sure that man has designs upon us!"

They both laughed.

CHAPTER XXI

HOW MUCH DOES HEALY KNOW?

THERE was comparative silence among them during their brief trip to the shore, Nora sitting beside her father and holding his arm in hers. Durkee, quartermaster, who was at the wheel, brought the boat alongside a jutting line of rock with a precision so exact as to be unnoticed. He held her there while the passengers alighted.

The Doctor, after helping Nora out, took occasion, as Mr. Lee availed himself of the same helping hand, to inquire softly: "How much, sir, have you told Captain Healy?"

"Nothing, nothing at all," answered Mr. Lee. "Simply that Mr. Stuart is going to make some geological surveys connected with his work here and to hunt possible fossils or things of that kind. I admitted to being ignorant of the exact nature of his research, never having gone in for geology. And I dare say Healy is no better off."

"I dare say not, indeed," smiled Berwind.

The boat pushed off, Captain Healy standing by to give certain last instructions. Berwind went over to Stuart who was looking about anxiously for the easiest ascent.

"Now, then, Stuart," he said, "so far, Healy knows nothing. Mr. Lee has informed him that you are out on a little geological jaunt, accompanied by your loyal friends."

"That is what he has been officially told, but how much may he have overheard, my dear chap? We have been shrieking the word 'treasure' like a chorus of pirates in a comic opera." He was frowning at the prospect as he spoke. "It looks to me as if our best course would be to skirt the shore here until we reach the fissure where that faint steam comes out. The surface is so broken there that we may be able to climb."

"Oh, easily," said Berwind. He was uncoiling the rope that was to fasten them together. "I think I will go ahead, then you, then Miss Nora, then Mr. Lee, then the Captain. Healy will strap on the basket and you and I can each take a rug."

He helped Stuart girdle him with the rope and gave his aid in fastening the others. As Nora realized that she was being linked to Stuart, her old mood of resentment rose

in her and she turned away from him. Stuart went on calmly with his task, but he spoke to her quietly.

"If you will dismiss from your mind," he said, "any notion that I have arranged this matter, you will do me the barest justice. I must in all common sense consider your safety. It will be necessary for me during this climb to offer you my hand and to assist you in many ways—sometimes, perhaps, with a seeming roughness. I beg you to believe that I do it as reluctantly as I see that you receive it and that I shall be as unfeignedly glad when we are released from this compulsory companionship as you yourself."

She made not the slightest sign that she had heard what he said.

Berwind, having fastened one rug upon his back and strapped the other one to Stuart's shoulders, gave each member of the party a climbing-staff and, with a laugh and a word of encouragement, led them down the rocky beach to the fissure in the face of the cliff. The steadily increasing cold gave to their exercise a biting stimulus.

FROM the Vatna spiral clouds of sulphurous smoke wound their way upward. The great glacier was silent in the intensified cold. Where the tall black mountains with their fantastic scarfs of glistening snow rose all about them, the horns of the Bull mountain stood highest of all against the cold mists of the sky.

When they at last reached the fissure in the great wall of rock, Berwind turned to enter it and stepped back suddenly with an exclamation. The others gathered beside him quickly, their rope dragging in loops about their feet.

The fissure blasted in the solid rock held between its rough sides a boiling pit of sulphur, seething and steaming. The thick, creaming, bubbling surface of the pit held their eyes in an ugly sort of fascination. Captain Healy was the first to speak.

"That there would be a mighty nasty grave for a man," he said with his usual melancholy sniffle.

Berwind laughed. "On the contrary," said he, restoring their spirits with his cheerful voice, "it would be a most desirable one. Cleanly, antiseptic and instantaneous cremation."

"Ugh!" said Mr. Lee with a shiver. "Let us go on. We will catch cold standing here. Is this where we begin to climb?"

"This is the place," said Berwind.

"Then lead on, Macduff!" said Mr. Lee pleasantly, "'Where the River of Snorr flows into the River of Halpa, flowing between the Mountain of the Bull and the Mountain of Sigurda,' and so forth. Can't you see the poor devil coming ashore, with the monkey on his shoulder holding his tail out of the water?" He pinched his daughter's ear as she laughed at him.

"River?" sniffed Captain Healy. "I don't see nothing like a river around these here parts."

Mr. Lee looked at Berwind who was frowning back at him in a friendly appeal for discretion. "Ah, neither do we, Captain," he replied, with a rub at the long suffering nose. "It is all part of a fairy-tale that begins 'once upon a time many hundred years ago.'"

CHAPTER XXII

A WILDERNESS OF ICE AND FIRE

THE ASCENT of the cliff was far more arduous a climb than Berwind had predicted. Not once but many times had Stuart been forced to give his hand to Nora Lee, below him, and to draw her almost by main force to a place beside him. On one of these occasions, having partly drawn her by the hand and partly lifted her with an arm about her, Stuart was about to relinquish his hold, when Mr. Lee below lost his footing and slipped heavily back, bringing the rope between them suddenly something more than taut. Stuart's arm instantly closed upon her with all his strength and held her.

Grimly and unsmiling he held her. But he felt his heart beating faster at each stroke. The suddenness of it all had startled the girl, which accounted for her docility, doubtless, as she permitted him to strain her painfully against his side. He was leaning forward, his other hand wound in the life-rope, watching the Captain help Mr. Lee to his feet again.

The moment passed. The rope swung loose again, Mr. Lee looked up, waved his hand and started upward.

Stuart released her instantly. "I beg your pardon," he said quietly. "There was nothing else to do."

To his surprise she answered him almost gently. "Of course. Thank you." He

looked at her wonderingly, but Berwind tugged at the line.

"All right there?" he called.

Stuart turned. "Coming up!" he answered, and drove his staff anew into the snow.

When they reached the top of the climb it was to find themselves on the edge of the wide ledge of lava. Beneath them at the left on the smooth gray-blue surface of the fiord, lay the *Blessed Damozel*, glimmering as white as the snow. On the far side of the water rose a cliff similar to that they had just ascended and beyond that towered the black crumpled horns of the Bull. Behind them lay the gray sea, cold and unfriendly. Before them rose the truncated peak of Sigurda just across from the Bull; and in the narrow gorge between the two lay the white glacier and the stony black prow of its moraine.

"'The nightmare Death-in-Life!'" quoted Mr. Lee softly.

"We might say so," retorted Berwind cheerfully, "but we find a little life springing up from the rocks here." He plucked from the seam of two splintered rocks a stalk which bent under its fringe of feathery green. Nora Lee uttered an exclamation of pleasure.

"The dear thing, flourishing here in this unholy moon country!" she cried. "What is it, Dr. Berwind?"

He smiled at her. "Wild oats," he answered. "This is the first time, I imagine, that that crop has ever been hailed as a good omen! But here in the Vatna, even wild oats——"

"So long as it is alive!" interrupted Mr. Lee. "I tell you, Berwind, this wilderness of rock and volcanic fire might easily get on one's nerves. But this bit of friendly life —— I understand now, why green should be the color of hope. Lead on, Mr. Stuart!"

Stuart smiled at him and drew the chart from his pocket. "It all tallies so far," he said. "There is Sigurda rising from this table-land. Now for the cave, gentles!" He looked over his shoulder at Healy, who stepped a foot or so farther away. "If you take my advice before you proceed, you will ask Captain Healy to remain here with the lunch-basket and the rugs. If you don't want to do that, Mr. Lee, and if—" he drew a long breath and something of his excitement trembled in his voice—"if the cave is really there, if there is anything in it—will you just look with me and come away, taking Miss Nora and the Captain with you? Then Doctor Berwind and I will remain behind to get the—fossils—into portable shape. And we can get them little by little over to the yacht, and none of the crew need be any the wiser as to the nature of our geological prize."

MR. LEE looked faintly puzzled, but Berwind went around to his other side and spoke softly to him. "You see, if this treasure—these fossils," he lifted his voice a shade on the word, "are really to be found in this place, the find will be of tremendous value—to a scientist like Mr. Stuart—to us all. We were saying that there are no police in these waters and when you come to think of it, sir, there are thirty men in that crew and we are three!"

The owner of the *Blessed Damozel* looked a bit staggered by the notion, but he seemed to realize the good sense of it.

Berwind laughed. "There is, in all probability, not one broken sixpence in the place!"

Mr. Lee nodded. As a matter of fact, his attention had suddenly begun to wander. He laid his hand on Berwind's arm. "Let them all go ahead, and you lag along with me," he said. "I want to speak to you."

Berwind glanced sharply into his patient's face. "Very well," he said slowly.

As they turned a little away from the others, Stuart bent his head over the tracings again. And Nora Lee stood very near him, watching his fur-gloved finger point out their route.

"We walk on to the peak of Sigurda now," he said. "Alack! the oak tree is no more, but no matter. One hundred paces upward—we decided that was five hundred feet, didn't we?"

Nora glanced ahead. "But, Mr. Stuart," —it was the first time he had ever heard her speak his name in so unhostile a tone; he looked up and saw the puzzled frown and the far-away eyes—"the whole mountain of Sigurda is not five hundred feet high, from the floor of the gorge upward."

"By George!"

They stood looking ahead a moment at the contorted lava cone and then, with one accord, bent over the paper again. "'One hundred paces upward to the Red Rock of Half,'" said Nora slowly.

CHAPTER XXIII

STUART SPEAKS HIS MIND

IT WAS curious, considering the problem confronting them, that they should look at one another steadily, like bewildered children, as if the solution of the question were to be found in each other's eyes. Stuart found himself gradually becoming conscious of the beauty of her, instead of keeping his mind upon the upsetting discovery she had made. In her eyes, warm golden-brown and clear cool green, lay a very snare of color enchantment fascinating to watch at such close range. Little flecks of softer brown lay here and there among the divergent rays spread like a solar halo about the great black eclipse of the mysterious pupil. It was seldom one had an opportunity to make so thorough an investigation of the matter, for so thick and long were the black lashes that guarded these windows of her soul that a man might have looked a hundred times and yet gone on wondering as to their color. Just at the further end of her equally dark eyebrows spread the tracings of a fine blue vein, clearly visible through the exquisite whiteness of her temple. "'Like a piece of pomegranate within thy locks,'" he found himself thinking. "'Behold, thou art fair, thou hast dove's eyes!'"

"Now, now!" called the nervous, quick voice of Mr. Lee, "What are you waiting for? Why don't you get on, you others?"

Stuart came to himself with a start. "I say, Berwind," he promptly began, "this old fossil chart of mine says five hundred feet up the Mountain of Sigurda, and as Miss Lee very sensibly remarks, the whole mountain is not so high as that."

Berwind laughed. He came to Stuart's side and, slipping his arm through his, turned him to face the fiord once more. Dramatically he pointed downward. "The River of Snorr did not flow into the River of Halpa at an altitude of four or five hundred feet, my geologist. And the oak tree at the foot of Sigurda, doubtless spread its generous shade by the bank of the river."

He looked whimsically into Stuart's face and saw that it was reddened by more than the frigid air. "Consider the glacier. I am very much afraid you are not paying attention," he said and bravely smiled. Then he added more softly. "But get on, my dear fellow. I must give my patient some medicine, I am afraid."

"Very well," said Stuart folding his plan and putting it into his pocket. "We are to start ahead, Miss Lee, with Captain Healy. Berwind is right, of course. We were forgetting that the little River of Snorr has swelled with the cold. I am afraid my wits did go wool-gathering for a moment. I wonder how many feet thick that glacier is back there. Of course, we must deduct that amount from our measurement."

"Of course!" she cried, disdainful of her own stupidity, but a shade more contemptuous of his. "How simple!"

"So it is," said Stuart meekly. "Of course, we are now above the Red Rock instead of somewhat below it. The question is now whether the glacier has not risen above the entrance to the cave and so cut us off effectually."

Her indifferent manner suddenly returned to her. Perhaps she realized that in her distraction of the moment past she had allowed him a more friendly approach than she was prepared to maintain. She turned up the collar of her fur coat negligently. "The question is rather, I should think, what could be more absurd than this wild-goose chase, in any event. And I don't for one moment believe there is any cave there at all, do you?"

He felt incomprehensibly hurt.

"No, I dare say not," he answered.

They started forward in silence, the snow crunching dully beneath their feet. Captain Healy, the rope wound in a great coil slung over one shoulder, followed them, but his eyes glanced back continually to see why the others lingered.

IT WAS not quite a mile to where Sigurda rose, a blackened and truncated cone; but it seemed to Stuart they had come an endless distance and through endless silence before Nora stopped with a little "Pouff!" and asked coldly, "Isn't this the place?"

"If we are on the right track, it should be," replied Stuart in the same tone. He withdrew a few paces from her as if to assure her he had no intention of boring her with the wearisome details and unfolded the tracing of the bell again.

But it seemed that this did not please my lady either. "I must say, Mr. Stuart," she remarked, "that one would think no one but

yourself had anything to do with the affair. You are quite welcome, as my father said, to any treasure"—she accented the word scornfully—"that may be found and unless you doubt his word I see no reason for your maneuvering in this way to keep the others behind and to prevent my glancing at the plan of the place!"

There was a moment of tense silence. Healy, who took "no interest in any sweetheartin' except his own," had wandered a little distance away. Then the paper fluttered from Stuart's fingers to the ground and without heeding it, he bore down upon her, his eyes blazing with a cold fire. His hands closed upon hers and held them mercilessly. She shrank involuntarily but unavailingly backward.

"How dare you!" he said in a low voice, his face frowning furiously down into her own. "How dare you continually insult me! If no one else has ever taught you the courtesies of life, then, by heaven, I'll begin!"

He turned suddenly and walked away from her again, his heart pounding in his ears. Already he regretted the outburst, yet he had been unable to control it. He walked quite a little distance in the snow and then turned and came back again. Berwind and Mr. Lee were only a few paces away and Captain Healy, with his coil of rope, had drawn near to Nora again.

As Stuart reluctantly joined them, his cheeks still blazing with his recent choler, Captain Healy turned to him. "I was just saying to Miss Lee, sir, that you dropped a bit of paper here that I tried to get for you. But a puff of wind caught it and carried it off to leeward and before I could say Jack Robinson it was gone."

Stuart, for the moment diverted, looked about him at the sky and sea. There had not been a breath of wind all day. He looked at Captain Healy and smiled agreeably. "How extremely interesting," he said.

Nora Lee had gone to meet her father. Dr. Berwind came on alone. The invalid and his daughter stood together talking and looking down on the tiny toy far below them that was their yacht.

"Well, Stuart," said Berwind, "have you located the place? Where is that tracing from the bell?"

"The paper blew away, so Captain Healy tells me," Stuart said indifferently. "Our way lies just along this ledge of rock. We will secure the rope, Berwind, one end to you and one to me. Captain Healy will be good enough, I am sure, to stay with Mr. Lee and Miss Nora."

He took one end of the rope from the Captain and, carrying it to the Doctor, fastened it about his waist. "It will keep him out of the way, at all events," he said in an undertone. He grinned cheerfully. "That gentleman is all my fancy painted him, Berwind. And he has got the tracing of that bell in his pocket now."

"Much good may it do him," said Berwind in a growl. "Come on, are you ready?"

"Good luck to you!" cried Mr. Lee cheerfully.

Stuart glanced back, nodded and smiled. Nora Lee was standing motionless, looking down into the fiord.

"I hope to heaven," Mark said to himself, with a boyishly imaginative resentment, "I hope the cave is full of diamonds and that she will have to take them all!"

THE ledge was wide enough for a man of steady nerves to walk along without much difficulty, but the brittle lava had a distressing way of breaking off in great lumps beneath their weight and pitching giddily downward into the waters of the bay. After a few rods of this sort of thing, the beach of the fiord showed white and far away below them and then, a little farther on, the narrow moraine of the glacier rose sharply almost to the level of the ledge on which they stopped. Above the moraine the glacier ascended continuously. After twenty minutes' walk the surface of ice had risen to a matter of some few feet below them.

"I say," called Stuart, "we could go along here on the glacier. If we had only known our exploration would lead us around this way we could have spared ourselves that climb over Sigurda and come straight up the moraine instead."

He sat down upon the shelf where they were standing and swung himself down to the surface of the snow-covered ice beneath them. Berwind followed suit.

Once on the surface of the glacier their walk became infinitely easier. They made their way forward, talking but little, until at last Stuart stopped and flung up his head.

"Since we are now face to face with the

side of Sigurda that fronts the valley, we should be in a position to see the jutting beak of the Rock of Half. Indeed, I don't see why it could not be seen from the deck of the yacht itself."

Berwind, who had gone behind his friend and was staring upward at the cliff under his shaded eyes, gave an unsteady laugh. "There is no beak sticking out from that wall, my dear fellow. The rock is as flat as a tray and as tight as a drum."

"But it's red!" cried Stuart, who had backed away too and was staring upward.

"So it is," said Berwind. "But what good does that do us?"

"But this must be the place," persisted Stuart. "Yet—it surely is not here! If the Red Rock of Half were covered by the glacier there would be less than five hundred feet of height exposed above the surface of the ice. If the rock existed at all it would be exposed to our view."

"Q. E. D.," returned Berwind. "It does not exist."

"My eye is fairly accurate in computing distance," said Stuart slowly, "and I am certain that splotch of red is exactly the location where the Red Rock ought to be. I must say that is adding aggravation to injury."

Berwind himself drew in a sigh. "I am bitterly disappointed," he said simply. "I dare say it is all a fairy-story."

More disappointed than either of them would care to say, they began the leaden retreat. It had been a wild idea, after all. They had pinned their faith to an old wife's tale and gone in search of buried treasure like addle-pated boys.

When they swung themselves up to the ledge again and faced about toward the table-land they noticed light fluffy masses of what appeared to be steam blowing toward them. Berwind was puzzled by it, but Stuart, with a frantic exclamation, hurried forward on the perilous footing. Then, as they rounded the turn again, Berwind stopped. "By George! It's fog," he said, "as thick as a linen sheet!"

The fog rolled over them like great clouds of smoke, as they made their way back to the others. Mr. Lee, grinding the snow beneath impatient feet, came shivering up to them. "Nothing, of course? Perhaps you will tell me now what we are going to do?" He flung out his hand toward the fiord which was filled, like a cup, with the icy vapor.

"I can," said Stuart. "We are going to eat some food and we are going to camp here till we can see our way down that cliff."

His cheerful voice braced them all. And only Nora ate her sandwiches in a contemptuous silence and drank, without one word of gratitude, the coffee that he warmed in a boiling mud-spring.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE FOG AND THE GREENLAND FLOE

THE afternoon passed wearily. Under the fog the biting cold increased until the men had to keep moving constantly, calling to one another lest they lose their bearings in the mist. Nora, wrapped in both rugs, sat in mournful silence and shivered and, it is to be feared, thought unwomanly things about the silly old treasure that had landed them in such a difficulty.

Toward night they finished the remains of the sandwiches and coffee—a dismal meal, for nothing bears immediate repetition so ill as a basket luncheon. Their talk was dejected and merely speculative. What would the men on the yacht think had become of them? Would Katie be worried? When would the fog lift?

Stuart and Berwind did their best toward keeping up the spirits of the party and indeed the Doctor was gratified to find that Mr. Lee was bearing himself in the disagreeable ordeal with more fortitude than he had expected.

When the question of the arrangements for the night was discussed, Stuart's good sense again served them.

He turned his attention quietly to the manufacture of snow shelters. Berwind, under his friend's direction, was playing assistant-builder, and Healy, complaining of soreness in his back, slowly imitated their movements in the construction of his own resting place.

"Look, Nora, my dear!" cried Mr. Lee in high admiration. "Each one of us as snug as an Esquimau in his little *igloo!*"

In spite of himself, Stuart, as he bent over his task, listened for the girl's reply; but not a word did she vouchsafe.

"There now, at last," said Stuart cheerily, straightening his stiffened back. "We are ready for occupancy. Front, show the gentleman to number 210! Ice-water runs in all rooms from the center spigot. Don't

blow out the electric light and please report any incivility at the desk. If you will allow me——" with an instinctive offer of service, he turned to Nora. But she drew back.

"No, thank you, Mr. Stuart," she said quietly. She glanced fleetingly, contemptuously at the *igloo* destined for her use.

"As you please," said Stuart, turning away. "But I think, Berwind, as physician to the party you should try to persuade Miss Lee not to expose herself any more than our necessity demands."

"Of course you must sleep in the shelter!" cried her father, rubbing his nose furiously. "You mustn't be silly."

"Really, Miss Lee," began Berwind.

But Nora leaned down and snatched up one of the rugs, laughing. "Don't impute such disinterested motives to me. I shall lie over here by the hot spring where the ground is warmer and the air softer, and I shall have good fresh air to breathe and altogether be vastly more comfortable than any of the rest of you. Good-night, father! Good-night, everybody!"

She went off with the rugs in her arms. After an interval of pottering about, she at last curled herself up in the rug and pulled her gray fur coat closely about her throat and head and composed herself with apparent calm and content to sleep beside the margin of the steaming pool.

DR. BERWIND, partly convinced that she was quite safe and partly aware of the utter uselessness of arguing with her, devoted himself to making his patient comfortable. Captain Healy, taking an ample flask from his pocket, had retired for the night with such hopes of warmth as he could extract therefrom.

But Stuart waited in the cold, white mist, watching the members of the fog-bound party disappear, one by one, until he was alone with Nora. At a sufficient distance from her to remain unseen by her, he waited.

In the still, twilight night, the half-hours went by, joining themselves one to the next and so becoming hours. It was not pleasant to wait there, walking to and fro and fighting with the physical weariness that sought relief in sleep. But he fought it out to the bitter end until convinced by her stillness that she had at last fallen into a doze. He turned and went toward her, unbuttoning as he went the fur-lined coat which all night had secured for him a certain degree of protective warmth.

She looked like a forlorn little kitten, curled up in the insufficient covering of rug. Deserted by all her waking dignity she looked very little and helpless. As he slipped out of his coat, the frozen breeze struck him with sudden sharpness.

With stealthy gestures and a gentleness as skilful as silent, he spread the soft, thick, fur garment over her. As he bent nearer to arrange one sleeve as a screen between her face and the cold fumid breeze, his lips twitched in a little involuntary smile. For she turned peacefully against the furry warmth with a little childish noise of satisfaction.

"M-m-m," she murmured contentedly. The little involuntary acknowledgement, ambiguous though it might be, brought to Stuart's heart an odd, tender pleasure.

He stood a few moments looking down at her, and then, with a quick shrug of his shoulders—the meaning of which involuntary action he hardly himself understood—he turned away. The cold was making him bitterly uncomfortable. Up and down he tramped till he had worn quite a path in the snow, swinging his arms to keep the cold blood moving in his veins.

In staggering, misty shapes of white the fog-wreaths swept seaward past him, like the ghosts of long-drowned men returning to their graves.

Alone, loomed and towered the faint outlines of Sigurda. Through the clouds below him the straw-colored sun burned its gradual way. Like a curtain slowly, steadily withdrawn, the vapors shivered and melted farther, farther away. The high promontory that guarded the mouth of the fiord appeared first, faintly gray, then deepening, glistening black. Beyond, as the misty veil dissolved and lifted, stretched the whiteness of the sea.

STUART took in his breath. "By the Lord Harry!" he cried sharply, and he stared again. That wide, white floor below him—— He stood staring.

The rent clouds above his head at last disclosed a glimmer of blue and the mists vanished. As far as he could see toward the enwalled horizon stretched high-heaped fantastic waves and peaks of rigid white, of fixed and icy green.

"Stuart!" The voice came abruptly,

unexpectedly, to end the long, silent, lonely vigil. Mark turned suddenly, gladly. Berwind, wrapped in his fur coat, was hurrying down the snowy hillside toward him.

"Will you tell me," cried Berwind, "in the name of all the goblins of this unspeakable country, what they have been doing to our sea out there while we slept?"

Stuart regarded him fixedly but with a little whimsicality. "You will sympathize with me, my dear chap, when I tell you it is my professional duty to inform you of the worst. You may remember my speaking the other day of the Greenland floe—the pack-ice that swings away from the Arctic snow when the Summer sun begins to shine, and comes drifting south? It is a little early this year, as you see. And it remains till the coast is sufficiently warmed by the long day to set it free—a process which is generally accomplished, I believe, by——"

"By when?" cried Berwind as he paused.

"By the middle of August," answered Stuart quietly.

Berwind stared at the speaker. "The middle of August—of August! My dear Stuart, then you mean to say——"

Stuart swept his arm toward the death-like construction of the rigid, white expanse below them.

"It means, old man," he said almost reluctantly, "that the *Blessed Damozel* and her company are fast-locked prisoners here in the Vatna Jökull, for the next three months to come!"

CHAPTER XXV

AT THE SHIP'S RAIL

THE sound of voices, speaking in the earnest, explosive style of those face to face with an unexpected emergency, woke Nora Lee. She opened her eyes and stared in amazement at the cruelly brilliant blue sky above her. Then she remembered and sat up.

Womanlike, she put up her hands to her hair. As she bent forward under this operation, her hands suddenly slackened and stopped. Spread over the gay colors of her steamer-rug was the rough, harsh fur of a motor-coat. She looked at it a moment in amazement and then her glance flew to the row of men standing staring out to sea. Her father, Berwind and the Captain were all huddled down inside their great coats; Mark Stuart was standing as passively as they, with nothing over his tweed jacket.

In an instant she had thrown off the covering and risen to her feet. And the crimson that seemed to flourish in her cheeks for the sake of but this one man, colored her bravely in the action. He had dared! He had taken advantage of her sleeping to put her under obligation to him again! Knowing that she would rather have died of exposure than accept a sacrifice from him, he had allowed her no choice but had come to her like a thief in the night and had stolen her permission to serve her! And doubtless he had been revelling in every movement of her unconsciousness, rejoicing in his own discomfort at the thought that he had gained another cowardly advantage over her!

She put on her cap again and was tying her long veil with a vicious jerk when her father turned and saw that she was on her feet. He came toward her instantly.

"Good morning!" she called brightly. "Well, there's no difficulty about getting down this morning, is there? Why didn't you wake me, dear? How clear it is, but how cold!" The word cold reminded her of the coat, but though she flushed again she did not so much as glance toward it. "Oh, for a hot breakfast on the yacht!" she said with a shiver. "Can't we start at once?"

Mr. Lee gave a short laugh. "You'll have plenty of hot breakfasts on the yacht!" he replied, half amused and half irritated. "Come and look at this!"

He put his arm through hers, as was his way, and turning about, brought her a few steps nearer to where the others were standing. They turned about to greet her, but her eyes stared past them at the sea and her step faltered beside her father's.

"Why—what has happened?" she asked slowly. "It looks like the North Pole!"

"That's just what it is!" replied Berwind, smiling. "The Greenland floe has closed in on us, and I am informed it usually spends two or three months' vacation on this coast every Spring."

Nora continued to stare at it. "But how do we get through it?" she asked.

"We—don't," said Berwind.

"Don't?" she queried. "What do you mean? We can't stay here two or three months!"

"I am afraid it is a matter of Hobson's choice," returned Berwind.

"I can't believe it!" cried the girl. "What about food? Why, we will starve!"

"No trouble about thet, miss," put in Healy. "We're pervisioned fer a year at least. 'N' as fer coal, we c'ud keep the heat goin' fer as long as thet and then hev' enough to git back to Reykjavik under a quarter head o' steam."

"Yes," said Berwind, "we shall live through the imprisonment, for that matter."

"The point is," said Stuart, "that we just plain have to!"

She looked at them each in turn. "Two or three months!" she said.

They nodded, like a row of mandarins, Stuart without looking at her but intent upon the whitened sea, Berwind with a grave cheerfulness, her father nervously and with much disgust, and Captain Con Healy with the unsurpassable melancholy that was his.

She drew a deep breath and was silent for a moment. Then with an encouraging pressure of the arm in hers, she said, smiling, "At that rate, the sooner we get down to breakfast, the better, don't you think so?"

"Well said!" cried Berwind, his face illuminated. "You are a trump card, Miss Nora. I am proud to know you!"

Even Healy smiled at her. But Stuart turned suddenly and walked back toward the snow-house, as if to gather up their few belongings. When he returned, as Berwind and Healy were securing the life-rope to Mr. Lee and Nora, she noticed that he was again wearing the fur coat that she had slept under all night without knowing it. She noticed also that his eyes regarded her with the look of a man who is supremely puzzled.

ALREADY the boat from the *Blessed Damozel* had put off and was nearing the shore of the fiord a mile farther down just below the fissure. "They've been wondering what became of us, I reckon," said Healy with a sad satisfaction.

As they set forward, the hard snow taking no impression of their footsteps, Berwind and Stuart fell in together, Mr. Lee and his daughter following, while Captain Healy led the well-known way.

"At least you can't complain of this place, Berwind," said his companion, "that nothing ever happens in it! I may say that a day at Coney Island with a lunatic would be peacefully barren of incident compared to the life we are leading here."

"And then the incident of finding no treasure cave!" retorted Berwind mockingly. "There's a thrill for you! Why, my dear fellow, all we have to do is to start out every day in another direction looking for pirates' caves, to experience it again."

"I believe you have caught melancholy from the Captain," returned Stuart.

Berwind eyed him. "That is not half so likely as that you have caught your death of a cold, going without your coat all night."

"It wasn't bad fun walking about watching the fog lift," said Stuart. "I can sleep any old time, but it is not more than once in a life-time that one can see an army of icebergs saunter into one's front yard." He spoke lightly, but the reference to his night's experience brought his brows together in the puzzled frown again. The problem that so perplexed him was Nora Lee herself. How could so many contradictory qualities find themselves all together in one girl? How could the girl who could face the three months' imprisonment on the Vatna more bravely than they themselves nurse so baseless an anger against him?

"Look here, Stuart," said Berwind gravely. They had but just reached the first cuts of the fissure, and the Doctor had bent down almost on one knee in the snow. He gathered something in his hand and held it up. It was a little bunch of the wild oats they had noticed on their way up the day before, flourishing in a pathetic insistence, wiry and dry, in the crevices of the rock. It was now absolutely withered and black.

Nora and Mr. Lee came up at the moment and stopped beside them. "Is this where we go down, Mr. Stuart?" he asked. "Berwind, what have you there?"

"Another evidence of the curse of the Abbot," said the Doctor, rising and laying the blackened wisps of straw in Nora's hand. "What is that line about the grass being thrown into the oven? What is an oven in comparison to the curse of a righteous man, eh?"

"Very largely assisted by a natural phenomenon in the shape of a drifting icepack," put in Stuart, as he took a step or two away toward the waiting Captain. But Mr. Lee, bending over his daugher's open palm, ignored this latter and most sensible remark. He lifted a face that was as white as a bit of linen.

"Yesterday it was alive," he said slowly. "We saw it growing here—it was alive." He took some of the withered bits from his

daughter's hand and they went into a rough powder between his fingers. "Dust to dust," he said, in the same tone. "The curse lies very heavy on this Vatna Jökull, doesn't it? And have you ever thought that we have adventured into the blackest wrath of it, identifying ourselves with the forbidden search for the forbidden treasure? I wonder when they will say of each of us—'yesterday he was alive'!"

He looked from one to the other, his pale lips smiling forcedly. Then Nora put a hand on her father's arm and laughed a bit nervously. "Why, you are really quite impressive in the carrying on of the torch, father!" she said. "One would think the days of curses were still with us."

Berwind nodded and smiled. "It would seem so to any man who was still a climb and a row away from that hot breakfast, Miss Nora." His sharp eyes had not overlooked the impression this slight episode had made upon his patient.

THE descent was immediately begun and the five of them made their slow way down the lip of the fissure without accident or indeed dangerous hazard. The Captain had no sooner set foot upon the beach than he was surrounded by the sailors from the boat, talking now earnestly, now apathetically, of the new situation that confronted them, looking into his face with the intense trust of children as they waited for his answers and remarks. It was evident that the Captain had won control of the crew, however little he may have succeeded in ingratiating himself with the owner's guests. Stuart watched the pantomime with interest. "I dare say," he remarked quietly to Berwind, "that it is just as well the treasure story was a hoax."

"I will try to make myself believe it, if you will give me a good reason," replied the Doctor gloomily.

"Simply that to divorce our interests at this time from those of that crew would be dangerous indeed."

"Rubbish!" said Berwind. "Divorce, is it? My dear fellow, the bonds of holy matrimony are easily broken, it would seem, but the fetters of the ice-floe from Greenland are a different matter. I don't consider your reason a good one and I shall go on cherishing my disappointment."

After a moment he added slowly, almost as if apprehensive of ridicule, "Do you know, Stuart, I can't help feeling that the treasure is there just the same?"

"Of course you can't! Neither can I. That is just the mule stubbornness of hope. But we have seen with our own eyes that it is not there and little by little we will come to believe it."

"Unless the vengeance of the Archangel descends upon us first, as Mr. Lee says," returned the Doctor.

"Ah, who's afraid?" said Stuart with a boyish laugh.

Later indeed, after the hot breakfast, Stuart, with his pipe between his teeth and a sense of physical contentment strong upon him, betook himself to the starboard rail to torture himself with the view of the Mountain of Sigurda. The infernal cold, as Mr. Lee had inaptly called it, was as searching as ever, but he liked the keen wind on his face, and the rest of him was so protected with warm furs and hot coffee that he would have gone into a blizzard without a murmur. From the bow came an unusual sound of laughter and the loud click of mallets. A glance forward served to arouse Stuart's surprise, and a vague sense of uneasiness.

The sailors who had evidently taken advantage of the overnight absence of the authorities to appropriate the shuffleboard set, had plainly not thought it worth while to cover this breach of discipline even by a tardy restitution. The stocky form of Grimson, the second mate, was bent in careless exertion over his mallet. Two or three of the sailors, pipe in mouth, were waiting their turns, while against the rail, in a pose of indescribable jauntiness, leaned the chief steward, the handsome red-headed Cockney Bill Levine, who had from the first day been Stuart's special detestation. This feeling was at the present moment in no wise remedied by the fact that from the fellow's wide open mouth came, in rolling though untutored barytone, the little song so identified in Stuart's mind with Nora Lee:

"Down she kyme as w'ite as milk,
A rowse in 'er bosom as soft as silk."

"What infernal impudence!" said Mark Stuart to himself. Yet it was not his yacht—not till life and death were involved could the conduct of Mr. Lee's employees become his business. So with a firm effort of will he turned his back and put his thoughts resolutely to his own affairs.

The smoke, rising from the bowl of his

pipe, was carried away in a thin blue line. He leaned his elbows on the rail, put up a foot upon a cleat and settled himself for a long stare at the decapitated Sigurda—he insisted upon considering it Sigurda. Even from where he looked he could distinguish a faint, tiny mark far away upon the mountain that showed a ghostly red. It may be he merely believed he saw it because he knew it was there, but in either event it added an exclamation point to his disappointment.

So intensely was he regarding the far-away spot where by all tallies there should have been a promontory and a cave full of golden chalices and jeweled crosses that he did not perceive another person had joined him at the starboard rail, until the newcomer also put a pair of elbows on the rail and in doing so touched one fur sleeve against his own.

HE TURNED, a bit startled. And then amazement froze him where he stood. Beside him was Nora Lee. She did not in the least look at him, but her eyes, staring off as his own had been, were very bright and there was a wavering color in her cheek. Yet she leaned there motionless, to all other evidences apparently at ease, her hands in their warm gloves clasped lightly before her, and her whole poise that of a long accustomed friend.

For a full minute he stared at her. Behind them, the dog Humbug, pattering up and down the deck on three legs as usual in a search for some warm spot, gave it up with a miserable whimper and returned to the cabin below. Then, as if perhaps the faint sound had roused him, Stuart straightened. "Shall I go away?" he asked quietly.

"No," said Nora Lee.

There was quite a prolonged silence, then: "If you would not look at me quite so intently, I would like to say something to you."

Even then his eyes did not leave her promptly, but lingered, and then very slowly moved away. The only sound about them was the piping of the wind in the rigging and the grinding of the ice-blocks beyond the waters of the fiord.

A slow heat began stealing into Stuart's veins. To have had her come and stand beside him like that, so quietly, so naturally, to have her remain there voluntarily near him was a thing he could not understand, but it was none the less troublously sweet.

Still he waited and she said nothing.

With his head slightly bowed over his clasped hands, he stole little glimpses of her, forbidden though they might be. Her fur cap had pushed her hair forward about her eyes, hiding the blue veins in the white temple, and yet showing between the brown threads of it, so golden in the crisp sunlight, the everchanging flush of her graceful cheek. She leaned heavily against the rail and her breath in that pressure came half fluttering between her lips. What was she going to say to him? What did it matter, since at least she had given him the sweetness of this silence in which he might almost make believe to himself that they were friends!

Quite suddenly she turned and faced him. "I have come to ask your pardon," she said softly, and he saw that her eyes were bright with more than the sunlight. "I have been very rude to you, and it was my knowing just how unpardonable it was that kept me at it—if you can understand what I mean by that. You are our guest, and I shall endeavor in the future to behave as—as people of good breeding always do. Will you forgive me?" she abruptly added.

"Forgive you? Good heavens!" His voice rang with a break in it. "My dear Miss Nora, it is I who have been unpardonably rude, and I who must ask forgiveness. You must realize that I spoke in a vein somewhat out of the normal yesterday when I undertook to instruct you in the usages of gentle society. But——"

"But—it was under quite sufficient provocation to warrant it," she interposed. Her face looking up into his had a childishness in its frame of curling hair that made it doubly appealing. "I want to hear you say that you forgive me."

For another instant of silence he looked down into her dove-like eyes. "Yes, I forgive you," he said very slowly, "and with all my heart. Will you also forgive me?"

A faint smile showed itself at the corners of her lips. "Forgive you? Yes—if you wish it." She put out her hand to ratify the compact, and he took it and held it.

"But with all your heart, you know," he said half lightly.

The wavering color in her cheeks came to stay. "With all my heart, then," she returned softly.

TO BE CONTINUED

THE SKIPPER WITH THE YOUNG EYES

BY GERALD CHITTENDEN

THERE had been some smart life-boat work that afternoon, when Mrs. Dupont's three-year-old had fallen overboard. Hume, an old-ish man, the ship's drunkard, had dived after the child; the two of them had been aboard again in less than twenty minutes. Hume's appearance in the smoking-room that evening had been the signal for a demonstration, from which he had sought sanctuary in his cabin.

"Hume, of all men," I commented to Kemp, "doesn't seem to me the stuff of which heroes are made."

"On the contrary," answered Kemp, "he is exactly the stuff of which all heroes have been made since the beginning of time."

"Do you think all of them are café athletes?"

"Far from it." Kemp filled his pipe with a slow forefinger. "The café business is superficial. But Hume has a boy's eyes, and that's what I mean by saying he is made of the same clay as all heroes since the beginning of time. When you find the head that knows a chain of consequences to the last link, and proceeds in carelessness of that knowledge because of a young heart and the young eyes that express the young heart, you have a considered heroism that makes its own laws and its own universe, for a little while. Not for long, though; we live too late to make a new heaven and a new earth, or even a new system of justice. Apropos, there's a story, if you care to hear it."

Kemp's reminiscences are always interesting; he has a boy's eyes himself. He began, presently, speaking slowly till he should grow warm with his tale.

"It's nothing about life-saving—just a story of a skipper with young eyes, and all the traits that go with young eyes, barring only ignorance of consequences. A mad sort of defiance, carelessness of the future, a kind of divine selfishness—he had them all."

"Gaiety, too?" I suggested.

"Gaiety—with young eyes? Never! I'm not talking of your blasé adolescents, over-civilized and half-baked. They have gaiety if you like. But they haven't the hankering to make the world over anew, remold it nearer to the heart's desire. York had, when I knew him. And he settled down to his story:

HE WAS the skipper of the *Dysart*, a two-thousand-ton cattle-boat plying between Quebec and Liverpool. I was almost broke at the time and wanted to get to England as cheaply as possible; it's only lately that I've taken to traveling on these apartment hotels. So I went to a friend of mine who was in the shipping and exporting business in Quebec and asked him about the vessels in the harbor just then; more especially about the officers of them. for you can stand almost any kind of a boat if you have a half-way decent captain.

"Take the *Dysart*," advised my friend. "York's her skipper. A queer cuss, with a queerer crew, as usual. All nations, with a majority of Irishmen. Englishmen don't like to ship under him, being conservative and not liking innovations. They tell me that they never know what York will do next. He'll be along the docks somewhere, with his cur; that'll help you to know him."

I found him on the deck of his own boat, where the first officer was superintending the loading of stores. His dog, a canine nondescript, part collie, was lying beside him with his head between his paws, He stared at me as I came aboard. Beyond that he took no notice of me, any more than he did of any man under the sun, save York alone. The

dog seemed to understand every word that York said to him or to anybody else.

I think it was the dog that attracted me first to the man; it was York's eyes that held me after I had exchanged greetings with him. Nearly all sailormen have peculiarly fine eyes; his were fine, but there was a certain quality in them that was not of the sea especially. Hume has the same expression —you know what I mean. There was a chiselled droop to the lids of York's eyes that proclaimed the fires within them. Fires of emotion, generally—sympathy, curiosity, what not. It took me some time to discover that the natural thoughtfulness of the man was always in control of the emotions that the eyes expressed. He thought along his own lines, though.

I booked passage on the *Dysart*. The price was low, even for a cargo boat. I think York took a fancy to me. He expected to reach Liverpool in twelve days.

In the Gulf we ran into nothing unusual—only battering seas, ice, fogs and bitter cold —the usual incidents of the Northern passage in May. The *Dysart* bucked along at ten knots or so and York seemed to like it, though he said little more than his dog.

Two days east of Sable Island the propeller dropped from the shaft without warning—luckily, during a period of comparitive calm, so that the *Dysart* lay sulkily in the sea.

The change of motion and the clang of the racing machinery in the engine-room disturbed the cattle, and they began to bellow. When York discovered that not much damage had been done he decided to keep on his course, and try to make some port on the English or Scotch coast. We were shorthanded, of course, and half the crew were stokers, whom the chief engineer kept busy at first tidying up the engine-room. I think no more than two or three of the men before the mast had ever handled canvas, and I'm sure that neither they nor any one else had ever pulled on the halyards of such sails as York devised in the day and the night following the accident.

He set the gang of polyglot paint-scrubbers to work at once, dismounting one of the cargo booms which he intended to use for a yard. That done, he called them around him and drew chalk pictures on the deck of the hybrid rig he meant to inflict on the *Dysart*. It was curious to see how his spirit—the boy's enthusiasm of his eyes—got hold of the men; his animation was reflected, though faintly, on the thick faces of the four Norwegians, while the Irishmen grinned at each other appreciatively over his head, and the solitary Finn—a warlock, if ever there was one—went crooning about his work when the artistic session was over. Later he made a song about it:

> "The winds obey him,
> Though the cattle bellow;
> Nor can the gray sea conquer
> The man with the young eyes."

It ran something like that—in broken English. The men were half afraid of the Finn—said he had the power of second sight. When the hatches were left open to give the cattle air he used to sit on the coaming with his feet hanging over the hold and sing in a minor key. York's dog never passed him with his tail up.

In the end York got some sort of sail on the old craft, a huge yard on the fore and another on the main; there was decent canvas on these. The rest was a mixture of deformed lateen and fore and aft sails made out of hatch-coverings.

"Lucky we haven't our propeller to cut down our speed," said York.

It was a mad rig and no one I ever saw except York would have held on his way to Liverpool with it, for at most we were only about one-third of the way across the ocean. We careered over the Atlantic like a drunken and disreputable old sport coming home from a ball.

With a fair wind the ship sometimes made as much as five knots. The only things that were unhappy were the cattle, who lowed uneasily at the heeling of the ship. We went along to a sort of G-string accompaniment. York said he had been raised on a farm and that the sound made him feel at home.

"We shan't be more than two weeks late, if this wind holds," he said, "and that will be something to boast about."

The wind didn't hold. It dropped absolutely, and then came a living gale out of the northeast. We had to lie to, of course. From that time on everything went against us. For days at a time York never took off his clothes, but lived on the bridge with his watchful and silent dog, and slept at odd moments. Tired as he was he kept control of the situation and drove his men to their tasks, sometimes with blarney, which

seemed natural to him, and once in true bucko style with curses and belaying-pins, which was just as natural to him, though it didn't seem so.

It was all a game to him—a game without plan, to be played from moment to moment, exactly as life is a game to all the fraternity of youth. York would have thoroughly enjoyed himself if it hadn't been for the cattle. As soon as he had rigged his sails he put the beasts on short allowance of fodder and water; the tone of their lowing began to change and finally ceased altogether, except for now and then the forlorn bellow of a steer disappointed over the size of his breakfast. Later we came to look for these isolated cattle noises, and the expectation kept us tense.

ADVERSE winds followed the gale. Have you ever been on a steamer trying to make headway under sail, and a jury rig at that? It's like nothing so much as the clogged flight of dreams—as heartbreaking, quite as hopeless. You creep, unless half a gale is driving you forward.

Blow followed blow, all from the northeast and the men would have yielded and turned back, if it hadn't been for the divine obstinacy which enabled York to make them obey orders and keep on.

About the beginning of the third week out of Quebec, food and water for the cattle gave out entirely. Occidentals and dogs are the only beings that protest against fate and moan when they are in pain. Horses, too, I've heard scream when they're wounded. Cattle bear all things silently—cattle and Orientals. Do they suffer the less on that account? I think not, for at the extremity of suffering, a little before they die, they go mad.

Nearly always on a cattle-ship some breath of sound comes up through the hatches—sometimes the noises of early morning in a farmyard; sometimes no more than a rustle and movement of animate life—as it might be the beating of some hundreds of hearts. One is conscious of it on a calm night especially. It's a reassuring undertone that mingles with the slow sigh of the water along the sides of the ship.

Perhaps you never realize it till you miss it as we did when the poor brutes had been some fourteen hours without food and water. Even the five cattlemen went below no more than was necessary. They remained aloof from the crew and were silent when they came on deck. Callous as they were, the wholesale slaughter by starvation and thirst that was going on between decks affected them.

It was different with York—different and worse. He would have done better to have gone his rounds and seen the worst there was to see, for while he remained on the bridge his imagination had free reign. I stayed with him the first part of the night.

Once he turned to me and said, "Suppose my dog wanted water and I couldn't give it to him?"

He didn't wait for his answer but resumed his unhappy tramp—up and down, up and down.

Again, some time later, "Dogs, cattle and men—does it hurt one more than the other to die slowly?"

"Why don't you kill them?" I asked.

"It's the insurance," This with contempt in his voice. "It will all go by the board unless the log shows that the brutes died from natural causes."

Once again that restless pacing, with the dog, dejected, at his heels. The calm of the night made it worse, for there was nothing to keep his mind busy; worse for the dog, too, in whom the protective collie instinct was strong. When I went below, the two of of them were standing in the moonlight, the man with the collar of his great-coat hunched about his ears and the dog lying down beside him.

To leeward a big berg glistened. At the wheel was the Finn, who now and then turned a spoke or two and looked occasionally at the dog and the man. I paused at the gangway and looked back at them again. The Finn struck six bells. The lookout's voice as he hailed the bridge crashed through the eldritch silence with a cruel unexpectedness, like a blow. York started and straightened; the dog whined miserably; only the Finn, playing with the wheel, kept up his wordless chant. A warlock, and the dog knew it.

I remained in bed the rest of the night because it was warmer there, but I didn't sleep much; when I did, I had bad dreams. About midnight the dog began to howl, and I could hear York talking to him and trying to keep him quiet.

When I turned out in the morning York was sitting on the flag-locker in the chart-

room, drinking coffee, with the dog beside him. There was an Irishman at the wheel and the sails were bellying to a light air from the west. Every now and then York bent down and scratched the dog behind the ears. He did not see me at first. When I said good-morning, he jumped like a guilty man.

"It's you, is it?" he said. "Have some coffee. It's been a long night."

His face—partly from lack of sleep, of course, but not altogether on that account—was deeply lined and the boy-look was absent from his eyes for the first time since I had known him. After coffee we went on deck together. At the forward hatch a few of the men were hauling some of the dead steers from the hold, for some of the weakest had died in the night. There was no steam in the donkey-engine, and the men pulled away at the tackles in silence, looking now and then at the bridge. It seemed that the whole ship was standing on tiptoe, waiting for something—something ominous, portentous.

One of the sailors tripped over a rope and fell sprawling; his fellows turned and cursed him vehemently, their voices rising high. York frowned down at them but made no move to stop them.

"Ten dead," said York. "Only ten and there are eight hundred of them. Some of them will last for a week yet. This ship is a hell adrift. And all because I'm afraid to have a red cross after my name at Lloyd's!"

The last carcass swung outboard and plumped into the sea. The men, moving slowly, stowed the tackle. The warm odor of a barnyard came up out of the open hatch and, though that was the only natural thing in the whole nightmare, yet it seemed the most distorted of all. It should have been an odor of death. I saw the Finn standing by the forecastle, looking at the bridge. Presently the dog threw his nose in the air and howled. York jumped to the forward rail of the bridge.

"For God's sake, close that hatch!" he shouted.

The Finn smiled as the watch on deck began to replace the grating and the tarpaulin; then he turned and went into the forecastle.

THE wind blew hard that night. When it had blown a few days before the cattle had been frightened and noisy, but now they remained silent as the grave. The men were all busy most of the time, and I don't suppose they noticed it. York did, and so did that uncanny Finn. I gave up all effort to sleep about four in the morning, and came on deck, where I met York with a lantern in his hand, bound for the hold.

"I've got to go below," he said. "I've got to see, and try to stop thinking."

I went down with him. The cattle were lying down for the most part—some of them dead—but here and there a gaunt steer was standing, his eyes gleaming in the lantern light as no steer's eyes have a right to gleam. The fancy came over me that they had ceased to be mere oxen, the most patient and unemotional things on God's earth, and had become human by suffering. York paused by one of the bodies, and looked down at it for some moments.

"I was in Canton once," he said, "during an outbreak of the plague. Let's get on!"

He moved away quickly, I after him. We passed down the runway between the stalls, almost to the end. There one of the stronger brutes, who had been standing with his thickened tongue hanging out, dropped as if he had been pole-axed and groaned and died where he fell.

York turned and, without a word, ran for the ladder that led out of the hold. That struck me with a kind of panic and I ran also, jostling him and trying to pass him in the runway. At the foot of the ladder he paused for a moment trying to find the bottom rung, and there I caught up with him.

We wrestled for the privilege of going first up that ladder; wrestled insensately, till he relaxed his grip with a little staccato laugh. A woman's hysterical laugh, it was, or a boy's. It brought us back to our senses and we climbed to the deck where the dawn was lightening. The dog was waiting for us at the top of the ladder, whining and steady eyed.

"I'll kill them all to-day!" said York.

"The insurance?" I queried.

"I'll kill them to-day! I've had enough!"

One by one they took the brutes out of the hold, when the sea had become quiet enough to make it possible. A cattleman stood by with a sledge-hammer and knocked them on the head as they swung over the deck. Most of them sank like stones. Almost the last was a monstrous fellow, with five-foot horns. The rope parted before the cattleman had hit him. He landed on the deck on his feet, and the men scattered. He

wasn't after men that time. He scrambled through the cargo gap and plunged overboard. We could see him for some minutes swimming gallantly away to leeward.

When the last of them had been put out of pain York turned to me, smiled, and yawned.

"I'm tired," said he.

There were others who felt as he did. The life of the ship, which had been suspended, in a manner of speaking, for the last few days, resumed its course. The noises of the ship grew natural again. It mattered little that we had many days ahead of us and perhaps no little danger, before we could tie up to a Liverpool quay.

That night York showed me his log: "This day jettisoned the last of the cattle."

"Is that all?" I asked.

"It's the least I can do for my owners."

There was in his eyes the old expression which had attracted me at first and which had been absent from them for the last few days—a lawless expression, perhaps, but with a contempt only for the law of the dollar.

"They'll investigate," I said.

"Let them." He slammed the book shut. "Let them! I'll stand to that entry under oath. A white lie it will be and it seems to me there are things worse than lying. That kind of lie at any rate." He leaned down to pet his dog. "Oh, yes, they'll investigate—the underwriters' attorney and the owner's attorney and all the rest of them. They'll investigate, in cold blood, sitting in their leather chairs and judging things that happen under the sky they never look up at. Much good it may do them! The men are with me."

WE WERE thirty-five days out before the northern headland of Ireland lifted over the horizon and forty before the Liverpool pilot boarded us.

"An accident, Captain?" he asked.

"No. We're trying sailing for a change. Experimenting with a new rig."

"Oh!" The pilot, a serious-minded person, thought York flippant.

He was, but any one would have been after so long a strain. "You can't get up the Mersey with this slant of wind and that rig," went on the pilot. "Hadn't I better send in for a tug, while you lie to?"

"I've brought her twenty-five hundred miles," responded York, "and I expect I can go on till I meet a tug!"

"Just as you please." If the pilot had been French, he would have shrugged his shoulders. "But I won't be responsible!"

"Sit in the chart-room, then, and sing psalms. I'll take her in!"

Take her in he did, almost to the docks before a tug came out to meet her. He had sent up all his bunting in stops. When the line was made fast he gave the signal and the flags broke free, and we went in dressed as if for the king's birthday. A boy to the end, you see, with all the characteristics that go with a boy's eyes.

He took me with him to the meeting of the underwriters' committee. They complimented him highly on his seamanship—and then:

"We have read your log, Captain. Did the cattle die from natural causes?"

For just one moment he hesitated. In the next breath I expected that he would perjure himself. He would have done so, if he had been altogether a boy. Then he grinned over at me.

"Very natural!" he said.

"What do you mean by that?" demanded a dry little lawyer-looking man. "Starvation, or disease or what?"

"They were hit on the head—except one, which jumped overboard!"

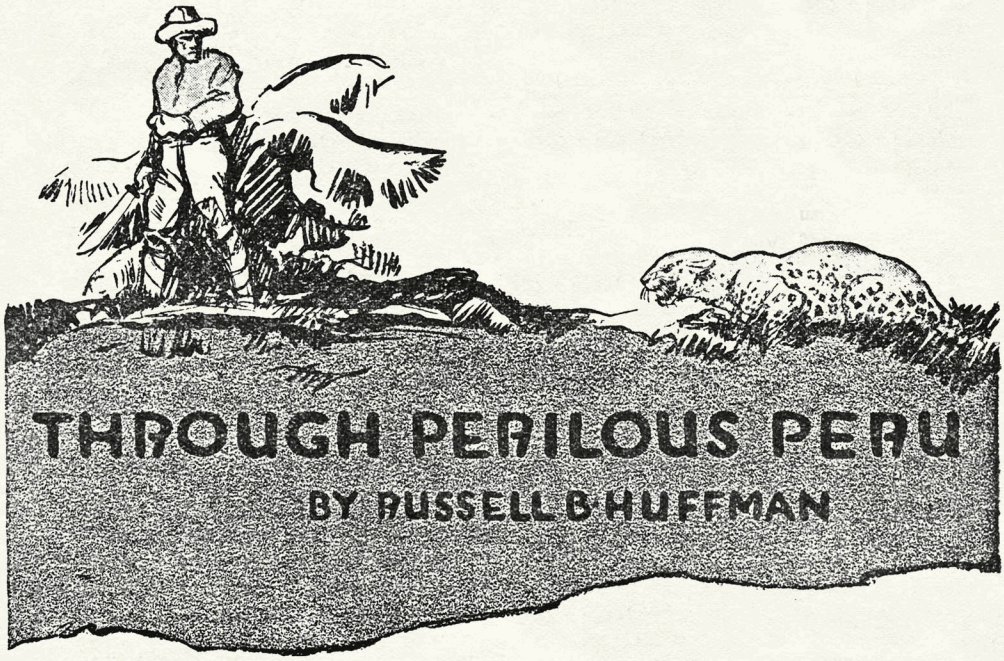
"I don't understand you. Are you trying to make game of us? This is a serious matter—as you may discover!"

"Gentlemen," said York, "I was captain of that ship, and responsible to the underwriters. But I'm not a cold-blooded frog. We ran out of fodder and water for the cattle on the twenty-fourth day. The beasts were starving; I stood it as long as I could and then I had them killed. The underwriters can go to ——!"

He turned and walked out with his head in the air. A boy's eyes—the kind that see visions. Like Hume's. And the rest of the world dreams dreams and sits in judgment on youth!

"AND York?" I asked. "What became of him?"

"They exacted their pound of flesh to the last ounce. York's real name is Hume, by the way—our fellow passenger—and he's sailed under a lot of obscure flags since he left the English service. But notice his eyes the next time you see him."



FOREWORD*

WITH cross on high and bright Toledo blade flashing to the fore, Francisco Pizarro alternately prayed and hacked his way into the heart of Peru—four hundred years ago. To-day that wondrous land is being conquered a second time, but the blade that hews the path is an engineer's *machete* and the Te Deum is temporarily abandoned for the invigorating cry, "Rod up!"

The unexplored spots on the map of the world are growing fewer. One by one men find them out and draw crooked black lines across them, which mean railways, and shake a pepper-box over them and call the dots "Santa Maria," and "Taft," and "Georgetown," and presently you wake up to find that while you twiddled your thumbs at home one more of the few "big things" has been invaded and promoted and commercialized.

Between the Peruvian Andes and the sources of the Amazon lies an unknown expanse of 500,000 square miles, unmapped by geographers save for the water-courses, and crudely bounded by doubtful surveys. Here—where tributary rivers are a mile wide 3,000 miles from the mouth of the Amazon, and a single cedar tree cuts up into 10,000 feet board measure—are the last of the "big things," the last of the virgin rubber forests, the unclaimed placers eroded from the mother lode, the vast stretches of mahogany.

Into a part of this shadowy wonderland which no white man had ever traversed an American firm sent their engineer on a reconnaissance. They wanted a link forged between the Atlantic and the Pacific—"Lima to Liverpool"—the Peruvian capital tied to the eastern ocean by 300 miles of steel laid in the heart of the jungle.

This road will place Peru closely in touch with the United States and Europe, for—and this makes you realize the size of the river and the continent—*sea-going vessels of ten thousand tons burden can then unload cargo* for Peru at Iquitos on the Amazon, *three thousand miles into the heart of the South American continent*, and the cargo, after transfer by lighter draught boats to the terminus of the railroad, can reach Lima on the West Coast in two days and a half. This, in effect, would be similar to entering the mouth of an imaginary river in the vicinity of Boston and sailing across the United States to Nevada to unload goods for San Francisco!

The work first necessary was the engineering reconnaissance of a line some three

*See Page 950.

hundred miles in length, starting at Goyllarisquisga on the Cerro de Pasco Railroad, descending the eastern slopes of the Andes and crossing the Huallaga River and a great table-land known as the Pampa del Sacramento. What the engineer did, what he saw and what trials he was obliged to undergo are told in this article. Our plight at times was desperate. That our party finally emerged from the jungle and gained the Ucayali with its work done and only one white man lost may be considered the result of undying determination mingled with good fortune.

LOOK OUT FOR THE CASHIBOS!

WE LEFT Lima in August, 1909, with not a little regret, for Lima had been good to us. The arm-chairs in the Phoenix Club had been very comfortable chairs and from their upholstered depths we and the gregarious Englishmen, whose club it was, had built railroads and dug mines and shot things in all parts of the globe for several weeks. The Englishmen had all knocked about a bit, they said, and, when a Britisher tells you that, it generally means something, but none of them had done much in the region toward which we were headed. They only drank their tea and listened to our plans and nodded pleasantly. "Wish you luck, old fellow," they said. "Look out for the Cashibos!"

Down at El Club Nacional the very hospitable Peruvians said the same thing in a manner a trifle more ornate, but none the less genially and with no less a note of warning. After a few afternoons and evenings of these hints, R. M. Brown, one of the party, and I looked into the matter of the Cashibos. A few hours' conversation with those who knew showed us that while half of our troubles might be concerned with food the other half would almost certainly involve attempts to keep from becoming food.

Brown came to me the afternoon of our last ride on the Paseo Colon with a rather serious light in his eye.

"I've been looking up these Cashibo fellows that live over in the Pampa del Sacramento," said he, "and I find that there's only one thing they won't eat!"

"Let's take it along," I replied.

"If you like," he answered. "It's a Chinaman. Old Chong Lung, who runs the roulette wheel at the Chinese joint, told me last night between spins that the only man who has ever been allowed to live in their country without being eaten is an old wizened-up trader he used to know back Canton way, who is so dry that he crackles when he walks. He says the trader told him that the Cashibos are particularly soft on babies."

"We're not taking along any babies this trip," I remarked. "We'll have to go through just the same, Cashibos or no Cashibos. Are you coming?"

"Certainly I'm coming!" Brown answered in injured tones. "You don't suppose I'd back out just because they want to *eat* me, do you?"

Brown would have made a big killing but a poor meal—strong and rugged, standing over six feet in height, a Houston boy with all the Texan's readiness for adventure. At this time he was twenty-eight years old and had already done considerable hard work. Coming out of college at the University of Texas the Big Ditch had caught his eye as the most promising job and he had dug and hustled trains around in the Culebra Cut until breaking yardage records became too prosaic for words.

About that time some one touched off a political magazine a few days farther south and Brown hustled down into Ecuador, getting in on the heels of a revolution and feeling very peevish because they didn't need any more generals or colonels. He told me that he stayed around in Ecuador for a solid six months buying bad brandy for café anarchists and trying to stir up another revolution so that he could send a picture of himself wearing a sword back to a Miss Somebody in Houston, but that the Ecuadoreans were a bunch of benighted bean-eaters and that the revolution business was very poor and on a dead center. Every one was complaining about it, he said.

"Never mind," said I. "Perhaps you can get in some of your 'inside' work among the Cashibos."

"I hope so," he answered innocently. "Perhaps I could get to be a king. They'd think a lot of that back in Houston."

Up at Cerro de Pasco we picked up Fleming and McClure. Fleming was a Yale man out of Sheffield Scientific School and came from Pittsburg. He also was young and strong, and hungry for a dangerous job.

McClure was a type. Grizzled and keen-eyed, forty-eight years old and a native of Montana, he had pounded drills and driven stages in every State in the West and several of the Provinces of Canada. His repertoire of stories, mainly involving his personal activities, transcended anything I have ever heard. If his stories were all true, he was the prince of raconteurs. If they were not true, he can be described fairly well in English. Here also we enlisted Fred Lewis, twenty-four years old and a native of Chile, but of German extraction. Lewis spoke four major tongues fluently in addition to several dialects. His other abilities were less noticeable.

WE FOUND Cerro de Pasco very full of American snap and vigor and therefore quite a different place from Lima, although probably the altitude accounts for that. Cerro de Pasco is said to be the highest and dirtiest city in the world. It's altitude is 14,200 feet, while some of the smells are even higher. Everybody in Cerro de Pasco is crazy on the subject of copper; otherwise they are quite sane, and certainly when the "Andes Club" from the big smelter over in the valley gets to touching up the "Mines" slab-artist for two and three cushions at a time on a nice bright day the rooters' yells that go up differ only in volume from those at the Polo Grounds during a "double-header."

The Cerro de Pasco people were genial and helpful, as the Lima men had been, and here our party shook itself together and more or less crystallized, as the miners put it. We bought our last American cigarettes here and had our boots re-soled by an American shoe-maker and went to a dance. Dancing at such an altitude is a matter of very scientific breathing, especially as the genuine Peruvian waltz sometimes lasts over an hour, but it was our last chance, "*la ultima suerte*," as my partner smilingly hinted, and we accepted it gladly. Shortly afterward we left for the little mountain town of Ambo on the road to our base at Huanuco.

There were various formalities to be gone through at Ambo. A new railroad in Peru is as much a matter of public rejoicing as elsewhere, and Government officials would have to be seen, and there would be a reception of sorts, and the usual bad cognac would be produced only to disappear again. Probably there would be a band.

A STOLEN CITY-RECEPTION

AS WE TURNED the last curve in the mountain road and looked down on the flat-roofed, white-walled houses of Ambo, gleaming like a tract of snow in the luscious green cup of the valley, the sounds which floated up to us through the thin air confirmed our ideas as to the music.

"You see," I said to Brown, "there's our band, sure enough."

"Yep," said he. "But it's going the wrong way. I wonder who all those little ants are, marching along behind."

A few minutes later we clattered into Ambo but paused to ask a question of a linen-trousered *cholo* who was hurrying toward the plaza.

"Haven't you heard, señor?" he asked, surprised. "Those are the Americanos who are going to build the railroad. Every one is *muy alegre*. The engineers are very rich and are buying nothing but champagne."

We had not gone far into the town, however, before sharp eyes saw us approaching. There was an excited bustling about and presently a fat official, all eyes and mustaches, hurried toward us.

"A great mistake has been made!" he hastened to announce, with mingled effusiveness and embarrassment. "A most lamentable affair! Certain American persons of great assurance entered our town a few moments ago and at once called for music and champagne, saying that they were the gentlemen so long expected. Meanwhile, they have amused themselves by throwing *centavos* to the *muchachos* and shooting off their revolvers. When we make speeches to them they do nothing but laugh. I ask you, *caballeros*, what could we do? What inference could we draw? Music for every one—and champagne? They must be the scientific men—*the engineers!*"

I exchanged looks with Brown and Fleming. "It's Eddie Murphy and his crew of highbinders from the machine-shop off on a vacation!" they muttered disgustedly. "We'd better hurry, or they'll eat all the pie!"

I turned to the perspiring official. "We are very much annoyed at being placed in so undignified a position," I said, "but at

the same time we can see that you are not entirely to blame. If you will return to the plaza and have the band brought back here to receive us properly, all will be forgiven and we shall not be obliged to report you to the Prefect of the Department, as was our intention."

"*Gracias! Mil gracias!*" said the fat official, and breathed again.

SOME PREHISTORIC IRRIGATION

THINKING of Ambo and its productive valley brings up remembrances of other wonderfully fertile spots in Peru. Yet so much of Peru is not valley at all, but hillside—and very steep hillside at that—that one marvels at the persistence of the mountain people in trying to cultivate their precipitous slopes. But whatever knowledge of agriculture the modern *cholo* of Peru has, poor fellow, he has to thank the Incas for, as usual.

Somewhere between a thousand and ten thousand years ago an Inca with an investigating turn of mind found that the way to hold the soil on the hillsides was to turn the slope into a series of mighty steps from three to four feet wide and high and to keep them permanent by masonry construction. In these modern days we point to our own clever masonry or concrete work with the knowing observation that it will last forever, but this Inca, who had been raised on a farm before he went down into the big city and was appointed Secretary of Agriculture, had neither leveler nor transit, nor even one barrel of good cement. What stones he used to make his steps he chose with infinite care, laying and testing and chinking, fitting his wall together with an ingenuity and prodigality of labor that was surpassed only by the builders of the Pyramids and making, in the end, something which was to last almost as long—and all this without a particle of mortar!

After his steps were finished and his soil prepared he irrigated. Authorities differ as to the beginnings of irrigation, most of them placing its start in Egypt (although the Rocky Ford people in Colorado who raise cantaloupes persist in claiming all the credit!) but I will make my Inca the one best bet.

He was a very wise chap, this copper-colored fellow of long ago, even though he had no Trautwein's Pocket Book to help him out and did wear a "fringe" on state days, for he always located his hillside work on both sides of a little gulch where water ran the year round. Here he confined the flow in a scientific manner, and at each level where his steps had been laid out he made a stone gate. In each gate he suspended a V-shaped slab and fitted it so that if he wanted water on the tenth step from the top he raised the first nine gates and shut the tenth, whereupon the water flowed out on either side along the steps and made things grow.

TO RETURN to our reception in Ambo, the fat official and the comedians from Cerro de Pasco. In an unguarded moment before our departure for Huanuco I let slip the information that we were to be the guests of the Prefect of the Department at that place. Shortly afterward, during an interlude in the festivities, the joyous ones from the big copper camp murmured strange ideas in my ears.

"*Sure* we're going with you!" they said. "Ain't there a dinner on? Ain't there goin' to be bands, and speeches, and French cider? You wouldn't have us miss all *that*, would you? Be a good fellow and tell the Prefect that we're rodmen and stake-artists. We'll all be good. We'll even make speeches for you if you say the word. And, say! If we go broke, there's a lathe-hand in the crowd that's got three walnut shells and a little pea!"

The Huanaca affair, as may be suspected, was a great success.

THE CANNIBALS BEGIN TO MAKE TROUBLE

BUT, once these pleasant preliminaries were over, our problems came thick and fast. We had contracted to surmount several high ranges, cross two wide rivers and one hundred and fifty miles of dangerous cannibal country. During this trip we must be able to protect ourselves and we must be fed.

As to the first of these, we soon found that it would not be enough to arm only the Americans of the party, but that the *cargadores*, or packers, must also have weapons of some sort. In fact, this became more and more apparent as the difficulties of engaging packers increased. Every one knew that we were headed for the Cashibo country and, although we hunted high and

low for *cholos* to carry our packs, we met only refusal and hints that such a trip was a piece of folly bordering on madness. Viewed from the point of view of the average, submissive, coca-chewing *cholo* who doesn't want to fight anybody, cannibals least of all, this was probably true.

And yet I do not think that the Cashibos are entirely to blame for the harshness with which they have met those who have infringed on their domain. Self-preservation is the first law, and when the wave of advancing civilization begins to wash the weaker peoples back and confine them in smaller territories they fight with tooth and nail to preserve a home and fireside which mean quite as much to them as ours to us, however migratory a hearth-stone it may prove to be. Probably the *gaucheros* have done more than any others to enrage this tribe of Indians, for the rubber-hunters on the upper reaches of the Amazon and it's affluents have been guilty of atrocities equalled only by those of the Congo region.

Again let me impress on the reader the immensity of this vast "twilight zone" where, lacking railroad communication, such things as slavery, cannibalism and wholesale destruction can occur without fear of reprisal or interference on the part of either Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia or Brazil. Here, and in that jutting corner of Brazil where Ecuador and Peru meet it on the west and Bolivia furnishes the southern boundary, is the one dark spot on the South American continent where at present neither laws nor magistrates can avail, where not the faintest spark of humanness enters into the relations between the rubber-pirates and the ignorant tribes whom they are steadily driving back against the eastern wall of the Andes.

Ponder awhile, gentle reader, ensconced in your comfortable chair beside the study lamp. A piece of your world a thousand miles wide by five hundred long, or *eleven times the size of Pennsylvania*, where Christianity has left no visible trace, where men with rifles shoot down other men armed only with arrows and blow-guns and sell their women and children into slavery and where the cannibal vies with the head-hunter for revenge upon the enemies now pressing upon them from every side! Take any good map of South America and find Manaos on the Amazon. Draw a line west for a thousand miles. It carries you into Ecuador. Turn south at an angle of ninety degrees for half that distance, then east for another thousand miles. After that retrace your weary steps to Manaos. You have covered the very heart of South America, the last of the virgin rubber-forests, the last unclaimed placer ground and the one spot in the Western hemisphere where in Kipling's phrase, "There's never a law of God nor Man."

Thus it will be seen that the Huanuco people, from the Prefect down, had grounds for their fears when they described our route to us, and as the days passed and our list of packers failed to grow, it began to look as if our expedition would die a-borning. In this situation there was nothing to do but secure Government aid and utilize what may be described as the police power of the Department. As a result, twenty *cholos* were impressed into our service in a short time and our most serious problem was solved for the time being. In general, it might be said that we were a scouting party, or skirmish line, seeking out a way by which others might come later. For this reason few instruments were necessary and we traveled very light, with provisions for two weeks. The rifles and ammunition for the packers were to be forwarded to us with the first provision party, as I knew we would not need them until we neared the cannibal country.

JUST WHAT A JUNGLE IS

LEAVING the Hacienda of San Juan, a point on the Huallaga River a short distance from Huanuco, on the morning of September 29, 1909, we spent the day in transferring our outfit across the river on a raft which we had constructed, and sundown found us established in our first camp. The next morning early we were at work cutting a trail into the jungle. This proved to be so dense that in two day's time we covered only four miles.

In order that the reader may appreciate what an obstacle this jungle offers let him imagine a trackless region densely forested with trees which grow to two hundred feet in height and whose foliage interlaces so closely as to shut off a view of either sky or sun. Many of these trees are eight to ten feet in diameter and ribbed at the foot with buttressing roots. From tree to tree run vine cables from two to six inches in thick-

ness. These not only wind about the trees for their entire height but also flower and leaf luxuriantly and, as if that were not enough, loop themselves in every conceivable manner from the branches and interlace with such marvelous complexity as to make the head swim in an effort to follow their courses. Add to this a veritable screen of cabbage-like lichens, orchids and vegetable marvels pendant from every branch, let a second screen of delicate ferns spring up from underfoot, bearing in mind that our maiden-hair fern of the Temperate Zone grows here to a height of three feet, and you will have a faint idea of the almost impenetrable mass of vegetation which stood in our way.

The ascent of the first range east of the Huallaga occupied seven days, during which time it rained almost incessantly. As we approached the summit and found ourselves among the clouds at an elevation of seven thousand feet our soaked condition made us feel the cold acutely. In all this jungle travel, it must be remembered, there is great difficulty in procuring firewood for the reason that the trees are so full of sap and water that they will hardly burn. But, after all, the discomfort of never being able to dry our clothes turned out to be the least of our troubles.

On the afternoon of the tenth we arrived on the banks of a small stream which we afterward—for good reason—named the River Destitution. This river lay only three thousand feet below the point from which we had glimpsed it two and one-half days before, but so circuitous a route had been forced on us by the character of the ground and so dense had been the undergrowth that it had taken us all of that time to advance little more than *a mile and a half* in a straight line.

AT THIS point I found it necessary to call a halt until the now overdue packers would arrive with fresh supplies and coca-leaves for the natives. Without coca for the *cholo* any attempt to extract work from the Peruvian mountain Indian is practically futile. The *cholo* is a small man and neither strong nor over-ambitious, so that without his accustomed stimulant he is little more than a child in either intellect or physical force. Bountifully supplied with his drug, however, this same dopey little man will carry a very fair-sized burden and undergo great hardships, to say nothing of going many days without food.

The cultivation of the coca-leaf, from which the cocaine of commerce is extracted, has been an important industry in Peru ever since the days of the Incas, so that the art is fairly old. During the colonial period the use of the drug by the natives was widespread. I imagine that its peculiar properties bothered those old Spaniards mightily. Spain was turning out some very fair fighting-men about that time, but they were better with their swords than they were at making organic analyses, so when it was up to them to explain whence came this mysterious power that enabled men to withstand hunger and exhaustion and lack of sleep their heads began to ache and they finally laid it at the door of the Evil One. But that was a way they had when they couldn't figure things out; just blamed it all on the poor old Devil and let it go at that.

STARVATION LOOMS AHEAD

OCTOBER 12th found us still waiting for our food-train and practically out of supplies. Such was my confidence in our arrangements, however, that it was not until we were actually on the verge of starvation that I began to feel doubts as to the reliability of our agent in San Juan and apprehension of similar predicaments when we should be farther into the jungle.

Our efforts to find game met with little success. There is very little animal life above three thousand feet in tropical South America and practically no birds at all, except parrots, which fly very high, and although all hands were sent out with orders to shoot at anything that could fly or walk, it was not until by great good luck I killed a deer on the thirteenth that we were afforded any relief. The fifteenth again found us without food and the packers still invisible. Although we redoubled our efforts to find game not even the redoubtable McClure was able to bag anything, although he had regaled us on many a feast that had been the result of his woodcraft—always in *other* countries.

I shall never forget Fleming's earnestness as he described a meal he had once had at the Café Berlin in Lima, while, to stay the pangs of hunger, he strode up and down with his belt drawn up to the last

notch. It seemed as if he couldn't get the flavor of it out of his mind.

"And yet, just *see* what a fool I was!" he exploded wrathfully. "There I ordered a great big, fat, juicy, porterhouse steak and when it came in, and just because it was a little bit overdone, *I wouldn't eat it!* Do you *get* me?" he asked viciously, with a gesture of disgust over his wastefulness. "I know perfectly well you won't believe a word of what I'm saying, but as true as I'm standing here to-day, dying by inches for want of a mere handful of worm-eaten, moldy beans, *I walked out of the place and left that steak untouched!*"

I don't think we properly appreciated Fleming just at that moment. My recollection is that we sat there on the ground shaking our heads and silently weighing the awful, sinful prodigality of a man who wouldn't eat a piece of steak just because it was burned a little on top.

After a time I picked up a *machete* and went off into the jungle. It didn't seem to me that I could stay there and listen to Fleming any longer. He had mournfully begun to remember other occasions when he had done similar wanton things and had finally gone back to reviewing his early childhood, starting when he was either four or four and a half and had been put away in a dark closet because he wouldn't eat his mush. Fleming must have been well fed in his early years. Certainly by his own accounts of it he had criminally, knowingly and with malice aforethought wasted enough good, honest American food in his younger days to have lasted us all the way from Huanuco to the Ucayali. I never felt the same toward Fleming again—at least, not until we had had a good square meal. As I went off into the undergrowth I could hear him still complaining about the Café Berlin and the Dutchman's steak.

FIGHTING A JAGUAR FOR A RAT

I THINK we often do some very remarkable things under the stress of these primal instincts. I know that it was only a few minutes after leaving camp that I astonished myself by my strange actions. Coming down to the bank of the stream in the course of my wanderings, I heard a peculiar animal sound, as if something were worrying something else, and, promptly following the sounds, came upon a fair-sized male jaguar which had just killed an extremely large coypu, or water-rat, at the mouth of its burrow. The jaguar had just sunk its teeth into the victim's neck preparatory to dragging it away when my approach made him drop it and stand over his prey with bared teeth and glaring eyes.

Several times since this occurrence I have wondered what my friends back in "God's Country" would have thought if they could have seen me at just that moment, sunken-eyed and cadaverous, armed only with a corn-knife, and about to fight a duel with a jaguar over the possession of a rat! But the poor little coypu represented so many things to me just then that I don't think any plain, ordinary member of the rat family could carry them. Probably it would be necessary to canonize it—like the Jackdaw of Rheims.

Right here is where my actions, viewed by the light of saner days, became remarkable. Once upon a time some unknown liar, chuckling over his ingenuity, put forward the statement that the human eye, backed by the unconquerable human will, could subdue any of the beasts of prey. Perhaps, however, I ought not to call him a liar but only ask him to omit jaguars from the list—hungry jaguars, when interrupted in their feeding. Strengthened by this theory and doing my best to keep my eyes off the nice, fat rat, I fastened a look on the jaguar which ought to have frightened to death any living thing except a theatrical manager's office-boy.

For five, long, breathless minutes I looked at that jaguar, and the jaguar, very much puzzled and not a little irritated, looked back at me. Finding at last that the strain was becoming too great, I changed my tactics abruptly and, leaping suddenly into the air, let out an unearthly howl. Much to my relief the animal shrank back, whereupon I at once began an improvised war-dance that would have made an Apache Indian look like a cheap amateur.

Up and down I pranced and leaped, howling and singing and swinging the *machete* and always approaching a little nearer to the jaguar until, with one last discordant screech, I made a desperate rush at him and swung the heavy knife at his head with all my force. Just what I would have done if he had sprung at that moment I don't know at all, especially as the force of my blow carried me so far

around that my shoulder and back were left entirely exposed, but luckily, somewhere in its arc, the sharp point of the *machete* flicked his nose and with a splutter of rage the animal spun around on its haunches and disappeared.

As may be expected, when I appeared with the coypu on my back there was a wild shout of joy and a rush to relieve me of my burden.

"What kept you so long?" they asked. "We could hear you singing and shouting hardly two hundred yards away."

"I had to take the coypu away from a jaguar," I answered with what I thought the right amount of carelessness.

Fleming and Brown exchanged looks.

"Oh, I know what you're thinking!" I said wearily. "But McClure, here, will tell you that such things have been done often enough." I didn't think it was right for them to disbelieve me after all that work. Besides, he had been the stingiest jaguar I'd ever seen.

"Sure!" said McClure promptly. "I stole a sheep away from a grizzly once."

After that I saw there was no good in saying anything more about the jaguar. I couldn't have made him small enough. But that's what one gets in this world for being truthful and unselfish and describing things just as they happened.

LATE in the afternoon of the eighteenth we heard shouts coming from the mountainside above us and a few hours later were much relieved to see the first of twenty-five carriers coming into camp with fresh supplies. On questioning them we found that they, like the men with us, had been impressed into service, and so had systematically loafed over the whole trip. I saw at once that not only had the matter of bringing provisions up to us assumed serious proportions, but also that we were in for trouble with our men, especially those who had already gone through our hardships.

So I was not surprised when, five days later, four of our original string deserted us during the night. We had, at that time, crossed our second range of mountains and were camped on a branch of the Tulumayo River, which flows into the Huallaga, but knowing that we must at least make a show of discipline, I sent McClure with a Winchester back to the summit of the range in an attempt to head off the packers when they had left the jungle and come back into the trail. Two days later McClure rejoined us. He had had a hard time. It had rained heavily each day and night and in the exposed position which he had been obliged to take he had suffered greatly from the cold winds. Inasmuch as the man had been able to take with him only five cans of pea soup by way of food, he had my sympathy.

The desertion of the four packers, while not as serious as some other matters, inconvenienced us greatly, but by dint of loading the remaining men more heavily, much to their disgust, and leaving behind what articles we ourselves could not carry, we were able to continue our toilsome journey and October 25 found us camped on the Tulumayo River.

At this point the uneasiness among the packers over our approach to the cannibal country became very apparent, and after a consultation with Brown and Fleming I decided to tie them up at night and stand guard over them in order to prevent further desertions. Probably none but *cholos* would have submitted to a proceeding so unusual among exploring parties, in fact, I have never heard of this having been done before, but we were taking no chances now, and this method seemed the simplest way to obviate worry.

MONKEYS AS FOOD

WE WERE now at a much lower elevation than at any time so far and began to find, among other game, great quantities of monkeys in the trees around us, more than a dozen varieties of which I have never seen in captivity. Among those that we frequently saw was the "Magasapa" monkey, which is generally black in coloring and has a tail so calloused by use in swinging from tree to tree as to be as tough as the sole of the foot. This monkey will dress about twenty-five pounds and is very good eating. Others we encountered were the "Fraile," so called from it's fancied resemblance to a tonsured priest, and the "Coto-Mono" or howling monkey, which is excessively noisy in the early morning, preferably about four o'clock. As this monkey has a goiter neck, he probably wants to get even with the world.

On the afternoon of October 30th, while camped on the summit of the third range of

mountains, our attention was attracted by the sound of shouting and a few minutes later the third—and what proved to be the last—relief expedition padded into camp. The men said that they had experienced great difficulty in crossing small streams now swollen by the torrents of rain into rivers of considerable size, and that they had been on the verge of turning back when they sighted our camp.

In the light of what followed I find it advisable to state here that while we had carefully estimated at San Juan the quantity of food necessary per man per diem and had made arrangements accordingly, we had overlooked the possibility of the packers eating the food consigned for our party only for the reason that the *cargadores* had contracted to supply their own rations. But of the food which left San Juan in the three supply parties I doubt if fifty per cent. reached us, the boxes and sacks having been broken out and their contents eaten or destroyed.

Much though we desired it, there was, of course, no redress and we could only unload the packers and bundle them out of camp as quickly as possible, with instructions to hurry the next load up to us. Just what transpired when these men returned to San Juan I have never been able to ascertain, but from reports I found in circulation on my return to Lima I believe that we were described as about to perish through our foolhardiness. This theory our agent apparently accepted with great alacrity, for his efforts to support us immediately ceased and were never resumed. I hope to meet the agent again some day.

But although it was disappointing enough to find our food supplies cut in half, I shall never forget our anger and disgust when we discovered that the twenty-five rifles sent us were antiquated carbines, such as were manufactured shortly after the close of our Civil War. Closer inspection showed that only eight out of the twenty-five could be used at all, and these were none too trustworthy. The remainder we threw away rather than burden our men with weapons that were worse than useless.

HOW IT FEELS TO STARVE

IT WAS not a pleasant outlook which confronted us now, only half supplied and half armed, and November 5th found us with less than two days' rations in front of the last and main mountain range, awaiting supplies two days overdue.

Though we made every effort to bag game, the eighth saw us existing upon such herbs and grasses as were palatable and even cutting down palm trees to get the succulent green tip which appears at the "Y" of the tree, although continued eating of this was soon found to bring on a painful dysentery. I have often been asked as to why hunters were not sent back over the trail in search of game, but you can not ask sick and emaciated men to do twice the amount of work they could do when they were well, and the fact that a rugged, foodless mountain range lay at our backs made the matter still more out of the question. We were now at an altitude of five thousand feet and to descend to the three-thousand-foot level would be at least a four days' journey, so that it seemed the part of reason to stay where we were and wait for the next provision train.

But the train never came, and on the tenth we found starvation staring us in the face. Other things may pass out of my memory in time, but I shall never forget the misery of that awful period of waiting. And yet I think that it is on the second and third day of a fast that the pangs are strongest. On the fourth day the pains seemed to diminish, and a kind of dull numbness takes their place. Of all our party Lewis seemed to feel his hunger most, although another white man who had come up with the rifle party was also in a bad way.

This man was James McRea, who had been a cook for Brown down in Bolivia and had arrived in San Juan too late to join our party at the outset. The exquisite irony of having obtained a professional cook at just that time did not appeal to us till later.

McRea was a short, red-headed Irishman and was by trade, I think, a beach-comber. He was such a character as you could pick up on Kearney Street on any good day before the Fire, ready at a moment's notice to enter into any project no matter how fantastic or lurid, provided it was venturesome. Like many of his confrères he claimed to be possessed of the gift of tongues. *Eight* of these tongues, however, seemed to be pure dialect and were quite unintelligible. Brown, also, said that he had never met any one who understood them. Originally, McRea came from

Poughkeepsie, New York, although he also made mention of Corinth. Between the two and having in mind the eight tongues, several of his stories and St. Paul's theory as to all Corinthians, I incline in favor of the latter place. But of the dead *nil nisi bonum*, and no one appreciated McRea's good traits more than myself. I am afraid that he met with a very miserable death.

COMPELLED TO KILL THE DOG FOR FOOD

UNTIL this time I have made no mention of one of the most self-sacrificing members of our party, but about this time he began to occupy the center of the stage. Before leaving Huanuco Señor Don Jorge Durand, of the well known *hacienda*-holding family of that name, presented me with a handsome Great Dane named "Alicran." This dog had become the pet of the party and somehow had managed to exist through all our troubles in very fair condition. In fact, I am not sure but that the sufferings of a dumb and hunger-stricken pet are more pathetic than those of a human being and I am confident that more than one man threw scraps to Alicran which he had much better have kept for himself.

But when the seventeenth of October came and we had been seven days without food of any kind except a handful of lard each day and the palm-tips, we decided to sacrifice our poor companion. In our desperate condition it seemed an easy thing to dispose of the question by vote, but when we had all come to the same conclusion it was a much different thing to choose a man for the execution. Even when Lewis, as the one in the most critical condition, finally volunteered to shoot Alicran for us, we found that we could not stay to see it. So we mournfully patted the poor beast on the head and went away from camp until a shot told us that the job had been done.

In all this time the natives had been relying on their coca-leaves and, though growing daily more morose and despondent, had not openly mutinied. But with the killing of the dog they came to us and demanded some of the meat. While this resulted in our getting only three meals on half rations, it may have obviated trouble, though we were careful never to allow our rifles out of our hands.

I NOW realized that it would be madness to wait any longer for the packers, so I put to a vote the matter of returning or going forward. We finally decided to push on at all hazards. The object of the expedition was yet to be accomplished and to turn back spelled failure. Some one once said that there are two kinds of men in this world—the man who produces results and "the man with the good excuse," and though our condition would have been a good enough excuse on sight, yet the revolving-chair man at home who listens to your report doesn't always appreciate the difficulties. Perhaps he has never been hungry.

Having made up our minds to continue, we assembled our packs, thumped the *cargadores* into life and started out again on the eighteenth in an effort to reach the summit of the last range, which we finally achieved at ten o'clock on the morning of the twentieth.

Although I had several times thought of trying out the properties of the coca-leaf on myself it was not until the morning of the nineteenth that I used it. I had been losing strength fast during the two days previous and had been very sick on the day following our three meals of dog-meat, so that with the arrival of the nineteenth I could hardly stand on my feet. Shortly after breaking camp I found it an almost impossible task to work up the hillside with the others and slowly dropped back from my position at the head of the file.

LEFT BEHIND TO DIE

ONE after another they passed me, Brown, Fleming, McClure and Lewis, interspersed among the *cargadores*, each one murmuring a word of encouragement and then clinching his jaws and stumbling ahead, fully conscious, I am afraid, of the fate which awaited me if I did not keep up and yet entirely justified in leaving me behind. I am glad to say that I did not reproach them, for even then I realized keenly that in the utter absence of food it was a case of each man for himself. Furthermore, there was nothing they could do, which fact each knew as well as I.

Feeling, after a time, that my legs would no longer support me, I sank down in the middle of the trail and gave way to despair. All of the party but one, a *cargador*, had

passed me by this time and I remember how I measured this one's approach. "He is the last," I said to myself. "In another minute he will be up with me—in five minutes more he will be beyond the sound of my voice. He is the last."

I think I realized all that this would mean, but, curiously enough, where a sort of terror should have nerved me to get up and stagger on a few yards farther, all I remember feeling was a great self-pity for a poor devil named Huffman who, without soles for his shoes or trousers for his legs, was dying by inches in a South American jungle because no one would give him anything to eat.

It was about this time that the last *cholo* came up to me. Nearly opposite where I was lying he stopped and, with a dull but not inimical look out of his glassy eyes at the man who had been oppressing him for the past month, began to hunt in his pouch for coca-leaves. Finding some, he was raising them to his mouth when something suddenly induced me to stretch out my hand. With a faint smile parting his lips he gave me the leaves. Then he felt in the pouch again, looked at me wanly for a moment, grunted out an "Adios" and was gone. They had been his last leaves.

And now I wish to state without exaggeration one of the most wonderful things I have ever heard of.

Five minutes after the cholo had gone by I was on my feet! Five minutes after that I had not only caught up with him but I had passed him! *And I kept on going*, gaining on one after another of the party and finally coming up with the four Americans in the van. I remember calling out to them in my enthusiasm while I was still in their rear and pleading with them to do as I had done. I owe my life to coca, and I am prepared to state without fear of contradiction that its like does not exist on the face of the earth. If you are ever starving to death where it grows, try coca-leaves. If you are not starving, however, it is far better left alone.

OCTOBER twentieth brought us to the summit of the range, as I have said, but we were so weak and emaciated that, after gaining the top, we could do no more than lie prone on the ground and stare out over the country below us. Immediately in our front lay an enormous stretch of *pampa* extending as far as the eye could reach in a gently hilled, heavily forested bed of green. Far in the distance a thin, gray ribbon, seen at intervals between what seemed like slight undulations but were in reality fair-sized hills, convinced us that we were looking at the Ucayali, many miles away, of course, but nevertheless representing that goal for which we strove.

It all looked very beautiful that morning, so peaceful and rich in color and so still, and yet in those silent forests there below our greatest danger waited for us, a fact which I think every man in the party realized to the fullest extent. When I ponder over this part of our journey I sometimes marvel at our temerity. For a party of twenty-one men, heavily armed, well guided and well supplied with food and ammunition to traverse a densely wooded cannibal country would have been a serious matter under the most favorable circumstances, but when it is remembered that there were only a dozen guns among us and that we were almost too weak to carry even those, to say nothing of using them, I wonder that we ever attempted it. But anything, even death by an Indian arrow or blow-gun, seemed preferable to a continuance of our tortures. A thousand pairs of eyes might have been watching us as we rested up there on the range, but in view of the food which we would certainly obtain once we reached the *pampa*, our indifference was complete.

(*The fate of Mr. Huffman's expedition will be told in Adventure for November.*)

THE DETECTIVE FOR THE DEFENSE

BY C. LANGTON CLARKE

ANSON VOKES, the waxen mask of his face fixed in its customary impassivity, sat in a heavy leather chair in the smoking-room of Croftwith Hall, his muscular hands interlaced upon his knee, and listened unmoved to the stout, keen-eyed bristly-mustached man who sat opposite. I, leaning my elbow on the polished mahogany, sat on the other side of the table and lent an attentive ear.

Two years before the time of which I speak Anson Vokes, one of the best, if not the best man in Scotland Yard, had thrown up his position and an excellent chance of speedy promotion, and had gone in for private practise. His remarkable powers, his intense application to any case he undertook, and his consequent success had already won for him some celebrity.

For several years before he resigned from the force I had counted him among my dearest friends, and had been his companion in some of his most important cases, notably that of the Mystery of the Gold-headed Cane which I have elsewhere recorded.

Under a sphinx-like impassiveness of countenance and a cool deliberate manner, he concealed a warm heart and generous impulses, and I had come to conceive not only a high admiration for the detective, but a warm affection for the man. Silent almost to a fault, there was one topic alone on which he showed any enthusiasm, and that was the sport of fly-fishing, for which he had a positive mania.

Slightly below the middle height, with a beautifully proportioned figure, the embodiment of strength in a small compass, and with his coal-black hair, waxen complexion, and a pair of brilliant eyes half curtained by drooping lids, he was a man who would attract attention in any circle.

It was in response to an urgent telegram from General Warbury, master of Croftwith Hall, that Vokes had come down, at almost an hour's notice, and, as had been his invariable custom for some time, had invited me to accompany him. Thus it came about that we two sat in General Warbury's luxuriously appointed smoking-room, waiting for him to unfold the reason for his hurry call on the services of my friend.

"I have sent for you, Mr. Vokes," said General Warbury, "because I have heard much at different times of your success in unraveling crime, and I wish to enlist your sympathies—perhaps that is the wrong word, I should have said professional skill—on behalf of a man at present under a very heavy cloud, but who, I am positively convinced, is innocent of the crime with which he is charged. I need hardly say that I refer to what is known as the 'Variole murder.' The press from one end of the country to the other has been full of it for the past two days."

"I presumed that it was in connection with this case you had sent for me, General," replied Vokes. "I have read some of the press accounts, but I have been very busy on an important case which I have just brought to a conclusion, and I have had little time for anything else. I know the main facts—that Mr. Almaric Variole was found dead in his own woods with a bullet-hole in his forehead; that he has been on

bad terms with his nephew, who was with him shortly before the crime, and that the latter has been arrested. I may add that I know some more of the broader details of the case, but it would be as well, I think, if you were to give me a short history of the crime. I will ask many questions on points which may be obscure, if you will permit me, during the narration."

"To make a long story as short as possible, then," said the General, "old Almaric Variole lived at Variole Manor about a mile and a half from my gates. He was of distinguished appearance and exceptionally polished manner, but the most unpopular man in the county. He was not quarrelsome; seldom, if ever, said disagreeable things about his neighbors, and was neither close nor slippery in money-matters. He subscribed to the hunt and, perfunctorily, to several local charities.

"The only man with whom he was admittedly at open feud was our parson, one of the finest fellows who ever stood in a pulpit. Variole not only professed, but actually felt, the greatest scorn and loathing for all forms of religion, and all belief in a hereafter. The parson is a peppery little fellow and he positively hated Variole and, what in a moment of exasperation he once described to me as, his "—— logic."

"IT WAS not his atheism, though, which made the old man so cordially disliked. There was something indefinably repellent about him. He seemed to be without the softer emotions. Never, to my knowledge, did he do a really kind act, and his attitude to his fellows, while invariably courteous, had a little too much condescension in it to please people. I and Dr. Marpole of Wroxmouth, a small town a few miles from here, were the only two men with whom he affected the slightest intimacy, if that is not too strong a word.

"Geoffrey Variole, his nephew and heir—for the old man never married—was brought up under his uncle's eye, and from the boy's childhood there was no love lost between them. About a year ago Geoffrey fell in love with a penniless but very charming girl, the daughter of a retired clergyman, and, in spite of his uncle's threats and protests, married her.

"I believe there was a tremendous scene when the young man broke the news, and Geoffrey, who is a high-spirited fellow, left the house after making a foolish remark that his uncle should bitterly rue the insults against his wife. Geoffrey, who had inherited a small fortune from his mother, took a small place about a mile from the Manor, and from the time he left his uncle's house in a rage until the day previous to the murder, the two men never exchanged a word, although they met occasionally in public.

"Apart from the tragedy, Almaric was a doomed man. It appears that he was suffering from a heart-complaint, and two weeks before he was killed he called in Marpole after a spasm of unusual violence. Marpole told him candidly that he had barely a month to live, that he might die at any moment and that science could hold out no hope for him. The old man went up to London and consulted a famous specialist who confirmed Marpole's diagnosis and death-sentence. I only knew of this yesterday from Marpole himself, as Variole had enjoined the strictest secrecy. However, that has no particular bearing on the case except that it brought uncle and nephew together again.

"The morning before the murder Variole walked over to Geoffrey's house. The poor young wife was away on a visit to London, and Geoffrey himself was not at home. Variole waited for some time, but, as his nephew did not come, left, saying that he would return in the evening. He did so and was closeted with Geoffrey for about an hour. There is no question about what transpired, for Geoffrey admits that his uncle offered the olive branch, promised forgiveness for past offenses, and suggested a meeting next day to clear up all differences.

"Geoffrey gladly consented, and at two o'clock the following afternoon met his uncle by appointment on the western terrace. The meeting was witnessed by several persons, and all declare that it was evidently a cordial one. The old man, according to Geoffrey, suggested a stroll, and the two walked up to what is known as 'The Grove,' a plantation about half a mile west of the house.

"A footpath from the village runs through the wood, which is a sort of island surrounded by marshy ground. A girl, whose duties took her daily to the manor, saw the two men standing in a large opening about the center of the plantation and

some little distance from the path. Just as she passed she saw Geoffrey break out in anger and shake his fist in the old man's face; while the latter appeared to be trying to soothe him. That was the last seen of the old man alive.

"Three hours later one of the maid-servants on her way to the village saw the body of a man lying in the grove, and gave the alarm. It proved to be that of Almaric Variole. There was a bullet-hole in the center of the forehead, which was blackened with powder and scorched, showing that the pistol had been held almost against the head. In his hand was a short hunting-knife, the edge of which had been ground to a razor-like keenness. It was evident that he had drawn the weapon in offense or defense but had not had time to use it.

"And now comes the most damning evidence against poor Geoffrey. A hundred and fifty feet away, in the mud of the marsh, was found the pistol with which the crime had been committed, evidently thrown there by the murderer in his flight. It was a heavy army revolver, and engraved on the silver plate on the butt were Geoffrey's own initials.

"GEOFFREY was at once arrested. He protested his innocence, saying that he and his uncle had stood for some time conversing most amicably, when suddenly, and without any premonition, the old man uttered a most unforgivable insult against the young wife. He admits that he spoke fiercely in reply and in his anger shook his fist at the other, but denies that he used the slightest violence. His uncle apologized most profusely and the young man allowed himself to be placated. They talked for about ten minutes longer, when Variole walked over to the pathway, looked up and down it and, returning, said, 'Now that there is no chance of eavesdropping I am going to talk plainly.' He broke out in a violent tirade against Mrs. Variole, and Geoffrey, fearing that he might be tempted to strike the old man, turned on his heel, walked along the path in the opposite direction from that by which they had come, and went straight home.

"This was about three o'clock, according to Geoffrey, and the story of the girl confirms this, as she distinctly remembers hearing the church clock strike a few minutes after she saw the two men. A laborer, ditching in a near-by field, heard a shot about this time, but can not specify the exact hour.

"That is practically the whole story. As the inquest will be resumed to-morrow night, and considering the evidence, there is no doubt as to what the verdict will be. Knowing Geoffrey as I do, I am convinced that he is innocent of the crime, but I can not but admit that it looks very black against him."

"Thank you," said Vokes when the recital was concluded; "you have stated the case very clearly. There are two points which are strongly in Mr. Variole's favor. In the first place, men in this country do not go about armed. It is clear, therefore, that whoever killed the old man went to the 'Grove' prepared to do so. Mr. Variole was aware that a witness had seen his burst of anger and, had he gone to the rendezvous with murderous intent, common sense would have told him that it would be wiser to postpone it. In the second place, there was no occasion to throw away the weapon, which would surely be identified. The finding of the pistol near the scene of the crime looks very much like a blind to fasten the murder on the owner of the weapon. What has young Mr. Variole to say regarding the revolver?"

"That is one of the perplexing points in the problem," replied the General. "The pistol formed a rather inconspicuous item among a large number of trophies in Geoffrey's study. He has not the slightest idea when it was removed, or who could have done so. None of his servants can throw any light on the subject, and all deny having touched it; moreover, none of them noticed its absence."

"And the hunting-knife?" queried Vokes.

"It had been in Almaric Variole's possession for many years. Why he should have taken it with him, unless he himself contemplated murder, is another mystery. He had more than one pistol in the house which would have been a better protection if he anticipated any possible violence from his nephew. It is an extraordinary case, Mr. Vokes. Now that you have heard the details, what do you think of it?"

"It is an interesting one," replied Vokes. "There are some very remarkable points about it, but it is too early to form an opinion. I should like first to visit the spot where the body was found. May I ask you

to procure me an intelligent guide who was present before the body was removed?"

"I think I can fill that post myself," said the General. "I was on the ground early. The dogcart is ready, and the groom who will drive us is the man who discovered the pistol. I think if he had known what trouble it would bring on a man who is generally beloved he would have stamped it into the marsh!"

"One question more," said Vokes, as the General gave orders for the dogcart to be brought around. "Does the uncle's death increase the nephew's income?"

"Not by a copper!" replied the other. "When the quarrel occurred the old man changed his will, leaving all his money and the estate, which is not entailed, to a distant relative. Only the night before the murder he added a codicil, but Geoffrey's name was not mentioned. The codicil left several comparatively small sums to a few persons, myself included. As I told you before, I was one of the very few persons with whom he was on terms approaching intimacy. The chief legatee in the codicil was his valet, who has been with him for a good many years."

"Ah!" said Vokes. "And was this servant aware of the condition of his master's health, and of the bequest?"

"Of the first, no," replied the General; "of the legacy, yes. He is perfectly candid about it. He says that after the codicil had been signed and witnessed by two of the other servants, in his presence, Variole said to him, 'I suppose you wonder, Masten, why I did not get you to witness this. Don't you know that a legatee can't be a witness without putting himself out of court? I have put you down for five hundred pounds as a reward for faithful service.'

"Masten thanked him, and then he says he plucked up courage and mentioned Geoffrey. 'I hope, sir, you'll not forget the young master,' he said.

"Variole glared at him for a minute, and then he smiled. 'Yes, Masten,' he said, 'I am going to leave him something to remember me by. We are going to be friends again.' That was all that was said on the subject, but if the old man really had any intention of changing his will in Geoffrey's favor, the tragedy next day put it out of his power."

"I should much like to see this man, Masten," said Vokes. "Would it be possible to have him meet us on the ground? It might save time."

"Assuredly," replied the General. "I will send a note over to the Manor, but if you have any suspicions of Masten I assure you they are unfounded. A more faithful fellow never breathed."

"I suspect no one—at present, General Warbury," returned Vokes quietly.

II

THE rattle of wheels on the drive cut short any further conversation. General Warbury hastily penned a note which he handed to a servant, bidding him take it to the Manor. In a few minutes we were bowling along in a tall cart behind a powerful bay.

At a stile, leading to a footpath which crossed a field and disappeared in a dark plantation, the General pulled up, and the groom sprang to the horse's head.

"There is the 'Grove,'" said the General, pointing with his whip. "We will get out here. Tie the horse to the fence, William, and come with us," he added.

A couple of hundred yards brought us to the wood, a gloomy looking covert indeed. For some distance on either side of the raised causeway the ground was swampy, with bare, sticky mud and little pools here and there, but as we proceeded up a gentle rise it hardened and the path became simply a beaten track.

"There, gentlemen," said General Warbury, coming to a halt and pointing through an opening in the trees, "there is the scene of the tragedy, and it was from this point that the girl witnessed the quarrel between uncle and nephew."

Some twenty yards away was a fair-sized clearing, and to this the General led the way.

"Here," he said, "is where the two men were standing when they were last seen together, and here—" he advanced a few paces and pointed to the foot of a small dead oak tree, "is where the body was found. It lay on its back, the feet almost touching the tree. You can see where the head rested, for there is still blood on those leaves."

Vokes swept one lightning glance over the ground and the tree and for several seconds his gaze remained riveted a few yards beyond it. Then he turned to the

General, who had been regarding him wistfully.

"I should now like to see the place where the pistol was found," he said curtly.

"This way," said the General, and he took us on a line almost parallel to the path by which we had come. In a minute we were picking our way through the viscid mud of the swamp.

"This is the place," said our conductor, stooping over a kind of protective cage formed of twigs, the ends of which had been thrust into the mud.

Looking through the interstices, we could see the rough outline of a large revolver, which had been embedded there. It must have been thrown away with considerable force, for it had ploughed its way for over a foot before coming to rest.

Vokes stood with his head slightly bent, but I could see his eyes glancing in every direction. He turned to the groom.

"You are the man who found the pistol?"

"Yes, sir," replied the groom. "It was about an hour after they discovered the body. I was coming along the path when my eye caught something shining. I went out to see what it was and found the pistol. If I'd ha' known——"

"You are sure this is the place?" interrupted Vokes sharply.

"Certain sure, sir," replied William. "I put them twigs over it myself to save it till the police could see it."

"An excellent precaution," commented the detective. "Then you can swear that *that* is not the place?"

He pointed to a spot in the marsh some twenty feet away, and, following the direction of his finger, we saw another distinct impression in the mud.

General Warbury was the first to reach it.

"Good heavens!" he cried, "here is the mark of another revolver! The assassin must have had two and thrown them both away. But what has become of the second?"

"It looks to me," I ventured, offering an opinion for the first time, "as if the murderer, repenting of his folly in throwing away a pistol which might lead to his identification, may have come back and recovered it and substituted one which would throw suspicion on Geoffrey Variole."

"That is a possible solution," assented the General. "What do you think of it, Mr. Vokes?"

But Vokes was busy examining the mark of the pistol, and the question was apparently unheard.

"BY THE way, General," I continued, "this man Masten; you say that he is above suspicion, and yet—is there not a possibility that he may have been the assassin? Of course he may be able to account for every moment of his time that afternoon, but he is the only man, so far as we know, who was aware that he would directly benefit by his master's death. Then again he did not know that Mr. Variole's days were numbered. Of course I merely suggest this as a possibility."

General Warbury shook his head. "There has been no suspicion directed against Masten," he said doggedly.

"Possibly," I hazarded, "that is because rural police are a little likely to jump at apparently obvious conclusions. They are so sure that the nephew committed the crime that they have not thought it worth while to investigate in other directions. Has he given any account of his actions that afternoon? Then again, take the possession of Geoffrey's pistol. The feud between uncle and nephew would hardly be likely to extend to their servants. Why couldn't Masten have gone to Geoffrey's house and gotten it?"

The General shrugged his shoulders.

"It may be as you say," he replied," but I confess I am skeptical. However, Masten should be here soon in reply to my note and no doubt will answer any questions Mr. Vokes may ask him."

Whether the detective had heard our conversation it was impossible to tell from his impassive countenance.

"I think I have seen all that is necessary here, General," he said, "and I think we may dismiss this man. He has told us all he knows."

William glanced at his master and, receiving a nod of dismissal, wended his way back to the dogcart with a mutinous look at the detective.

"And now," continued Vokes, "with your permission I should like to make another inspection of the place where the body lay. Also a brief search," he added.

"You expect to find something?" queried the General.

"Yes," replied Vokes. "There is something missing."

Without another word he turned from the mystified General and led the way back to the glade.

We had barely reached it when the figure of a man entered it from the opposite side.

"Here is Masten!" said the General. "Ask him any questions you like, but I fancy he will be able to answer them satisfactorily."

The newcomer was slightly above the middle height, spare of figure and sallow of complexion, with a hatchet-shaped face from which looked eyes so pale as to give the impression that the pupils were lacking.

He advanced to meet us, but, at the sight of Vokes, stopped suddenly and it seemed to me that his face took on an additional shade of pallor. There was a noticeable tightening of the lips and a sharp indrawing of the breath. If there was recognition on the part of the valet, there was none apparently on the part of the detective, for he barely glanced at him.

"This," said General Warbury, addressing Vokes, "is William Masten, a very faithful and attached retainer of old Mr. Variole. You saved his life once, didn't you, Masten?"

"Yes, sir," replied Masten respectfully. He appeared to have somewhat regained his composure.

"Plunged after him when he fell into the Combe pool while fishing," continued the General, "and pulled him out. You were nearly drowned yourself, were you not?"

"Yes, sir," said the valet again. "He was a good master to me was Mr. Variole."

The General looked at me with a sort of triumph.

"And you were a good servant to him," he said. "How long were you in his service?"

"Seven years, sir," replied Masten. "I entered it the year Mr. Geoffrey came home from college."

"Exactly," said the General. "This, Masten, is Mr. Vokes, a very eminent detective. We do not believe that Mr. Geoffrey had any hand in his uncle's death, and he is trying to clear up the mystery. He would like to ask you a few questions. I have told him I am sure you have nothing to conceal."

AGAIN that look of discomposure, not to say alarm, on the servant's face as he turned to Vokes.

"I am ready to answer any questions," he said.

"I have very few to ask," returned Vokes, crisply. "I understand that your master kept several revolvers in the house?"

"Yes, sir," replied Masten; "three—a small target-pistol, an American Colt, which a friend gave him some years ago, and a British army revolver."

"Of the same pattern as the one which was found here?"

"I think so, sir. I never did know much about firearms, but I——"

"Your memory is not failing, is it?" interrupted Vokes, and the other gazed at him in a sort of helpless fascination. "You remember where they were kept?"

"Yes, sir," faltered the valet. "They are all in a drawer in the library."

"Then go," said Vokes, authoritatively, "and bring the army pistol here and half a dozen cartridges, if you can find any."

After a moment's hesitation, and another frightened look at Vokes, Masten turned away without a word and disappeared in the direction from which he had come. The General stared hard at my friend with a perplexed brow.

"I suppose you have some definite purpose in view," he said, "but I'll be hanged if I can guess what it is."

Vokes contented himself with a slight inclination of the head.

"But, Vokes," I said, "that man looked as if he knew you. If ever I saw fear on a man's countenance, I saw it on his!"

"Possibly," replied Vokes coolly. "Ten years ago I arrested him for burglary and attempted murder. There was no moral doubt of his guilt, but we could not bring it home to him, although there were several previous convictions against him. William McGregor is his real name. 'Moonlight Billy,' he was known as. He was acquitted and I heard a year later that he had become converted, broken loose from his old associations and was living 'on the square.' After that I lost sight of him altogether. He has changed a good deal. In those days he wore a heavy beard and mustache, but I spotted him the moment I set eyes on him."

The countenance of General Warbury was a study in emotions.

"Good heavens!" he cried. "Do you mean to say that the man Variole placed so much confidence in is an old burglar, and that he once tried to murder some one?"

"He fired at a man who interrupted him at work, and 'winged' him," said Vokes un-

concernedly. "His professed lack of knowledge of firearms was rather entertaining under the circumstances."

"Why did you let him go?" exploded the General. "We shall never see him again."

Vokes looked at his watch.

"How long will it take him to reach the Manor?" he asked.

"About ten minutes."

"Then, allowing him five minutes to get the pistol, he should be back in twenty-five minutes. If I were a betting man, General, I would venture a considerable wager that we see him here within the half-hour. In the meantime there is something which I wish to find, and with your permission, while we are waiting, I will make a search."

III

AND a very thorough search it was. The General and I, after offering our services, which were declined, seated ourselves at the foot of a tree and watched the detective "beating" the ground.

Starting from the small tree where the body had lain, he moved into the wood on a line at an angle of about forty-five degrees with that formed by the tree and the spot in the marsh where the pistol was found.

He walked slowly, closely scanning the ground on either side of him and the branches overhead. Having reached the edge of the swamp he paused a few moments, glancing over its surface, and then returned along a line a few yards to the south, with the same care and deliberation.

"What the —— is he looking for?" said the General, rather testily. "Is he doing it for effect?"

"I have known Anson Vokes for some years," I replied, "and I never yet knew him to pose. Depend upon it, he has some object in view. See! He is picking up something!"

Vokes had turned slightly from his course and, stooping, raised some object from the ground. He glanced at it for a second and then, thrusting it into his pocket, came straight to where we sat.

"Well?" queried the General. "Have you found what you were looking for?"

Vokes inclined his head in the affirmative.

"Is it what you expected to find?"

"Assuredly," replied Vokes. "It is the one thing missing, which I spoke of just now."

"Is there any objection to your friend and me seeing this missing link?" demanded the General with a touch of hauteur.

"Not the slightest," was the reply. Vokes drew from his pocket the object he had picked up and laid it in the General's outstretched hand.

It consisted of two cords, each about eighteen inches long and about half the thickness of a man's little finger, fastened together with a reef-knot.

The General stared at it in a mystified fashion.

"Do you mean to say," he asked incredulously, "that this is what you were looking for, and that you expected to find it?"

"I certainly expected to do so," replied Vokes, "unless some person had picked it up and, not knowing its importance, had carried it away, which was rather unlikely."

"And now that you have found it," said General Warbury, "would you mind telling me what bearing it has on the case? Two bits of string tied together do not convey a very important clue to my mind."

"If you will have patience, sir, until Masten returns," said Vokes, "I think I can make it clear."

"Does that mean you know who committed the crime?"

"Certainly!"

"It was not Geoffrey?"

Vokes shook his head. "Young Mr. Variole had nothing to do with it," he said.

The General heaved a great sigh of relief.

"Thank God for that!" he said. "I am almost as fond of that boy as if he were my own. And now Mr. Vokes, one question: Is it your intention to arrest Masten on his return?"

"I have no power to arrest him, General. I am not here in an official capacity."

"Because," continued the General, "if you will allow me to say so, it seems a very unwise move to send him for a loaded pistol which he would be pretty sure to use—that is, if he returns at all, which I very much doubt."

A twig snapped in the wood a short distance away, and Vokes drew out his watch.

"Two minutes under the half hour," he said. "General, I should have won my wager. If I am not mistaken, this is Masten now."

The words had hardly left his lips when the valet appeared in the glade and, spying us, advanced. In either hand he held a revolver.

I glanced at the General in some apprehension, and I could see that he was startled. "I told you so," he muttered under his breath.

Vokes alone was quite unconcerned.

"You have exceeded your instructions," he said quietly. "I asked for only one."

"I thought it best to bring both," said Masten. There was a decided hardening of his tone and a certain defiance in his eye as he faced the detective. "I suppose you have told them all, Mr. Vokes?"

"I have thought it best, McGregor—or Masten, if you prefer,"—for the other shrank back—"to inform General Warbury of one incident in your former career. You lack self-control and your alarm on seeing me was too evident to escape observation. I also informed the General that I had heard you had abandoned your former ways and so far as I knew had lived an honest life."

"And so I have!" cried the valet with sudden vehemence. "If you think I had anything to do with this dirty business you are wrong, smart as you think yourself, Mr. Detective Vokes, the bloodhound! A hundred times I could have robbed him, aye, and murdered him too, in the past seven years, if I had had a mind, and do you think there was no temptation to a man of my bringing up? A thief since I could walk and a burglar after I did my first bit! But I swore I'd walk straight and I did. The old man was square with me, though every one hated him, and I played square with him. Now, —— you," —he flung the pistols at Vokes's feet—"if you want to arrest me, go ahead!"

THE General and I stared at the man, whose mean personality was transfigured by his emotion, and then we looked at each other.

"If that's acting, by Gad," the General said in my ear, "the fellow ought to be on the boards!"

Vokes, who had appeared quite unmoved by the valet's burst of eloquence, stooped, picked up the pistols, and handed them to me.

"I am not going to arrest you, Masten," he said, "for two very good reasons. One is that I have not the power, and the other because there is absolutely nothing to connect you with the crime."

Again the General and I exchanged glances of bewilderment. "Sparring for time," he whispered.

The valet caught his breath and his hand went to his heart.

"Thank you, sir," he said. "It's not because I am afraid you could get anything against me, though I might be hard-put to it to prove where I was that afternoon, but ——" he paused, "it would have meant the raking up of old sins and exposure and maybe would have started me on the old road again."

"I told General Warbury something of your past," continued Vokes, in the same even tones, "because I considered it necessary, but there is no reason that it should go any farther. The General will, I am sure, respect your desire to continue in honest ways."

"Show me that you had nothing to do with this infernal business," said the General, "and no one shall know of it from me."

"Thank you, sir," said Masten, again the deferential servant. "I swear to you that I had nothing to do with it."

"Your oath is all very well," replied the General, "but we shall require something a little more conclusive. Mr. Vokes, you said just now that you knew the murderer. Masten was the only person against whom your suspicions seemed to point, and now you acquit him. Honestly, I dislike mysteries."

"There need be no further mystery," replied Vokes. "I think I can make matters clear by a little exhibition which will not take many minutes. May I trouble you for those pieces of cord?"

The General produced them without a word, and Vokes, with deft fingers, unfastened the knot and retied it, leaving the loose ends considerably shorter than before.

"And now the pistol," he said, holding out his hand to me. "The army revolver. Is it loaded Masten? Yes, I see it is.. Now kindly follow me."

He led the way to the dead tree which stood in the center of the glade, and we stood around and watched him with the expression of a crowd about a street-acrobat.

About five feet from the ground the tree forked, and into this crutch Vokes forced the revolver, the butt pointing to the swamp. About ten feet away stood a strong, stiff sapling, and as Vokes laid his powerful hand on it and bent it down, I perceived for the first time that the top had been broken off about twelve feet from the ground, leaving a long prong. The top of

this sapling Vokes brought around so that it almost touched the butt of the pistol. Then, gaging the distance with his eye and holding the broken end with one hand, he removed the weapon and handed it to me. Next, bringing the prong a little closer to the tree, he passed the lengthened cord around the two and knotted it firmly.

With a horror creeping on me, I looked at the General, whose eyes were almost starting from his ruddy countenance.

"Oh, the villain!" I heard him mutter.

With a slight blow on the cord, which twanged like a harp-string, Vokes cocked and replaced the revolver in the crotch. The prong of the sapling projected about half an inch in front of the trigger.

"Now, gentlemen," said Vokes, and impassive as he always was, I could detect a note of triumph in his voice, "I think it will be clear to you who was responsible for the death of Mr. Almaric Variole!"

"The —— villain!" muttered the General again.

Vokes drew a knife from his pocket and ran his finger along the blade.

"This is not quite as sharp as that hunting-knife," he said, "but I think it will answer the purpose. Masten," he added, handing it to the valet, who had stood looking on with a face almost as expressionless as that of Vokes himself, "stand beside that cord and when I give the word draw the knife sharply across it. Are you ready—Now!"

With a quick movement of the wrist Masten complied. There was a sharp report and as the bullet went whistling among the trees the revolver, caught by the backward spring of the sapling, was sent hurtling in the direction of the swamp. The severed cord leaped like a snake among the bushes, and all was as it stood before.

"Gentlemen," said Vokes, "if we follow the direction taken by that pistol, I think we shall find yet another impression in the mud."

IV

THE General was the first to speak. "What an infernal scoundrel!" he cried. "I see it all now. How he must have hated the boy to contrive such a diabolical plot! His suicide I can understand, for life under such circumstances must have been almost insupportable, but that he should try to hang his own nephew for murder is almost incredible. But for you, Mr. Vokes, there is little doubt that he would have succeeded. How the deuce did you unravel such a skein?"

"It was a very unusual case," replied Vokes. "Unlike anything I had ever handled before, but the solution was not so difficult as you imagine. In the first place, as I mentioned to you when you told me the story, it was very unlikely that Geoffrey Variole would have run the risk of almost certain detection, when he could have attained his end, an apparently objectless murder, by the way, by waiting. Nor would he be likely to throw away the weapon so near the scene of the crime, when it could be so easily identified.

"Had the pistol been found close to the body, there would have been little question that it was a case of suicide, particularly in view of the fact that the man had but a few weeks, at the most, to live, and probably in great suffering. The fact, however, that the weapon was found a considerable distance away seemed to put this theory out of the question. It was not until I visited the spot that I was able to dispose of this difficulty.

"The first thing I noticed was that the bark on the inside of that fork in the oak tree had been very recently abraded. Then that sapling caught my eye and I noticed also that the break in the top was not many days old. Also that, if it were bent around, that prong would about reach the tree. At once I saw a possible solution of the mystery. When we went to the swamp I may say that I fully expected to find a second if not several more impressions of a pistol, as, if my surmise were correct, it was highly probable that the man who contrived the plot would make sure, by experiment, that his crude machinery would work. My only fear was that some footmark might have obliterated it. Fortunately it escaped.

"The discovery of that second impression, which my friend here so ingeniously accounted for, confirmed my theory, and when I told you that I expected to find the one missing link I was not exaggerating. The open hunting-knife, ground to a razor edge, fitted in perfectly with my theory. It had evidently been used to sever the cord, rope or thong which held the sapling in place, and the cord when cut would naturally be jerked away, but, being lighter than

the pistol, to a less distance. Do I make myself clear?"

"It's as clear as noonday!" said the General. "All he had to do after setting his hideous contrivance was to place his forehead against the muzzle and make one sweep with his knife! I warrant the villain's hand was steady enough. Then ten seconds later there would be nothing but his own body, a couple of little trees, standing as they stood before, the pistol a hundred and fifty feet away, and—all the evidence prepared to send Geoffrey to the gallows! No doubt that scene when Geoffrey threatened the old man was specially prepared for the benefit of the one witness. That girl was in the habit of following the path from the village every day about the same hour, and Variole was, no doubt, aware of the fact and counted on it. But how did he get hold of Geoffrey's revolver?"

"The fact that he did was one of the points which from the first strengthened my theory," replied Vokes. "You will remember that he paid a visit to his nephew's house the morning before the tragedy, and, not finding him in, waited for some time. There was nothing to prevent his taking the pistol then. Possibly he went for that very purpose. Everything points to the most carefully and deliberately prepared scheme. His very remark to Masten here, the night before the murder: 'I am going to leave him something to remember me by,' shows how determined was his purpose."

"Thank God, it has been foiled!" cried the General heartily. "They say one should speak nothing but good about the dead, but if ever ——" He threw his hands up with a sort of despairing gesture. "Come," he said, "let us carry the good news to Geoffrey."

OF THE subsequent events there is little need to speak. That night we slept at Croftwith Hall and Vokes, to a late hour, went over, with manifest delight, the huge stock of fishing flies which the General had accumulated, and discoursing learnedly on his favorite hobby with our host, who was almost as great an enthusiast as my friend. At the inquest the following night, Vokes appeared, greatly to the discomfiture of the local police, and his evidence, briefly given, resulted in the only verdict possible under the circumstance.

There is a mile of well-preserved trout stream, which runs through the lands of Croftwith Hall, and next week, if all goes well, Vokes and I are going to enjoy the hospitality of General Warbury and Geoffrey Variole.

THE CAST-OFF

BY GILBERT PATTEN

PROFESSIONAL baseball, much less the bush-league variety, had never been the goal of Jack Pennington's ambition; but a seemingly inherent distaste for Virgil and higher mathematics, combined with superior acquired skill in the art of warping a horsehide covered sphere over a rubber pentagon had lighted the beacon of destiny.

The wrath of an irate parent fanned the torch. For, on learning that his only son, for whose educational advancement he had spent money cheerfully and with an open hand, had been dropped a year at college, old Gardiner Pennington, rich alarm-clock manufacturer, escaped by a narrow margin indeed an apoplectic stroke that might have been fatal.

The ensuing interview between father and son was of a most unpleasant nature. Placing the blame for the boy's failure wholly upon baseball, Pennington, Senior, made the grim announcement that no more money should be wasted in sending him to college; either he could enter the clock factory as an unskilled workman at eight dollars a week and learn the business from the bottom up, or get out and hustle for himself.

Although in some degree he was like his gentle, refined mother, whom he could barely remember, Jack was a Pennington at bottom, having inherited sufficient of the spirit which had enabled Gardiner Pennington to fight his way upward from a poor inventor at twenty-three to become a wealthy manufacturer at fifty.

If the boy regretted his hasty choice of the latter alternative, he was not the sort to let it become known.

Directly following the game in which he had pitched for his college against the "Indians" of the Big League, but lately arrived North after Spring training in a more balmy clime, Pennington had been approached by the manager of the professionals, who, secretly in need of twirlers, had offered him a try-out.

But the college pitcher had laughed at Dugan's overtures, turning him down flatly.

Cast upon his own resources, following the break with his father, the young man had bethought himself of Dugan's offer, not, however, with even the remotest idea of taking up baseball as a permanent career.

Seldom has a raw cub so quickly obtained his opening in fast company. The season had been cold and wet and, with his entire firing staff carrying lame arms swathed in flannels, Dugan sent the collegian on to the mound three days after Pennington joined the team.

Pitted against the Gazelles, the youngster surely had his work "cut out for him," but perfect support in the early periods pulled him out of the bad holes without serious damage being done. As his natural nervousness wore off and his confidence returned, he settled down into his best form and held the Gazelles runless and almost hitless in the last six innings.

Pennington had chosen to appear on the batting order under a fictitious name, but there were baseball reporters who had seen

him pitch before and his subterfuge was unavailing. Nearly every printed report of the game mentioned him as a well-known college pitcher and gave his right name.

He could well imagine the feelings of his father. "He will be about as proud of me," thought Pennington, "as if I had been caught red-handed cracking a safe!"

AS A Big League pitcher, Pennington's career was brief. He had fancied that success in the first game would settle everything, but, to his surprise, he found his position still far from assured. Dugan took care to impress upon him the fact that support of the hair-lifting variety alone had saved him from being slaughtered early in the game, and assured him that his swift "chin-wiper," on which he relied for a strike-out ball, would be pie for real batters when they got wise to it.

Nor were Pennington's team-mates more friendly and encouraging. Some of the sore-arm brigade of flingers sneered at him openly; others ignored him; not a man of them had a cheerful word for him. The Indians were reputed to be the biggest bunch of grouches in the business.

Whether or not they conspired to throw him down, he had his troubles next time he was sent to the firing-line. In direct contrast to the first occasion, his backing was of the most wretched order. The day was cold and marrow-piercing, but a succession of seemingly bone-headed plays behind him made the youngster hot enough.

Deciding that he must rely on himself, he whipped the ball over with savage fierceness, using his high in-shoot for almost every strike-ball pitched. For a time, the surest hitters of the opposing team were as helpless before his speed as back-lot players might have been. The spectators were with him, and up to the eighth inning it looked as if he would get away with it.

Then something happened! He felt—and heard—a snap in his shoulder! A stabbing pain shot the length of his arm to his finger-tips and he turned sick and faint. After that he could swing his arm only with the most excruciating agony, but he was foolish enough to try to continue. When three long hits had given the enemy two runs, he walked out of the box, holding his right shoulder with his left hand.

"Yellow!" was Dugan's only comment. Not one of the Indians seemed willing to believe there was anything the matter with his arm.

Hoping it would come round, Pennington held on for a few days, but it continued practically useless. Although the pain gradually subsided, there was a lameness that hurt like a knife-thrust whenever he attempted to lift his hand above his head. He could not pitch, even for batting practise, and finally, telling him in the most insulting manner that the trouble was with his heart, Dugan dropped him. Although he longed to hit the sneering manager, he held his hand.

With his stuffed traveling-bag beside him, Pennington sat in the waiting-room of the big Union Station and wondered whither he would go and to what he could next turn his hand. As a self-sustaining hustler he had made a very poor start indeed, and things were not looking very bright.

He was sitting there, head down, when a hand fell on his shoulder and a familiar voice sounded in his ears:

"On my word it's Pen—old Pen! What are you doing here looking like a man who doesn't know where the next meal or a bed is coming from?"

It was Harvey Whipple, second pitcher of the Varsity, who had profited much by Pennington's coaching. Pen rose and shook hands with him heartily.

"You came near hitting the spike on the head that time, Whipple," he confessed; "I was wondering where I'd go and what I'd do to earn my salt."

"Great Scott!" said Whipple. "Last I heard of you, you were one of the star slant-slingers of the Indians. You don't mean to say——?"

Pennington told him the truth, briefly. "It's the pick and shovel for mine, I reckon," he concluded. "Decency won't let me go home, and I doubt if my esteemed dad would have anything to do with me now if I did."

"Well, that's what I call rotten hard luck," sympathized Whipple. "I'm up against it, too. I'm pitching for Sahagan in the Mountain League; bush baseball, but good money. I'll pick up enough to pay my way through college next year, but of course I'm off the Varsity for good. They're baseball crazy in Sahagan. Tail-enders last year, they're ready at any expense to make a hot fight for first place this

season. They ve got a local man as manager and he's no good—don't know his business. Last night the directors held a meeting and decided to hire another manager. We lay off to-day, and they've sent me down here to see if I can't get a line on a good man who can be hired to manage—— Cæsar's ghost! you're the man!"

He pounced on Pennington, grabbing him by both shoulders; but the cast-off looked doubtful and shook his head.

"I tell you you're the man!" repeated Whipple. "You can do it; you can hold down the job and it's better than wielding a spade! It was your work, more than that of the coach, that put the Varsity in form. They'll take any man I recommend and the pay'll be good. As manager of the Sahagans you'll have plenty of rope."

"To hang myself with!" laughed Pennington.

Then he became sober and considered while Whipple brought his most eloquent and convincing powers of persuasion into play. After a time Pennington laughed again. "All right," he agreed, "I'll take a crack at it, but it's likely I'll ruin your reputation as a manager-picker."

II

UNDER Jack Pennington, known in Sahagan as John Morgan, the former tail-enders of the Mountain League made a wonderful record that season. To begin with, the new manager found the club wofully lacking in team-work and badly disrupted by dissension and jealousies among the players, who had scarcely been controlled or directed at all by the former authority. Cliques were broken up without delay and the trouble-makers were soon given to understand that the youngster who had taken them in hand would stand for none of their foolishness.

The places of two or three incompetents were filled as soon as good players could be secured, and the chief disturber of harmony, failing to heed a second warning, was fired, even though he was the idol of the bleachers.

In short order boozing and shirking among the Sahagans was a thing of the past, and, having discovered that it was necessary, every man was hustling to hold his job. Regular daily practise, when possible, became imperative and the man who failed to show up for it or was tardy had to furnish a mighty good excuse.

The ruling hand of iron was hidden to some extent by a silken glove, but every one knew what that glove contained. Nor did Pen make the mistake of becoming overchummy with any of the players, decent fellows though some of them were. With Whipple, even, he was no more friendly than with the others.

Having made a study of inside baseball, Pennington knew its effectiveness, and by never-ceasing drilling he hammered it into his team. In defense, as well as in batting and base-running, he taught them to work together like a machine, of which he, in uniform, either on the bench or the coaching line, was always the controlling power.

Nevertheless he took care not to rob them wholly of their individuality and the courage to think for themselves and take the initiative in sudden emergencies. He always had a word of commendation for the player who, of his own accord, gave proof that he had a head on his shoulders when it was needed. Deliberate "grand-standing" was not tolerated, yet the youngsters were encouraged to "try for everything," and the one who made a sensational play without attempt at effect was sure of proper praise. An excusable error never evoked a growl or even a look of disapproval.

And so, before long, every Sahagan player came to entertain for his manager, not only respect, but a feeling bordering on affection.

Within three weeks after Pennington took command Sahagan climbed out of the tail-end position and in a few weeks more she was fighting for second place. There were only four teams in the league and, though Ashburg, at the top, had obtained a flying start and a good lead early in the season, the ambitious "Comets," as one newspaper jocosely dubbed the former tail-enders, had great hopes of beating the Champs out in the final lap of the race.

Not, however, until Sahagan had fought her way into second position and won two games out of a series of three on the home grounds of the leaders did the self-satisfied Ashburgers awaken to the danger. And even then, with a fairly good margin of safety, they failed to regard the peril as menacing.

Singularly enough, it was his pitching staff that gave Manager Pennington his greatest cause for worriment. He had found it practically impossible to get hold

of good twirlers in the middle of the season and so, doing the next best, he had spent all the time possible coaching those he had. Rowan's long swing, persisted in with men on bases, had enabled runners to steal on him almost at will. In time he was taught to cut it down to a snappier delivery, but this he acquired at the expense of control. The pitcher who is liberal with passes seldom wins pennants.

Coppinger was erratic and, though he often did brilliant work for a number of innings, he could rarely be depended on to hold down a hitting team throughout an entire game. Whipple seemed to be a wonder; besides winning the most of his own games, he was often able, when the enemy had them "on the run," to step in and save games for his fellow twirlers. He became the joy of the fans and the pride of every Sahagan baseball enthusiast.

In coaching, Pennington pitched a great deal himself. He was compelled, mostly, to use an underhand ball or a side-arm swing, for that "kink" clung obstinately to his shoulder. Nevertheless in time he began to perceive that he was gradually working it out; but, though he occasionally tried an overhand throw, he was cautious not to put snap and steam into it.

However, he slowly developed an elusive underhand rise and something resembling a "fade-away." Recalling the experience of Mathewson, who, after seemingly doing his arm permanent injury, had acquired a new style of delivery and a new batter-baffling twist, Pen began to think it possible his pitching days might not be ended.

Toward the close of the season, after the Comets had set all Sahagan delirious by tying Ashburg and then beating the Champs in a twelve-inning game for the lead, Pennington, fearing for Whipple's overworked arm, went on to the slab himself in the final innings of two games when his regular pitchers were being slaughtered. He saved one game, the other being lost through no fault of his.

A FULL week before the season ended Sahagan had the championship practically nailed and the proud little city figuratively belonged to the ball-players. It was then that the team directors suggested that the manager should try to arrange for a game with the Big League Indians. The year before, Ashburg had secured such a game, but now, proving what bad losers they were, the citizens of that place were giving their team such poor support that doubtless the necessary guarantee would not be forthcoming.

It was Sahagan's opportunity and, as John Morgan, manager of the Comets, Pennington proceeded to get into communication with Bill Dugan. The Indians, having played off the most of their double-headers, found themselves hopelessly sandwiched in the middle of the second division. They were able and willing to play in Sahagan on a certain date, although the guarantee they asked, rain or shine, made it a risk for the bushers and would leave them only the small end of the finances under the most favorable circumstances. Nevertheless, as is often the case with such places, Sahagan, as a city, fancying it had the fastest team outside the Big Leagues, wanted the game and got it.

Although the grounds were the roomiest in the Northern League, the crowd that poured in through the gates that bright September day packed every available foot of seating space and made it necessary to rope off the field.

The Indians came in on the one-o'clock train, had dinner and, wearing their suits, rode out to the park in a barge. They were naturally mildly amused by the yells of some whooping youngsters who jeeringly prophesied that the Comets would take their scalps. The bushers were practising on the field and Dugan immediately called for their manager. He was surprised when Pennington, in a Sahagan uniform, responded.

"Hullo!" grinned Dugan, after relieving himself of a mouthful of tobacco-juice. "So you're playin' with this bunch o' tall grass wonders. How's the heart these days? I wanter see your manager."

"I'm the manager," replied Pen, again fighting a fierce desire to plant a bunch of fives on that sneering mouth.

"Huh! You?" grunted Dugan "The manager's name's Morgan."

"That's the name I'm known by here."

"Oh, I see," said the Big League man slowly. "Same old game; swell ideas, fam'ly pride an' that rot, eh? Didn't make you special pop'ler with my men while you stayed. Hear you've gut a wiz by the name o' Whipple. Goin' t' pitch him t'-day?"

"He'll start the game."

Dugan grinned again. "That's a safe way t' put it, but we won't be too hard on the boy. I want t' see him work. Is he any good?"

"He's reckoned the best pitcher in the Northern League."

"If there's the makin's of a real pitcher in him, mebbe I'll give him a try-out."

"Not with my encouragement!" said Pennington. "I shall tell him just what kind of a dirty deal he'll be likely to get."

"Sore head!" said Dugan. "If you'd had the goods you'd be on my staff now. You're a quitter."

WHEN it came time for the Indians to practise they did so in a careless, perfunctory way; yet they scooped up grounders and drives and flies with a listless ease in strong contrast to the tense eagerness of the less experienced locals. Center field was packed back of the ropes when the umpire announced the batteries and called "Play!"

It had been necessary to agree upon a special rule that a hit into the crowd should give the batter only two bases. The Indians growled over this, but it was their habit to growl at anything.

In Pennington's final words to his players he had mainly sought to impress upon them the conviction that their Big League opponents were not so formidable as they seemed and could be beaten by teams that had never been heard of. He did not warn them particularly against getting nervous, for he knew that, with youngsters, the fear of nervousness frequently brings about the result that is dreaded. As far as possible, he instructed Whipple concerning the peculiarities and failings of the batters who would face him.

"Watch the bench, Whip!" he said. "I'll tip you off when it's necessary."

"Pug" Flaherty, the battle-scarred right-fielder of the Indians, sauntered confidently forth from the bench, grinning at the youthful pitcher of the bushers, who, despite his attempt at unconcern, was plainly on edge and anxious. Pug "had an eye" and was the best waiter on the team, therefore Pennington had instructed Whipple to bend them over at once, and the youngster proceeded to do so. The first one clipped a corner, but Flaherty let it pass.

"Stri-i-ke!" cried the umpire, flinging up his hand.

The bleachers barked and the batter grinned still more tolerantly. He was still grinning when the second one came slanting down across his chest on the inside and he fouled it.

"Strike tuh!" was the arbitrator's call, which was drowned by another shout from the crowd.

A warning sign from the bench led the too eager twirler to take more time. Like most young slabmen, Whipple was inclined to pitch too fast when nervous.

With the standing two strikes and no balls, the wise fans expected the pitcher to "waste one." If Flaherty also looked for this, he, nevertheless, held himself prepared for anything, gripping his club and crouching a bit like a monkey ready to spring. The fielders, as well as Whipple, saw the catcher's signal for an in-shoot and it seemed that every man was swinging toward third when the sphere left the pitcher's fingers. There was a ringing crack of leather meeting wood and the ball went humming on a line toward left field.

Had Grozman, the short-stop, failed to heed the back-stop's signal, and had he not been moving in the proper direction when the ball was hit, he would have failed to reach that whistling drive by six feet at least. As it was, he shot forward, leaping into the air, and pulled the smoker down, bringing a shrill, wild yell of joy from the uprisen spectators.

That initial play of the game justified Pennington for the weary days he had spent drilling his sometimes rebellious players in defensive team-work. Not yet, however, were the visitors to realize that the bushers were trained in the science of baseball as played higher up.

"Hard luck, Pug," said Mat Buckley, the following batsman, as Flaherty came growling back from first, to which he had raced. "That lucky stab killed a sure two-bagger."

"That duck out there must carry a rabbit's-foot," said Pug. "He's easy, Buck; puts 'em all over. Knock the cover off!"

Whipple remembered Pennington's statement that Buckley's weakness could be found with a low ball close to his knees, but he failed to keep the first one close enough, and it was well that the outfielders were playing deep. The batter smashed out what looked like a hit into the crowd beyond the center fielder but that guardian of the middle section made a marvelous running

catch with his back turned directly toward the home plate. Well on the way to second, with the roaring of the crowd in his ears, Buckley stopped and swore.

"Them guys is loaded down with horseshoes!" he said as he repassed the coacher.

With two gone, the spectators howled for the locals to get Luchow, next in order. The little German was particularly clever at advancing runners, but now, with sacks untenanted, it was his duty to get safely down the first stretch if he could. Whipple, pitching cautiously, presently found the count was "strike one and ball three," the batter having fouled the only one to come over. Then the youngster remembered Pennington's statement that Luchow always "took one" when it stood that way, hoping to get a walk. Straight over the heart of the pan hummed the ball, and the second strike was called.

"That puts you even with him, Whip," laughed Bennett, the catcher. "Don't lose him! Make him hit!"

"Put it across," said Luchow, "and I'll bust the stitches!"

But he bit vainly at a dizzy drop and the Comets received an ovation as they came cantering in from the field.

"Now it's runs we want," said Pennington, as the youngsters gathered at the bench, "and want them quick. They'll be likely to come easier now than later, if those fellows get the idea that you can play and tighten up. Start us off, Collier, if you can."

Dugan had sent in Tom Harris, his weakest pitcher, thinking him fully capable of holding the bushers down. The Sahagan manager told his players just what to expect from Harris, who had an arm that would not let him make frequent use of his once marvelously effective drop. Collier, the center-fielder, did not waste time tipping his cap to the cheering mob, but squared himself in the batter's box and leaned against the first ball Harris warped across, driving it through an opening for a pretty single that redoubled the uproar.

Temple hastened to the plate with instructions to bunt, but Harris, hoping the over-confident runner would try to steal, "pitched out" twice. Then twice the ball was whipped to first to make Collier hug the bag. Pennington, fathoming the design and catching Temple's eye for a flashing instant, unobtrusively signed for the bunt on the next one.

No mistake was made. Harris put a sizzler over; Temple dumped it toward third. Only by the sharpest kind of work did "Laughing Ham" Hunter scoop up that slow roller and get the batter in his last stride by a perfect throw to first.

THERE is a saying that "more games are lost on the third-base coaching line than anywhere else," and Pennington hastened to take Coppinger's place there. Some of the Indians were joshing Harris, and the pitcher did not seem greatly pleased over the success of Temple's sacrifice. Giving his attention to Copley, who came next, he burned the ball across, a smoking white streak through the air. Twice Copley fouled; then he banged a grasser past Miner Samson, the first-sack guardian, who made an ineffective lunge at it.

Collier could run. He came over from second with the speed of a deer that is being peppered at by a sportsman with the buck fever. With a flourish of his arms, Pennington sent his man home.

Collier, crossing third, swung toward the plate without the slightest hesitation or let-up. Flaherty winged the ball to Creel, waiting at the registry station. It seemed to the upstanding, breathless crowd that the runner must be nipped. The ball, however, took a curve and came in wide, forcing Creel to reach for it in the wrong direction, and Collier, sliding spikes first, flung his body away from the catcher. Gripping the horsehide, Creel swung and lunged, but the umpire, squatting near by, spread out his hands, palms downward. On the throw in Copley cantered to second.

The spectators were simply a mob of pop-eyed, purple-faced, howling lunatics, and it seemed a marvel that some of them did not drop dead in the effort to split their throats. This was what they had come out to see; this was what they had told themselves they would see; yet all along, hidden in their hearts, there had been a fear that they would not see it.

The Indians were more amused than alarmed. Harris, although a trifle sore, felt no twinge of fear and he twisted his mug at Samson, who had flung him a jeer. On the bench Dugan shifted his quid, spat and said, "Hear the —— fools! They think one run wins this game!"

Badger, next hitter, knew what he wanted to do and Harris found the man would not

bite at coaxers. With three balls called, the pitcher was forced to find the rubber. He did it, and the busher took a called strike. But if Harris thought the batter would wait again, he was deceived. The ball was close, but Badger, standing back, poked it skimming over the middle of the third hassock beyond the reach of Hunter's yearning bare right.

Again idiocy seemed rampant in the crowd that watched Copley scurry home on that hit, which Badger, by great hustling, turned into a two-sacker.

Tom Harris was no longer undisturbed; in fancy he could hear Dugan calling him all sorts of a worthless bone-head, and he knew, even if he lived the inning through, there was something coming to him when he reached the bench. His team-mates were not jeering him good-naturedly now; they were asking what in a certain warm place was the matter with him. However, it was his anger, rather than fear of the batter, that led him to walk Eagan two minutes later.

It was time he pulled himself up and he pitched to Grozman with all the skill at his command, drawing a breath of relief when Sahagan's short-stop popped up an in-field fly.

"I reckon the little squall is over," commented Dugan, as Conroy walked into the batter's box. "These tail-end bushers must be weak with the stick."

But Pennington did not have a genuinely weak hitter on the list, having studied every one and coached them all to overcome their failings. Conroy had once felt that he could not hit a high ball, but now he picked out one level with his eyebrows and hit it a smash that should have left it marked with a dent. It was more of drive than a fly, yet it passed over the head of the center fielder, and would have been a homer save for the rule which made a hit into the crowd good for only two bases. Badger jogged home and Eagan and Conroy camped on third and second.

Bill Dugan discarded his chew of tobacco as if it tasted decidedly disagreeable.

"Kotman," he said, rising and motioning for Harris to leave the slab, "go out there an' stop this blazin' foolishness! That has-been couldn't hold down a bunch o' batters from the Old Woman's Home!"

The rejoicing crowd mercilessly laughed at Harris as the unfortunate twirler walked to the bench, his bronzed face having a putty-colored tinge. What Dugan said to Harris matters not, and, if it did, there are reasons why it could not be recorded.

"Spike" Bennett, the Sahagan catcher, stood back from the plate and leaned on his bat while Kotman, the star flinger of the Indians, limbered his wing a bit and got the range of the rubber by throwing a few to Creel. A few moments later Kotman was highly displeased by the behavior of Bennett, who met the second ball pitched to him and poled it to left for a clean single. The fielder tried to get Eagan by throwing to the pan and Bennett stretched his legs for second.

Creel, realizing he could not stop the score, wasted no time in shooting the sphere to Norris, who covered the cushion at the remote vertex of the diamond; but, after his usual manner when in haste, he threw to the wrong side of the hassock and Bennett, sliding, was safe. This attempt to catch Bennett might have let in another run had not Conroy lost his footing twenty feet from third. Before he could recover and get back to base the ball was there, and Hunter jammed down the lid of Pandora's box by tagging the Sahaganite viciously.

OUT of this pother had come four runs for the locals, and the crowd, though annoyed by Conroy's bungle, was jubilant; more than one usually dignified citizen joined in whooping at the Indians as the disgruntled and growling Leaguers approached their bench. Dugan greeted his players with a sneering, snarling countenance.

"Quit this monkey-business now," he said, "and git down to cases! You've been makin' a holy show o' yerselves! Buck up an' choke off them howlin' fools by makin' some runs! Git after that cub pitcher an' hand him his!"

But Whipple, heartened and steadied by the lead his team had obtained, pitched well. He added to the joy of the assemblage by whiffing the first two men to face him in the second, although they were known to be the Indians' most dreaded stickers. When "Miner" Samson followed with an easy high fly that was smothered, the crowd rose again and cheered the Comets collectively and individually.

Pennington took pains not to permit his players to become over-confident or careless.

"Don't get the idea that we've clinched this game, boys," he cautioned. "We'll have to fight for it until the last man is down. Get more runs; we're almost sure to need them."

Kotman, however, soon gave evidence that he belonged in a different class from Harris; apparently he did not work for strike-outs, but his pitching was so baffling that Whipple, Collier and Temple popped to the infield or poled weak rollers into the diamond, not one of them coming within ten feet of reaching first.

The game had settled into a grim battle, with the Big Leaguers, no longer disdainful and careless, fighting every inch of the way and resorting to every artifice at their command.

Hunter, leading off in the third, "got a life" on an error and sought to shake Whipple's nerve by laughing at him from the sack; but when he tried to steal on the second ball pitched to Creel he was slaughtered by Bennett's perfect throw and Grozman's fearless covering of the anchorage. Then Creel fanned and Kotman drove a whistling liner straight into the unflinching hooks of Conroy.

"Some baseball!" commented a happy spectator.

Kotman continued his hitless career on the slab, mowing down the bushers in one-two-three order.

In the fourth, with the head of the list up, the Indians got after Whipple and, with one down and two on, had him wobbling. A double play, executed on a fly to center and a rifle-shot throw to the plate, stopped at least one run and allowed the choking spectators to get breath enough to howl.

Whipple was perspiring and shaky when he reached the bench. Pennington saw this and, hiding his anxiety, tried to chirk him up. Deep in his heart, the Sahagan manager was apprehensive of what might happen if a break came and the belligerent visitors started scoring. The young pitcher knew how bitterly sore the great crowd would be if, after such a favorable beginning, the Indians were to win, and he could not put that haunting, harassing thought aside.

When he came to bat with two out and Conroy on first, Whipple betrayed the condition of his nerves by slashing at three wide ones, not one of which could have been touched with a bat several inches over regulation length.

Fully as well as Pennington, Dugan seemed to understand that the time for the break had arrived.

"Start something now!" he rasped. "Here's where you do it! Pound that pitcher's head off!"

Maddern started it with a clean single. Samson rolled out a soggy bunt and, in his anxiety, Whipple fumbled the ball, being saved from a wild throw, perhaps, by Eagan's yell for him to hold it. Hunter, laughing uproariously, pranced to the bat and banged the ball into the crowd, scoring Maddern.

"Get out back of the stand, Coppinger, and warm up!" ordered Pennington at once. "Hustle!"

The coachers were howling; the crowd was aghast; Whipple was shaking. There was some relief when Creel, eager to follow Hunter's example, boosted a fly back of second and was out. This relief was temporary, however, for Kotman came on with a single to right, scoring Samson and Hunter.

Three tallies had been made and, with Whipple off his feet and the Indians hot on the warpath, everything seemed to promise that the game would be lost and won right there.

Pennington had no faith in the ability of Coppinger to check the rout, but he knew Whipple would be in no form to continue in the next inning and some one must pitch.

Instead of swinging on the ball, Flaherty bunted and Whipple interfered with the fielding of Temple, who might have got the man at first.

"It's all over," groaned the same spectator who, a short time before, had declared the game "some baseball."

Buckley's weakness was forgotten by the confused young twirler, who handed him one high on the inside. The batter smashed the ball on a dead line toward third and Temple forked it sensationally with his bare right hand, swinging in time to wing it to first for a double, Kotman being unable to get back to the sack.

III

"WHERE'S Morgan?" was the question as the Comets reached the bench, heedless of the relieved shouting of the gathering.

Pennington was not there.

Over behind the stand he had rushed at Coppinger, saying, "Give me that ball! I'm going to warm up myself. I'm going to pitch the rest of this game if I never pitch another! Go back and watch, Cop. Let me know when the inning ends, so I can start the sixth."

Coppinger, who had felt no relish for the mauling he fully expected to receive, willingly obeyed.

Pennington was not given much time to get his arm into condition, Kotman continuing as invulnerable as ever. The crowd knew another pitcher would be put in and there was a craning of necks when the locals trotted out once more. Pennington, walking to the slab, was received with surprise and uncertain applause.

"What's this! what's this!" whooped Hunter, standing with his hands on his hips and staring. "Can it be? Oh, say, now there *will* be sport!"

Dugan took a fresh chew of tobacco and settled himself on the bench, grinning. "You know what you c'n do with him," he said. "His heart-valves are weak as rotten leather hinges."

Pennington had spoken a moment with Bennett. He started off with his underhand rise and Luchow, biting at the same ball twice, cut two gashes in the air. Then he fouled a wide "roundhouse," but this encouragement proved deceptive when, a moment later, he slashed inches beneath another rise ball and was out!

Seemingly utterly deaf to applause and paying strict attention to business, Pennington took Norris in hand. He knew the man's weakness for grandstanding and when, having missed once, the batter did a derisive jig-step in the box, Pen caught him off guard and whipped a straight one over for a called strike. Then came the lately acquired "fade-away" and Norris, his peacock feathers drooping, followed Luchow to the bench.

Maddern meant business and he fouled the ball four times. Still the grim young man on the slab continued to bend them over, Maddern eventually perished in the same manner as the two comrades who had preceded him.

The crowd hailed Pennington as Sheridan was greeted on his arrival at Winchester. Here was the man to save the day! They gave full token of their faith in him.

On the other hand, Dugan muttered, "He'll blow up; he can't help it."

Pennington wanted more runs, but Kotman still "had the goods," and delivered them.

The seventh opened with Samson making a ludicrously weak showing against the slants and headwork of the Sahagan slabman, being likewise retired by the strike-out route. But Hunter hit a grounder to Grozman, who booted it and instantly there was a commotion. Dugan himself was on the coaching-line now.

"Ah-yah! ah-yee!" howled the manager of the Indians. "Here he goes! He's soft! He's easy! He's a quitter! Make him pitch! We'll make a hundred now! Yow! Look out!"

The final cry was a warning to Hunter, who leaped back to the sack; but Pennington's throw was so slow and faltering that the runner's taunting laugh seemed almost justified. Again the pitcher threw to the sack, evidently trying to be quicker, but it seemed apparent that he could not catch a real player by that sort of a trick. Made bold, Hunter took a bigger lead.

Suddenly, as he seemed on the verge of pitching, Pennington pivoted like a flash and shot the ball straight and low into the hands of the waiting Eagan, who put it against Hunter, sliding.

"You're out!" barked the umpire.

Tricked, Hunter rose from the dust, protesting. Dugan ran at the umpire fiercely, but was ordered back, the wildly shrieking crowd demanding that he should be put out. Abusive, the chagrined and exasperated manager of the Indians delayed the game until the umpire pulled his watch. Then Hunter, all the taunting merriment taken out of him, retired.

Creel fanned.

Although in no manner did he give expression to it, Pennington really had little hope of making further runs. He felt that the sole chance of winning lay in holding the enemy where they were. Still he kept his players keyed up and trying their hardest with the club.

Kotman, however, pitched like a man straining every nerve to win a Big League pennant and one after another the bushers, Pen included, bit the dust.

The eighth throughout was a wrangle, the Indians resorting to umpire-baiting and all sorts of bullying tactics, even though

the exasperated spectators threatened to mob them. Nevertheless, Pennington, iron-nerved, permitted only three batters to face him.

IV

IN THE final half of that inning the second Sahaganite had melted away before Kotman's wonderful skill when a messenger-boy found Pennington resting on the bench and handed him a Western Union envelope. The envelope bore the name of John Morgan, but Pen tore it open with a premonitory throb of apprehension.

The message stunned him:

Just succeeded in locating you. Your father died four days ago. Will leaves you everything. Business needs your attention.

At the bottom were the names of Gardiner Pennington's attorneys.

"There goes Copley. Now hold 'em down, manager, and we'll own Sahagan to-night!" It was the voice of Bennett in his ears.

Like a man dazed, Pennington rose, thrusting the crumpled message into the bosom of his woolen shirt. His father was dead and they had parted with bitter words. Like a man dazed, he walked on to the diamond and stood dully watching his companions throwing the ball. When it came to him he caught it mechanically, but he did not get ready to pitch until the umpire twice sharply called "Play!"

The spectators became vaguely aware that something had happened to the pitcher on whom they depended, and the cheering died away to a questioning hum which ran through the stand and over the bleachers. Bennett, removing his mask, walked out.

"What's the matter?" he asked, gazing at Pen's pale, drawn face. "Are you sick?"

"No," was the husky answer, "I'm all right. Get your position, and signal."

Luchow pounded a grasser to Grozman, who trapped it and threw the German out.

Pennington gave himself a shake and pitched to Norris, who smashed a long fly to center, where Collier made a wonderful catch against the ropes.

The pitcher did not hear the taunts of the coachers; he scarcely seemed to see Maddern at the plate. Bennett was forced to signal three times. Then Maddern, after watching two wide ones sail past, got one to his liking and wrenched a groan from the crowd with a clean single.

"He's gone!" cried Dugan, again on the coaching-line. "He's quit! Yellow! Yellow! His heart's gone back on him. He never was no good."

Behind Pennington's back Maddern stole second and the spectators groaned again. Once more Bennett came out into the diamond.

"For the love of Mike pull yourself together!" he entreated. "Only one more man to get and the game's ours!"

Pen nodded. "I'll get him," he promised.

But Samson was dangerous and Pennington felt himself unstrung. His first two to the miner were balls. With a mighty effort, he got one over and Samson smashed a grounder down the first base-line, foul by two inches.

"He's gone!" howled Dugan again. "He's quit! Yellow! Yellow!"

If Samson hit safely, Maddern would be almost certain to tie the score and, with the Sahagan pitcher shaken and Kotman going at his strongest, that meant defeat. Pennington realized it and got a firm grip on himself. He tried the underhand rise and Samson fouled over the top of the stand. That man could hit in a pinch and he was dangerous now.

Pennington tried a wide curve, but Samson leered at it as it sailed past. It was two and three now. Bennett was fearful, but the pitcher, his face set and grim, shook his head until he got the sign he wanted.

The call was for a high in-shoot, and Pennington, believing it was the last ball he would ever pitch, whipped across the overhand "chin-wiper" that had made him famous at college.

Samson missed it!

A SHORT time later, as he was leaving the field, having escaped with some difficulty from the riotously rejoicing crowd that overran the diamond, Pennington encountered Bill Dugan.

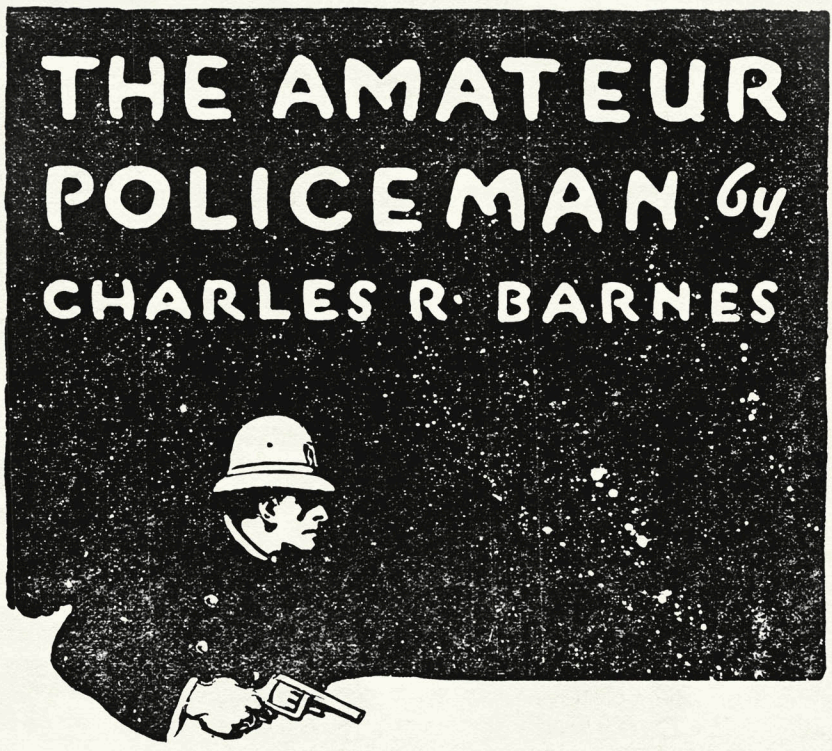
The Big League manager looked the young man over.

"Say," he said, "I'll swaller it; you're no quitter. Reckon I didn't give ye a fair tryout and, if ye want the chanct, you shall have it now."

"Thanks, Dugan," replied Pennington without the slightest touch of animosity, "I've had a better offer."

THE AMATEUR POLICEMAN

by CHARLES R. BARNES



COSGRAVE ORR was one of those young men to whom something unusual happens with amazing frequency. I believe that most of us lead lives remarkable solely for the sameness of events which make them. We arise and breakfast and go about our employment, day by day. And one day is the echo of another. Somehow, the things that are in the stories do not happen to most of us. They do, however, to men like Orr.

He had been shipwrecked; he had made a bonanza mining find; he possessed a life-saving medal, issued by the Government. Thugs once held him up and robbed him; he had come alive out of an overturned railway coach that was afire. A group of bewhiskered Russian anarchists were about to shoot him; on one occasion, because they suspected him of having betrayed them. And so it went on in his life—adventure, experience, dramatic, pathetic and humorous incident without end.

At least once a fortnight he could be counted on to relate a strange tale. His nature was venturesome; he was quick to act, resourceful, daring—the kind of man to risk an issue on a small chance. That was Orr.

One evening he dropped in on me for a chat. There was something in his manner that suggested a story. He was a bit nervous and full of talk. Repression came into the atmosphere as soon as he entered the room. I began the conversation.

"Well?" I questioned.

He laughed. "You can smell a story a mile away," he said. "I didn't know I was so transparent."

"Why not begin?" I suggested. "I can use an idea just now."

Again he laughed. "I'd hate to make my living your way," he assured me. "If you run out of ideas, then you take your place in the bread-line. Isn't it like that?"

I nodded assent. He went on:

"Can you make a story out of a drunken cop?"

"That depends," said I.

"A cop with the loveliest souse you ever saw? And does the fact that he's a friend of mine make any difference?" Orr spoke quizzingly. He was a natural story-teller and he knew that he was arousing my curi-

osity by thus retarding the action of his tale. I spoke up rather impatiently:

"Orr, I wish you'd throw your patter into the high gear. What were you and the cop with a souse up to?"

"The cop," he said, "was not up to anything. I was up to adventure." And then he plunged into the story of a most remarkable happening of the night, wherein rang the scream of a woman, the barking of pistols and the hoarse cries of fighting men.

Orr lived in the "seventies," occupying a luxurious bachelor suite. The policeman on post there was an intelligent young fellow named Martin. Orr often saw him while returning home late at night, and from a friendly nod an acquaintance grew up. Martin was much like Orr in physique. Both were men whose backs required wide coats; they were deep chested, strong fellows. Orr, however, had the long, firm face of the Englishman; Martin looked Irish.

As the time wore on, Orr fell into the habit of talking to the officer—chatting for five minutes or so whenever the two chanced to meet. And he learned much of interest about the man. He found that his new friend was studying law, also that he held in great esteem a certain Miss Kate Grady, a fascinating saleswoman in a big department store. She has nothing to do with this story, save as she created a motive for a deplorable circumstance. You'll generally find a woman at the bottom of wo.

ONE night in June, Orr was returning late from a delightful little session at his club. He didn't go much into details excepting to mention the fact that, when he left, everybody was sitting on the floor in a circle, singing; and while most of them were fairly good singers, a surprising number were off the key and couldn't carry the tunes very well. Which is of no importance, other than to suggest that some peculiar influence must have been in the air that night.

As Orr approached his home he saw a figure of a man leaning against the house, in the shadow. Now New Yorkers usually keep moving at night, especially when it is very late and the street is deserted. There is something suggestive of quick, dread doings about a silent, deserted side street when darkness has settled down. One's steps echo like the pounding of a nightstick, the street lights blink weakly, the houses are dark and one can picture everything from late suppers to murder going on behind the silent walls. At least, so it seemed to Orr. And that is why he wondered what the fellow leaning against his wall might be up to.

Approaching the man, he said, "What's the matter?"

There was no response. Orr went closer and to his surprise made out the uniform of a policeman. And that uniform covered the frame of Officer Martin! Again Orr spoke:

"Why, Martin, what has happened to you?"

You see several things are likely to happen to a lone policeman on a dark night. The notorious New York gangs don't like the police and often say so with automatic pistols. Pursued highwaymen also shoot. But Orr soon discovered that Officer Martin had run afoul of none of these perils. The man held up his head with an effort and managed to drool:

"Sh-h-h, no' so loud. I got a brooful bun."

Orr looked at him. This was a serious business. Here was a police officer drunk on post. If he were caught in this condition things would go hard with him. So Orr did some quick thinking. He had a sincere liking for Martin and wanted to help him. So he grasped a limp arm.

"Come, Martin," he said, "I'm going to take you to my rooms and straighten you up a bit. Come!"

The man staggered along unresistingly and Orr soon had him in the apartment. And under the light he got a firm impression that the policeman was distressingly drunk. There was no life in him; he slumped down on a davenport and began to snore, leaving Orr to save the situation. For an hour he lay there. Orr finally succeeded in awaking him to administer hot coffee.

Then he asked; "Why did you do this?"

Martin gazed about him blearily.

"The lady," he explained, "threw me down!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Orr and understood.

Martin was still in no condition to appear on the street. And his friend thought busily. From time to time his eyes wandered over the policeman's uniform, then, in a long mirror, over his own proportions.

Finally he said, "Martin, do you think your clothes would fit me?"

The policeman squinted foolishly. "Sure," he affirmed.

"Then," decided Orr, "give me your coat and trousers and cap. I'll go outside and walk post for you and take chances on the roundsman!"

Martin, drunk as he was, had sense enough to protest. But the other man, deeming his judgment the best under the circumstances, insisted And at length the change was made. In the mirror, the counterfeit mace-wielder saw himself as fine looking a specimen of the genus as ever wore a shield. From his hand dangled a club; in his hip pocket lay a big revolver, full to the last chamber.

And so, putting the coffee-pot where Martin could get it, he advised frequent draughts of its contents and went out into the night. As the door closed upon him, he heard Martin laugh in a silly maudlin way and exclaim:

"'S fine night for a murr'er!"

ONCE in the street, Orr looked about him for the dreaded roundsman. But no one was in sight. It was now a little after three and his part of the city lay in deep stillness. There is nothing so dead as a sleeping city. The desert night has its mystic noises; the air seems to talk to one—to breathe ghostly messages. But a city street is dead—ghastly as the inside of a tomb. One feels a kindred sensation in Pompeii. Where life ought to be, there is none.

And Orr was keenly alive to the mental condition his environment produced. Perhaps the knowledge that he was a fraud helped to intensify his state of mind. And so, with a heart that beat a trifle faster than it should, he paced the street for perhaps ten minutes. Then, suddenly, he stopped.

A window near him was flung violently up, and a white-clad form protruded itself outward. The next instant a shrill scream ripped into the gloomy silence.

"Help—help—burglars!"

Orr was momentarily stunned with the suddenness of it. And then a wave of annoyance ran over him as he came to a realization of the pretty mess into which he had got himself. If he had kept out of Martin's affairs, he would have been safe in his apartment. Now, however, because of his foolish love for the unusual, he was face to face with a situation that might end with a bullet through him. Frankly, he didn't like it. But, of course, there was only one honorable course for him to pursue, he thought. To all intents and purposes, he was a policeman. And now he was going to find out how it impresses a new officer to tackle his first case of burglar-catching. Already Orr was convinced that the job had, at least, its preliminary thrills.

He called up at the white figure, "Where is your burglar?"

The reply came in a girl's voice.

"Oh!" she exclaimed in a scared tone, "I didn't see you. Please come in! Wait and I'll throw you down the key—it's in my purse."

She disappeared. Orr stood still and stared at the wall before him. The building was a private house, as were most of the others in the vicinity. The girl had called from the second story. Soon she reappeared, threw down the key and began to talk in a low voice.

"He's in the dining-room!" she told the bogus officer. "On the ground floor, back. I heard him gathering up the silver! He's still there, for I just listened. He couldn't hear me scream; he's too far away. You see, we can't hear street noises in the dining-room——"

She was rattling on, but Orr did not wait for her to finish. He mounted the steps, quietly inserted the key and let himself in. The hall was in total darkness. At the head of the stairs he heard a low voice. It came from the girl.

"Straight back," she murmured. And so Orr advanced, revolver in hand, guiding himself with the other hand against the wall. When he had gone a dozen steps he, too, heard a muffled noise. The man was evidently a careless worker. Orr didn't know it, but the fellow he sought was an amateur, for he had brought along no lookout; he worked alone. And he had made enough noise with the metal dishes to be heard by the girl from the top of the stairs.

On went Orr. It was creepy business, this. He could think of a great many more things that he would prefer doing. But he was in for it and if he got plugged with a steel-jacketed bullet out of an automatic, then, if he survived, the wound would be a reminder to keep out of other people's

business. Martin was paid for this sort of thing and he was not.

Nevertheless, he proceeded cautiously along the dark corridor and at last found himself outside the door behind which the burglar worked. He placed his hand carefully on the knob and turned it, slowly, silently, until it would turn no more. Then he took a deep breath and gripped his revolver more firmly.

The door swung suddenly open as he pushed. He found himself in a dark room, but opposite him, for a second, gleamed an electric flash-light. As he entered, it glowed upon the sideboard. Then it turned swiftly and bore full upon him! Suddenly it vanished!

And then came a spitting flame. In a straight line, a large-caliber cartridge roared and something tore through the uniform at his left side! He instinctively dropped to the floor and fired in the direction of the shot, at the same time crawling a few feet to the left. He heard a quick curse, loud like a cry.

This was indeed a ticklish position. Here were two armed men, each intent upon murdering the other. And they were in the dark. Orr did not know the location of the switch and he would not have pushed the button had he known where it was. For light would mean death to the slower man. Neither knew where the other was. It was a case of listening for movement, for breathing, for any sound.

And now, curiously enough, the makeshift policeman found himself less concerned with his immediate peril than with what might happen afterward. He felt positive that the girl at the head of the stairs would telephone police headquarters for help, or make further outcry. The shooting would frighten her into violent panic and she would arouse a goodly portion of the neighborhood.

Then the real police would come and he would be found out. And there would be publicity and prosecution for impersonating an officer. And Martin? No one could tell what might happen to him!

Orr's mind ran along after this manner, as he crouched with his revolver extended in the direction from which the shot had come.

Suddenly he stopped thinking altogether! The other man's weapon spat fire twice, very quickly. It was as if only one shot had been fired. Orr heard the bullets thump into the wall above his head and in the light of the flashes he dimly made out the form of a man in an opposite corner.

The dining-room table was between them and in an instant of inspiration Orr sprang forward and under it, just as another shot crashed into the space he had been occupying. Reaching forward, he carefully covered the burglar's position and shot at it. Then he fired to the right of it and to the left. And after the last shot he heard a gasping cry followed by the sound of a body half sinking, half falling to the floor!

HE SLIPPED hastily from under the table, toward the fallen man, but to the left of him. He was against the wall. The man was cursing and moaning. All at once he cried thickly:

"You've got me, but I'll get you!"

And then the swift-firing automatic pistol belched the last of its contents in a semicircle, which covered Orr's former position under the table and to the right and left of it. The last flash was pointed almost at Orr, but not quite.

As it left the muzzle of the weapon the make-believe policeman, who had counted the shots, leaped forward and threw himself upon the burglar! He found both of the man's hands and held them fast. Then he called to the girl:

"Come down here and turn on the light!"

There was the sound of slippered feet upon the stairs. The captured man cursed softly and tried to struggle. But he had been too badly injured to offer much resistance. Orr easily held him until a light burst forth in the hall and in the room where the struggle had taken place. Then he looked at the man and loosed him.

"You poor fellow!" he exclaimed.

The burglar's legs were drawn up against his body and his face was contorted with pain.

"You got me here," he said, holding a hand over his chest. Then he fell to coughing. Orr turned to the young woman.

"You'd better telephone for an ambulance," he said. "This man doesn't need the police now."

The girl was staring, wide-eyed, at the scene before her. She was a tall, graceful girl of about nineteen. Her black, thick hair hung in a braid down her back; she had girded a trailing bath-robe around her.

"I'm all alone in the house to-night," she began. "He frightened me so!" She seemed unable to act. A bell somewhere in the place set up a loud jangling.

"That's the police," exclaimed Orr, looking wildly about him for an exit. The girl ran to the front door and opened it. Several men, hastily clothed, came trooping in.

"We're neighbors," they said. "We heard shooting. Is there anything we can do?"

The girl pointed toward the dining-room and they entered it. And as Orr saw them coming, inspiration showed the way out.

"You fellows watch him," said Orr. "I'm not the regular man on this post. I was going home when I heard the young woman cry for help. I'll go now and find the man on post and let him take charge here. Watch this fellow and telephone for an ambulance." He bowed to the girl and left the house.

Thus far he had carried off the situation with great success. But how was it to end? With the ambulance would come other police no doubt, and they would find a badly shot burglar but not the policeman who shot him. Martin was bound to get into trouble over this thing, that is, unless Orr could think of some way out of it for him.

He thought rapidly as he walked the short distance to his apartment. When he entered it he found a different Martin. The man had been gulping hot, black coffee with fine industry. Orr detected the improvement as soon as he entered the room. Hurriedly he began stripping off the uniform.

"I've shot a burglar, Martin!" he said. "Get your clothes on and get to that house as soon as you can."

Martin looked aghast.

"I'm in for it now!" he exclaimed. "I ought to have been on post."

"That's true," admitted Orr, "but we've got to fix up something to let you out—some story. Let's see—I told 'em back there that I didn't belong to this precinct. Let's call it a mystery and let it go at that."

"How?" inquired Martin.

"Like this," explained Orr. "You tell 'em at headquarters that a man in uniform came to you and said he'd shot a burglar. You didn't stop to ask questions, supposing that he'd report the case to his superior. Do you see?"

Martin nodded.

"You hurried to the house and found a wounded man. The girl told you that an officer had done the shooting. That's all you know about it. You were on another part of your post at the time. Is that clear?"

"I'll try it," agreed Martin, slipping into his clothes as fast as he could. "Maybe it will go."

"Of course it will," Orr assured him. "It will be a mystery, of course, that will bother the Department, but you must let them bother. They can't clear it up unless you tell. No one there looked at my number; I believe you are safe on that score. Tell the truth, as you know it. A uniformed man really did tell you about the shooting and, as a policeman, you didn't recognize me. I'm not a policeman. You don't even have to lie—only tell bare facts."

Martin grinned.

"No," he said. "I won't have to lie, but I'll have to come so close to doing it that there won't be any difference."

In another minute he had belted his night-stick on and was leaving.

"Clean your gun as soon as you can," suggested Orr, "and fill the chambers. You might have to produce it."

AT THIS point Orr paused to light a cigar.

"How did everything turn out?" I asked.

"Well," he replied, "I just learned myself. You see, I called at that house, a while ago and I'm going to call again."

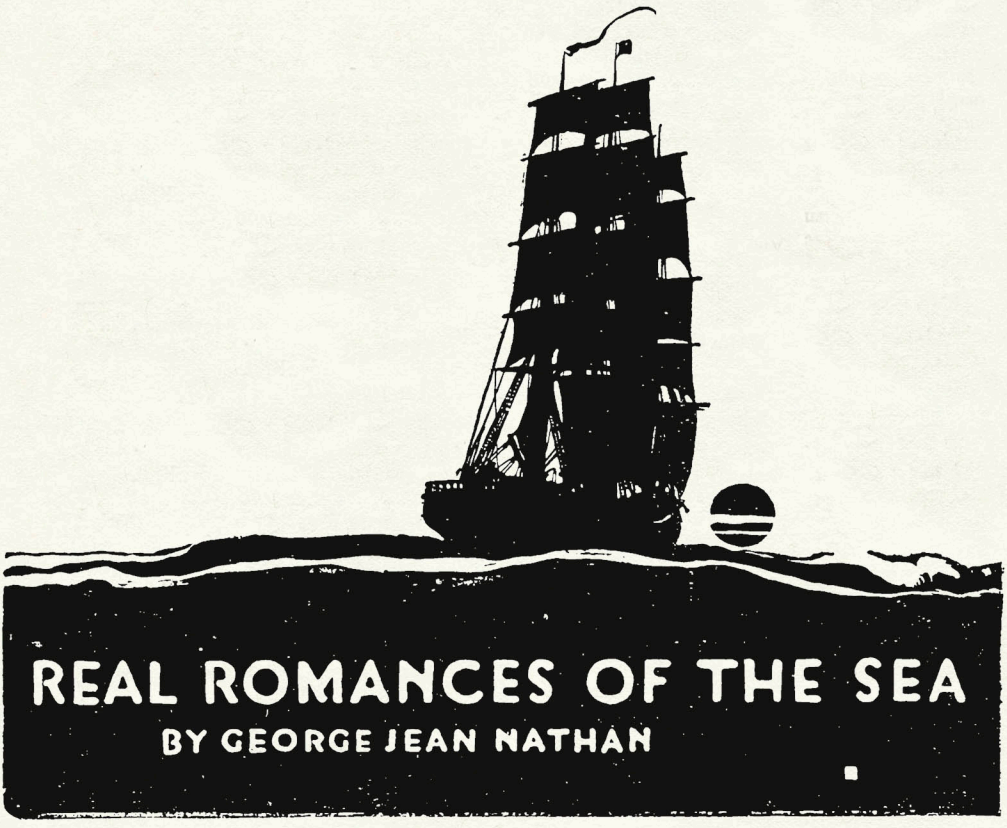
I laughed, but he went on seriously:

"I told her how it all happened. But about Martin. The story went through all right, but the whole department is mystified. You see, the cops aren't in the habit of doing a trick like that and then keeping quiet. These things count for promotion. I believe they suspect something—suspect Martin of some queer trick."

"Why?" I inquired.

"Because," Orr explained, "Martin says that after they had questioned him, the captain said:

"'What I can't understand, Martin, is how you got those two little holes in the side of your coat.'"



BURIED away in the records of the American Seamen's Society, the writer recently discovered a report made by the Captain of the bark *Anjou* (2,069 tons) upon his arrival in Marseilles aboard the liner *Ernest Simons* in 1906.

After a mysterious disappearance from the face of the earth for a period of many months, he reappeared. During this time not only had all trace of the Captain himself been lost, but, alas, of the *Anjou* with her crew and twenty-five passengers.

The scant, scenario-like report, unadorned further, follows in the Captain's words:

MODERN CRUSOES

"THE *Anjou*, while on a voyage from Sydney to Falmouth, was wrecked on one of the Auckland group in the Pacific. We had left Sydney on January 20, and during a thick fog and rough weather on February 4 the ship struck on a reef. The masts fell and smashed some of the small boats, and there was a panic on board.

"Fortunately all escaped in the boats that remained whole, but many were only partly dressed and some not at all. After a terrible experience in a heavy gale, lasting for almost a whole day, we reached the shore of one of the deserted islands the following afternoon and, after a battle with the heavy sea, managed to drag our bodies up on to the land.

"Naked and wounded, for what clothes we had had been ripped off, our bodies torn and bruised by being battered around, we looked like a band of phantoms marching on to the conquest of some infernal island.

"Almost starved, we lighted a big fire with flint and attracted some sea-birds which we captured and ate. Making clothes for ourselves out of long grass and leaves, we started out to explore the island. After a search that lasted three days, some of our party discovered a rude shelter, showing that shipwrecked people had been there at some time before.

"On the following days we killed, with rocks, a number of albatross and caught a

quantity of shellfish, on which we subsisted. Also, we captured a small seacow, which proved to be decent eating.

"As a chance of making our condition known, we caught three albatross alive and set them free with bark cards tied around their necks, stating our plight in French and English. But day after day passed and help failed to come.

"We resolved to make the best of our condition, because we feared—and rightly so—that we might be left on the island for months, even years, before we could in some way or other attract the attention of a passing vessel. The vessels, we knew, gave the particular island we were on a very wide berth.

"So we got up a little government all of our own and called ourselves the 'Shipwrecked Kingdom.' We had a sort of king, or boss, a cabinet of advisors and all that sort of thing. Our 'army'—or exploration party—was dispatched into the interior of the island and the 'army,' consisting of eight men, discovered some wild sheep.

"They established a sort of fold in which to keep the animals for use as necessary. Our royal tailoring department made clothes for us out of the sheep-skins, and boots out of the same stuff together with wood.

"Signals of distress were hoisted at different points along the coast to attract the attention of shipping. New Robinson Crusoes, we lived an extraordinary life, fishing, hunting, eating our food sometimes in a cave, sometimes on a rock, and sleeping where we could. A great deal of the weather was very bad.

"On May 7, after we had been on the Island Kingdom for over three months, the New Zealand Government steamer *Hinomoa* rescued us. This vessel had on board the two daughters of Mr. Mills, the New Zealand Minister of Commerce, who superintended most of the work of helping us back to our natural civilized state and, as a token of our gratitude, we gave them the cat that had been saved from the wreck of the *Anjou* and that had gone through all our troubles with us as the mascot of our little Kingdom."

AT THE end of the Captain's report, there is the simple statement that ten large vessels before the *Anjou* had been wrecked at the same spot during fifteen years, among them the *General Grant* with a loss of seventy-five lives.

It is inferred, too, that some of the crews and passengers of the other nine vessels had experiences fully as curious as that of the citizens of the "Shipwrecked Kingdom."

And there are scores of true tales like this that have never come to the eyes of the great reading world, actual romances and dramas of the deep that rival the attempts of fiction.

I have them from the mouths of the old sea-dogs at Sailor's Snug Harbor on Staten Island, from George McPherson Hunter, a man who has spent his entire life on the sea and among the sailor communities of the world, from C. C. Pinneo, of the American Seamen's Society, and from the records and reports of that organization.

HOW MRS. SKEWERS QUELLED A MUTINY

ELEVEN years ago, the American sailing vessel *T. F. Oakes*, with a crew of thirty-six men and bound for American ports from the Far East, was posted for lost after it had been overdue one hundred and twenty-five days. After twenty-five more days without a word from the vessel, the relatives of Captain Skewers and his wife, who was on the ship with him, and of the crew, went into mourning for their presumably dead kin.

On the one hundred and fifty-ninth day, however, the *T. F. Oakes* was sighted and boarded, and this is the tale it disgorged:

While in the Indian Ocean, Captain Skewers had been seized with an attack of paralysis that had rendered him helpless. The crew was not especially fond of the mate and, despite the fact of the emergency, began, in no unmistakable manner, to indicate their displeasure over his promotion to the position of command over them.

Captain Skewers, although aware of the impending mutiny, could do nothing except have the men brought to his cabin and weakly urge them to remain orderly. But the men told Skewers they would obey no one but their regular captain. Mrs. Skewers, who was forced to remain by her husband's side, similarly beseeched the crew to help get the *T. F. Oakes* to its destination, but to little avail.

Presently, just as the mutiny was about to break, one of a series of fearful storms broke and for days the vessel was tossed about like a little chip of wood. Temporarily, the crew were held from rebelling by the elements that momentarily threatened to batter the ship to bits. No sooner, how-

ever, did the skies begin to grow clear again than the crew once more started in to take charge of the vessel. The mate acted like a child, knowing not what to do nor which way to turn. At this crisis he appealed to Mrs. Skewers who, brushing him aside, rushed on to the deck, flourishing her husband's revolver, and ordered the crew to obey her as their captain.

"Until we get to port," she cried to them, "I am going to take my sick husband's place! And what's more, I'm going to see that we *do* get to port!"

THE crew had always liked Mrs. Skewers. They assured her that they would go about their work and take their orders from her.

All went well for a week, when once again the vessel was caught in the fist of a bad storm and driven hundreds of miles out of its course. Food kept growing scarcer and scarcer and half rations were declared. When things grew still worse, Mrs. Skewers begged the crew to allow her to withhold from them what little milk and what few eggs remained, so that she might use this food to nourish her husband. The crew rebelled.

"What!" they protested. "You want us to keep on living on hardtack while Skewers gets the delicacies? Not much!"

But Mrs. Skewers persuaded them with her revolver. The latter was the only weapon on board and, even if there had been more, it probably would not have been in the men's hearts—dark as they were—to do harm to this woman. In this way, holding the crew alternately by love and fear, Mrs. Skewers cared for her disabled husband and brought his ship and cargo to port, through storm and trouble, one hundred and fifty-nine days after it had been due.

The dramatic exploit of Mrs. Skewers is without a parallel not only in the actual chronicles of the sea but, very likely, even in fiction records of this kind.

THE VOYAGE OF THE KEROSENE-LADEN "THORNLIEBANK"

A SHIP'S fight against a storm, made more exciting by the fact that some dynamite happens to be included in the cargo, is one of the favorite and stock devices of the sea-fiction writers.

What would you think of a story concerning a leaking clipper ship, with eighty-six thousand cases of kerosene and benzine aboard, that went through wrecking storms, that was on the point of being smashed to pieces every other minute, and that was finally brought to port eight thousand miles away? She was saved only through the sleepless efforts of her starved crew, who for two and one-half months guarded the shifting cargo against explosions and kept up a steady pumping night and day.

I know *I* should say, and I am sure *you* would, were we to read of it in fiction, that it could not be true. And yet the records of the seas reveal just such a case, known among seamen as the most thrilling voyage in the memory of two generations.

The clipper *Thornliebank*, of Glasgow, Captain Smith, left Philadelphia bound for Wellington, New Zealand, July 1, 1903. It carried a cargo of eighty-six thousand cases of benzine and kerosene. When the vessel reached latitude 41 south, longitude 13 east, off the Cape of Good Hope, on September 9, it encountered a cyclonic storm of such unabating fury that for days the *Thornliebank* threatened to go under.

As the storm worked its havoc, the men were compelled to lash themselves to one another, after the fashion of Alpine climbers, to prevent their being sent overboard.

All the while the cargo, having slipped its fastenings, was banging from side to side and was not beyond the danger of possible explosion. An effort to fasten the cases of benzine and kerosene was of no avail.

The wind tore the foresail and upper topsails into shreds and broke part of the mainmast. The wreckage came tumbling to the decks, carrying staysails and yard-arms in its wake.

LET us quote now from the plain, unvarnished record of the *Thornliebank's* perilous trip.

"In the evening the ship gave a sudden lurch, plunged into the seas and for a moment was submerged from stem to stern. Every one on board thought she was foundering and the sailors dropped on their knees and prayed. While the vessel was submerged, everything movable was washed overboard. Worst of all, the donkey-engine was torn loose and knocked to pieces. With the forward deckhouse gone and skylights smashed, the seas came tumbling in below decks and added to the terror.

"After a fine struggle on the part of the men, Captain Smith succeeded in keeping the ship off before the gale for safety, using oil from port and starboard and thus diminishing the force of the gigantic waves. After a day filled with awful dread, the weather began to moderate and the ship was put on her course again. The officers noticed soon after she had resumed her course that she was moving sluggishly, so the wells were sounded and it was found that there were eleven inches of water below.

"After successfully battling with a terrific hurricane, to realize that death by drowning was still a matter of possibility nerved the crew to redouble their efforts to bring the vessel to a safe harbor. Slowly but surely the water was gaining. When the ship took the heavy plunge that carried away her deck-house and smashed several skylights, she started some of her rivets. With the donkey-engine gone there was no other alternative than to use the hand pumps, and from that day, September 10, to November 29 they were kept going night and day—two and a half months of incessant pumping. Night after night, day after day, with only a few hours sleep, the men worked like Trojans in an effort to keep the water down.

"All this time the vessel was struggling toward Australia. One day she would make fairly good progress; the next day adverse winds would drive her back many miles. And thus the days went on. At last Australian waters were reached, but the *Thornliebank's* troubles were not over. An effort was made by Captain Smith to pass through Bass Straits with his crippled ship and worn-out crew. It was his intention to put into Melbourne, but the weather was against him, so he determinedly rounded Tasmania.

"Not for an instant were the pumps allowed to remain idle. With half the crew below decks working to keep the water down, the other half was laboring above decks to bring the vessel to safe harbor. On November 6 the *Thornliebank* rounded the South Cape and the course was shaped for New Zealand."

In other words, the sieve-like *Thornliebank* was brought by tireless and fighting seamanship to her destination after an eight thousand mile struggle with death.

THE FIRE WOMAN OF THE SEA

HERE is another real tale of the sea. In actual sailor lore, they characterize the story as that of "The Fire Woman of the Sea." The latter, concretely, was—or rather is, for they say she is still alive at the age of eighty-four and living in Masssachusetts—Mrs. D. B. Bates, the widow of a well-known American sea captain. She later married Lieutenant James F. Hyde, of the United States Army. For years there was a superstition among American seamen that whenever Mrs. Bates went to sea a hoodoo fire was sure to break out on the vessel that carried her.

According to the chronicles of the American Seamen's Society, Mrs. Bates had more narrow escapes from the hoodoo fires that pursued her than Kate Claxton ever dreamed of. Mrs. Bates always went to sea with her captain-husband.

HER first trip was made in 1850, when her husband was in command of the Boston ship *Nonantum*. On July 27 Mrs. Bates left Baltimore on the *Nonantum* for San Francisco. The ship's cargo was a thousand tons of coal and a huge quantity of provisions listed for Panama. When the *Nonantum* reached the latitude of the Rio de la Plata flames broke out in the hold and for twelve whole days Mrs. Bates, her husband and the rest of the crew stuck to the burning hulk and, by fighting desperately with the fire, finally managed to bring the vessel to the Falkland Islands before the flames ate through its sides.

A mile from shore the fire conquered the fighters and the *Nonantum* began to fall apart as all hands got clear in the small boats.

After weeks of waiting, the party on the barren island were picked up by the Dundee ship *Humayoon*, bound from Scotland to Valparaiso. The cargo of the *Humayoon* was also coal and, when the vessel reached Cape Horn, the "Bates hoodoo"—as sailors always called it—got in its work again and the ship went up in flames. Mrs. Bates and the others on the ship were compelled to take to the small boats without stopping to put aboard food supplies or fresh water and for four days they drifted about the seas, almost dead for food and drink.

The Liverpool ship *Symmetry*, bound to Acapulco, rescued them. It was learned

that the *Symmetry* was laden with coal, as the other two ships had been, and Mrs. Bates and the sailors gathered on deck and offered up prayer that the "Bates hoodoo" would pass them by this time.

During the first three hours that Mrs. Bates was aboard nothing happened. But the crew of the *Symmetry* were so positive in their superstition that a fire would surely break out if she remained on the vessel, that Mrs. Bates and her husband were persuaded to transfer themselves to the *Fanchon*, that passed the *Symmetry* on its course to San Francisco. The *Fanchon*, Mrs. Bates learned to her horror, was also laden with coal.

On Christmas night, several days later, when the *Fanchon* was twelve hundred miles from land, the usual hoodoo-fire came about, as sure as Fate. Half of the crew was quickly ordered to go below and fight the flames and Mrs. Bates, donning sailor's clothes, gave the men her assistance, remaining below on watch for two days after the fire had been extinguished. Five days later the *Fanchon* struck the rocks of the Galapagos Islands and Mrs. Bates was one of those who was hurled overboard by the shock of collision. Three hours after she reached the shore—her life having been saved by the merest chance—the flames burst out on the *Fanchon* once more and one hour later the vessel was a black ruin.

After living for weeks as Crusoes on the island, the shipwrecked colony was rescued by a passing bark. Mrs. Bates was then transferred to the steamship *Republic*, carrying four hundred passengers. Five days out, the old hoodoo again asserted itself. Another fierce fight with fire was in order, but this time with little damage.

IN SHORT, fire followed Mrs. Bates as a shadow, not only for years on sea, but on land as well. Shortly after her arrival in San Francisco that city suffered one of its greatest conflagrations. Six months later the hotel in which Mrs. Bates was stopping in Marysville was destroyed by fire and Mrs. Bates narrowly escaped death. The records even show that in 1890, in Plymouth, Massachusetts, the house in which she was living burned and Mrs. Bates was nearly killed.

Mrs. Bates, "the fire woman of the sea," is regarded by American sailors as the most extraordinary escaper from death that they have ever encountered. For thirty years her name and the story of her pursuing Nemesis were familiar wherever a sailor was to be found. And yet, despite the fact that she and her story are regarded as one of the sea's most curious chronicles, it is doubtful whether one reading landlubber in one hundred thousand has ever heard of either.

FOUR STRANGE TALES OF THE SEA

THE sailors and records reveal hundreds of similar unknown sea tales of fact that vie with the fiction bookshelves.

For instance, there is the story of a pitched battle that occurred in 1858 aboard one of the convict sailing ships bound from England to Australia, a battle that lasted two whole days.

There is the story of Agnes Weston, a Florence Nightingale of the sea, who worked for three days without a wink of sleep or bite of food to help relieve the condition of the half-dead crew of H. M. S. *Hindustan*, when that vessel capsized going out to Spithead. The way in which Agnes Weston, her work of immediate necessity done, set out subsequently to comfort the widows and sweethearts of the men who had lost their lives, breathes romance truly magnificent.

There is the story of the Captain of the bark *L. A. Van Romondt*, bound for Cuba from Nova Scotia. The Captain had just married a young girl in Nova Scotia and thought the voyage to Cuba would be his honeymoon trip. Before that honeymoon trip was ended, twenty-six days later, wrecks and transfers had placed the bride successively on vessels carrying the Dutch, Cuban, Norwegian, American, Mexican and Italian flags.

Then there is the story of the stranding of the U. S. S. *Waterce*, Captain L. G. Billings, U. S. N., on August 8, 1868, by a Chilian earthquake; of the frightful battle with the huge guns that broke loose in the storm preceding the stranding and crashed back and forth across the decks; of the subsequent fight on the part of the officers to bring the panicky crew to discipline; and of the final carrying of the ship by the earthquake two miles inland and the depositing of the vessel at the base of a coast range of the Andes.

As the sailors say, "*All* truth may not be stranger than fiction, but you can bet your marlin spike *sea* truth is!"

What would *you* say?

SYNOPSIS: Gervase Agnew, civil engineer, takes charge of building the Bir Railway in the Balkans, ignorant that the engagement of his employer's daughter, Katrine Gresham, and partner, Gordon Glaisher, has been outgrown by the girl. In the muddle of international politics the road is covertly opposed by Italian secret societies, with Gessi, a sectional engineer, the Commandante Sarrasco, and the Turk, Esuli Bey, as leaders. Jovan Vaco, Gresham's supposed courier Vilip, and other Balkan patriots work for its completion. Agnew, though estranged from Katrine by supposed ill-treatment, is persuaded by her at Jovan's instigation to pretend a love-affair to intensify Lucia Gessi's passion for Agnew in order to learn from her the lost plan of the former engineer Sanders, who died a victim to Lucia's wiles, for overcoming an unbridgeable break in the road. Uiko, a fisherman, reports that Esuli Bey has tampered with secret underground passages from the lake. Several attempts are made to assassinate the Americans and Albanians. Glaisher, angry at his dismissal by Katrine, tries to ruin the road by financial attacks in New York.

CHAPTER XXII

GESSI TAKES ORDERS

GESSI took his eye slowly from the theodolite and turned to see what manner of man it was who addressed him with the whining accents of a professional beggar—a native of Palermo, as his accent betrayed. He saw a middle-sized, swarthy compatriot, girdled with the eternal scarf of red, clad in a most dilapidated jacket and trousers and holding out his hand with an air of graceful melancholy.

"Excellency!" said the man, with a lamentable gesture. "I starve! For the love of God—an alms?"

Gessi observed him gravely. An instinct told him that this was no mendicant. What should bring an Italian beggar up into the wilds of Albania? And was there not something familiar about the stranger's aspect? Both these questions were answered without words. Below his breath and faintly between his teeth the man whistled a little air of runs and sharp staccato lilts.

Gessi drew a pace or two back from the track, out of earshot of the ballast-tampers.

The man followed, with hands still outstretched.

"What was the result of last night?" he demanded in whining accents, but this time in French.

"There was practically no result, Signor Commandante," answered the other, using the same language. "Our man missed his mark. Signor Agnew was more fortunate. There is a bullet still in Giuseppe's shoulder this morning, which, as far as I can see, must stay there—Signor Pellegrino would be too curious and the coincidence too marked. It is a pity the chance was missed. Opportunities grow less with every attempt."

"They take precautions?" whined the man, pulling at the dark mustache which Gessi had last seen above the lips of the Chevalier Sarrasco. "But opportunities? Why should they not recur?"

"They are not entirely fools—the Signors Agnew and Gresham. They keep well within reach of skilled assistance. Jovan Vaco and some of his band of cutthroats are never far away when work has to be done in the open."

The Commandante groaned irritably. One of the ballast-punchers stood erect for a moment, wiping his streaming face. Sarrasco moved a yard or two farther out of earshot, still stretching out imploring hands.

"Work—that is all I ask!" he pleaded. "Work, that I may place no more than bread between my lips. Surely a man skilled as yourself does not propose to be balked by a score of highland bandits? Why not make *them* the instruments of your purpose?"

Gessi made a gesture of repulse. "God Himself could not bribe them!" he returned. "They and all their clans have cast their influence toward the building of this road, and it is not one which we can easily discount. It most cases, you see, Signor Commandante, we of the Society work with the advantage that we are *in* civilization but not *of* it. We wing with ease because to ordinary minds we are so unexpected and our methods so pitilessly unconventional. Surprise is one of our keenest weapons. Here we work in a land and among a people as ruthless and as little normal as ourselves. Our opponents are handicapped by—nothing."

Sarrasco, beneath his guise of obsequiousness, managed to make his eye express contempt. "They have frightened you, my good Gessi," he sneered.

A flush rose to the foreman's cheek.

"Not me, Signor Commandante," he answered quietly. "But some of my underlings have developed attacks of nerves. They talk a good deal, these Albanians. They have let it be very thoroughly known how they will treat all and sundry found interfering with the interests of the road."

"Do I understand that the Society is being set at naught by a handful of uncivilized peasants?"

"The less their civilization, the greater their power," said the other imperturbably. "They all go armed, they all hang together, and they are directed by leaders who are by no means devoid of intelligence."

The Commandante so far forgot his pose of deference as to let escape him a full-flavored oath.

"*Dominiddio!*" he swore. "Leaders? Who and where?"

"The good God alone knows, signor. But they lead. New influences are at work in Constantinople—here—throughout the Balkans. We have to reckon with them."

There was scorn in the shrug of Sarrasco's shoulder. "That is all talk—that and nothing else. You are being frightened by phantoms—all of you. You need assistance, good friend. You want some stiffening put in your organization."

"If you say so, Signor Commandante," answered Gessi, still with no sign of offense, "I will welcome it whenever Headquarters choose to send it."

"It is here before you. You must get me a berth among your trackmen. I am going to get a first-hand review of the situation—I myself."

Gessi inclined his head in acquiescence.

"Attend at the office this evening," he said loudly. "For the present, here are five piasters. Go to the store. You will find bread there."

The man of rags burst out into vehement laudations of his benefactor's charity. He withdrew in the direction pointed out to him, shambling along the track with eager footsteps, his eyes reviewing his surroundings curiously. The ballast-punchers offered him little attention. One looked up apathetically and watched him as he passed a corner and disappeared, but the glance was the heavy, bovine stare of the unintelligent peasant, to whom nothing is surprising,

nothing of interest, save the immediate needs of life.

MATTERS at the office went as Gessi's prevision ordained. The newcomer was taken on as unskilled laborer at a low wage. He duly appeared at Gessi's door to offer, as he loudly declared, his homage to one whom he should ever remember in his prayers. He was invited inside. He was from Signor Gessi's own commune, it was understood. He would bring news of the countryside.

Gessi placed wine before his guest and waited. Sarrasco poured himself out a mugful, drained it, and offered his host a nod of congratulation. "I regret to say I will not be here to enjoy it," sighed Sarrasco. "I am not going to take up this appointment which you have secured for me, my friend. I have seen—what I want to see. These Albanian ruffians are everywhere. I recognize the difficulties of which you spoke. While I strolled among them, however, a great and God-given inspiration reached me. Good friend—there are other ways of reaching the Signor Proprietor than by perforating his skin. I even outline in my imagination a scheme by which we can insure his throwing up the whole enterprise and returning to his native land."

"A safe one?" inquired Gessi. To an outsider his tone would have sounded expressionless. Sarrasco eyed him narrowly.

"A safe one," he agreed, after a perceptible pause. "We shall need a coadjutor. She, I believe, is now beneath this roof. Your daughter."

If Sarrasco expected his companion to show any emotion, he was disappointed. Gessi stood with his head bent at a deferential angle; his features did not change; his glance was unfluttered. "You may command the services of my family as you would my own, Signor Commandante. Lucia will be honored to give you service. And her duties?"

"To seek the friendship and society of the lady who most unfortunately received last night the knife-point intended for our friend Signor Agnew. Can she win her confidence? Surely?"

Gessi meditated through a silent instant. "Matters will go easier where Signor Agnew is not a direct factor in the situation," he said at last. "He is—unexpected. Perhaps you realized that when you attempted the Signor Gresham's removal on the occasion of your last visit?"

Sarrasco nodded. "No, we avoid complications with the Signor Intendente. Has your daughter any crucial objection to water—as a medium of progress?"

"Water?" Gessi murmured.

"Water," repeated Sarrasco, and it was patent that he took a childish delight in the other's amazement. "The water of Lake Vodra, to be specific. The Signor Proprietor's daughter seems to have an inclination toward boating-excursions. If the Signorina Lucia could be made a partner in these small adventures it would help my scheme enormously. It is a question of tact, is it not? A daughter of yours should possess this rare attribute in overflowing measure, my dear Gessi."

The foreman's face cleared. "It could, after a little time, be arranged," he assented. "There is not a superfluity of boats, Signor Commandante."

"Still the one used last night was apparently water-tight. We must not expect more. Its owner the fisherman? Can he be easily—used?"

Gessi hesitated. "I do not know, Signor Commandante. He is a man of no standing, something of an outcast, but familiar, as it appears, with Jovan and his Albanian colleagues. Yes, I think he might be used—and cheaply, too."

"So much the better. The signorina is at home?"

GESSI opened the door of the inner room and pronounced his daughter's name. She came silently, arrogantly, her eyes expressing wonder at the deplorable figure in the chair. Sarrasco rose and bowed elaborately. "Signorina!" he breathed with obsequious admiration, and then smiled at her astonishment. She was looking inquiringly at her father.

"The Signor Commandante Sarrasco, from Headquarters, desires to make your acquaintance, my child."

She bowed in her turn, but without reflecting any of the humor in the other's aspect. Her eyes were perfectly grave.

"At your service, Signor Commandante," she said slowly. And waited. In her air of expectation a critical observer might have diagnosed a faint tinge of suspicion.

"May I be brisk—and businesslike, signorina?" said Sarrasco. "I have, on behalf of the Society, two duties to lay upon you. The first is to gain the intimacy of the Signor Proprietor's daughter. The second is to endeavor to enjoy her society in a series of boating-expeditions."

"I do not like the Signorina Gresham," she said. There was sullen finality in the tone.

Sarrasco's brows contracted in the ghost of a frown. "Does that matter?" he asked. "In your profession—in *our* profession, Signorina Gessi—it is no bad thing to practise in minor matters the rôle of actress. It then becomes second nature by the time more crucial necessities arise."

She did not answer. The sullenness of her aspect did not disappear. Sarrasco's lips grew set and hard. "It must be done!" he said. "I leave it to your tact—and your father's counsel—to suggest a way. But it must be done! In our Society we value family co-operation—and expect it!"

Gessi coughed. "There will be no difficulties in the matter, my dear Lucia," he said. "My experience will be at your service. Nothing at all distasteful to your desires will be required of you I feel certain."

She looked at him keenly. "It is the Signorina Gresham alone with whom I have to deal?" she asked.

"The Signorina Gresham alone," acquiesced Sarrasco. "The young lady appeared to me good-humored and vivacious. The task of winning her confidence can not be a very terrible one?"

"And the boating-excursions?" inquired Lucia. "You propose that they shall result—how?"

"As Fate—and the Society—decide," grinned Sarrasco evilly. "It is impossible to forecast the will of the one or the other, my dear signorina."

"The boatman?" Her voice had the faintest thrill of unsteadiness in it. "He will be——"

"Uiko the fisherman," interposed her father hastily. "Who else?"

"I merely wished to know," she returned evenly. "Uiko? Very well. I will do my best, Signor Commandante."

"I ask no more," he assured her, with another of his artificial gestures of admiration. He wheeled sharply. A knock had come upon the outer door—a knock which was followed by its slowly opening.

AGNEW stood on the threshold. He looked inquiringly at the unexpected figure of the pseudo-mendicant. Gessi hastened to push forward a chair.

"We are honored, Signor Intendente," he said. "You find us getting the news of our countryside. This fellow is using the plea of fellow citizenship to beguile a trackman's berth from me. He comes from my own commune."

Agnew nodded indifferently. He continued standing. "I came to give you notice, Signor Gessi," he said, "that you will probably have to remove yourself and your belongings back to Gorac. Work on that section will be shortly recommenced."

There was a moment's silence. Then Lucia spoke. "You condemn us—to solitary confinement again, Signor Intendente?" she said. "Gorac? You saw how we lived there?"

He smiled sardonically. "I had your own word for it, signorina, that all places—in this wilderness—were alike to you."

Her eyes grew suddenly soft. "I had not lived here then—through this last month," she answered, and again a queer silence filled the room.

Agnew broke it with a little laugh. "Well, perhaps it can be arranged," he conceded. "Perhaps your housekeeping can go on here, signorina, even if your father returns to the scene of his former labors. He can return here nightly, if you wish."

Gessi bowed gratefully. "You are benevolent—as ever, signor," he answered. "It is almost a question of my daughter's health. At Gorac she pined. Here I have found her a new creature."

"Of course, then," said Agnew, and gave a little half bow in the girl's direction, "I trust it will continue to benefit you, signorina. We consider that settled. You must find occupations to interest you in your father's long absences."

"She must, indeed," said Gessi. "I wish to encourage in her a love of the open air life. She is sadly town-bred in her ideas."

"There are the mountains and the lake," said Agnew. "All invitations to a newborn energy. Walk—or learn to row, signorina."

Her face lighted. There was no longer arrogance in it. A new and strange softness brimmed her eyes. From the background Sarrasco looked out from under

deferentially lowered lids to recognize it and understand her attitude of a few moments back.

"It was this one whom she expected commands to betray," he told himself. "He has waked passion in her. Well, even that may have its uses—in time."

"I should need a teacher, signor," she said suggestively. "I must learn these things. I have no natural knowledge of them."

The ghost of a smile flickered across his face.

"For walking, I recommend Professor Jovan Vaco. For rowing, the eminent scientist, Doctor Uiko," he said. "I myself might have offered a beginner's course, but for one thing."

She looked at him bewilderedly. "Yes, signor? And that is——?"

"I myself am returning to Gorac."

His smile broadened into a little laugh. He bowed, made formal farewell, and passed back into the night. From his corner Sarrasco watched in suave interest the whole gamut of emotions, from surprise to fiercest anger, flit across Lucia Gessi's face.

CHAPTER XXIII

BY THE PATH OF THE TORRENT

TWO men were striding warily along the ravine of Slivnitz—two men who carried binoculars and examined their surroundings with infinite keenness. The river which rushes along at the foot of the stupendous crags that prison it sees little of the sun even at the brightest season of the year.

It was between three and four o'clock in the afternoon, but already a tinge of twilight shadowed the canyon.

The men halted on a rocky platform overlooking the stream. Both of them focussed their glances at a spot immediately opposite them. It was a huge, shrub-covered bluff, torn at its foundations by the Winter rage of the waters, though the scars of their wounding were well-nigh covered by the lush herbage which dropped across them.

With an almost simultaneous movement the two men lowered their glasses and looked at each other. And then the taller of the two laughed exultantly. "The spot, I think, my good Jovan!" he said. "Look at the water-level! Observe the difference above the bluff and below it. The lower channel is wider and deeper than that above. And yet it has contained a fuller body of water. What is the obvious inference? In Winter this was the point at which an auxiliary supply joins the main stream."

Jovan nodded. He turned and looked at the sheer crag above them. "I see no signs of a cascade," he said.

"Nor I," said Agnew. "Nor has any one else—if any one else ever had the curiosity to penetrate to this pit in the hills. No, the water came in beneath the high-water level of the river. But now? We shall see. Forward!"

He swung himself down from the platform of stone and slid carefully to the river's edge. Jovan followed. One or two boulders in mid-stream gave foothold, but they had to wade waist-high between them before they had crossed.

Suddenly Jovan, who was leading, gave an exclamation. "Your logic and my instincts have not been at fault, Excellency!" he cried.

Agnew joined him. Jovan lifted a mass of herbage to show behind it a wide but shallow opening in the cliff. The veil of herbage sank over it, touching the water-worn sill of rock. And over this a tiny rivulet flowed into the main stream—a little trickle of water where the signs of a torrent's rage were still unobliterated.

Agnew bowed his great bulk below the entrance and crept forward, supporting himself with his hands. A yard or two inside the cave mouth the roof rose rapidly. He was able to stand upright. There was a sputter and then the nauseous reek of a phosphorus match. Jovan had lighted a candle.

The roof soared away from them into illimitable darkness. But the walls had drawn nearer, and the stream, it was easy to see, had at times risen a full five fathoms above the floor. An immense body of water had gushed down this tunnel in the hills some time previously—to judge by the indications, very recently indeed.

"Something of a trap, if Fate should send a thunderstorm to catch us in it!" suggested Jovan grimly.

"We should, at any rate, not die of thirst," grinned Agnew. "But what is Fate but something to be tempted? How many candles have you?"

Jovan displayed six. Agnew nodded, took the lighted one into his own hand and

stepped out into the emptiness that confronted them.

"Forward!" he cried. "Forward, my friend! Here is an adventure which appeals to every instinct of romance in us! The unknown? What treasure may it not contain —what mysteries can it not conceal?"

With the sigh of a fatalist Jovan followed.

FOR the next few minutes they proceeded without speaking. The clang of Agnew's nail-studded soles upon the stone, or the drip of tiny rivulets from the roof were the only sounds that broke the stillness. Jovan's feet, shod with string-covered and soft-soled *opanki*, made little or no noise as he trod in his leader's footsteps. And the path was not difficult. There were no pebbles and few boulders in the groove cut by the water. Its forces had been sufficiently powerful to sweep all such aside. They progressed quickly.

After half an hour Agnew turned and looked at his companion. "We must have come something like a couple of kilometers!" he said, and there was wonder as well as satisfaction in his voice.

The Albanian nodded: "And how far in a straight line did your Excellency compute the ravine to lie from the banks of the lake?"

"I have taken no detailed observations; but the tunnels that pierce the range for the road are, in all, somewhere about a thousand meters in length. The intervals about as much again. Say six kilometers between Gorac and the Jeka arm, which, after all, stretches in a decidedly western direction."

Jovan nodded again. "So——" he began.

"So, if the tunnel keeps moderately straight and presents no difficulties, we may possibly come on the closed entrance at the far side after going about twice as far as we have come."

"And we have used one candle—out of six," said Jovan in emotionless, matter-of-fact tones.

"That fits in exactly with my proposals," said Agnew gaily. "Forward! But at the same time let us walk a little faster. A candle to spare is better than one too little in any case."

Jovan sighed again and followed. Agnew's stride had become almost a run. And the path of the waters rose rapidly. The labored breathing of the two companions was tossed from wall to wall by the echoes; the surface, too, was more difficult. Great ruts, as if some Titanic chariot had passed, grooved the rock. And a mile farther on a new difficulty presented itself. The underground aqueduct divided into two. They came to a halt, hesitating upon their road.

Agnew made a gesture of resignation. "We must each take one," he decided. "I to the right, you to the left. And we must hurry if we are to come to any conclusion to-day. The candles are insufficient."

Jovan looked at his leader with a curious expression—one which Agnew, at first, failed to read. Then the American laughed, at first with amusement, finally with a sort of irritation. "My good Jovan!" he deprecated wonderingly.

The Albanian shrugged his shoulders. His tanned face had grown strangely wan in the candle-light which was reflected by the white panels of limestone.

"I can not help it, signor," he whispered, and the quiver in his usually self-confident voice thrilled Agnew with amazement. "The afreets of the earth have strange powers in their own dwellings—that I learned for a surety at my mother's knee. I can not face these shadowy perils—alone!"

Agnew laughed again. The Albanian's glance, no longer arrogant with self-confidence, searched his surroundings fearfully. He quivered as the sound of Agnew's mirth was lost along the vault-like passage. The names of half a score of the Holy Men of Islam were breathed by his pallid lips and among them Agnew distinguished chosen Saints of the Orthodox Church. Jovan, it was to be supposed, was catholic in his beliefs when the terrors of the unknown besieged his intelligence.

For a moment Agnew was at a loss. Then Chance became his colleague. He slipped, jerked his elbow against a rock, and let fall the candle. It rolled upon the stone and was extinguished.

He heard Jovan's breathing come in a horrified gasp, and chuckled as he bent and searched the darkness. His hands fell upon the object of his search almost immediately. He struck a match. The gasp on the Albanian's lips immediately became a sigh of profound relief.

Agnew echoed the sound with a cry of surprise and satisfaction. His eyes had followed the stub of the match which he had thrown, still glowing, to the ground. The still red light disclosed something which he had not noticed before.

The print of a human foot was outlined in the sodden gravel. He bent to examine it—discovered another beyond it—lost the traces for a yard or two on hard rock—picked them up again in the silt of a pool at the junction of the caverns—and followed them finally into the right-hand opening.

HE looked at his companion with inquiring amusement. "You have seen?" he asked. "Are these, in your valorous opinion, the tracks of afreets and djinns?"

Jovan's eyes were alert and keen. His imperturbability was his again. "No, Excellency. These are the tracks of boot-wearing men. Who, in these parts, wear such? Not my countrymen. Italian laborers sometimes. Zaptiehs *always!*"

"Zaptiehs?" Agnew's voice held a note of excitement. "Esuli's men?" he questioned.

The Albanian shrugged his shoulders. "Who else? If they *are* Zaptiehs. We must not poise certainty on the impression of a boot." He stared up the passage meditatively. "Have we, by chance, missed other footprints lower down?" he suggested. "Have they penetrated to the canyon?"

Agnew shook his head. "No; across all those beds of silt we could not have avoided remarking them. Observe them! They have come—and they have returned. They point both ways."

Jovan nodded.

"It is as you say," he assented. "We continue to burn candles," he added dryly.

Agnew smiled, nodded, and led on. And this new path rose in a yet steeper ascent and upon it the marks of water were comparatively few. Originally water-hewn, the chisel of the torrent had left it for so long a time that the beds of silt were dry. Upon the thick carpet of dust-dry rubble their footsteps made scarcely a sound.

It was for this reason that a few moments later on they came to a sudden halt. For in the silence of their going a tiny thrill of movement from above reached their ears. A muffled and scarcely perceptible sound, but unmistakable. Agnew extinguished the taper. The two men stood motionless as statues, the faint thudding of movement above their ceiling of rock competing in their ears with the drumming of their own hearts. Jovan's breath came in uneasy pants. "It is one of the Unknown Powers of Evil at work, signor," he said. "What do you propose?"

"To introduce ourselves to him and plead for his assistance," grinned Agnew. "Or at any rate to inspect his methods. For the moment let us proceed by touch alone."

He splayed out his hands into the darkness and passed on slowly and warily, fending himself from harm. In this way he climbed another forty or fifty yards and the thudding sound became clearer. But it puzzled him. It was scarcely produced by blows, he considered. It was not sufficiently staccato—it was too diffused; regular in sequences of thirty or forty, it had curious intermissions. Once, when it halted it was followed by a new noise—a sound as if a sack of heavy objects had been emptied on the bare earth.

HE CLIMBED on, and Jovan, he could distinguish, climbed at his heels. The Albanian's hand, indeed, fell upon his limbs at frequent intervals, but whether to seek guidance or assured companionship Agnew did not inquire. But there was no mistake about the grip with which it seized him finally, bringing him to a halt.

"Yes?" he breathed inquiringly. "Yes?"

"Above your Excellency's head," said Jovan. "Look!"

Agnew raised his eyes. An almost imperceptible thinning of the darkness, scarcely to be called light, showed, however, that light was hidden from them by some obstacle or corner which they were about to turn.

With infinite precautions for silence Agnew crawled on. The thudding noise suddenly grew louder.

His head came in contact with the roof. He stifled an exclamation and reached out his hand upward. It touched a slab of stone, felt along it, and reached the edge of a sill carved, as his fingers informed him, by tools other than the friction of a cascade. He hauled himself upward and met directly a beam of light. He was emerging through a floor into a rough-hewn passage. Through its entrance came the daylight, the increased sounds of thudding, punctuated by hoarse, intermittent cries.

He turned at the sound of falling pebbles to see Jovan slowly drag himself up and stand erect beside him. The Albanian's features bore a curious expression.

"I said that it was one of the Powers of

Evil, signor," he whispered dryly. "We may count Esuli Bey as such, may we not?"

Agnew started. "Esuli?" he repeated. "This is——?"

"The courtyard of the Governor's castle," interrupted Jovan imperturbably. "They drill these precious Zaptiehs, signor. There must be a reason for that. Shall we inspect them?"

Silently and with infinite precautions the two crept forward toward the mouth of the cave. They looked down from the protecting shadow of its dusk.

Below them was a ring of whitewashed buildings, surrounding a courtyard of dried and trampled mud. Across it, to and fro, a couple of score of ragged and sullen men-at-arms were moving, goaded by the commands of a sergeant. Watching them sat Esuli in a wicker chair.

But it was not at the Bey that Agnew's incredulous gaze was directed. It was at his companion, who lounged very much at ease in surroundings which he must, at any rate, have found unaccustomed.

It was Gordon Glaisher!

CHAPTER XXIV

WOMAN'S WORK

UIKO and Gugi poled their boat slowly and carefully up to the edge of the embankment. Their untidy craft was transformed. Half a dozen gay cushions covered the stern; the bare planks of flooring had been strewn with dry reeds upon which a rug had been spread; from a tiny flagstaff fluttered the combined flags of the Union and the Turkish Empire. The deplorable paddles had been replaced by sound and well-made oars.

The flags had been the work as well as the idea of Vilip, and it was he who looked down upon them and the approaching boat with the complacent air of the inventor who sees the phantoms of his brain brought into actual being. He saluted his mistress obsequiously and held out his hand to assist her and her companion to land.

"The Signor Agnew has arrived from Gorac," he informed her as he gathered up the rug and cushions and prepared to follow her across the square. Though he spoke in his broken English his pronunciation of the name was exceedingly distinct. He watched Lucia Gessi alertly.

She turned. "The Signor Intendente is here?" she asked, instinct supplying his meaning.

"Yes, signorina." He looked at her thoughtfully and then the corners of his lips drooped into a smile. He turned his gaze from her to her companion with an air of something like commiseration.

She flushed. Behind her red lips she ground her teeth, for again her instinct interpreted his aspect more easily even than his words. 'You still interest yourself in your recreant lover?' This was the meaning implied by the courier's smiling glance. 'You still hope to hold him?'

The stormy shadow passed from her eyes to leave them frigidly indifferent. She turned and came to a halt opposite Mr. Gresham's veranda.

"I have to thank you once more for your companionship, signorina," she said. "Am I becoming something of a water woman at last? I rowed—positively I have learned to propel that terrible craft a matter of half a kilometer or more. Let me beg your felicitations."

"You have them, and with enthusiasm," said Katrine. "These expeditions have been most enjoyable and have greatly aided my convalescence. I shall never be sufficiently grateful to you for suggesting them."

There was a queer look on the Italian girl's face. "The gratitude should all be mine," she said. "Life has lost its monotony for me—since you came. I have much to thank you for—more than you are aware of."

And the queer look was made the more noticeable by the odd emphasis of her tone. Katrine noticed it. She looked at her with an air of slight bewilderment.

"Two women in such a masculine community as this were bound to seek mutual companionship, were they not?" she said. "I was fortunate in finding you here, signorina. It was certainly unexpected."

And this time it was Katrine who laid a subtle emphasis on her words—and who smiled, as if at a meaning withheld. She held out her hand with a gesture of farewell.

"And now I must hurry in—to meet my —my guest," she said, and the hesitation over the last word was well contrived. It hinted of a warmer phrase which had halted on her lips for intimate reasons which were not for the ear of her companion.

Lucia bowed. "Don't permit me to detain you, signorina. Not for an instant. The Signor Intendente has little time to spare when he visits Vodra. You are right to make the most of it—you are, indeed!"

And she passed on, on the crest of her little triumph. The last word? No smashing blow in the forefront of the battle thrills the feminine foeman with the elation won by a successful Parthian shot.

AS KATRINE came into the inner room through the veranda her father looked up. Agnew rose, exchanged greetings, and placed a chair for her. But there was something restrained in the attitude of the two men—something which her woman's instinct told her concerned herself. They both smiled—a little artificially, she reflected, as if they discounted bad news before it was disclosed.

So convincing was her instinct that she probed for information without delay. "What is it?" she said quietly. "Something has happened—something new?"

On her father's face was an expression of diffidence. And that this emotion was dominant in his mind was evident by the way with which he played with the litter of his writing-table. The engineer's eyes met her impassively—or was there in them some tiny hint of compassion? She repeated her question.

Gresham drew back his shoulders and faced her. There was a sort of wearied resolution in his glance.

"Can you tell me, daughter," he asked slowly, "on what terms you parted from Gordon Glaisher? That is a question which I hate to ask you, but you must blame Fate, not me." He tried to smile over his conclusion, but it was a lame attempt.

The unexpectedness of it almost stunned her. Gordon Glaisher? Surely that page had been turned for good and all. She stammered. "I—I don't understand," she cried.

Gresham lifted his shoulders with a shrug. "I didn't seek or need the information before," he said. "I never thought to ask for it. You told me that your engagement with him was definitely at an end. Directly afterward we left for Europe. Now, if you can bring yourself to it, tell me how he took your decision. Did—did he put up any sort of—fight?"

Again he made his pitiful little attempt at jocularity and again made it entirely unconvincing.

But now she had regained full self-possession. "I told him that I had never loved him," she answered quietly, and her glance—in spite of, not because of herself, as it seemed to her—met Agnew's squarely. "He made no attempt to influence my decision."

Her father nodded. "Nothing that could in any way be described as—as a threat?" he suggested.

"A threat?" Her surprise was overwhelming. "You have heard from him again? He is demanding—what?"

He shook his head. "No. I have heard nothing. But he is here—not six miles away, at Jeka, the guest of our friend Esuli. What has brought him there? If you can throw no light on his movements we must attack the puzzle from our own point of view. But we thought—" he shrugged his shoulders again—"we thought you might—have your own opinion?"

Her bewilderment increased. "He is there—without letting us know?" she cried. "But that is incredible! Esuli? What has he to do with *him?*"

She was still standing. With a gesture that half pleaded, half commanded, Agnew pointed to the chair. And there was something intimate in the act which made a pulse of happiness leap within her. She thanked him with her eyes and sat down.

"Bluntly, Esuli focusses—so we believe—the whole of the opposition to the road," said Agnew. "The inference is that Glaisher has joined it. His knowledge of and communications with the Turk previously we can only conjecture. His object? That is more easily guessed. He and his uncle are still believers in Birs—perhaps they have earlier political information than even Esuli. But they want to buy the Bir Railway at wreckers' prices—after the wreck."

The troubled shadow on her face lifted. "Then I——?" she began.

The engineer interrupted. "Then you have had no responsibility in his action," he said quickly. "If the personal question is lacking—and your assurance proves that—the man descends at once to the level of the common blackleg, selling a partner for gain." And he spoke with a certain satisfaction which he did not attempt to conceal.

Her father nodded. "Perhaps you kept the dog chained, Katrine," he smiled con-

temptuously. "I am glad you loosed the chain and let us have this intimate view of his teeth before *his* chain was on *your* neck —the chain of matrimony."

Suddenly she turned again to Agnew. "There has been no mistake?" she said. "How did you get this news?"

"Personally," he said with a dry smile. "I saw him."

"You yourself! You have been in the Castle of Jeka?"

"No, but I have seen him in it. And I have seen other things—of greater importance. I have seen how Esuli held up the water which used to flow subterraneously from the Jeka arm. I have seen how to release it again. I have also seen how to enter his domain—if the need arises. I have the key of Esuli's back door."

"You spied—at night?"

"No, by day. Yesterday at sunset I overlooked Esuli's barrack-yard. An hour later I was back in the ravine of Slivnitz. Doyou understand the significance of that?"

"Yes! You have found the subterranean channel! You entered it from the Gorac end!"

"Exactly!" His voice was vibrant with exultation. "We write check to one device of the opposition at any rate. There were two openings into the tunnel. The first which we explored leads out upon the mountainside on a level with Esuli's roof. The other, which we examined later and which we closed by blasting, is below the lake level. A pinch of dynamite is the key to *that!* It locked it. It will unlock it again!"

SHE thrilled to the ring of triumph in his tones. "And now?" she asked softly.

"Now? Work! The matter of the embankment and the morass is settled. They have become things we can arrange at leisure. We press on with other needs."

"And the ravine and the bridge?" she asked.

Her father looked at her curiously. There was suppressed anxiety in her tone as if something for which she herself was responsible awaited an answer. This was no mere curiosity. She spoke as colleague speaks to colleague when the lines of their research converge.

And Agnew did not answer—for the moment. The light of assurance died from his features. A shadow grew in his eyes. "There I make no progress. And you?" he asked.

Gresham stared from one to the other. Katrine? She was working to read that baffling riddle? How?

"I have done well—to my thinking," she said calmly. "I have made my impression. I toil to deepen it. She conceives that there is a bond between us. She is not yet satisfied of its strength. She waits, before she sets herself to cut it, because she can not make up her mind how keen a weapon she must use. So far, I think, she has not got beyond the goad of her own personal beauty."

The elder man was staring at his two companions in entire bewilderment. Katrine looked up—at Agnew.

"You must see her," said Gresham's daughter earnestly. "She knows of your presence here. You must continue to do your part."

He lifted his eyes and stared at her morosely. "I don't like it!" he said. "I don't like it! It is a part beneath you—and —now—beyond me!"

She drummed her fingers on the table. "That is not fair," she said quickly. "I am doing my part. I have paid my price in humiliation. You must do yours."

"I am no actor!" he said harshly. "I am not convincing."

"Be yourself!" she said, and there was an odd cadence in her voice. "Be hard, unrelenting, indifferent! She will convince herself. Then she will learn your price!" And she smiled at him—a queer provoking smile.

"I hate it!" he cried in exasperation. "It humbles me—under your eyes."

Her smile faded instantly, but again a throb of happiness leaped in her heart. Had he got back as far as this? Could he do nothing sordid, simply because she—the woman whose faith he had questioned—was there to watch it done?

"No," she said quietly. "Nothing humbles you when you do it for your honor's sake—and for the road. And now, with all these forces arrayed against us, your honor and the completed road count as one"

The sullen expression died from his face. He shrugged his shoulders. He even began to smile. "Very well!" he answered, and moved toward the door. "I will go and be —myself. And then back to Gorac and—thank God—men's work again!"

He nodded his farewell and went. Gresham surveyed his daughter with wondering eyes.

"I don't understand all this, Katrine," he said. "You are remarkably strange."

"No—merely womanlike," she laughed. "You dear old father, you never understood a woman in your life—never once!"

CHAPTER XXV

THE TRAP

A BREEZE came sighing along the surface of the lake, and Uiko emphatically addressed his thanks to High Heaven. He drew in his oar, yelled commandingly at Gugi, and began to haul at the sail.

Katrine from her lounge among the cushions looked up. "If you run before it, you will have to row back against it," she reminded the fisherman. "Remember that I wish to be home early—well before sunset."

"It is this way, Gospodinya," said Uiko. "The midday breeze sets up the lake. An hour before sunset it sets down again. This is as invariable as the seasons, except in the very depths of Winter. We may rely on it."

She nodded. "Where do we go, then?" she inquired indifferently.

Uiko turned toward the prow. "The Gospodinya Gessi suggested that we have never yet visited the Jeka arm," he suggested.

Lucia, who was dabbling her hand in the water, rose and stepped under the halyards which Gugi had already begun to lash in place, and came aft.

"It looks interesting," she said carelessly. "These open expanses of water and reed-covered lagoons have a sameness. Now the Jeka? It is a regular fiord, they tell me, and picturesque."

Katrine smiled. "Where you will," she said, "as long as I am back by five. Your father, too? He will be arriving then. You would wish to be home to meet him."

Lucia's eyes were somberly inquiring.

"You are better informed of my father's movements than I myself, signorina," she said. "He arrives at five, does he? You are sure of it—how?"

"Signor Agnew arrives then. The construction train, therefore, arrives then. It follows that Signor Gessi arrives then. That is good reasoning, is it not?"

"Yes," said Lucia quickly. "I know that the Signor Intendente arrives again to-night. But he mentioned no hour."

"No?"

There was something in Katrine's tone which seemed to whip her companion's complacence into irritation—something superior, something condescending. The color showed duskily in Lucia's cheek.

"He is not a creature of hours and appointments—Signor Agnew," she said. "He drops in unexpectedly. He comes when he can—and is welcome."

"You must not spoil him, Signorina Gessi. You must not let him do with you as he likes."

The tone of pleasant patronage had not left her voice. She spoke as an elder might speak to a child—instructively, with a hint, indeed, of authority. And Lucia's color deepened. She shot a keen glance at her companion—a look which was wrathful and incredulous and questioning. She leaned forward.

"You speak of the Signor Intendente—as if you owned him!" she said.

For a moment there was a silence. And then Katrine laughed—gaily, but still with a reserve of condescension.

"In America we women own all the men," she explained. "They have to do as they are told—if they want us to be nice to them."

"Then they are puppets—not men!" said her companion promptly. "The Signor Agnew is not a puppet."

Katrine nodded gravely. "No, he is not a puppet, signorina. You are not the first to discover it."

"And yet—he does as he is told? And you are nice to him?"

"Not always, my dear signorina. Not always."

Lucia looked at her reflectively. "Does that answer the first part of my question or the second?" she asked. "Are you ever nice to him? And how nice? I do not understand what an American lady may or may not do—to win a man. We Italians draw our cavaliers to us. We do not plead. We command."

Katrine smiled enigmatically. "Signor Agnew is not easy to command," she answered.

"All men can be commanded—but not when they know it is a command," said Lucia. "Signor Agnew is no different from the rest."

Katrine laughed. "Haven't we changed places?" she asked. "It was I who suggested that men must be kept in submission and you who denied it. Now you are all for our proper feminine authority—to me who never challenged it."

"Because I have learned to command," said Lucia defiantly, "and you have not. To bear authority one's soul must be in the matter. Have you a soul? You never let it look out of your eyes. Your blood is cold—with the cold of the North."

Katrine leaned back upon her cushions with an air of cheerful self-satisfaction.

"We are both of the North—Signor Agnew and I," she said slowly.

The breath came from between Lucia's lips in a little gasp. Her hand quivered upon the gunwale.

"Let me direct your attention to one simple fact in nature," she said, and her voice was rasping in its intensity. "Did you note Uiko's reliance on the set of the wind—north in the heat of the day, south with the coolness and the sunset? That was because he knew that warmth seeks the cold, and cold the warmth. But cold turn to cold? Never, signorina, never!"

KATRINE trailed her hand in the water. Her tone was still pleasantly indifferent—and condescending.

"Perhaps you have more experience of men than I," she allowed. "But not, I think, of Signor Agnew."

"The instincts of a *true* woman are not concerned with time," argued the other hotly. "They come to conclusions unerringly—where their—their interest is aroused."

"Instincts—and interests—must not be permitted to get out of hand," said Katrine. "Both may be—mistaken."

Lucia rose. Her eyes were dilated; she stood, looking down at Katrine as if she held herself a conqueror, scorning the vanquished. She laughed harshly, exultingly.

"My instincts? I do not control them, signorina. I let them have their will! Why? Because I control the instincts of others! Because I command them—because they seek me—me! Because they can not escape me. Because I am what I am. Because those who look upon me desire me. Because they—are men. And Signor Agnew? He, as I said, is no puppet. He—is a Man!"

She stepped forward, holding herself erect. She passed back to her former place in the bows, offering no other word.

Katrine still smiled—and no longer enigmatically. The leaven of jealousy worked well. What is the first sign that an autocrat begins to doubt his autocracy? Boasting. He is not sure of himself. And so keeps declaring that he *is* sure, and reiterates it again and again.

She turned her mind, at last, from meditation to the interest of her surroundings. Lucia still sat in the bows, but her pose of indifference had left her. She was looking about her eagerly—almost, indeed, with an air of expectation. The boat was running under the shadow of the great bluff which commands the narrow entrance of the Jeka arm of the lake.

Uiko hauled down the sail. "We do not need to penetrate far up this channel, Gospodinya," he said. "From here you see all that is to be seen."

Lucia turned toward him. "You mean that you do not intend getting out of the reach of the evening breeze," she sneered. "You have no intention of having to use the oars again if you can help it."

"I thought that the Gospodinya would like to land," said the fisherman, unabashed. "This is the village of Jeka—on our right. I have a sister there." He looked suggestively and ingratiatingly at Katrine.

She smiled. "I have no desire to land," she said. "But you may moor us for half an hour while you lay your offerings on the shrine of domestic affection. We will eat our lunch while we await you."

"Not under the eye of these uncivilized barbarians," objected Lucia. "We shall be mobbed. Let us get higher up below the fort or castle or whatever grandiloquent name Esuli has given to his heap of ruins."

Uiko looked questioningly at Katrine.

"How far is it?" she temporized. The fisherman shrugged his shoulders. "A couple of kilometers, signorina, and there is no breeze—not a vestige of one in this ravine. It will take us plenty of time. I could not guarantee our return by sunset."

Katrine looked up the channel. The white walls of Esuli's habitation shone here and there between the patches of stunted oak and beech. A flag drooped lazily from the flagstaff which topped the spinnies. A hundred feet below, on the edge of the lake, was another building—a boathouse, ap-

parently, for as she looked a boat shot out into the open and came toward them.

"Perhaps that is the Bey himself," she said to Lucia. "Perhaps he will ask us in to lunch."

And Lucia laughed with a sudden excitement which Katrine failed to understand. The girl's eyes danced, her face was suddenly flushed, she looked at the approaching boat with eagerness. Did she expect to make another conquest of the Turk? Was her mind given over to considerations of this kind and this alone? Katrine shrugged her shoulders. Consciousness of sex seemed to be the dominating phase of the Italian character. To be so uplifted at the thought of meeting another man! And a Turk, too! How—how un-American!

Uiko stared at the boat, frowning. It came along fast, propelled by six oars in the hands of men who had learned to row. Its sharp prow cut the surface, and it still headed for them undeviatingly. The fisherman muttered to himself.

"If instead of the Gospodinya I had happened to have contraband on board," he mused, "I should have been swimming by now—for the reeds. What does he want—this jackal of a Bey?"

A moment later he frowned again doubtfully. For the boat did not lessen speed and, as it came nearer, the figure who sat in the stern was revealed. It was not Esuli.

The man who steered wore the uniform of a corporal of Zaptiehs and he bent his course and his eyes upon the fisherman's boat with obvious satisfaction. When he was within a hundred feet he shouted to his crew. The oars were flung inboard, the bowman turned, flourishing a boat-hook, and the two boats met side by side amid much creaking of Uiko's unstable planks.

THE steersman stood up and vaulted on to Katrine's cushions. He laid his hand upon the fisherman's shoulder.

"Caught, my friend!" he cried exultingly. "Caught in the act!"

Uiko made a startled movement which flung aside the other's grasp. The corporal whipped out a revolver and held it pointed at his prisoner's forehead.

"None of that, child of a dog!" he cried threateningly. "Or else——!" He made a very convincing motion of a finger toward the trigger.

"What do you want of me?" cried the fisherman in amazement. "I am in charge of two ladies, as you see. Your Bey will have the hide from your despicable body for this insult!"

Still holding the revolver, the corporal beckoned to one of his men to join him. He paid no attention to the volley of questions fired at him by the exasperated Uiko. He made a comprehensive gesture which included boat and passengers.

"Search!" he said laconically, and then turned with something of apology in his air to Katrine.

"It is a matter of my duty," he exclaimed with a slight shrug of the shoulders and in Italian.

"Your duty?" Katrine's surprise and anger were no less than Uiko's. "Your duty is to disturb a couple of ladies on a pleasure excursion? Your master sent you for that?"

"No," said the man, and laughed exultingly. "No, signorina, he sent me for—this!"

He pointed to his underling, who from beneath the cushions at Katrine's very feet had drawn a package which he held and weighed appraisingly in his two hands. And his face, too, was full of triumph. He echoed his leader's mirth.

"Ha, my wily Uiko!" he cried. "It was a fine thought! A pleasure excursion? Gospodinya? All the accessories of innocence? And now all the signs of offended astonishment!" He snapped the string which bound the package. A stream of bright brass cartridges rattled to the floor.

The corporal tweaked his captive's ear. He laughed again, uproariously. His capture and his self-satisfaction in it seemed to have restored him his temper.

"The Gospodinya hid those in your boat, good friend, did they not? The very things they would need on a pleasure excursion, hey? You? In Allah's name *you* would scarcely recognize such things—you can not conceive a use for them, peace-seeker?"

Katrine looked at the fisherman keenly. She expected to read in his face signs of guilt, of self-abasement, possibly of resignation. She encountered instead unqualified amazement and indignation. A string of oaths rapped from Uiko's lips.

"It is a trap—a trap—a trap!" he bawled resoundingly. "As if I should risk such matters with Gospodinya in the boat!" He turned suddenly upon Gugi with a snarl.

"Offspring of dirt! You were bought to work this shame upon me!" He struck out at him wildly.

Gugi burst into an inarticulate blubber of protest, and Katrine, whose glance had traveled swiftly on toward the boy, felt sympathy for him. For here, too, was an astonishment which could not have been feigned. It was too undisguised, too transparent, to deceive. No—Gugi was not the culprit.

And then Lucia's voice joined the chorus of protest. "It is an outrage—this!" she cried. "What have we to prove that you have not placed these things there yourselves? We shall immediately report you to your master!"

Katrine experienced a thrill of something like suspicion. The girl's gestures were stagey, her voice artificial, her pose utterly unconvincing. Why? Katrine confessed herself at a loss.

With a businesslike air the corporal motioned her to leave the bows. He himself took up his position there and flung the painter over the gunwale into the hands of one of his men. He settled himself down, his cocked revolver in very close vicinity to Uiko's head. Till these arrangements were completed to his satisfaction he offered no answer to the questions and invectives which the fisherman rained at him.

"I shall bear your report to my master with much interest, Gospodinya. For the moment I am taking you both to explain to him why I find you accompanying a notorious smuggler in his attempt to introduce cartridges from over the Montenegrin border. The penalty for this act—for principals and accessories—is death!"

He leaned back against the gunwale with a satisfied air. He commanded his underlings to row. As the six oars took the water the boats shot forward, one in the other's wake. The corporal smiled appreciatively. He leaned forward and tweaked Uiko's ear again.

"Death," he reminded him gaily. "My courtier, my flower of breeding—death!"

CHAPTER XXVI

ESULI'S HAND CLOSES

THE Zaptiehs' boat and its convoy reached the landing-place rapidly. It was a secluded and reed-girt spot and Katrine, as they approached it, became aware that what she had taken for a boat-house included a kiosk, thatched, open toward the full expanse of the lake and furnished with chairs and a couple of little tables.

A figure sat at ease in one of these, reaching lazily for a pair of binoculars as the boat drew near.

The figure rose and came forward to the edge of the little terrace that commanded the landing-place and the forest of reeds below. They recognized Esuli, leaning his elbows upon the parapet and staring down at them with unconcealed astonishment. He gave a sudden exclamation, left his post, and hurried toward a flight of steps which gave directly upon the landing-place.

As he appeared the corporal stood up and saluted.

There was a faint splash among the reeds which were rustling below the gunwale. It was followed by a shout of warning from the Bey, a muttered encomium from Uiko, while the place occupied a moment before by Gugi was empty. The boy had leaped as an otter leaps, almost as silently, and now, swimming and diving as an otter swims and dives, he was lost in the wilderness of green that covered the shallow acres of the foreshore.

The corporal, carried away by sudden excitement, would have sprung into the water. His master thundered a command to remain where he was and guard at least one of his prisoners. But the remaining Zaptiehs were on land and racing along the bank of rushes before Esuli had time to reach the tiny wharf. They ran, they shouted, they splashed into the mud-banks, but, for the moment, without success. Gugi remained unseen.

The Bey, regaining his self-possession after the first instant of exasperation, addressed them with ominous calm. They were to guard the shore. Without their prisoner they were not to move so much as an inch. The boy was in the patch of rushes. Sooner or later he would emerge or drown. His body, animate or inanimate, must accompany the six guardians before they enjoyed the privileges of food or sleep.

And then he turned with elaborate courtesy to greet the new arrivals.

"Signorina!" he said, with an air which implied a delighted amazement. "Signorina, Fate is smiling upon me incredibly to-day."

She looked up at him and, for a moment, silently. His eyes seemed to convey all that his words expressed, and yet with a difference. They smiled, but the smile was not convincing—was, indeed, inhuman. Pleasure was there, but the pleasure of the hawk eying the covey in the stubble. Instinct told her that their arrival was not unexpected—that Chance had had no hand in it. Uiko had been betrayed.

She answered him with a little bow that was studiedly frigid.

"I hope you can rectify the stupidity of your man, your Excellency, and release our boatman with the utmost expedition," she answered. "It would be of the highest inconvenience to Signorina Gessi and myself to be unduly detained."

The wave of his hand expressed entire acquiescence. "But, of course, esteemed signorina. My services are yours to command. As yet I am entirely in the dark. I received a message that my man had put out to arrest smugglers. Surely *you*, of all people, have not Montenegrin tobacco concealed in your luncheon-basket?"

And he continued to smile—with pleasant and artificial bewilderment.

The corporal stood up, saluted, and spoke rapidly. The smile faded from Esuli's face, was replaced by a thoughtful air, became, finally, a frown of doubt and deliberation. He put half a dozen questions to his underling who replied for the most part with monosyllables.

He shrugged his shoulders as he turned again to Katrine.

"THIS is a far graver affair than I thought, signorina," he said. "The man who accompanies you—Uiko Vukic is, I understand, his name—had contraband in the boat, contraband of war. This you must admit, I fear."

"Your man produced a packet of cartridges from under a cushion upon which I had a few moments before been sitting. I could not have done this without being inconvenienced by it," said Katrine quietly. "The obvious inference, therefore, is that it was not there. Uiko had no possible chance of placing it there between whiles. You will not be surprised, then, when I accuse your man of having placed it there for purposes of his own—to win promotion, perhaps—or favor." She looked at him significantly as she emphasized the two last words.

He threw out his hands. "Signorina!" he protested. "Signorina! This insults my men—and, indirectly, myself!"

"You think so?" Katrine's voice was icy. "Yet nobody touched those cushions since our start, save the Signorina Gessi, myself, and your man."

He made a repudiating gesture. He turned toward Lucia. "Signorina!" he cried obsequiously. "You too? Do you concur in this monstrous accusation?"

She raised her eyes to his with a queer hint of diffidence which was entirely foreign to them. She shook her head.

"I have no facts to guide me," she answered. "But you can not expect me to accuse this man—or any one else," she added, with an odd glance at her companion.

He stood looking from one to the other with dominating eyes. He shook his head.

"I am in a great difficulty," he confessed. "On one side duty; on the other inclination. It is impossible for me to release your man, signorina. The charge is too grave."

Uiko bent toward her. He spoke in a breathless whisper.

"Gospodinya! For the sake of God do not desert me! By Saint Basil and All Saints I swear to you that I had no hand in this. I have smuggled—but with you, never! Witness for me, Gospodinya! Prevail with this accursed! Or else——" he finished with a shrug—"my race is run." He sighed, pessimistically.

The blood rushed to Katrine's face. In every fiber of her being she knew that, for purposes of his own, the Bey was playing with her. But pity, indignation, a sense of racial pride or what you will, stirred in her to protect Uiko. She stood up.

"I will sponsor this man and return with him—to-morrow," she said. "Give him into my charge. Fix what guarantee you like. My father will pay it if it becomes necessary."

"Signorina," he said gravely. "For an act of war—and it is no less—no bail can be given. I doubt, I very much doubt, if my oath to my sovereign permits me to take even your own parole till this matter has been sifted. What am I to think? Munitions of war brought across the border to men who are always in chronic revolt? You have learned the measure of loyalty these Albanians show. Those concerned in such a deed released with no more than a reprimand! Governors of far wider provinces

than this have been degraded for many an act less weak. The code of my sovereign is rigid, signorina—rigid and far-reaching as his justice. And that is flawless!"

A throb of uneasiness passed through Katrine's heart.

"You implicate *me!*" she said sternly.

"It was the act of—of a woman," allowed Esuli. "That you understood the graveness of it I do not for one moment suspect. But that this son of dishonor deceived you into complying with his nefarious designs seems possible, signorina. Did he say it was tobacco, perchance, and you turned a complaisant eye away from so petty an act of contraband? That is so excusable in one of so kindly a nature as yourself, but the consequences, signorina—the consequences? Deplorable! Deplorable!"

He shook his head. A little deprecating murmur escaped him.

Katrine's eyes flashed. "I have told you expressly that I knew nothing of this matter. I will go further. I specifically accuse your man of having designed and executed this despicable fraud!"

Esuli bowed rigidly. "You leave no course open to me but one, signorina," he said. "You must remain here to prove your point or bear the brunt of your responsibility in making it. You impeach my men and therefore me. I can not allow this matter to die. To-morrow an inquiry will be opened. For the moment I must ask you to accept my hospitality and must require your parole not to—evade it."

Katrine looked up at him with incredulous eyes. "I am to consider myself a prisoner—I?" she asked, and Esuli's bow was an affirmative.

She stood up and stepped ashore.

"Then I refuse to acquiesce in it and I give no parole," she said. "But I lay upon you, Excellency, the responsibility of arresting an American citizen on this grotesque charge. You may find it a heavy one to bear."

He bent his shoulders obsequiously. "It is your own displeasure which hurts me most, signorina," he said quietly, "but even that, when my duty requires it, I must bring myself to face."

HE TURNED and gave rapid orders to the corporal. A moment later Uiko's wrists were lashed behind his back and he was being goaded up the path in the direction of the buildings. The Bey gave a keen glance in the direction of the six Zaptiehs who were sedulously and sullenly guarding the reed-patch. They looked toward him. He did not speak, but his eyes were eloquent. They turned to their wardership of the shore with a sudden shivering zeal.

The grimness died from the Bey's face. He pointed up the path. Katrine took a step or two along it, but Lucia Gessi's voice, in sudden indignation, checked her.

"*I* do not come!" she objected loudly. "Some means of returning me to Vodra must be accomplished!"

The Bey turned toward her imperturbably. "I am afraid you must share the responsibilities implied in your companionship, signorina," he said.

Her excitement increased. "How dare you!" she cried. "I have no responsibility—I have simply done as I have been told to do! I demand to be given my liberty and a boatman's help! I will not remain!"

Esuli shook his head. "Yes, signorina," he said dispassionately, "you remain."

She strode toward him—she shouted in his face—she became the virago unashamed.

"You think to make a tool of me—of me?" she cried. "Are you threatening me—the daughter of Carlo Gessi? And do you happen to remember what Carlo Gessi represents?"

"He is no doubt an important functionary of the Great Bir Railway, but even his daughter becomes amenable to the laws of the country it pervades," said the Bey, and there was some small shaft of humor lighting his somber gaze.

"The Bir Railway!" She spat into the dust as a gutter wench of Catania spits to show her utter scorn. "What is the road to me—who know that another year will see every rail and tie torn from its resting-place and every tunnel and embankment a ruin! The road, indeed! I know no road but the one which you will tread if you run counter to the Society whose daughter I am—the Society——"

A stone rolled down the slope from above and crashed through the herbage to her feet. That it had been set rolling by the foot of a passer-by on the path above was evident, for some one was descending the path. Some one who whistled gaily—a lilting, catchy air, with staccato flourishes, one which had been shrill in Gessi's ears a day or two before on the Gorac embankment.

Lucia gave a startled exclamation as the stone settled almost at her feet, and then flung up her head in a listening attitude—the attitude of the hound thrown out who hears the distant chorus of the pack in cry. The flush died from her cheek. A mask of impassivity—or was fear the emotion? Katrine asked as she watched—seemed to settle upon her face.

The whistler came pacing round the corner, came to a halt in sudden surprise, and then stood uncovered, bowing elaborately.

"Signorina!" exclaimed Sarrasco, his voice as eloquent of amazement and satisfaction as Esuli's own had been. "Signorina!"

Katrine looked at him stonily. During the last few minutes a sense of nightmare had seemed to enclose her. Through the weeks she had been losing her American—her civilized—points of view, but without conviction. She realized into what a world of hitherto incredible circumstance she had entered, but, *in* it, she had never got the sensation of being *of* it.

And now? She found herself a leading member of the cast.

For again her instincts served her. She knew absolutely and completely that she was involved in some intrigue—even now she had a dim and undefined nature of its import—which was to affect herself, those she held dear, those with whom she was associated. And it was to culminate its results against the project against which all results seemed to culminate—the road. Esuli was an instrument of the conspiracy. And here stood another—Sarrasco. And she, a well-bred, advanced, American woman, found herself arrayed against such as these—experts in intrigue, relentless in savagery, men steeped in knavery to their fingers' ends. She gave a little wondering gasp. This was the year 1909!

A CERTAIN exasperation seized her. She conceived a sudden loathing for these men—for their methods—for all the Old World knavery for which they stood. She would bare her weapons—she would not stoop to fence with such as these.

She looked the Italian in the eyes and nodded toward the white-faced girl beside her.

"You used this tool, then?" she said contemptuously. "It came near to turning in your hand."

Sarrasco threw out his open palms with a gesture of bewilderment. "I am of an astounding denseness, signorina," he deprecated, "but your meaning is—what?"

"I think—I *know*—that you lie!" she said coldly. "You or your confederate"—she let the loathing in her eyes include the Turk—"hired this woman to play her sorry treachery for you. It was she, after all, who hid those cartridges—to be found."

Sarrasco stared from her to Esuli. His shoulders rose and fell with a sort of despairing wonder.

"I am at a loss—utterly at a loss!" he confessed. The Bey eyed him with sympathetic appreciation.

"The Signorina Gresham has a grievance against us which it will take time, and intelligence, to investigate," he said gently. "I have no alternative but to make her my guest meanwhile."

The Italian smiled vivaciously.

"But that is—from our point of view—delightful!" he cried. "I deplore any inconveniences you may be put to, signorina, but, consider the brightness you will bring into our purely masculine lives. Consider it!"

She made him no answer. She stepped forward slowly up the path which Esuli again indicated with a deferential wave of the hand. Lucia stayed, irresolute, watching for orders, as it seemed, from Sarrasco's beaming eyes.

He looked at her, smiling still, but this time possessively and appraisingly. A tiny unseen shudder shook her.

"And the Signorina Gessi?" he queried. "She refuses to be separated from her companion? But that is what had to be expected. The bonds between them have grown strong through these weeks of companionship. And the proprieties are served too, are they not? You will play chaperon to each other? Each will be to each the severest of duennas?"

She dropped her eyes. She followed Katrine without another word. Behind them the two men closed in abreast, walking as warders walk, with impassive watchfulness. And to Katrine, looking up at the white walls of the house on the hillside above her, it seemed that the prison had already enclosed her in its grip. And yet? She dug her nails into the palm of her hand to convince herself that this was indeed no nightmare—that the almanac had not slipped

back the centuries to leave her the unconscious victim of an age of barbarism. No, this was the year of our Lord one thousand nine hundred and nine! America was ten days' steam away. And she was Katrine Gresham, a prisoner of — Fate. She walked on, as the sleep-walker walks, seeing the inward vision alone.

Down by the lake-side the Zaptiehs plunged and splashed through the reed-bed, shouting to each other acrimoniously. They saw the broad expanse of green, the long vista of the lake, and out in the current a collection of withered herbage amassed by the wind and borne by it far into the gathering dusk.

But of Gugi they saw nothing.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE CARDS ARE ON THE TABLE

"NOT artistically done, my dear Gordon. Not convincing."

The artificial, exaggerated start with which Gordon Glaisher had greeted Katrine as she stepped into the veranda which fronted the courtyard of the main building became a very real pulse of amazement at her words. There was contempt in her tone, but no surprise. He cast a keen glance of inquiry at Esuli. The Bey, by a slight lift of the eyebrows, explained that he, too, shared his guest's astonishment.

"But—but this is stupefying!" he stammered. "You yourself, Katrine—*here?*"

She made a weary little gesture of protest.

"There is no need for that pose," she said. "I hardly think I was unexpected, was I? I see no reason to believe that you have been left outside this—conspiracy. Perhaps I hardly grasp the immediate results you expect it to have, but I have not had the benefit of even a beginner's course in intrigue—till lately. What are you doing here, Gordon—and why do you do it?"

His color went and came. His eyes shifted—his disconcertment was almost pitiful.

"I am here in—in consultation, Katrine," he said. "The road. I came here directly—in its interests. I used my holiday to gain information about the possibilities—of the future. I have to give convincing reasons to the public if I am to float the further issue which will make its completion possible. I—I am seeking them at first hand."

His assurance, his glibness, increased as he spoke. This, it was easy to believe, was the lesson he had prepared to recite at their meeting. Her refusal to make their encounter run on the lines he had prepared had, at first, put him at a disadvantage. He was recovering.

She smiled, but with no sign of acquiescence. "You did not consider that the most detailed information was to be gained from my father—your partner?"

He shook his head. "No," he said, quietly, and his self-possession was his own again. "No, I had reasons to think otherwise. He is being led astray, if what I hear is correct, by his engineer. This line can not be built upon a remunerative basis, Katrine. As a business proposition I have to set my face against it."

He was dignified, important, entirely the conscientious business man again in every aspect.

"And your reasons?"

"Very complicated and detailed ones, needing special knowledge to comprehend them," he said. "But they all come back to one starting-point—expense. No future traffic can be made to pay interest on the needful outlay. That I find conclusive."

"Ah!" Her voice was ominously indifferent. "But a new company, obtaining the already accomplished work at wreckers' prices, might make a very reasonably good profit, either by completing and opening the line, or by threatening to do so and bargaining with those who can not afford to see this culmination—the Austrians, for instance?"

There was a queer silence. From behind Esuli's back she heard the long intake of breath hiss between Sarrasco's lips. Over the Bey's face a mask-like expression of imperturbability had fallen which, however, was not convincing. Glaisher's face was mottled—odd patches of red and white dappled it. He blinked.

Katrine laughed. "There!" she said. "I have flung the cards on the table. We know where we stand—all of us. You can enjoy a new experience, Signor Commandante—and you, your Excellency. You can be absolutely frank!"

ESULI made a little gesture of despair. "You speak in enigmas, signorina," he deplored. "Your meaning completely evades me."

She wheeled to confront him. "You cling

to your illusion, then?" she asked. "Does your etiquette demand that? You may cheat, but you may never own it—not once?"

Glaisher frowned. "It is my host whom you are insulting, Katrine," he said. "Please remember that!"

"How am I to arrive at bluntness?" she asked calmly. "I am waiting to discuss questions with you. You refuse to show me your standpoint."

"Our obtuseness endeavors to probe for yours, signorina," said Sarrasco obsequiously. Esuli nodded.

"I had informed the signorina that I should open an inquiry on the comparatively small matter of this afternoon's unfortunate incident. She, it now appears, is sitting in judgment on wider issues—which at present are beyond my intelligence," he confessed.

She looked round meditatively at the three men. And of the three Glaisher recognized that her glance, in meeting his, held more than scorn. It was wonder. And in his heart the discomfiture of the discovered knave was suddenly engulfed by a sort of rage of shame. For he understood instinctively. Her astonishment was not directed at him, at his presence there, at his attitude toward circumstance. No, it was directed at herself. "I admitted this man to intimacy," she was reflecting. "I even contemplated being his wife. In God's name how—and why?"

So incisive was the instinct that he made as if he would retort to the unspoken question with bluster—meeting scorn with scorn.

"I am being called on to answer for an act of concealment," he said. "I have no reason to meet such a charge patiently, Katrine—from you."

She inclined her head gravely. "No," she agreed. "I was not straight with you once, Gordon. I allow it—I confessed it. But circumstances, more than I myself, were at fault. I did not grasp the situation."

"As you have grasped what you believe to be the truth of this one?" His voice was sarcastic and firmer. The shock of his self-abasement was passing.

"As I grasp what I know to be truth in this one," she agreed. "Am I to be plainer with you yet?"

"It would be better," he said, and laughed harshly. "At present your intelligence moves in higher spheres than we can reach. We are completely in the dark—I think I may permit myself to speak for all of us."

Sarrasco hunched his shoulders to the highest point of incredulity. Esuli bowed a sort of plaintive assent.

"It needs few enough words," she said. "This is what you and your underlings have proved to us—to us who are building what you labor to destroy. You, Commandante,"—she pointed at him denouncingly—"you have been hired to effect, by assassination or such other methods as your talents are familiar with, the death of the man on whom the success of the Bir enterprise principally hangs. That is my father. So far you have failed.

"You,"—she turned and confronted Esuli—"work for the same object and have had your price—from the same quarter, but you have your private bias as well. You see in this line one more weapon pointed at the heart of the old régime in your country—the one on which your self-interest hopes to climb. You work, then, for more than gold. You work because you see destruction for your hopes in not working. That is your position. Like your confederate you have tried to make assassination your weapon, but have failed also, and more than once. Each attempt makes opportunities fewer, and the time, by your own expectation, may be growing short. Does that make you start? Walls have ears, they say. So, believe me, Excellency, have waters, and this lake of yours has learned more secrets of yours than that one.

"And now, Gordon, we come to you. You are here—why? Because something in you which I—and you yourself—did not suspect six months ago has come to the top. Something racial, perhaps—some throw back to instincts familiar to your breed but foreign to the land of your birth. You have been injured. You have brooded, you have magnified, you have struck back. And you have tried to strike hard and you have sought to use any weapon that will make the blow effective. And so you have come to—these!" With a comprehensive sweep of her arm she indicated the two men who stood beside him and listened, as they had listened to their own condemnation, with imperturbable, ominous calm.

HE STOOD looking at her darkly, wrathfully, but for the moment in silence. It was the Bey who broke it.

"You are making my task more difficult with every word, signorina," he said gravely. "You indict not only myself—and that is of little enough consideration—but you have insulted the master whose beneficent rule has made our land what it is. Your words prove that you have dabbled in sedition—that sedition which is all too deplorably the common talk of the moment. These are matters not to be put aside."

She smiled and nodded confidently. "Sedition?" she repeated. "I can support the charge, Excellency—in this land better than in some others. But how have I offended? Outline my crime to me broadly."

"You share the standpoint—if there is any meaning in your words—of the enemies of my master. You must have shared their councils. That also, I regret to say, must become a matter for investigation."

"Here?" she asked laconically. And she still smiled. If he expected to shake her he failed.

"Here—or where necessity and the instructions of my superiors direct," he said.

"It will be a matter of time?" she submitted.

"Possibly."

"You will inform my father fully?"

A curious expression woke and almost immediately died in the Bey's face.

"Your father will be—informed," he said. There was a queer hesitation over the last word.

She looked at him keenly. Her instinct responded to something latent in his words or in his voice.

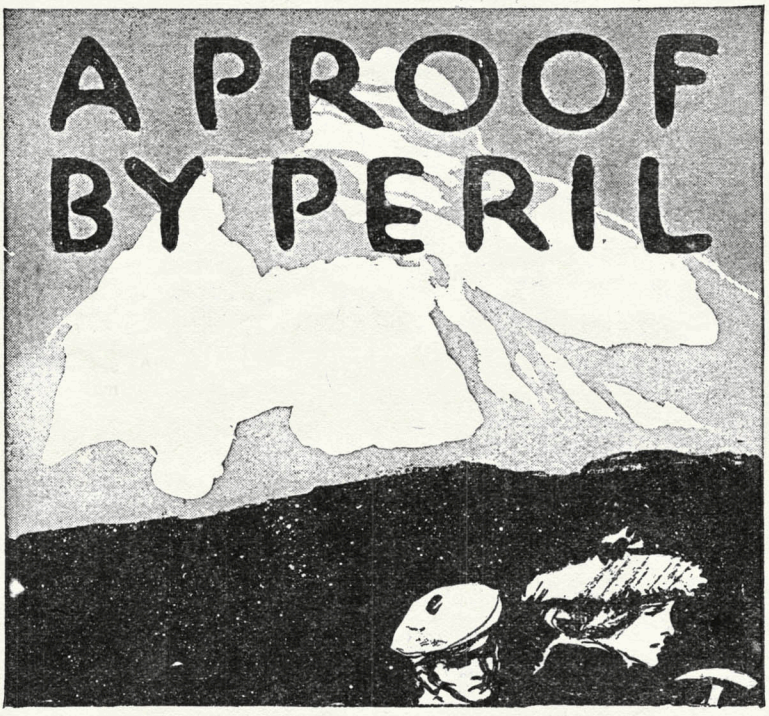
"Indeed I myself will have the regrettable task of informing him," he added. "And as soon as possible."

"Thank you," she said amiably. "Then for the present we put the matter from our minds. I retire—to my cell?"

"You and the Signorina Gessi will, I fear, have to put up with some restraint," he agreed gravely. "Discomforts I will do my best to mitigate for you, signorina. Have the kindness to follow me."

With another bow he led the way into the shadows which the dusk flung athwart his—prison.

TO BE CONCLUDED



BY JOHN EDWARD RUSSELL

ALONG a narrow path, cut like a shelf upon the flank of the fog-hung mountain just above the valley, a man was walking. His rough suit of cheap tweed was muddied with the dust of long roads and splashed in yellow stains where the mist had soaked.

On his back was a paltry canvas tramping-bag, in his hand a rude stock. Haggard and travel-worn, he strode with a set smile upon his sharp-featured face as one who knows the goal is just ahead.

He came, at length, to a wide bend where the path swept, circling inward, hugging the dip of a broad, deep ravine. A tawny brook foamed and fumed down the rocky channel. The way led over a rustic bridge and there stood a sign post:

HOTEL ZUM BRUGHORN,
2 kilometers

The traveler stopped and read, leaning on his staff, and as he read he laughed, a strange, false, evil laugh.

Very small, very helpless, was this man against the dimmed, dripping immensity of the mountain—a fragile atom in a land of ruthless, brooding, latent power. And yet he laughed. And the laugh was lost, like a blasphemous whisper in the profundity of the fog.

"Two kilometers," he said aloud. "So near? Have I come so near? Have I run the quarry to earth at last?"

He looked about him. Where he stood, his bit of visible world was the brook and the bridge and the boulder-strewn sides of the ravine, curtained by the close, clinging mist. Some paces up the cut from the bridge, by the verge of the torrent, a flat rock, set in a patch of grasses, tempted his weariness. He climbed to it and flung himself upon the damp surface.

From where he sat he overlooked the path and the bridge as through a filmy veil. The restless stream beside him held his vagrant attention.

"This shall be my Rubicon," he mused, smiling at the conceit—an unpleasant smile. "When I cross it my empire shall fall to me. Not all the powers of darkness that seem to

live in this cursed Swiss wilderness shall forbid."

He had been on his rock some half-hour when voices reached him through the fog. He looked about him, startled. The voices moved nearer, along the path in the same direction by which he had come. He peered down as two figures came to view.

A man and a woman were following the path side by side. They were young, garbed for the out-of-doors, and they spoke trivial things happily and confidently as they walked.

They came to the bridge and paused a moment to watch the flurry of the moiling brook. The man on the rock above them, glaring through the mist veil, saw their faces as they leaned upon the railing. And as he saw, his body became tense, his eyes vulpine and his smiling lips drew apart upon his white teeth.

"Here's the two-kilometer post," the girl was saying. "I remember. From here the Reisenweg sweeps out to girdle that bulging cliff where the pines overhang the path."

"You may also remember that your father warned us not to take the Reisenweg at all, coming back," said her companion. "There have been signs of landslips following the rains."

"And still here we are."

"I was reluctant—you'll bear me out in that."

"Reluctant? I had to drag you! You were all for returning by the valley path and the funicular. I shall do you justice, Mr. Hargood, for your timidity," she mocked at him, with a sidelong glance that was a caress. "Do you feel so unsafe here?"

"Julia, I always feel unsafe with you." In his voice was a tenderness that belied the light tone. "But I shall feel safer if we hurry on to the hotel."

"What would you do if there were a landslip?" she asked, perversely setting her elbows upon the rail.

"Ride it, with you in my arms," he answered promptly.

"But really?"

"I don't know," he said, with sudden gravity. "Landslips are very terrible things. I suppose no man knows what he would do in face of death until he is tested."

"I think I would chance your meeting the test," she said, then went on quickly as he turned to her. "But what a fraud father is! Fancy a man who has dragged his loving daughter through untold perils by icy crags, climbing the tallest peaks on three continents, and all that sort of thing—fancy him preaching caution against a hillside promenade like this Reisenweg!"

"But do you know what he said?"

"Well, don't I just! 'Sir,'" she said, pompously, standing back and blowing out her cheeks in adorable mimicry, "'Sir, you will not mistake me when I warn you against these hillside paths. They are muddy, sir, and treacherous. The true sportsman takes no unnecessary risks below the snow-line. He seeks to measure his mettle against the vast, unyielding, but clean and even-handed forces of nature; adventuring his pygmy-might against a noble antagonist that has neither animus nor mercy. High spirits grow in combat with high chances; mean minds shrink before sublimity. Among the peaks, where the ice is crystal and azure and the air is sweet and undefiled—well, so one could wish to die. But to be buried in mud—pah!'"

"The Major, to the life!" he cried, as she paused, flushed and breathless. "But I'd rather you saved it until we get back to the hotel," he added.

She nodded mischievously. "Of course, the hotel. That's the attraction. I forgot your afternoon billiards with that cub brother of mine. By all means; let's hurry."

"Julia!" he said, but when he reached for her hand she was already half-way across the bridge.

HE HAD taken a step after her when a low, chuckling laugh came to his ear. He stopped, glanced up and stood transfixed. From a rock in the ravine a face was grinning at him, gnome-like, unreal, hazed about by the fog. He stared, wide-eyed, and shuddered.

An instant, and he flung himself away as if tearing free from a loathsome grip, and hurried after the girl. She had neither heard nor seen. She did not hear now, though her companion did, the low laugh that pursued them.

"You were saying, Mr. Hargood?" she began innocently. He did not answer. She glanced at him. His head was turned away toward the misty gulf of the valley. With a little flit of her tam-o'-shanter she hastened her pace.

They had reached a curve where the yellow bank was strongly ribbed with lime-

stone, when, out of the bosom of space somewhere behind them, there grew a sound. Softly, it began, sonorous, majestic, then swelled in successive waves, grew in awful volume and beat upon them in a billowy tide. The mighty diapason of the Alps thundered forth, rocking the earth; infinitely deep and terrifying, vast, immeasurable; a sound to send reason reeling.

They stopped upon the path, man and woman, two tiny, quivering things of life, while the sound rose to its fearful height and sank slowly into the valley. Soul to soul they were, and in its nakedness each soul looked upon the other.

The color had fled from Hargood's cheeks and he leaned limply against the gullied slope of the mountain-side. Julia stood watching him and there was neither fear nor tension in her young face.

Again the surging roar began, rising in thunderous crescendo, filling the air with a mighty pulse. The world trembled. The crest of the cliff above the path seemed to nod toward them through the heavy, drifting wreaths of the fog.

"God!" stammered Hargood, and his breath sucked between his teeth. "It was —ahead of us that time."

The girl was in the grip of a curious composure. The appalling danger of the moment left her unmoved. She kept her eyes upon Hargood, and in their fearless gaze was the dawning of a great surprise.

"Father said the rains had made the Reisenweg unsafe," she observed evenly. "The mountain has slipped twice, behind us and before us."

He seemed not to have heard her. Pallidly he gave ear to the booming of the landslide as it ground its way to the depths. He followed some inner train of thought that racked him with tense emotion and played strange tricks with his handsome, mobile face, always plastic to the workings of his nature.

"The first must have followed that ravine—back there where the path crosses the bridge." He spoke with difficulty. "And the last was between us and the hotel."

"Yes," said Julia. Her tone was casual. She remained mentally apart, watching—watching, with incredulity that strove against bitter disappointment and disillusionment, the development of this unsuspected weakness in him.

The conflict in Hargood's mind, aroused by the alternative presented in one vivid flash to his keen and sensitive understanding, furrowed his forehead with anguish. He listened with strained attention. Only the drip from the grasses came out of the fog. Always his glance wandered along the path behind them.

"Now that the ravine is filled up," went on Julia dispassionately, "there is little chance of another slide there. Safety is probably in that direction, back the way we came. We have the overhanging cliff ahead of us."

She made the suggestion deliberately, as one approaches the crucial moment in a fateful experiment. Unconsciously she bent toward him a little.

With the marks of his inner wrestling still sharp upon his brow, Hargood came to a decision, apparently urged thereto by her words. "Come," he said abruptly, passing a limp hand over the knotted wrinkles. He turned back along the path. "It must be this way."

Julia did not move. She kept her cool gaze upon him, her graceful head poised perhaps a trifle higher, her lips in a thin, white line. "I prefer to go on to the hotel," she answered.

Hargood shuffled nervously. "No. We must go back. We may be too late, even now," he said jerkily.

"I shall not go with you."

Hargood seemed to come out of some painful abstraction with a start. "What?" he cried. Then, impatiently, "Come! You don't understand. It is safe back there."

"I shall not go."

"But you must, Julia, you must. I ask you to come with me." In his eagerness he caught her hand. The mere touch brought a quiver to her whole body. She stepped back quickly.

"I shall not go back with you," she repeated.

Hargood's strong, supple fingers twisted and interlocked. There was much of the Gaul in Hargood. "Good heavens, Julia!" he cried. "Why do you thwart me? What notion is this? Don't you see I'm planning for the best? Don't be stubborn—at such a moment—with the mountain trembling under our feet. Come!" He started away again, but she did not move.

"Julia!" he pleaded in frenzy. "Are you mad? I say come back with me. There is

no danger there. What's wrong? Come, girl, come!" His voice tightened to the breaking pitch.

SHE leaned upon her alpenstock, a trim, competent, self-sure figure in her tan walking suit. The serenity and balance of abounding health, the vigor and sanity of rich blood, showed in her fresh skin, her clear, gray eyes, her lithe symmetry. She was of the sun, the spotless snow, the clean air, this girl. Frankly, honestly, in the light of the straight things she honored, she judged him.

"Don't let me detain you if you care to go back," she answered, and her tone was steeled in indifference. If there was a throbbing in her throat it was not visible. If a prayer crept unbidden from her heart it was crushed. She watched.

The dead silence of the fog-wrapped mountain, filled only with the drip of moist grasses, closed about them, strained with possibilities of impending disaster. Hargood was in agony, but he snatched at her words.

"Will you stay here?" he asked quickly. "I—I should like to go back—back there—for a while—I must." He kept darting quick glances over his shoulder toward the ravine. "If you are determined to stay—though I can't see why—Julia."

At his stammering, appealing speech something gave in the girl's restraint. Her armor weakened at no joint, but there was a traitor within. Her level gaze fell, her head drooped for an instant. When she looked up again her eyes were no longer upon Hargood but averted from him along the Reisenweg toward the hotel. It was as if she had seen the thing for which she had watched and had put it from her for all time.

"You will stay here—while I go?" repeated Hargood. "You will be quite safe at this spot, I am sure."

"Yes," she answered wearily. "Yes, yes, anything—go!"

For the first time it reached the man's agitated preoccupation that something was decidedly wrong with Julia. The knowledge added once more to his perplexities. He bit his lips, stared, then frowned. "Once more, will you come with me?" he asked.

Her response was only a slow, negative movement of the head and a little gesture with her lax fingers as if unconsciously freeing them from some remaining shred that clung unpleasantly.

Hargood stared a moment longer, then spun on his heel. His drawn face was that of a man overburdened. Jamming his alpine hat upon his head, he hurried off into the fog.

The girl remained leaning upon her staff, almost without breath until the last padding footstep had died away. Suddenly she started and looked about her questioningly. She was alone on the flank of the mountain in the dim circle of the fog. Both hands pressed convulsively against her breast.

"It came in time," she breathed. "Oh, if I had not known until later! I am thankful, thankful!"

Swiftly she gathered the folds of her short cloak about her and without a backward glance vanished in the direction of the hotel. Something, a soft and stricken sound, stole through the mist, but it might have been the drip from the weeping grasses on the mountain-side.

II

EVART RIPLEY sought Hargood where he stood, glooming, in the billiard-room of the Hotel zum Brughorn. It was clear to that perspicacious young man that even the distressing exhibition of the English game then in progress could not wholly account for his friend's knotted brows and heavy stare. Whereupon he felt moved to lumber into action after his own ponderous manner.

"You've had a fuss," he began knowingly.

Hargood's brooding gaze expressed witless vacuity.

"A broil," continued Evart. "Don't tell me! I noticed she wouldn't look at you during dinner. And she never called for your testimony explaining to the Major where you two were while the landslips were messing up the Reisenweg this afternoon. Huh! When she said you came back by the valley path and the funicular she had that soothery, peppery, April-fool-molasses-taffy way she always uses for fibs. I knew right away you must have been off somewhere having a lovely scrap."

Hargood shrugged.

"Oh, yes, I'm wise," continued Evart, nodding his big head sagely. "I've not been her brother for nothing. She will scrap. You'll have to learn."

Hargood winced under the club-footed

pleasantry. "Chase away and play!" he growled.

Evart's blue saucers widened. "Oo-o-o!" he commented. "Bad as that? Look-a-here, old man, you ain't going to let it get serious, are you?"

The hand he tucked under Hargood's arm was strong and commanding and sure. For all his blundering youth there was a massive solidity about Julia's brother that had been a source of infinite comfort to Hargood's more subtle temperament during their college days. The touch won the other out of his morbid reserve.

"Serious?" he repeated, with a level glance into the cheerful blue eyes. "It's more serious than I care to think. If I did not know that your father had made all arrangements for climbing the Brughorn to-morrow and that my withdrawal would disappoint him keenly, I should leave here to-night."

"Tush!" said Evart incredulously. "You wouldn't do that."

"I ought to," returned Hargood, in a burst. "I'm not welcome any longer. She won't speak to me. I can't get a word with her. It's all a frightful mystery and nightmare!" His fingers interlocked.

"Listen to him!" mocked Evart.

"I'm giving up. I shall get the first steamer for New York."

"Rot!"

Hargood nodded.

"But look-a-here," protested the boy, "just last week you said there was only one thing kept you from asking her."

A twinge of pain shot across Hargood's mouth.

"Is that one thing still in the way?" continued Evart, pressing laboriously after the truth.

"No," said Hargood.

"Then it's been removed?"

"It was removed to-day."

"To-day!" cried Evart, scouring his hair. "Then why under heaven aren't you planning honeymoons instead of moping here? What more do you want? Haven't I trained you personally for this event? Haven't I told you you could win any time you would permit yourself to try?"

"It's kindly of you," said Hargood, simply. "But it's no use. Goodness knows this should have been the happiest evening I have ever known if things had gone right. But I've lost her. She detests me. I suspect the reason and it will be enough to say that it is one no gentleman could bring himself to combat."

"Tragedy!" proclaimed Evart hollowly, and clapped a hand to his forehead. "Dark and chill despair! Come here, you——" He yanked Hargood into a corner.

"Now I'm going to make a bet with you. I'm playing my own dope and it's good. Based on past performances and general hunch. See? I'll bet you—four francs, that's all I have—four francs, that she'll never let you get away from her. Understand? Whatever *you* may think about it isn't worth a whoop. You may *think* you're going to cut it. My boy, you're not a free agent. You couldn't if you wanted to. Come! Four francs she'll never let you get away from her in the wide, wide world. Are you game?"

"I'm tired," said Hargood wearily.

But Evart would not relax his mighty paw. "Is it a bet?" he insisted.

"Just as you say," murmured Hargood, for the sake of escape.

He went up to his room and passed a sleepless night.

III

THE party, clad and booted for rough work, left the hotel before sunrise with Otto, the head guide, and Jergens, his helper. An hour's easy climb brought them to the snow-line, the verge of that far white country that ends in distant minarets piercing the sky.

Past them, a short, sheer drop below, flowed the mighty glacier, barred and ridged with greenish crevasses in parallel chevrons that the eye followed up and up into the nest of peaks. Clustered on either side, their massy bases walling the frozen river, the giants of the range reared beyond and before them, in bluff angles, rocky arêtes, smooth contours, shelf upon shelf, vista upon vista, height upon height, to the soaring caps that tossed into the blue at the zenith. Just across rose the lesser summit of the Brughorn, less inacessible than its overtowering neighbors, but a proud, bright garmented courtier to these kings.

Lowering glacier-glasses over their eyes in the glare that shot like barbed lances from the snow, they descended to the glacier. Before essaying the slippery slope ahead they unslung the ropes and the Major

arranged the strings for the ascent. Hargood found himself assigned to the string with Julia which Jergens was to lead. He looked for some maneuver that would change this disposition, but she made no sign.

Then a strange thing happened. A thing that brought throaty, Teutonic oaths from Otto and wondering exclaim from the others. Jergens stooped to recover the rope which had fallen from his shoulders. As he did so a hummock of snow gave treacherously under his foot. The sole of the shoe, clogged between the spikes, slid sharply along the ice, and he fell heavily, twisting the foot and bringing his whole weight upon it. Examination showed that he had wrenched the ankle badly.

"*Jener verdammte,* Jergens," groaned Otto.

"Did ever man hear the like of it, sir?" demanded the Major, puffing out his cheeks indignantly. "A guide and mountaineer born, recommended by the Alpine Club, falling on an ice-field as level as a billiard-table and doubling a joint like a man of straw!"

Jergens made no defense. Never a wordy man, he seemed now quite dazed and sat nursing the injured member, nodding over the objurgations of Otto, as if they had been precious bits of wisdom, which was possibly the case.

"I shall not abandon the ascent!" fumed the Major. "I say, sir, I shall not!"

"Right!" said Evart, promptly. "Hargood's a tiptop climber. He can look after Julia if we lead the way." He turned a sly eye upon Hargood, who was unappreciative.

"Then what are we to do with Jergens?" asked Julia, with a troubled glance at her father.

"Haul him back to the rest-hut above the glacier," said Evart. "He'll be happy with a cold bandage and a sack of tobacco."

"Sir," said the Major gratefully, "I have hopes of you, decided hopes."

"Sir," returned his son, as with Hargood and Otto he prepared a carrying seat for the disabled guide, "you do me too much honor, too much!"

When the forces were reformed once more Hargood was leader of a string, and that string was Julia. Otto led the other, with the Major in the middle and Evart tailing. After the ropes had been knotted through the steel rings on the broad climbing-belts both parties began the first pull, up the central ridge of the tremendous river of ice that flowed from the roof of the world.

Long scrambling among the green-mawed crevasses with which the monstrous shoulders of the glacier were gored and slashed brought them to a steeper rise where their real struggle with the Brughorn itself began.

Up the sheer face of spiring cliffs they toiled, gripping the ice garment. At times they braced on spurs and splinters of the shaly foundation, all too insecure save for the rigidity of the frozen bands. Again they hung on sharp lips of granite or cut footholds with their climbing-axes under the lee of some beetling pinnacle where they might breathe a moment.

Through the difficult negotiation of the climb Hargood kept careful guard over his attitude toward Julia. Intent upon his task, he let no weakness lure his attention to an outblown wisp of curl or the lithe, graceful swing of a girlish figure below him. If his pulse pounded when the rope tugged suddenly over an ugly place, if he caught his holds hard and chose them cautiously, if the vision of an audacious red tam-o'-shanter and lips to match danced at the back of his head, he made no advance to restore the lost comradeship. She, at her end of the rope, was unaware of him.

The upper ice-field was won and crossed. Above rose the slope of the Brughorn's massive head, cruelly white and smooth and hopeless.

"No brown-stone flight here!" Evart called down to them. "Better wait, you people. Otto says the copper rods have been buried and we'll have to feel out a new way."

Hargood and Julia stood apart on the field, while the first string, with clutch of pick-headed axes and bodies pressed against the steeper wall, pulled slowly up. In their ascent they disappeared at intervals in the ice-dust that burdened the down-sweeping wind from the peak.

"Collis," came Evart's hail from far above, "look out for this blind here! Rotten clear through under good black ice."

Hargood made mental note. A blind, where the surface offers a fair hold over a false heart, is to the climber what the air-hole is to the skater.

The Major waved to them through a lull in the flake-mists a few moments later and the first string passed definitely out of sight

beyond a ridge. As if its exit from the slope had been the cue for the scene-shifters of the mountain the pitiless white light of the snow went out. Hargood looked up quickly. The sun had vanished. A dark, whirling, smoke-like cloud was circling in about the peak and the air smote suddenly with a damp ache.

"THAT'S bad, Miss Ripley," he said impulsively, pointing upward. "You know how storms gather and break in a moment along this range. We'll wait here under the shelving rock until it passes."

It was simple mountain-sense, such as any Alpinist must have used, such as Major Ripley himself would have approved. To attempt the glassy slide in a snow-flurry was mere madness.

Julia had been standing as far away from him as the rope that joined them would permit. At his words she turned toward him, then, with a brusque gesture, raised the heavy black glasses from her eyes, snapping them over her hat. She took Hargood in slowly, from head to foot, as one examines a repellent object thrust upon the attention. If she had somewhat veiled her judgment of him before, she spoke it now in a blaze. The man recoiled from her before her lips parted, so intense was the scorn in her glance.

"Mr. Hargood," she said, precisely and very distinctly, "I think I made it clear yesterday that you are free to follow your own course without considering me. If you are afraid, kindly untie the rope from your belt. I have no wish to be linked to—a *coward!*"

The word slashed him like a whip of white-hot metal. Every nerve in his body leaped under the impact. He went the color of the snow; then, as he braced, the hot blood surged back to the surface in a raging flood. His hands clenched about the ice-staff with a spasmodic strength while with supreme effort he forced down the wild, insensate surging of revolt. The girl, aroused as she was, quailed before the dumb cry of suffering from his stricken manhood.

For a space he stood, every fiber twanging. Then, with a thrust of his underjaw that brought each lean muscle out like a plaited cord, he whirled and strode forward. In another moment they had attacked the slope.

Hargood's instinct was for frenzied action, but after a few yards he was forced to painful deliberation. The numbing wind plucked at him with eager fingers as he worked from hold to hold. Grips were hard to find or to make upon the evasive ice-sheath. Before they had gained fifty feet above the field the dark, menacing snow-clouds swept upon them and Hargood knew that he had been right. It was a flurry, and no trifle.

Dashing the gathering moisture from his eyes with frozen glove, he worked on, seeking in violent effort surcease from the pain at his heart. The dancing, wreathing flakes enveloped him. Glancing below, he could scarcely distinguish the figure of the girl he still loved in all faith and tenderness. In that bitter moment he was aware that it was so, that it could never be otherwise. With the thought, the folly of this risk to her came clear before him. But he could not find it in him to go back. The wound was raw. He stiffened to his task.

Up and up he wriggled and hacked and spiked. A sharper rise confronted him, the arête over which the first string had disappeared. He took a wide angle to the left, edging in search of a supporting ledge. He had long since lost the trail of the others in the swirl and twilight of the storm. He found a narrow shelf whereon he kneeled and, selecting a likely spot beyond the break, he drove the shod end of his climbing-ax into the ice.

As he made good his grip a sudden drag upon his waist threw him backward. Julia had slipped. The combined weight of the two climbers fell upon the ax and tore it free. He had struck the blind.

Hargood retained, from the next few moments, the vague, hazed impression of a racking fall down a furrowed incline, vain graspings at unaiding ice—and the face of death. In a vivid flash of comprehension it came to him that his angle to the left had carried them far along the flank of the peak. Below them lay, not the ice-field from which they had come, but—emptiness, and the glacier two thousand feet down. And the poignant pain was the thought of Julia, who had been entrusted to his care, "shooting" the slide somewhere near him at the other end of the rope.

His last sensation was the feeling that he had pitched over the final dip into the void beyond. Then breath and life were driven from him in a terrific shock.

IV

WHEN he returned to a sense of his surroundings he fancied himself for a time to be not in the land of the living. Outward and below, his gaze met floating puffs of cloud, through which dazzling sunbeams danced and flickered. Looking between his feet he caught a glimpse of the wrinkled surface of the glacier straight below him. Lazily he noted a particular crevasse of V shape, wide as a street when he had passed it a few hours before, that now showed no bigger than a line on his palm. He seemed to be peeping into a gigantic cut-glass bowl filled with cream whip. The jagged circle of peaks that marked the horizon was the edge and through a hole in the froth he saw the earth itself, no bigger than a prune.

Suddenly he became conscious that his shoulders and heels were resting lightly against a wall of rock. From that he grew to the conviction that he was hanging by his own belt, which had tightened up under his arms. His head swam and actuality swept back to him. He was suspended, without support, over two thousand feet of space!

"Julia!" he cried, and again, "Julia!" in a voice that held all of agony, dread and love. The quick response from a little way above was the sweetest sound he had ever known. He craned his head, but could not see her. The rope by which he hung ran up to a jutting rock and from there out of his sight. She was some ten feet higher on the mountain than was he, he judged. Warmth stole through his veins again as he listened.

"It's all right, for the present," she was saying. "We came down a short distance apart and the slack of the rope caught over a projecting elbow of shale. The shock almost wrenched it loose, but it holds. Don't move, please."

"But you?" he demanded impatiently. "Are you hurt? Are you safe?"

"Safe and not hurt," she answered quietly. "I slid into a depression here like a trough, where I have a fair grip, enough to keep us as we are."

Hargood grinned with pure relief and delight. The snow had passed and the sun now flooded the sheer wall of the Brughorn in brilliance. Under its searching glare the man's strong face showed only serenity and gratitude. He laughed aloud. There was no tremor in his voice.

"Then here we are, hung over that tooth of rock like a pair of skates on a nail, one above the other——" he checked abruptly. "What about that rope?" he went on, in a subtly altered tone. "How has it caught? You say it's hitched over an elbow of shale. How firm is the shale—quick!"

"I—I think it is safe," came the answer.

The words stumbled. Hargood felt it and the corded muscles of his jaw gathered as he frowned out into the sun-filled void. "Take hold of the flap of your belt, do you hear, Julia?" he said, and his speech was crisp with dominance and command. "Loosen it—loosen the flap from the tongue and hold it in place with your hand. Are you minding what I say?"

"Well?" she returned.

"Now watch the elbow of shale where the rope is caught. If the rope slips, or the shale crumbles, even a trifle, don't wait to see what happens—let go your belt flap!"

She was silent for a space. "But what will you do?" she asked. There was a curious note in the question.

"Never mind me," he said, with positive savagery. "Do what I say."

"But why?"

"Do it!"

"I won't, till you tell me why."

"So I won't yank you with me if the rope gives way," he roared in exasperation.

"Then if I loosen my belt, and the rope should give way——"

"My weight would simply whip your belt clear of you and leave you safe in that depression of yours."

"Ah," she said slowly. "But don't you see, the rope might start to slip and then catch again. If I let go my belt right away at the first alarm——"

"Do what I say!" he shouted.

A tiny thrill ran along the line, like the pluck of a bird's claw. The man did not feel it. But the girl, lying on her side in a shallow break of the cliff, felt and saw. Her eyes were fixed upon the point a few feet beyond and above her, where the rope hung over the frail tooth of rock. She choked back a cry.

"Have you done it?" he called up to her.

"Yes," she said meekly.

STARING down through the dizzy gulf beneath his feet with an eye at peace, he cast about for the surest way to ease her.

"Say," he began chattily, "this is delightful, isn't it? I really think the view from here is superior to the one we would have had from the summit. You see, that little snow-storm has cleared the air for us."

There was another twinge on the line. The man was not aware of it. But the girl knew. Hargood struggled on valiantly.

"Over the scarred hill far across there you can get a glimpse of the pines, do you notice?" he said. "Down, to the left. I do believe I can make out the flag on the hotel, a red dot against the green. And isn't that thin, brown gash part of the Reisenweg —the Reisen——" His even voice tripped. He could have cursed his stupidity. Of all things he had blundered into speaking of the Reisenweg, that hateful path where his hope had died.

"Yes, Mr. Hargood," came the answer softly. "You were saying—the Reisenweg?"

"Er—yes—the Reisenweg." To save himself he could not get past that word gracefully. "Then observe to the right," he hastened on, "there are the peaks of the Altenhorn, the——"

"But the Reisenweg," said the voice above him. It was very gentle, strangely gentle. "You were saying?"

"Why—nothing," he stammered. "But look over there to the right——"

"Please don't make me look to the right," she said. "Tell me about the Reisenweg." The tone was pleading.

He stared out into the creamy clouds aghast. What a mess he had made of this attempt to be casual and conventional. "The—ah—Reisenweg, Miss Ripley?"

"Wont you help me?"

"Help you!" he exclaimed. He did not understand.

"But it is just; I should take it upon myself, without help," she went on more firmly. "Like a woman I still tried to shoulder all upon you. Mr. Hargood, can you find the way to forgive—a wicked, stupid girl? Can you accept the remorse of one who has hurt you cruelly?"

Hargood mentally writhed. It was the last tack he could have wished the conversation to take. It came too close to the wellsprings of emotion, and it was his plain duty to calm her, to keep up her nerve against a catastrophe so that she might save herself by prompt action.

"Why, of course, Miss Ripley," he blurted, "there is no forgiving. I have simply forgotten—everything except this view. Now over there to the right——"

"No, no," she interrupted, and his heart vibrated to the full, resonant tone, "I must make reparation—what I can. Let it be clear between us, Mr. Hargood——"

She stopped with a sharp intake of breath. Once more came the thrill running along the rope. Hargood was unaware. But the girl, every faculty centered upon the tooth of rock that held the rope, felt and saw again. Wholesome, sane, clean-fibered as she was, trained to the courageous endurance of the sportsman, she needed all her control to keep her voice clear and steady.

"Yesterday," she went on presently, "I did you the gravest injustice. I—it is hard for me to say this—I thought I had discovered a weakness in you. After the slide came in front of us you wished to go back. I made it then, in my foolish pride, a test. When you left me I was sure. But I could not be true, even to my blind, dull self, unless I told you that what you have done, and said, this day, after all my cruelty, have made me proud that I should have known such a man!" She ended in a rush of feeling.

The ready crimson mounted to Hargood's face. "I—I—you make me very happy, Julia," he said, dropping into the old form without effort. "This more than compensates. And now—that you have said what you have—do you think it would be the act of a cad for me to explain what took place yesterday on the Reisenweg? I beg you to believe I should never have spoken without your invitation."

"I am not worthy," she murmured. "It can't matter."

"You are worthy of all," he said simply.

THE belt cut his chest, his shoulders ached under the dead weight of his body, but he gave no heed. This was a moment for which in the wildest fancies of delirium the night before he had not dared to hope. The clouds were gathering in about the Brughorn again, shadowing its cliffs, and the peak wind had sharpened. His words came to her through the gusts as he began, quietly and simply:

"There was once a man of stupendous talent and rotted heart, Bevis by name. This man had gifts which made him, at twenty-five, one of the most promising artists of the year at the Salon and instincts

which made him, before the same year was out, one of the most notorious of international criminals. He carried off, within three months, a series of startling impersonations and forgeries which put the police of the world on his track. Rewards were out for him in five countries. His name and likeness were placarded everywhere. The press rang with his crimes and narrow escapes. You must have heard of him—Bevis?"

"Yes," she answered, wondering.

"The friends of Bevis wiped him from their memories. His family hid its sorrow as it could. Meanwhile this cultured scamp, this artist criminal, continued at large. He was pressed for means. Trading upon the shame of his relatives, upon their fear of his capture and the revelation of his identity, he began a system of blackmail. His favorite victim was his younger brother. Are you listening?"

She murmured assent, abstractedly. Her strained gaze never left the tooth of shale.

"To this brother Bevis became a scourge and a parasite," went on Hargood, "dogging his steps, mocking him, begging, threatening, terrorizing, tyrannizing. With the years the scandal had faded somewhat from the public mind. The younger brother had ventured to hold up his head once more among men. And this was the opportunity of Bevis."

He paused, for something rose in his throat. Presently he resumed, calmly.

"I am the younger brother of Bevis Hargood.

"It was easy enough until I met you, Julia. I paid him what he asked, did his will, withstood his polished sarcasm, his envy and his taunts. As a child he had been my idol. As a man he was my burden. But when he learned, as he did, with fiendish certainty—that you meant much to me, he became intolerable. He saw me slipping from his grasp, he saw me—pardon this, Julia—sharing my life with another and strengthened against him by dearer interests. A month ago he came to me in New York.

"'You are, perhaps, thinking of marrying?' he asked me. I can not indicate his provocative and insulting manner.

"'What then?' I asked.

"He tapped me on the chest. 'Poor Collis,' he said, with his stinging sneer. 'Poor old chap! I have too much affection for you, Collis, too much abiding affection. I shall watch over you, believe me. You shall come to no such fate while you have an elder brother to prevent it.'

"I started up at him, crying to know what he meant. He waved his adieu from the doorway. 'I shall watch over you, Collis, never fear,' he taunted. 'I shall be with you at Philippi. When the affair becomes interesting, look out for me. I shall be on hand. I imagine the young lady's family does not know your elder brother, Collis.'

"That was the last I knew of him, Julia, until yesterday on the Reisenweg, in the fog. As we crossed the bridge in the ravine I saw him. He was seated on a boulder off the path and he looked worn with travel. Apparently he had come far on foot.

"He looked at me, and the sneer was on his face. I feared he might speak. In the veiling curtain of the mist you did not notice him. I was thankful for that and hurried away.

"Then came the landslips. I know now that you read my agitation. You were right. I did show weakness. I was almost certain the first slide had plunged down the ravine, where I had just seen him.

"Do you mark what confronted me? If I went back with you and found him alive he was capable, with his devilish aplomb of revealing himself and my shame on the spot, —nay, of grossly insulting you. I dreaded your learning my secret, Julia. Of all things I dreaded it. I had hidden from you, with despairing caution, that Bevis, the criminal, was the brother of the man who had come to love you.

"I never meant to tell you as long as he was alive, never meant that you should know, even though I had to give up my hope of you. I may say it now, Julia, I think. I formed the resolve after that last meeting in New York. Whatever happened I had no right to call you to share that burden. But, do you see? If we returned to that ravine and found him he was capable of shattering my last chance on the spot.

"And yet—and yet, Julia, he was my brother. I pictured him lying there, injured, crushed, crying pitifully for help. Pictures come vividly to my mind. I am made so. And the thought that he was in instant need drove me frantic. If we went back, it might be only to meet his taunts and sneers and to lose you. If we did not go

back, and it should appear afterward that I had failed in duty toward him, I should never rid myself of the reproach. He was my brother.

"So it was that when you refused to come with me and seemed willing to await me on the path, I snatched at the compromise. I knew there could be no danger where you and I were standing at that moment. The cliff was ribbed with limestone. I felt you would be safe there. I hurried back alone."

Again Hargood paused, with the something in his throat.

"He is there, Julia, in the ravine," he continued gently. "I made sure, and I meant to tell you the story. But when I came back along the Reisenweg you were gone; and at the hotel later I knew from your scorn of me that you suspected—that I had lost all in your eyes. I could not combat it. That is all—I think."

SILENCE fell between them. Then sweetly, a little choked sob stole down the ice-bound rock and took refuge in his breast.

"Julia!" he cried.

"Collis, Collis—dear, brave one!"

He could only breathe her name and reach up impotent hands in bewildered welcome of the miracle.

"How can I ever blot out the wrong of that word to you?" she murmured. "Even here, on the lip of death, after taking thought for my safety you must rattle nonsense to keep up my courage. Dear, brave heart—the kindest, truest——"

She wept quietly a little. Still he whispered her name. Oh, the cruel, cruel chance that kept him out of reach, out of sight of her in that moment!

"Collis," she breathed, "there is not much I can share with you. Here is my one secret, mine for yours. It is right you should know, now. Since we have been here the rope has slipped three times!"

"The rope!"

"Yes. I have not taken my eyes from it. At this moment, it no longer has the shale for support. It is clinging on a thin splinter of ice."

"But, Julia! Julia! Didn't I tell you—beg you——"

"To let my belt slip?" she said tenderly, and if it be that words may smile through tears, then did hers. "Yes. But am I to make the move to send you to death? Three times, by your orders, I should have let you fall. And yet I still hold you."

"Girl!" he cried in anguish. "If you love me——"

"What? Let you go?" she mocked gently. The tone caressed him.

"At least you have your belt-flap free and ready, so that when I go I sha'n't drag you with me?"

"Oh, that—of course," she answered smoothly.

"I suppose I shall have to be content with that," he sighed.

A darting sunbeam found a way through the clotted clouds and kissed the stern, old rock in a fleeting flash. The down-sweeping gusts of ice-flakes glowed like diamond showers.

When they spoke again it was of simple things, friends at home, places they had visited together, kindly hours of the past Summer. Thought welded to thought over the break of the ice-coated cliff and they held close communion. Only once, before the end, did either refer to the terror that hung over them.

"Julia," said Hargood softly, "if I could see your face, just for an instant!"

"Yes," she answered patiently. "But we can call, one to the other. I shall hear you, dear."

He mused for a time. "This has its compensations," he decided.

After that they talked on and there was no pain in any precious remembrance. They sought and freshened each picture out of their lives that reflected a mutual interest, finding content and comfort.

It was while Julia was speaking of her brother's love for him that the signal came. She broke off abruptly as the tiny thrill leaped down the rope. He felt it now.

"Good-by, Collis—dear heart!" she whispered.

"Good-by!" he said, and, "Good-by!"

He nursed no regret, no bitterness. She, at least, was safe.

"Hold ready with the belt-flap," he warned, and rested his head a little wearily against the rock.

SUDDENLY, borne on the chill breath from the peak, came a sound like a faint trumpet-blast. It roused them both with tingling nerves. Again the note trilled, unmistakably a hail, the far-piercing call of the mountaineer.

Hargood sensed the meaning and the strain that would fall upon them, the starting of hope, the slowly dragging minutes of suspense after their calm resignation.

"Steady, girl, steady!" he warned. "Don't answer till you catch a full breath."

It was timely aid. With desperate effort of muscle and will Julia regained mastery of herself, aching eyes fixed upon the frail point where the rope clung, numb lips repeating his command. She raised a quavering hail in answer.

Quick shouts showed that she was heard. She repeated her cry. Deep-throated response in another key came back. She glanced once from the rope to the upper surfaces. If it should slip again—now!

Hours had passed, it seemed to her, before Otto, high above, caught sight of her and bellowed. He worked nearer and leaned out.

Swiftly, in three emphatic phrases, she explained the imminent danger. Then, after another long interval, a blessed line wriggled in tantalizing spirals down the cliff.

She watched it dully, exhausted, incapable of further emotion after the last terrific revulsion. Like a live thing it snaked and whirled and looped, dropping too far to the right, then too far to the left. It coiled over the edge. Then she saw it tighten with a pull from below and she knew that Hargood had caught it.

The world went blank——

SAFE on the upper ice-field, with the couple they had all but given up, the rescuers indulged in a very creditable imitation of a Sioux war-dance, a strange, yelping group amid the white, cold reaches of the Brughorn. Major Ripley whooped and jigged about on his thin old legs, stopping ever and anon to pat Julia's pale cheek foolishly. Evart hugged her and Hargood indiscriminately, footing clumsy, intricate steps the while. Otto rejoiced vigorously in his own guttural tongue. He halted sharply to break out, with notable emphasis, "*Jener verdammte*, Jergens!"

Probably no tribal humorist of the Alemanni ever achieved the success that came to Otto for that unpremeditated sally. It was the relief they needed and laughter restored them to sanity.

Then Hargood told what he had to tell, omitting certain important details for an effective climax. But Julia, half in mischief, wholly in love, robbed him of it.

"You see," he was saying, to the breathless audience, "through some wonderful chance, Julia slid to a safe hold. Even if the rope had slipped she could have let go her belt, which she had loosened. So she was entirely out of danger——"

"But I hadn't!" interrupted Julia, and her eyes were turned on Hargood with a look that sent red ripples through his blood. She gave a little toss of her tam-o'-shanter. "I hadn't loosened my belt. I hadn't touched my belt. I was holding to the rope with both hands!"

He blinked at her. "Why—Julia!" he cried. "You mean——"

"That's just what I mean," she nodded vigorously. "I couldn't have saved you, dear, but I shouldn't have let you go—alone!"

Evart fell upon him bodily. "What for a dopester am I, Collis?" he chortled. "What for a dopester? She wouldn't let you go! Four francs, please!"

A POINT OF TESTIMONY

BY CAROLYN WELLS

BERT BAYLISS was the funniest detective you ever saw. He wasn't the least like Vidocq, Lecoq or Sherlock, either in personality or mentality. And perhaps the chief difference lay in the fact that he possessed a sense of humor, and that not merely an appreciative sense, either. He had an original wit and a spontaneous repartee that made it well-nigh impossible for him to be serious.

Not quite, though, for he had his thinking moments; and when he did think, he did it so deeply yet rapidly that he accomplished wonders.

And so he was a detective. Partly because it pleased his sense of humor to pursue a calling so incongruous with his birth and station, and partly because he couldn't help it, having been born one. He was a private detective, but none the less a professional; and he accepted cases only when they seemed especially difficult or in some way unusual.

As is often the case with those possessed of a strong sense of humor, Bayliss had no very intimate friends. A proneness to fun always seems to preclude close friendships, and fortunately precludes also the desire for them. But as every real detective needs a Dr. Watson as a sort of mind-servant, Bert Bayliss invented one, and his Harris (he chose the name in sincere flattery of Sairey Gamp) proved competent and satisfactory. To Harris Bayliss propounded his questions and expounded his theories, and being merely a figment of Bayliss' brain, Harris was always able to give intelligent replies. Physically, too, young Bayliss was far from the regulation type of the prevalent detective of fiction.

No aquiline nose was his, no sinister eyebrows, no expression of omniscience and inscrutability. Instead, he was a stalwart, large-framed young man, with a merry, even debonair face, and a genial, magnetic glance. He was a man who inspired confidence by his frankness, and whose twinkling eyes seemed to see the funny side of everything.

Though having no close friendships, Bayliss had a wide circle of acquaintances, and was in frequent demand as a week-end visitor or a dinner guest. Wherefore, not being an early riser, the telephone at his bedside frequently buzzed many times before he was up of a morning.

Every time that bell gave its rasping whir Bayliss felt an involuntary hope that it might be a call to an interesting case of detective work, and he was distinctly disappointed if it proved to be a mere social message. One morning just before nine o'clock the bell wakened him from a light doze, and taking the receiver, he heard the voice of his old friend Martin Hopkins talking to him.

"I want you at once," the message came; "I hope nothing will prevent your coming immediately. I am in Clearbrook. If you can catch the nine-thirty train from the City, I will meet you here at the station at ten

o'clock. There has been murder committed and we want your help. Will you come?"

"Yes," replied Bayliss. "I will take the nine-thirty. Who is the victim?"

"Richard Hemmingway, my lifelong friend. I am a guest at his house. The tragedy occurred last night, and I want you to get here before anything is touched."

"I'll be there! good-by," and hanging up the receiver, Bayliss proceeded to keep his word.

"You see, Harris," he said, silently, to his impalpable friend, "Martin Hopkins is a gentleman of the old school and a man whom I greatly admire. If he calls me to a case requiring detective investigation, you may be sure it's an interesting affair and quite worthy of our attention. Eh, Harris?" The imaginary companion having agreed to this, Bayliss went calmly and expectantly on his way.

At the Clearbrook station he was met by Mr. Hopkins, who proposed that they walk to the house in order that he might tell Bayliss some of the circumstances.

"Mr. Hemmingway was my oldest and best friend," began Mr. Hopkins, "and, with my wife and daughter, I've been spending a few days at his home. He was a widower, and his household includes his ward, Miss Sheldon, his nephew, Everett Collins, a housekeeper, butler, and several underservants. This morning at six o'clock, the butler discovered the body of Mr. Hemmingway in his library, where the poor man had been strangled to death. Clapham, that's the butler, raised an alarm, at once, and ever since then the house has been full of doctors, detectives and neighbors. We are almost there now, so I'll tell you frankly, Bayliss, that I sent for you to look after my own interests. You and I are good friends, and you're the best detective I know. The evidence seems, so far, to point to some one in the house, and among those addle-pated, cocksure detectives now on the case it is not impossible that I may myself be suspected of the crime."

"What!" cried Bert Bayliss in amazement.

"Just that," went on the old man, almost smiling. "Hemmingway and I have had large business transactions of late, and as a big bundle of securities has disappeared from his safe, it may look as if I had a hand in the matter."

"I can't quite take that seriously, Mr. Hopkins, but I'll be glad to look into the case and perhaps I can give justice a boost in the right direction. You've no further hints to give me?"

"No, the hints all point one way, and you'll discover that for yourself soon enough." They walked together up the short path that led to the house of the late Richard Hemmingway.

CLEARBROOK was a small settlement of well-to-do society people, who wished to live near but not in New York. The houses were rather pretentious, with well-kept grounds, and picturesque flower-beds, but Bert Bayliss paid little attention to the landscape as he hurried to the Hemmingway mansion. Once in the drawing-room, Bayliss was presented by Mr. Hopkins to his wife and daughter, also to Miss Sheldon and Mr. Collins.

It was surely a tribute to the young man that all these people, who were fully prepared to treat the detective with a supercilious hauteur, were won at once by his affable and easy demeanor and involuntarily greeted him as a man of their own class and standing.

Mrs. Estey, the housekeeper, was also in the room, and at the moment of Bayliss' arrival, Coroner Spearman was about to begin his preliminary queries of investigation. Quite content to gain his knowledge of the case in this way, Bayliss settled himself to listen.

"Harris," he said silently to his faithful friend, "these are all refined and sensitive people, but, excepting Mr. Hopkins, not one shows a deep or abiding grief at the death of this gentleman. Therefore I deduce that with most of them the loss is fully covered by inheritance."

"Marvelous, my dear Bayliss, marvelous!" replied Harris correctly.

At the command of the coroner, Clapham, the butler, was summoned to give his account of the discovery of the body.

"I came down-stairs at twenty to six, sir," said the pompous but deferential Englishman, "and it would be about six when I reached the master's library. The door was closed, and when I opened it I was surprised to find one of the lamps still burning, the one by the desk, sir. By its light I could see the master still sitting in his chair. At first I thought he had come down-stairs early,

to do some work; then I thought he had been working there all night; and then I thought maybe something was wrong. These thoughts all flew through my mind in quick succession, sir, and, even as I thought them, I was raising the blinds. The daylight poured in, and I saw at once my master was dead, strangled, sir."

"How did you know he was strangled?" asked the coroner.

"Because, sir, his head was thrown back and I could see black marks on his throat."

"What did you do then?"

"First I called Mrs. Estey, who was already in the dining-room, and then, at her advice, I went to Mr. Collins' door and knocked him awake. He hurried downstairs, sir, and he said——"

"Never mind that. Mr. Collins will be questioned later."

"Harris," said Bayliss silently to his friend, "that coroner is no fool."

"No," said Harris.

"If that is all the account of your finding of Mr. Hemmingway's body," continued Mr. Spearman, "tell us now what you know of Mr. Hemmingway's movements of last evening."

"He was in his library all the evening," said Clapham. "He went there directly after dinner, and gave me orders to admit three gentlemen that he expected to call. He told me, sir, that I need not wait up to let them out, as they would stay late, and he would see them to the door himself. The three gentlemen came, sir, between nine and ten o'clock. They came separately, and after I had shown the last one into Mr. Hemmingway's library I did not go to the room again—until this morning. I went to bed, sir, at about eleven o'clock, and at that time they were still there, as I heard them talking when I left the dining-room, sir."

"Good servant, Harris," commented Bayliss; "if this household is broken up, he'll have no trouble in finding a new situation and yet—is he just a trifle too fluent?"

"Perhaps," said Harris agreeably.

Mrs. Estey simply corroborated Clapham's story, and was followed by Everett Collins, who had been the next to appear upon the scene of the tragedy.

Bayliss looked at this young man with interest. He was not of an attractive personality, though handsome and well set up. He had the physical effects of an athlete, but his face was weak and his glance was not straightforward.

"He impresses me as untrustworthy," Bayliss confided to Harris, "and yet, confound the fellow, there's something about him I like."

"Yes," said Harris.

Mr. Collins had little to say. He had been wakened by Clapham from a sound sleep and had hastily run down-stairs to find his uncle indeed dead, and evidently strangled. As to his own movements the night before, he had spent the evening out, had returned at about half-past eleven, had let himself in with his latch-key and had gone to bed. He had noticed that the library door was closed, and he could not say whether any one was in the room or not.

Miss Ruth Sheldon testified to the effect that she had played bridge with Mr. and Mrs. Hopkins and Miss Ethel Hopkins until about eleven, when they had all retired. The Hopkins family corroborated this, and all agreed that they had heard no sound of any sort down-stairs after reaching their rooms.

"It was Mr. Hemmingway's habit," volunteered Miss Sheldon, "if he had late callers, to let them out himself, to close the front door quietly after them, and then to go up to his room with great care in order not to disturb any of us who might be asleep. He was most thoughtful of others' comfort, always."

THE members of the household having been heard, Mr. Spearman turned his attention to some others who sat in a group at a small table. One of these was the lawyer, Mr. Dunbar. He simply stated that he had full charge of Mr. Hemmingway's legal affairs, and was prepared to make an accounting when required. But he added that his client's business with him was not extensive, as the late financier was accustomed personally to look after all such matters as did not require actual legal offices.

Mr. Hemmingway's private secretary, George Fiske, testified that he was in the habit of coming to Mr. Hemmingway's home every day from ten o'clock to four. He had left as usual the day before, at four o'clock, and knew of nothing unusual regarding his employer or his business matters at that time. Fiske had been sent for earlier than usual on this particular morning but could throw no light on the affair. He knew the

three men who called, and they were three of the richest and most influential citizens of Clearbrook, who were more or less associated with Mr. Hemmingway in some large financial interests. As a confidential secretary, Mr. Fiske courteously but firmly declined to go into details of these matters at present.

There seemed to be no reason to suspect any one whose name had been mentioned so far, and the coroner next turned his attention to the possibility of an intruder from outside, who had forced an entrance after the three gentlemen had departed and before Mr. Hemmingway could have left his library.

But investigation proved that the windows were all securely fastened and that the front door shut with a spring lock which could be opened only from the outside by a latchkey. No one, save those who were already accounted for, possessed a latchkey, and as no doors or windows had been forced, it began to look to the coroner as if the evidence pointed to some one inside the house as the criminal.

The doctor declared that Mr. Hemmingway had died between twelve and one o'clock and the three men who had called, being asked over the telephone, asserted that they left the house about midnight. One of these, Mr. Carston, had tarried after the others and had talked a few moments with Mr. Hemmingway at his door, but though this would seem to make Mr. Carston the last person known to have had speech with the dead man, nobody dreamed for a moment of suspecting him. Bayliss' eyes traveled over the assembled listeners.

"Pshaw," he said silently to Harris, "there are too many suspects. Granting the criminal was in the house, it might have been any of the servants, any of the guests, the ward or the nephew. Every one of them had opportunity, for, apparently, after midnight the callers were gone and every one in the house was sound asleep except the victim and the criminal. But the fact of strangulation lets out Mrs. and Miss Hopkins, who are too slender and delicate for such a deed. That big, athletic Miss Sheldon might have done it, had she been inclined; that gaunt, muscular housekeeper could have accomplished it; and as to the men, young Collins, old Mr. Hopkins and that complacent butler are all capable of the deed, physically. So, Harris, as we've heard the facts of the case, we'll now hunt for clues and theories."

"Marvelous, Bayliss, marvelous!" breathed Harris with deep admiration.

II

REACHING the library, Bayliss found the Precinct Inspector busily going through the papers in Mr. Hemmingway's desk. Inspector Garson had heard of the clever Bert Bayliss and was glad to meet him, though a little embarrassed lest the city detective should look upon his own methods as crude.

With the coroner's permission the body of the dead man had been removed, but otherwise no changes had been made in the room. Bayliss glanced interestedly about. There were no signs of a struggle. The position of several chairs showed the presence of callers who had evidently sat around in conversation with their host. The desk, though not especially tidy, showed only the usual paraphernalia of a man of business.

By themselves, in an open box, had been laid the articles taken from the dead man's pockets. Bayliss looked at, without touching, the watch, the bunch of keys, the knife, the pencil, the pile of small coins and the handkerchiefs, which, together with a few papers, comprised the contents of the box.

Then Bayliss looked swiftly but minutely at the desk. The fittings of handsome bronze were of uniform design and rather numerous. Every convenience was there, from pen-rack to paste-pot. There were a great variety of pens, pencils and paper-cutters, while many racks and files held a profusion of stationery, cards and letters.

Yet everything was methodical; the plainly labeled packets of letters, the carefully sorted bills and the neat memoranda here and there, all betokened a systematic mind and a sense of orderly classification.

"The motive was, of course, robbery," said the Inspector, as several others followed Bayliss into the library, "for though everything else seems intact, a large bundle of securities, which Mr. Dunbar knows were in Mr. Hemmingway's safe last Friday, are now gone."

"Oh, those," said George Fiske; "I didn't know you looked on those as missing. I have them at my own rooms."

"You have?" said the surprised Inspec-

tor. "Why did you not state that fact when interviewed by Mr. Spearman?"

"Because," said the young man frankly, "I didn't consider that the time or place to discuss Mr. Hemmingway's finances. I was his confidential secretary, and though prepared to render an account at any time, I am careful not to do so prematurely. The bonds in question are at my home because Mr. Hemmingway gave them to me last Saturday to keep for him temporarily. Here is a list of them."

FISKE took a card of figures from his pocket-book and handed it to the Inspector, who glanced at it with satisfaction and approval.

"You did quite right, Mr. Fiske," he said, "and I'm glad the securities are safe. But then what in your opinion could have been the motive for the deed of last night?"

Fiske made no reply, but the expression on his face seemed to imply, against his will, that he could say something pertinent if he chose.

"Might it not be, Harris," whispered Bayliss, "that that young man overestimates the confidentialness of his secretaryship at this crisis?"

"H'm," said Harris.

Meanwhile the Inspector was rapidly looking over a sheaf of opened letters, each of which bore at its top the rubber-stamped date of receipt.

"Whew!" he whistled, as he read one of these documents. He then looked furtively at George Fiske, who was occupied with some clerical work which had to be done at once. Without a word Inspector Garson handed the letter to Bert Bayliss, signifying by a gesture that he was to read it.

After a glance at signature and date, Bayliss read the whole letter:

Sunday Afternoon,
September 9th.

MY DEAR MR. HEMMINGWAY:

After our talk of yesterday morning, I feel that I must express more fully my appreciation of your declaration of confidence in me, and my gratitude therefor. I was so surprised when you asked me to act as executor of your will that I fear I was awkward and disappointing in my response. But, believe me, dear sir, I am deeply grateful for your trust in me, and I want to assure you that I shall perform all the duties of which you told me, to the very best of my ability, though I hope and pray the day is far off when such need shall arise. I am not a fluent talker and so take this means of telling you that a chord of my nature was deeply touched when you asked me to assume such a grave responsibility. I am, of course, at your service for further discussion of these matters, but I felt I must formally assure you of my gratitude for your kindness and of my loyalty to your interests.

As to the revelation you made to me, it was so sudden and such a surprise, I can not bear to think your suspicions are founded on the truth; but as you requested, I will observe all I can, without seeming intrusive or curious. I have in safe keeping the papers you entrusted to my care, and I hope our present relations may continue for many happy years.

Faithfully yours,
GEORGE FISKE.

With his usual quick eye for details, Bayliss noted that the letter was dated two days before (that is, the day before the murder, which occurred Monday night); it was postmarked at the Clearbrook post-office Sunday evening, and had therefore, been delivered to Mr. Hemmingway by the first post Monday morning. This was corroborated by the rubber stamped line at the top of the first page, which read: "Received, September 10."

The letter was among a lot labeled "To be answered," and it seemed to Bayliss a very important document.

"I think," he said aloud to the Inpsector, "that we would be glad to have Mr. Fiske tell us the circumstances that led to the writing of this manly and straightforward letter."

George Fiske looked up at the sound of his name. "Has that come to light?" he said, blushing a little at being thus suddenly brought into prominence. "I supposed it would, but somehow I didn't want to refer to it until some one else discovered it."

"Tell us all about it," said Bayliss, in his pleasant, chummy way, and at once Fiske began.

"Last Saturday morning," he said, "Mr. Hemmingway had a long talk with me. He expressed his satisfaction with my work as his secretary and kindly avowed his complete trust and confidence in my integrity. He then asked me if I would be willing to act as executor of his estate, when the time should come that such a service was necessary. He said it was his intention to bring the whole matter before his lawyer in a few days, but first he wished to be assured of my willingness to act as executor. He told me, too, that he would add a codicil to his will, leaving me a moderate sum of money. All of this was on Saturday morning, and when I left at noon, as I always do on Saturdays, he gave me a large bundle of securities, and also his will, asking me to keep them for him for a few days."

"You have his will, then?" asked Inspector Garson quickly.

"I have; and also the bonds of which I have given you a memorandum. They are all at your disposal at any time."

"Then Mr. Hemmingway died without adding the codicil to his will in your favor," observed Bayliss.

"Yes," replied Fiske, "but that is a minor matter in the face of the present tragedy."

Bayliss felt slightly rebuked, but he couldn't help admiring the manly way in which Fiske had spoken.

"AND this conversation occurred on Saturday," went on Mr. Garson. "You took occasion to write to Mr. Hemmingway on Sunday?"

"I did," agreed Fiske. "I was so surprised at the whole thing that I was unable to express myself at our interview. I am always tongue-tied under stress of great surprise or excitement. So I sat down Sunday afternoon and wrote to Mr. Hemmingway. I mailed the letter Sunday evening and he had already received it when I reached here on Monday morning, at ten o'clock, as usual."

"Did he refer to your letter?" asked Bayliss.

"Yes; he said he was glad I wrote it, and that he would answer it on paper that I might also have his sentiments in black and white. Then he said we would discuss the matter more fully after a day or two, and we then turned our attention to other matters."

"And this revelation he made to you?" queried Inspector Garson, running his eyes over the letter.

Mr. Fiske hesitated and looked not only embarrassed but genuinely disturbed.

"That, Mr. Garson, I want to be excused from telling."

"Excused from telling! Why, man, it may help to elucidate the mystery of Mr. Hemmingway's death!"

"Oh, I hope not, I hope not!" said Fiske, so earnestly that both Bayliss and the Inspector looked at him in surprise.

"You *do* know something," said Mr. Garson quickly, "that may have a bearing on the mystery, and I must insist that you tell it."

"It is because it may *seem* to have a bearing that I hesitate," said Mr. Fiske gravely. "But, to put it boldly, as I told you I am not fluent under stress of excitement; in a word, then, Mr. Hemmingway implied to me, that—that he had a half-defined fear that sometime his life might—might end suddenly."

"In the way it did?"

"Yes, in that way. He feared that some one desired his death, and that was the reason he asked me to care for his will and his valuable securities for a few days."

"Why were these things not in a safety deposit vault?" asked Bert Bayliss.

"They have been; but a few days ago Mr. Hemmingway had them brought home to make some records and changes, and as it was Saturday he could not send them back then, so he gave them to me. I have a small safe at home, and of course I was willing to keep them for him."

"Then Mr. Hemmingway feared both robbery and murder," said Bayliss, and Mr. Fiske shuddered at this cold-blooded way of putting it.

"Yes, he did," said the secretary frankly.

"And whom did he suspect as his enemy?"

"That I hope you will allow me not to answer."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Fiske," broke in the Inspector, "but you have knowledge possessed by no one else. You must, therefore, in the interests of justice, tell us the name of the man whom Mr. Hemmingway feared."

"The man," said George Fiske slowly, "is the one who inherits the bulk of Mr. Hemmingway's fortune."

"Everett Collins, his nephew?"

"His wife's nephew," corrected George Fiske. "Yes, since I am forced to tell it, Mr. Hemmingway feared that Mr. Collins was in haste to come into his inheritance, and—and——"

"You have done your duty, Mr. Fiske," said Inspector Garson, "and I thank you. I quite appreciate your hesitancy, but a crime like this must be punished, if possible, and you need not appear further in the matter. After your evidence the law can take the whole affair into its own hands, and justice will be swift and certain."

III

THE law took its course. Although circumstantial evidence was lacking, the statement of George Fiske and the undoubted opportunity and evident motive, combined, caused the arrest of Everett Collins.

The will, when produced, left nearly all the estate to him, and as he was known to be a thriftless, improvident young man, the majority of those interested felt convinced that he was indeed the villain.

The property of the late Mr. Hemmingway, however, was of far less amount than was generally supposed, and also, the large fortune which he had in trust for his ward, Miss Sheldon, had dwindled surprisingly. But this, of course, was in no way the fault of the nephew, and it was thought that Mr. Hemmingway had perhaps been unfortunate in his investments. George Fiske became executor, as desired by the late millionaire, but probate of the will was deferred until after Everett Collins should have been tried at the bar of justice.

Collins himself was stubbornly quiet. He seemed rather dazed at the position in which he found himself, but had nothing to say except a simple assertion of his innocence.

"And he *is* innocent, Harris!" declared Bert Bayliss soundlessly. "No villain ever possessed that simple straightforward gaze. Villains are complex. That man may be a spendthrift and a ne'er-do-well, but I'll swear he's no murderer, and I'll prove it!"

"Marvelous, Bayliss, marvelous!" said Harris.

Bayliss had come to Clearbrook on Tuesday, and on Wednesday Collins was arrested.

On Wednesday afternoon Bayliss shut himself up alone in the library to clue-hunt, as he called it. Acting on his conviction that Collins was innocent, he eagerly sought for evidence in some other direction. Seating himself at Mr. Hemmingway's desk, he jotted down a few notes, using for the purpose a pencil from the pen-tray in front of him.

HE LOOKED at the pencil abstractedly, and then he suddenly stared at it intently.

"A clue!" he said mentally to Harris. "Hush, don't speak," though Harris hadn't. "I sure have a clue, but such a dinky one!"

He looked at the pencil as at a valuable curio. He glanced about the desk for others, and found several. In a drawer he found many more. They were all of the same make and same number, and while those on the desk were all more or less well sharpened, those in the drawer had never yet been cut.

"Oh!" said Bayliss, and putting carefully into his pocket the pencil he had used in making his notes, he began scrutinizing the waste-basket.

There were not many torn papers in it, but the top ones were letters, envelopes or circulars, each torn once across. On top of these were some chips of pencil cedar and a trifle of black dust.

As if collecting precious treasure, Bayliss, with extreme care, lifted out the top layer of torn envelopes and, without disarranging the tiny wooden chips and black lead scrapings, laid all in a box, which he then put in a small cupboard and, locking its door, put the key in his pocket. Then he returned to the desk and picked up the packet of letters which had been received on Monday and from which Mr. Fiske's letter had been taken. There were about a dozen of them and he looked with interest at each one. Every one was cut open the same way, not by a letter-opener, but with shears—a quick clean cut, which took off a tiny edge along the right-hand end. Each was stamped at the top with the rubber "Received" stamp in red ink.

"Clever, clever villain!" mused Bayliss. "I say, Harris, he's the slickest ever! And nobody could have found him but Yours Truly."

"Marvelous!" murmured Harris.

Then straight to Inspector Garson Bayliss marched and asked to see the letter that Mr. Fiske wrote to Mr. Hemmingway.

Receiving it, he stared at it steadily for a moment, then, going to the window, scrutinized it through a lens.

Moved by an excitement which he strove not to show, he returned it to Mr. Garson, saying: "You've no doubt, I suppose, as to the genuineness of that letter and all that it means and implies."

"No, I haven't," said Mr. Garson, looking straight at the young man. "I have wondered whether there could be anything wrong about Fiske, but that letter is incontrovertible evidence of his veracity."

"Why couldn't it be faked?" persisted Bayliss.

"I've thought of that," said Mr. Garson patiently, "but it's too real. Whether it was written Sunday or not, it was positively posted Sunday evening and it was positively delivered to Mr. Hemmingway Monday morning. The postmark proves that. Then Mr. Hemmingway opened it, for it is cut open precisely the way he cuts open all his

letters, and he dated it with his own dating-stamp, and put it with his lot 'To be answered.' Can anything be more convincing of Fiske's good faith?"

"And yet," said Bert Bayliss, "it *is* a faked letter, and George Fiske's the murderer of Richard Hemmingway!"

"My dear sir, what *do* you mean?"

"Just what I say. Richard Hemmingway never saw this letter!"

"Can you prove that?"

"I can. Look at the envelope closely with this lens, in a strong light. What do you see between the letters of Mr. Hemmingway's name?"

"I see"—the Inspector peered closer—"I see faint pencil-marks."

"Can you make out what they spell?"

"No — yes — 'G-e-o' — *is* it 'George Fiske'?"

"It is, though not all the letters are discernible. Fiske wrote this letter on Sunday and mailed it on Sunday, *but*—he addressed it to himself, *not* to his employer."

"Why?" exclaimed Mr. Garson in amazement.

"Listen. He addressed it with a very soft pencil to himself, and traced the address very lightly. It reached his boarding-house Monday morning, of course, and then he erased the pencil-marks and boldly wrote Mr. Hemmingway's name in ink. Then he cut off the end, in precisely the way Mr. Hemmingway opens his letters, and put the whole thing in his pocket. All day he carried it in his pocket (I am reconstructing this affair as it must have happened), and at four o'clock he went home with the missive still there.

"Late Monday night he returned. After the three visitors had left, he strangled Mr. Hemmingway. You know he's an athlete, and his employer was a frail old man.

"And *then* he used the rubber stamp on his own letter and tucked it into the bunch of 'To be answered.' Then he rifled the safe, with Mr. Hemmingway's own keys, turned off all the lights but one and swiftly and silently went home to bed. The rest you know."

"Mr. Bayliss, I can scarcely believe this!" said Inspector Garson, fairly gasping for breath.

"What, you can't believe it when the villain has written his own name as damning evidence against himself?"

"It must be," said the Inspector, again scrutinizing the faint trace of pencil-marks. "But why did he do it?"

"Because he wanted to be executor and thus be able to convert into cash the securities he has stolen."

"He returned those."

"Only a few. Oh, it was a clever and deep-laid scheme! Fiske has quantities of bonds and other valuable papers entirely unaccounted for and which, as sole executor, he can cash at his leisure, all unknown to any one."

"How did you discover this?"

"By the simplest clue. I chanced to notice on Mr. Hemmingway's desk a pencil, freshly sharpened, but sharpened in a totally different way from those sharpened by the man himself. I looked at all the other pencils on his desk, at the one taken from his pocket and at one in his bedroom—they are all sharpened in exactly the same way, with numerous long careful shaves, producing a whittled pyramid. The pencil I spoke of—here it is—is sharpened by only five strong, clean cuts, making a short exposure of cut wood, quite different from the long point of wood in the others. Then I looked in the waste-basket, which at your orders had not been touched since the discovery of the crime, and *on top* I found the chips and lead-dust of this very pencil. They were *on top* of some torn envelopes whose postmarks proved they had come in Monday evening's mail, which reaches the Hemmingway house about six-thirty. Hence, whoever sharpened that pencil did it *after* six-thirty o'clock Monday night, and *before* the discovery of Mr. Hemmingway's dead body."

Mr. Garson listened breathlessly. "And then?" he said.

"And then," went on Bayliss, "I looked around for some pencils sharpened like that, and found several on and in Fiske's desk in the library. The pencil might have been borrowed from Fiske's desk, but it was sharpened right there at Mr. Hemmingway's desk after half-past six o'clock. Fiske, as you know, testified that he left at four and did not return until Tuesday morning."

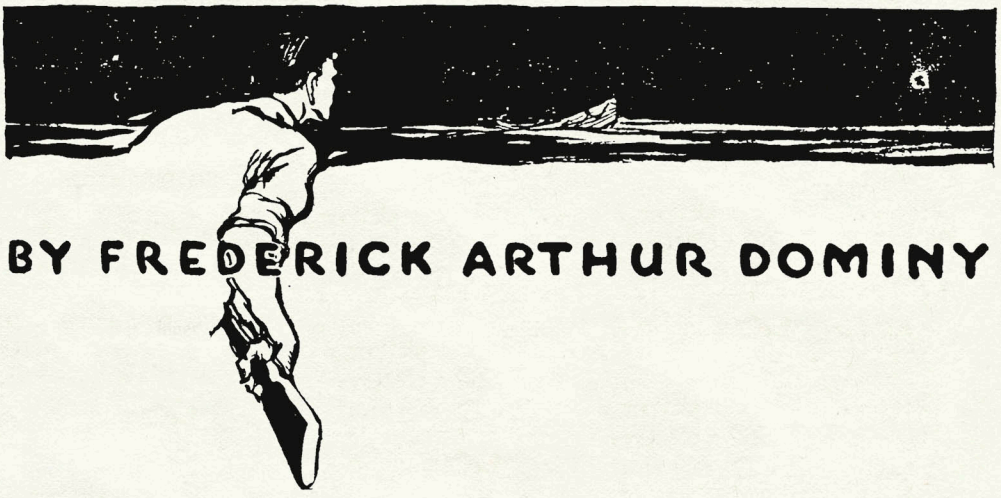
BAYLISS' deductions were true. Confronted suddenly with the story and with the traced envelope, Fiske broke down completely and confessed all. He had been planning it for weeks, and had

the decoy letter ready to use when Mr. Hemmingway should have a large amount of bonds in his own home safe. The whole story of the Saturday morning interview was a figment of Fiske's fertile brain, and of course Mr. Hemmingway had no suspicions of his nephew. Fiske had known of the expected callers, had watched outside the house until the last one went away and then, running up the steps, had stopped Mr. Hemmingway just as he was closing the door and requested a short interview. Innocently enough Mr. Hemmingway took his secretary into the library, and, while waiting for his fell opportunity, Fiske talked over some business matters. While making a memorandum, Mr. Hemmingway broke his pencil-point, and, unthinkingly, Fiske obligingly sharpened it.

"And to think," murmured Bayliss to Harris, "that little act of ordinary courtesy proved his undoing!"

"Marvelous, Bayliss, marvelous!" said Harris.

SMUGGLING AT OLD POINT



BY FREDERICK ARTHUR DOMINY

KEEPER RORKE MACLEAN turned from his desk and found me inspecting a rather queer looking object that I had found upon the mantelpiece. At first glance it looked like an ordinary quart tomato-can and had it not been for the strange black characters that were painted on the tin I probably should have passed it by as a receptacle for some of the Keeper's various and innumerable odds and ends.

I looked at the Keeper inquiringly, and, answering the unspoken question, he said, "That can held somethin' that we don't manufacture on this side. Them fellers with the yeller skins an' pigtails are the principal dealers in it an' they ain't always partic'lar that Uncle Sam gits the duty on it."

"Opium?" I ventured.

"Yes," he said, "that's it. I reckon that can held 'bout a hunderd dollars' worth of the dope an' there was nearly three hunderd like it put ashore within a stone's throw of this Station."

"Why," I exclaimed, "I hardly thought that in these days such undertakings were practised within so short a distance of the headquarters of the revenue officers."

"They ain't, as a rule, I suppose, Lieutenant, but this looked so easy they thought they'd try it, an' darn if it wouldn't have succeeded except for a mishap they couldn't help! You see it's pretty lonely 'long this stretch of beach the two months the crew's off an' there wasn't one chance in a hunderd of any one seein' them. All they had to do was land it here an' carry it 'cross to the mainland in their la'nch, then 'twould be

easy enough to git it into the city. Nobody's 'spectin' smugglers to try such a scheme, an' that's what made it pretty safe."

Then the Keeper began his tale.

I THOUGHT that you had heard 'bout this little scrimmage, but, come to think, it happened 'fore you come in this district. Orders from headquarters was to keep it quiet, an' I don't 'spose over half a dozen men ever heard the whole truth of the affair, till a couple of years after it was over with.

It happened in June, 1903, the tenth day of the month, to give the exact date, an' that, of course you know, is jest ten days after the commencement of the inactive season. I was 'lone here in the station an' kinder glad of it, to tell the truth, gittin' a restin' spell, though 'fore that night was over I'd give consid'able to have seen my crew walkin' in the door.

I had been settin' in here takin' it pretty comf'table. Coat an' vest an' shoes off, for the night was hot, smokin' an' readin' the paper, havin' finished my supper an' got the table cleaned up. Guess 'twas 'bout nine o'clock when I begin to think of turnin' in, so, as I always does every night, I goes to the 'phone an' rings two long an' one short for Ditch Plain. Cap'n Parson hardly ever makes me ring twice, but, after waitin' a while an' not hearin' him, I jingles the bell again. He don't answer then, so I turn the handle for the third time. Still no answer, so I try Nag's Head, four short. They ain't no better than Ditch Plain, for I called them three or four times an' not a word did I get. I begin to think somethin's the matter, for it's mighty funny when neither one of them answers, an' decide to look the line over in the mornin' for trouble with the wires.

I had been standing up 'long-side the 'phone all this time, of course, an' my back was to the door. As I was givin' the bell crank a finishin' turn an' sayin' a few cuss-words I hears a step in the room an' turns 'round, mighty s'prised, an', to tell the truth, a mite startled, for visitors to Old Point are scarce an' 'specially so at night.

There stands a feller, jest inside the door, calm as could be, an' half way smilin'. He was tall an' fair lookin', an' had on pretty good clothes, but there was somethin' 'bout his face I didn't quite take a notion to.

"Cap'n MacLean?" says he, kinder inquirin'.

"That's me," I answers, short-like, for I wasn't a bit pleased at the way the feller'd come in, 'thout givin' me no warnin'. "Who might you be, an' what the dickens are you cruisin' 'round here for this time o' night?" I asks him.

"I'll tell you in a minute, Cap'n," he says. "There's a couple of friends of mine outside an' first I'll call them in."

Then, 'thout givin' me a chance to say yes or no he goes to the door an' whistles, an' two fellers, who must have been waitin' close by, comes in.

I was gittin' mad by the minute. First I had sized the feller up to be one of them fresh chaps from the city who come down here an' think us countrymen ain't much better or brighter'n cattle, but somehow he didn't act jest like them, either. There was a slick way 'bout him that didn't suit me, an' the other two fellers had kinder shifty eyes that wouldn't look square at a man. I begin to think they wasn't the best kind of company to have 'round an' was jest 'bout to tell them to git out when he says, soft an' easy, an' still smilin' in that sassy kind of way, "I've been tellin' my friends, Cap'n, that this is a life-savin' station an' that, no doubt, there is a surf-boat in the buildin'. Am I right?"

"Yes, you are," I says. "There's two of them in the boat-room an' I reckon too that they'll stay there a consid'able spell yet. What you want to do, cut pieces out of 'em for souvenirs, or steal the brass-work an' sell it for junk?" I was too mad now to stop, so I gives it to them good an' hard. "I'll tell you the best thing for you to do, young man," I continues, "an' that is for you an' your friends to move out of here quick as possible. This is Gov'ment property you're on an' you're mighty liable to git in a muss, 'less you step lively."

"Softly, softly, Cap'n," he answers. "Jest a moment an' I'll explain."

"Explain an' be ——!" I shouts back. "You'll do your explainin' somewhere else 'sides here. I tell you, an' it's the last time, to git out!"

With that I makes a move for the corner where my gun stands, for I thought I'd feel consid'able better if I had hold of it. Three to one is big odds. But he orders, stern an' sharp, "Stop!"

I wasn't goin' to, but when I sees a pistol pointed at my head I does, an' 'thout any argument.

"Now, Cap'n," he says, keepin' that pistol pointed right at me, "You sit down in that chair an' my friends will try to fasten you in it so there will be no danger of fallin' out."

I sits down, for when a man points a gun at my head means business, as I could see this feller did for all his jokin', I am goin' to do jest as he says, as I ain't anxious to be an angel for quite a spell yet, an' them other two men tied me up good an' solid, usin' knots that tole me they'd follered the water sometime durin' their lives. They didn't tie my tongue, though, an' I cussed an' threatened them good an' plenty, but they only laughed.

You can imagine how took back I was at such strange happenin's. Here I was, trussed up like a chicken, in my own office, an' three men rummagin' 'round the Station, like as not stealin' everything worth takin'. I couldn't quite get through my head why the tall feller had asked 'bout the surf-boat. If they had any sense at all they'd know better than to take one of them, for they ain't somethin' you can hide very easy, 'specially a Gov'ment boat, as they're built on a different model from them the surf fishermer use, an' would soon be spotted.

I could hear them mussin' round in the boat-room, an' now an' then catch a word or so. The tall feller was the boss, that was plain, an' he was orderin' the others to do this or that in a way that showed he had some plan an' knowed jest how to go 'bout it. Somehow, though, I never thought they was goin' to do anything with the boats an' was mighty 'sprised when I heard the boat-room doors opened an' then the noise of the boat-wagon rollin' 'cross the floor an' down the runway.

"WHAT the dickens can they be up to?" thinks I. It was the small open boat on the wagon—the big one was chocked up on the floor; an' though she was light an' easy handled by the crew, I couldn't see how them three fellers was goin' to git her to the beach, an' that was the only thing they could do if they wanted to git away with her. I made up my mind they'd have their hands full an' I could hear them runnin' in an' out the Station as though they were luggin' a good many things off. Then that stopped an' the sound of their voices grew fainter an' fainter till I couldn't hear a sound an' figgers that they have gone.

All this time I had been workin' at the ropes that held me, but them fellers had done a good job, an' though I pulled an' strained, I couldn't loosen a thing. My hands were hangin' down on each side of the chair an' the rope had been hitched round one of my wrists an' then passed under the chair-bottom an' fastened to the other, so, while I could move my hands a little it didn't do any good at first, till I studied out a scheme that more by luck than anything else happened to work.

They had tied my legs to the chair-posts, lashin' them fast jest 'bove the ankles, an' my only chance was that I could reach the knots with my hands. If the rope was long enough for me to work my hand round my legs till I could feel the knots, all right; if it wasn't, I reckoned I'd have to stay there till somebody come 'long an' untied me.

I tried it, though, an' it worked, but I had a dickens of a time with them knots, for they had been tied by men who knew how. First one leg an' then the other I loosened; then I plans to git my hands free, which I did by smashin' the rungs of the chair with my heels, an' then shovin' it over backwards. It didn't take long then for me to git a knife out of my pocket an' open it, though it was kinder awkward, for I had to do it with my hands still behind my back an' 'bout a foot apart. Then I cut that rope an' was free.

The first thing I did when I got loose was to grab my gun an' see that it was loaded; then I slips a few shells in my pocket an' starts to look them fellers up. I'd made up my mind that I wouldn't stand for a bit of foolin', but, if they showed fight, to let 'em have it, both barrels, an' keep on shootin' till they quieted down. There was good-sized shot in the shells an' while they wouldn't kill a man 'less he was pretty close, they wouldn't feel a mite pleasant an' would prob'ly take most of the fight out of him.

I knew they wasn't in the Station but wasn't jest sure how far away they was, so I slips out the back door an' looks round the corner toward the boat-room, careful, but there's nothin' in sight 'ceptin' the boat-wagon, so I walks out there an' finds how they had got the boat away.

You know them roller skids we use in haulin' the boat out on the beach? There's five pair at this Station. Well, them cusses had found them an', after gittin' the boat off the wagon, had rolled her down to the beach, puttin' down in front an' takin' up behind,

an' she goin' 'long so easy one man could push her. Smart, wasn't they?

I could see the tracks in the sand an' follerin' them to the beach, found where they had la'nched the boat, but it was too dark to see any distance an' I couldn't make out anything of it in the surf.

I didn't know hardly what to do. There was no doubt that they'd cut the wires or I'd called up Ditch Plain an' got Cap'n Parsons to come down, but there wasn't any use thinkin' of that, so I'd have to do the best I could alone.

I was sittin' on the edge of the beach hills, with the gun 'cross my knees, studyin' the matter over, when I saw the lights of a steamer, close in an' bound west. I first thought the men was goin' to board her, 'cause it looked as if some such game was up, they stealin' the boat an' then the steamer comin' 'long jest as she did, but she never slowed up a bit, an' in fifteen or twenty minits was well past the Station.

All of a sudden as I sits there I catches sight of a light bobbin' up an' down on the waves, an' then others kept showin', till I counted six of them, close together an' 'bout in the wake of the steamer. I understood the whole game then. Somebody on that steamer had throwed something overboard that the men in the surf-boat were to pick up, an' them lights—they were the kind that burn for a little while after gittin' wet—were to give them the bearin's. It was a pretty good scheme to keep from payin' duty, but why them men hadn't used a boat of their own, 'stead of stealin' mine an' runnin' chances of havin' their plans spoiled, I couldn't see till it was explained later.

Of course I couldn't see the boat, but I kept watch of the lights an' in a few minutes one goes out, then another an' another, an' in a little while they was all gone, showin' that the men had been layin' close by in the boat an' ready for business.

I was hopin' they'd land here when they got through, but I hardly thought they would. I was achin' for a chance to square up with them for tyin' me up an' stealin' the boat an' had made up my mind that if they ever got within fifty yards of me I'd either have a bunch of prisoners peaceable or there'd be consid'able shootin' done, an' I doin' my share. I was willin' to back the ten-bore 'gainst their pistols an' take my chances an', to tell the truth, I was jest mad enough to hope they'd show fight.

The surf was pretty calm that night an' finally I heard the clump of oars in the tholepins. It kept gittin' closer an' closer an' then I could hear the men talkin'. Now I was sure they was comin' ashore an' I waited till I could see the boat in the white of the breakers. Then I sneaked down an' dropped behind some wreckage, not over fifty feet from the surf an' 'bout where I thought they would land. I made sure the gun was in good workin' order, then peeps out an' watches them come ashore.

The tall feller was in the stern, steerin', an' the other two pullin' at the oars, all three handlin' themselves like men who'd been in a surf-boat more'n once. As she runs up on the beach they jumped out an,' waitin' till the next wave floats the boat, pulled her up as far as they could.

'Twas 'bout time for me to git busy, but I thought I'd wait an' see what their next move would be, so I keeps down an' watch them careful.

"We'd better git that stuff out on the beach an' we've got to hurry, 'cause there's no tellin' who might come 'long," says the tall feller. So they unload the boat, each man makin' two trips an' bringin' ashore 'bout fifty cans, all lashed together, at a time. Cans jest the same as the one you've been lookin' at, 'cept they was full.

Then he says, "We'll shove this boat off now. There's no use lettin' people know jest where we landed."

As they was gittin' ready to put the boat afloat I thought it was 'bout the right minute for me to show up so I raises up from behind the wreckage an' pointin' my gun at them, says, "Hold on a minute! I've got a little somethin' to say 'bout castin' that boat adrift."

They was mighty 'sprised, of course, but the tall feller he wasn't so much so but that he yanks out his pistol an' takes a shot at me. Didn't hit, but come too close to suit me, so, thinkin' I'd better show him that he wasn't the only one could shoot, I cuts loose, gittin' him in the leg, jest where I 'tended to.

"Ouch!" he hollers, an' jumps round lively for a minute, the shot stingin' him up consid'able, but when I orders him to throw his pistol away an' come up on the beach or git another charge higher up, he drops it in the water an' wades ashore, the other two follerin' him like sheep do a bell-wether.

I kept the gun trained on them steady, an' havin' made up my mind 'forehand what to

do, I tells them to face east an' walk, an' to keep close to the surf. Higher up the beach the shadows from the hills made dark spots an' I wanted them where the light was best. My shootin' seemed to have took all the fight out of the leader, an' the other two didn't 'pear to be able to do anything 'less he told them to, so when he starts east they do the same, an' I foller them, gun 'cross my arm, handy to raise an' shoot, if necessary.

WE KEPT goin' for a little over an hour an' once or twice the tall feller stopped an' complained that his leg was hurtin', but I told him he'd git plenty of time to rest 'fore long an', though he growled consid'able, he saw I wouldn't stand any foolin' an' kept goin'.

When we got to the big hill that stands in front of the Ditch Plain Station I showed them the path an' we headed 'cross the beach.

It got pretty dark soon as we left the surf, so I watched my prisoners sharp an' 'twas a good thing I did, for one of them made a break an' started up a gully handy by like a scared rabbit. He didn't git far, though, 'fore I give him a dose same's the other feller got an' yelled that, if he didn't come back, the next time I shot 'twouldn't be at his legs.

I'd slipped another shell in my gun while we were walkin' down the beach, so I wasn't bluffin' an' he must have known it, for he walks back like a licked pup.

We were close by the Station then an' I see a light flare up in the mess-room an' Cap'n Parsons comes to the door an' sings out, "Who's there?"

"It's me," I says, "Rorke MacLean. I'm bringin' over a little company for you."

"Well, I'll be darned!" says he, as the three men walked in the door, I follerin' them close up with the gun. "Who's them fellers?"

"Them," I tell him, "are a gang that come to my Station, tied me up an', stealin' the boat, which they was goin' to cast adrift when they got through with it, rows out an' picks up a lot of stuff that'd been throwed overboard for them to git from a steamer. Now if you'll tie them up, Cap'n, I'll feel a mite more comf'table, as they're pretty slippery, an' I'm gittin' tired of watchin' them so close."

So he ties them up, good an' solid, an' after that little job is done I go in the office an' 'phones the telegraph station, tellin' the operator to telegraph to the mainland an' get some officers over to the Ditch Plain Station quick as possible.

That done, I turns in for a spell, for I was pretty sleepy an' tired after what I'd gone through, an' Cap'n Parsons says he don't mind watchin' the men. I sleep longer than I 'spected to an' when I do wake up it's broad daylight. I start gittin' breakfast an' we was jest settin' down—that is Cap'n Parsons an' I was; we was goin' to feed the others after we got through—when we heard some one talkin', an', goin' to the door, finds the sheriff an' his deputy, who'd jest got 'cross from the mainland.

All hands has somethin' to eat an' then the sheriff takes charge of the smugglers, or boat-stealers, I don't know which to call them, an' the last I see of them for quite a spell they're sittin' in the cockpit, the sheriff watchin' 'em, an' the deputy navigatin' the sailboat.

Soon's we got rid of our company Cap'n Parsons an' me walk up to Old Point an', findin' the surf-boat, anchors her till I could git some men to help me put her in the boat-room. Then we carry the tin cans up to the Station an' that 'bout winds up the affair.

Of course, I have to go to the city an' testify 'gainst the men an' all that, an' while they're bein' tried it comes out why they took my boat. It seems that they had come 'cross from the mainland in a la'nch, towin' a dory that they 'spected to use, but somehow they got foul of an oyster-stake, broken off jest below the water, an' it had punched such a hole in the dory that she had filled an' sunk. Their chum on the steamer had made all the arrangements, even sendin' them a wireless message givin' the time she'd be off Old Point, so of course there was no puttin' the thing off, an' as they had to have a boat an' knew I was 'lone in the Station, it seemed easy enough to git mine. It was, too, an' but for the little mistake they made in makin' me fast there'd been thirty thousand dollars' worth of opium taken into the city, 'thout a cent of duty bein' paid on it, an' them three fellers would now be spendin' the money, 'stead of servin' time.

THE WOMAN WITH THE WOLVES

BY BERTRAM ATKEY

CHAPTER I

MISSING

IF YOU go through the glades and green tree-tunnels round about that triangular iron monument erected to commemorate the spot in the New Forest where the Red King was killed by an arrow glancing from a tree, and from that place proceed westerly—leaning perhaps a little south—you will open up a region of wide bleak spaces, where there are no oak and beech and elm, but only sparse heather and fir, with patches of plentifully-spined gorse. It is desolate in that place and you may go many miles without encountering anything living other than forest ponies, a few yellowhammers, an occasional hurrying pigeon, here and there a lonely lark fleeing from under your feet, and, not infrequently, vipers in and about the marshy places.

In mid-Winter, when a black frost has glazed the snow, this part of the forest has something remotely Russian about it in a small but effective way.

It was in that neighborhood, then, that the affair I have made it my business to relate took place. My friend Torrance, who is an extremely out-door man, has a rather elaborate bungalow there and it was the third time I had come down to pass the beginning of a New Year with him.

He had not come personally to the little country station, just outside the Hampshire boundary of the forest, to meet me. His man—old Gregg—had driven in for me and, unemotional though Gregg knows how to be, I think that he was more than usually pleased to see me.

"Mr. Charles' cough is bad to-day," said Gregg, reaching for my bag. "It's the frost nips his chest."

I believe I heard a resentful mutter of "Cigarettes" as the huge old man turned, handling the big bag as though it were no more than a fan. Under the flickering oil lamps of the wayside station I fancied Gregg's face looked hard and a little anxious.

We climbed into the little slipper-shaped car.

"I've got to get a few things in the village," said Gregg, as we dropped like a toboggan down the hill that leads sharply from the station. "Owbridge's lung tonic, cigarette-papers, ink, and salt butter," I heard him say to himself as we pulled up at the narrow-windowed, lamp-flickering general shop of the village.

Gregg never writes down a message or list of requirements—and never forgets them. But he forgets nothing—and, I sincerely believe, knows everything—worth knowing. Just as he can do everything—worth doing. Old Gregg is about the only man-servant of my acquaintance that I find myself able to like and respect at the same time.

A man with a piece of bacon under his arm came out of the shop as we slid to a standstill. He was talking over his shoulder and paused a second on the threshold.

"Heard tell of bloodhounds comin' over from Sal'sb'ry Plain to-morra," he said to some one inside the shop.

Old Gregg suddenly stiffened, half-turning his head to catch the reply. His face looked white and worried in the wavy, uncertain lamplight.

"Ah, be 'em, now," droned some one from behind the piled counter. "Take a main host of bloodhounds to find Major Stark, I'd reckon. Nivver heard much good of they things."

The man with the bacon guffawed, came noisily out of the shop, and swung off down the windy street.

"Only keep you a minute, sir," said old Gregg, and passed in under the jangling doorbell.

"Good evenin', Must' Gregg," came the drawl of the shopkeeper again. "Main cold out to th' Forest, I reckon."

Gregg nodded and spoke quietly.

"And so you'm havin' the bloodhounds out your way to-morra,—they tell me," continued the other garrulously, reaching about his shelves. "Not that they'll do a lot of good. Reckon the Major knows the forest too well to lose his way out there—sober."

The shopkeeper—a little, bald, beady-eyed wisp of a man—shot a look of rustic cunning at tall hard-bitten old Gregg.

"We folk—butcher, baker, tinker and tailor—'ud do as well as bloodhounds to find 'im, I'd reckon, Mr. Gregg, and good cause most of 'em got." He leaned forward across his counter. "I've heard tell the Major owes a matter of three to four hundred pound in the village alone. Now he's gone. Take a main of bloodhounds to find *he*, Mr. Gregg."

The shopkeeper cackled cunningly as he passed over Gregg's change. I took it that a resident in the district was missing—some, apparently, believing that it was a case for bloodhounds, others that it was a case for creditors. I asked Gregg, as the little car began her climb up to the Forest level.

"IT'S a Major John Stark, sir," said Gregg, staring straight in front of him. "He disappeared a few days ago. His horse was found on the road near Stony Cross Hotel—without a rider. They think he intended riding out to No-Man's Court. He was the owner. It is let now to a Russian lady—a Princess, I think. From what she has told the police, it looks as though Major Stark never reached the house that day. He had been there before, but not that day—she said."

Old Gregg turned, and I had an instinct that he had given a little, tight-lipped smile.

"It's a mystery, sir. Mr. Charles will know more about it than I do."

We had topped the long hill and the little car set her droning nose to the Forest. It was bitterly cold and now we seemed to be traveling along an illimitable white road flung across unfathomable canyons of darkness.

I sank down among the heavy furs Torrance had sent for me—although he is a dreamer, Torrance can be very practical—and listened to the strident wind. Our lights ate into the darkness like a white-hot graving-tool eating into soft black stuff; twice I saw little shadowy dark things flicker across the road—rabbits, I supposed they were; occasionally I caught, or imagined I caught, the smell of the busy motor in front, hot and oily; and once we passed a wee spot of light with a shadow behind it—a belated cyclist hurrying out from the deso-

lation of the wind-haunted flats that we were now traversing.

The rush of keen, clean air was making me drowsy when a few yellow lights lifted suddenly away to the right, dodging, darting and flickering behind trees.

"No-Man's Court already?" I said. We had been coming quicker than I had known.

Gregg did not answer for a minute, for just then the little car seemed to falter, to hang in her stride, and Gregg's hand slipped from the wheel to a lever. The car stopped and the wind seemed to hush for a moment, holding its breath, as though to say "What's this?" "Nothing much," said Gregg, and got out. He opened the bonnet of the car and put his hand into the nest of cylinders and things.

I turned to the lights of No-Man's Court. Even as I looked there came quavering up to me, riding uncertainly on the wind, as it were, a curiously startling sound. There was a sort of remote melody in it, but also there was pain, and desire, and hopelessness, and something very evil. It came again and quite suddenly my blood ran cold.

"Good Heavens! What's that, Gregg?" And I recognized a sort of entreaty for reassurance in my voice.

Gregg looked up. His face was as white in the lamp-glare as I knew mine to be. But before he replied, the sound floated up again —louder this time—and I knew.

It was the howling of wolves.

Wolves—in the New Forest! There was an explanation somewhere. Gregg climbed in again and I demanded that explanation.

It was quite simple—the Russian lady at No-Man's Court kept a dozen of them—pets, just as other women keep little dogs, or birds, monkeys or even lizards. Gregg professed to be quite used to hearing their eery serenades—which made it increasingly difficult to understand his sudden pallor.

Then away to the left the lights of Torrance's bungalow burned friendly through the dark and swung steadily toward us.

CHAPTER II

THE MAN AT THE CASEMENT

OLD Gregg had been pale and his hard face drawn, but his eyes had been cool and steady. Torrance, too, was pale, but *his* eyes were restless and bright—haunted. He was good-looking as ever, in his thin, aquiline, dark style, but he was changed in some vague, intangible way. All the old humor was gone. Perhaps that is what I missed.

Almost the first thing he told me was that he had not worked for months. I must explain that he is a poet and essayist—he is rich enough to afford the luxury of writing verse for its own sake; that he spends a little of each year in London, moving among people of all kinds from leader-writers to stevedores, cabinet ministers to Punch-and-Judy proprietors, Rabbis to racing-tipsters; that from London he drifts lazily abroad, perhaps to some corner of the Continent, perhaps farther afield; but always the late Autumn brings him, not less surely than it brings the first few woodcock and snipe, to his bungalow on the western moors of the New Forest.

There, with old Gregg, who served his father before him (in one of the Dragoon regiments), Torrance sorted, classified and, I suppose, pondered upon his experiences of the year, wrote, read and dreamed.

Women had never seemed to attract him. Like many dreamers, he had, I think, set up a quite impossible ideal and was content to await her coming.

He lost nothing but the streets and the people by wintering in the forest, for Gregg was a wonderful cook, and thanks to a huge, humming and immensely business-like oil-engine, carefully housed at the back of the bungalow, there were such aids to comfort as electric lights, hot water, perfect water supply and so forth.

Torrance was thirty, in perfect health, save for a trifling cigarette cough, tall as old Gregg—that is, a fraction over six feet—but shapelier, and until this New Year I had always considered him languidly happy. But now he sat at supper with me, eating nothing, smoking a great deal, and obviously nervous and uneasy to the point of irritability. Three times I looked up to find his eyes fixed in a sort of uncomfortable reverie upon a photograph on the mantel. The third time this happened I got up deliberately—I have known Torrance intimately for many years—crossed over and studied the picture. It was that of a woman. She looked to be about thirty years old, and was extraordinarily beautiful, a kind of keen, wild beauty that stung one into interest. The photograph had been taken in Petersburg, but there was nothing Russian in the woman's beauty.

I sat down again, saying nothing. There

was a queer little smile on Torrance's lips, and he began to tell me of a strange custom he had discovered in the Spring of the Old Year among the French charcoal burners. (I believe it was the French charcoal burners, but I am not sure.) I was not listening. I was wondering whether the woman in the picture were the woman with the wolves and what she had to do with Torrance.

He saw that almost at once, for he drained his glass suddenly, drew in his breath, and spoke in quite a different voice.

"I'll tell you the story—part of it—after supper," he said, and his voice trembled. "I *must* tell some one." I heard the note of desperate impatience and finished my supper then and there.

"Come on, then," I said, took a cigar, and lay back in a chair before the big fire.

I heard old Gregg come silently in behind me and begin to clear the table. Torrance looked into the fire for a long time, thinking. He seemed to be seeking the proper beginning of the story he was going to tell. Presently he laughed a little bitterly.

"I can only tell you about the affair from my own point of view," he said. "I am in it—in a sort of uninvited, superfluous way. But, really, I am little more than an onlooker."

He waited again. Old Gregg put a couple of decanters, cigarettes and a cigar-box on the table, and spoke quietly. It occurred to me that a tremor lay under his voice.

"Excuse me, Mr. Charles," he said.

Torrance turned.

"From what I heard in the village tonight, they are bringing out some of Colonel Shafto's bloodhounds from Salisbury Plain to-morrow," said old Gregg, watching his master's face.

Torrance winced a little, and a slow flush crept up over his cheeks. He looked steadily at old Gregg and there was a queer silence for a few seconds. Then Torrance took a cigarette.

"Thank you, Gregg," he said, and turned to me. "Have you ever seen bloodhounds at work? If not, you'll be interested. There's a——"

SUDDENLY some one tapped at the casement door behind the heavy curtains—rattled would be a better word to describe the panic-stricken scrabble on the glass—and a quavering voice called from the darkness outside.

Gregg was at the casement in an instant. He shot back the bolts, turned the catch, and a man, panting like a hunted thing, fell into the room.

"——! They nearly got me—hairy, rank things—great eyes and teeth!" he sobbed. "Look at my coat!"

He stood in the lamp-light, his face gray with fear and exhaustion, his eyes wide with terror. I remember that his mouth hung half-open like that of a frightened child. His face was veiled, as it were, with a network of tiny red scratches—as though he had fallen again and again into gorse. One shoulder of his coat was ripped to ribbons—the fragments hung down over his shaking arm.

Torrance gave him half a tumbler of cognac, and the stark fear slowly faded out of his eyes. Then, all suddenly, he straightened himself and looked round the room with a quick, curiously official glance. I guessed then what he was. Detective-Inspector was stamped all over him—the hard, capable but blunt, rough-cut face, the close-clipped mustache, the short hair, the square shoulders, the quiet blue Melton overcoat.

Quite recovered from his panic, he gave a hard-lipped smile as Torrance laughed.

"I warned you, Inspector," said Torrance.

"And I wish I'd taken your warning, Mr. Torrance! That was the nearest squeak I've ever had."

"The wolves, I suppose?" asked Torrance casually. "You were a fool to risk it. I told you they might be loose."

The Inspector looked at Torrance rather queerly, I thought.

"I believe they were only loosed for my special benefit," he said dryly.

"Oh, that's impossible," said Torrance. "Tell me about it. Take another drink and sit down."

Before he sat down the Inspector went to the casement windows, pulling the curtains to behind him, and stared out for many minutes into the night. Then he came slowly back, shaking his head slightly.

"It's a queer place to get lost in—this New Forest is," he said.

Then he took something silver from his pocket and handed it to Torrance. It looked like a cigar-case. It had been flattened and was terribly dented—as though it had been stamped upon with heavy hob-nailed boots.

"Why, what's this, Waynill?" asked Torrance in a tone of surprise.

The detective smiled.

"Major Stark's cigar-case," he said. "I found it out in the forest to-day."

Torrance laughed again, and, looking very steadily at the detective, shook his head in turn.

"I'm sorry to spoil your effect, Inspector," he said. "But it happens to be mine. I lost it a week or more ago. Some one seems to have trodden on it."

He noted the sudden doubt on the Inspector's face, and turned to Gregg, who had been hovering about the sideboard.

"Gregg—what cigar-case is this?"

The old man took it, looked well at it and handed it back.

"Yours, sir—the one you lost ten days ago." He looked at the Inspector, his old face grim and hard in the lamplight. "If there were any cigars in it when you found it, sir, they would be the same brand as these." He pushed the open box on the table to the Inspector, who took one out and looked carefully at the narrow green, red and gold band. He shrugged his broad shoulders with an air of good-humored resignation and took from an inside pocket an envelope containing four cigars, crushed almost to shreds. There were four bands on them—three ragged and one intact. He handed them over to Torrance—who lazily compared the bands with those on the cigars in the box.

"Yes, the same cigars of course,"

"Try one—out of the box, Inspector. We'll call it a reward, if you like."

The Inspector grinned ruefully.

"I'll take the reward," he said, reaching for it, "but you've spoiled a very good clue—between you. Can't you throw a wash in with the reward, Mr. Torrance?" he added.

"Why, of course. Gregg will show you the bathroom."

The Inspector followed the old man out.

I HAD remained very silent—knowing what I knew. For instance, I was aware that Torrance had always resolutely refused to carry a cigar-case. He objected to take them on account of their size. He rarely smoked cigars at all. But evidently the Inspector did not share my knowledge.

I leaned over to him. "*Is* that your cigar-case?" I whispered.

He shook his head furtively.

"Whose, then?" I insisted, impatient with curiosity.

Torrance put his lips to my ear.

"Stark's," he breathed, his eyes glittering through half-closed lids.

"But the cigars—did he smoke the same brand as yours?"

Torrance shook his head.

"No. The cigars Inspector Waynill found in the case were from my box. I gave them to him the morning he disappeared. Nobody seems to have seen him alive after he left here. At least nobody has come forward yet."

"And he *did* leave here alive—you'll never persuade me otherwise, Torrance," I said uncomfortably. "Did he say where he was going?"

Torrance glanced at the photograph of the woman on the mantelpiece. If possible, he had become paler than ever.

"He was going to her—to No-Man's Court," he whispered dryly. There was horror in his eyes.

Then we heard the Inspector coming down the passage and Torrance began to describe the ingenuities of his willing domestic slave at the back—the oil-engine.

The Inspector was quite himself again now—stolid, heavily humorous, tenacious, but, I thought, not too intelligent. He lighted his postponed cigar, mixed himself a drink and told us the story of his day's work.

CHAPTER III

MARY

"THERE'S something queer about this disappearance," said the Inspector. "It might be anything from an ordinary 'flit' from a crowd of creditors to"—he hesitated for the fraction of a second—"murder. I'm not sure that I ought to be talking about it even to you, Mr. Torrance." He chuckled rather heavily. "If I hadn't known you and your man in town for the last ten years, I'm not sure that I shouldn't ask you a lot of questions that would sound a bit suggestive."

Torrance laughed very naturally.

"My dear man, ask 'em now. I've always wanted to see how the police work," he said.

The detective's chuckle deepened.

"Well, to tell the truth, I've asked 'em already. What I haven't asked, you've volunteered one way or another," he answered.

"Oh!" Torrance looked a little blank.

And, privately, I withdrew a good deal of my opinion that this burly Scotland Yarder was not too intelligent. And I did so with some relief, for it was clear, in that case, that the detective did not associate Torrance with the disappearance of Major Stark. If he did, then I was very certain that he would not be sitting there telling us of his day's work.

"I don't know whether bloodhounds are much good at tracking a man on horseback," began the Inspector again, "but if they are, we might see something interesting to-morrow. There are one or two very queer things out there." He jerked his head, indicating the forest; then paused, staring with somber, thoughtful eyes into the fire as old Gregg entered, carefully bearing a wineglass filled with a brown, heavy-looking liquid.

"Your Owbridge's, Mr. Charles," he said gravely, handing the mixture to Torrance.

Gregg was a firm believer in the medicine and, I have no doubt, insisted on Torrance's taking a dose every time he dared to cough. And I am not sure that Gregg was very far wrong.

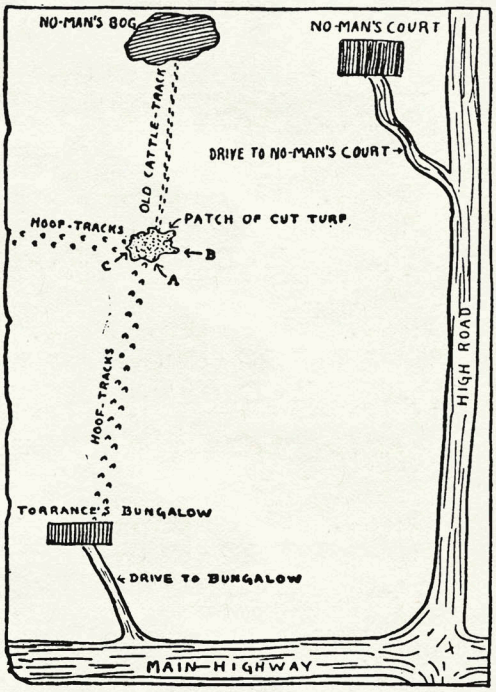
"What I want to find out," said Inspector Waynill, half to himself, "is the person who has been cutting turf out there at this time of the year and why he did it."

To this day I marvel that the Inspector did not notice the sudden start of old Gregg at these words. He was too rapt in thought, I suppose. For a second the old man became flaccid. The wineglass slid out of his hand and cracked softly on the thick carpet. He recovered himself instantly, muttered an apology to Torrance's "Gregg! Gregg! You weren't looking, you know!" and went quietly out. But I saw the keen old eyes flash doubtfully at the broad back of the Inspector as Gregg left the room.

"That's it—whose been cutting turf and why? It's rotten bad turf, anyhow," repeated Waynill, looking up.

"The first thing I did this morning was to follow the tracks of Major Stark's horse from your gate, Mr. Torrance. It was comparatively soft weather four days ago—the day he disappeared, but it's been freezing ever since and in some places the horse tracks are as clear as if they had been molded in plaster of Paris. It's a pity the ground was too hard that day to take boot-marks. Well, the hoofs led me straight to a spot about midway between here and that big house—No-Man's Court—over there. At this spot there's been a lot of turf cut and removed. The Major seems to have ridden up to the edge of the cut turf and then altered his mind and instead of going on turned off to the left at right angles.

The Inspector took out a small note-book and showed us a rough plan.



"You'll see what I mean if you can follow that," he continued. "'B'—the shaded part—is the place from which the turf was cut—it's just a patch of peaty mold. 'A' is where the Major's horse came to it, and 'C' is where the horse left it. Now that turf was removed after the Major rode away from the place, because there are no hoof-marks on the mold."

"Perhaps the Major jumped over the mold patch," suggested Torrance.

The Inspector shook his head.

"No—I thought of that. If he had, the hoof-marks would have been deeper at 'C' where the horse would have landed, and for a few strides, at any rate, the direction of the hoof-marks would have been straight on—

in the same line as at 'A'. But they aren't —they go off at 'C' from the edge of the cut turf at right angles. So, unless the horse turned in the air—which is unlikely—Major Stark did not jump the patch. And if he didn't jump it, the patch wasn't there. You follow that."

We nodded.

"Now at 'A' the horse was cantering. At 'C' he was galloping like the ——!"

"What!" I think we spoke together.

The detective smiled and wagged his head.

"Any farmer's boy could see that from the hoof-marks. And that's another thing I want to know. Why did Major Stark canter up to Mark 'A,' turn suddenly at 'B,' and gallop off hell-for-leather at 'C'? And did any time elapse between the change from cantering to galloping? That's it, gentlemen—What happened at 'B'? Was anything spilt on the turf that made it necessary to remove it—blood, for instance? Or was anything buried at that spot and the turf cut to hide the traces of digging?"

Waynill paused again, brooding. Mentally, I unreservedly withdrew the whole of my opinion as to the Inspector's intelligence.

"Well," he roused himself once more, "whatever happened, the horse galloped away either with or without his rider. So I followed his tracks—they were the only fresh tracks about the place—I had a thorough look round for them. But I only found your cigar-case, Mr. Torrance."

"Yes, it would be somewhere about there that I lost it," said Torrance composedly.

"Oh, it was a good three hundred yards farther on," corrected Waynill. "It was quite tarnished and discolored. Lying in the middle of a kind of rough cattle-track. Considering that we've had no rain for the last week you must have lost it at least ten days ago for it to have become so discolored." There was a queer dryness in his tone and Torrance stared.

"I see," he said. "If it had been less tarnished and nearer the patch of cut turf, you would have——"

"Asked you a question or two which are not necessary now."

Torrance shrugged. "See how nearly I have approached a new experience, Herapath," he said, smiling across at me.

THE detective slowly helped himself to another whisky and soda.

"The cigar-case was not the only thing I found before I followed up the tracks of the horse," he said, and dipped two fingers into a waistcoat pocket and brought out a tiny gold locket. We craned forward.

"It was under a little clump of heather near the edge of the cut turf," he said. "And it has not tarnished at all. That is another thing I want to know. Who is the owner of this locket?" He touched a spring and the little ornament opened. "And," he continued, his heavy face suddenly grim, "and just who these two young people are. You don't happen to know them, Mr. Torrance, I suppose?"

Torrance took the locket and looked attentively at the two people. Then he shook his head and passed it to me.

"I'm afraid I can't help you, Waynill," he said. "They look very young—but you have probably noticed that for yourself," half satirically. "I haven't the remotest idea as to who they may be."

I looked at the two faces. They were those of a young man of about twenty-five —handsome enough but arrogant looking, and of a girl, thin, dark-eyed, with wild hair. She looked to be about eighteen years old. The photographs were somewhat faded and seemed to have been cut from a rough snapshot and fitted to the locket. Curiously enough, there was something vaguely familiar to me in the face of the girl. It was as though I had seen a picture of her, in one of the illustrated weeklies, for instance, a week or so before. But I could not reproduce that picture quite perfectly in my mind.

"It is rather a queer thing," I said, "but I seem to know that girl's face. I haven't the least notion where or when or under what circumstances. It is more than likely that she remotely resembles some one I have interviewed, or whose picture I have seen in a periodical."

Waynill turned to me with a quick interest.

"That is exactly how I feel about it," he said.

I turned the locket over. There was no monogram, but round the upper rim was engraved, "To Mary from Jack." I read it aloud and returned the locket to the detective. Torrance had risen and was playing with the things on the mantelpiece. I chanced to look at the mantel, when pres-

ently he sat down—and the photo of the woman that was taken in Petersburg was gone.

"Of course, Major Stark's name is John. That would be 'Jack' to his girl," said the detective. "I thought of that this morning, out there. If this boy *is* Stark, it is Stark as he was ten years ago, judging from the latest photo of him. It struck me that I might do worse than hunt for 'Mary'—grown ten years or so older. Now this locket belonged to 'Mary' anyhow—men don't carry lockets much and it's inscribed to her, and it's not altogether crazy to assume that 'Mary' dropped the locket. At any rate there's a chance of it. Now, this isn't London where there's a hundred Marys to the acre. This is the New Forest, where there's about one to the square mile, and I fancy that one of these Marys could tell us a good bit about Major John Stark if we can find her.

"That's the conclusion I had come to by the time I had finished tracking that horse's hoofs from the patch of cut turf. It was easy enough to follow where he went, although it twisted and turned in the most aimless fashion. No horse with a rider on its back would have twisted about like it.

"I followed the track for about seven hours to-day and it brought me out to the highroad near the Stony Cross Hotel. It was the hostler of that hotel who found the horse without a rider. I went into the hotel and had something to eat and thought it over. Then I saw the hostler. Now, listen a moment, gentlemen!" The tone of the detective had taken on an edge, a keenness. He was speaking now quickly, tensely, as a man hot on the trail of another speaks. Torrance was watching him intently.

"Major Stark left here at eleven in the morning. He cantered straight toward the spot where the turf has been cut. He got there say at eleven-twenty. Then there's a blank—so much time unaccounted for. Presently his horse gallops away from the spot—gallops say three miles, and then drifts about, feeding here and there, just wandering; and eventually strikes the hard road. He drifts up to the hotel at about four o'clock, just as it was getting dark, the groom said. Nothing much seems to have been done to find out what became of the Major until next morning. Then the groom, starting at nine, followed up the tracks of the horse from his end and arrived at the cut patch of turf at about two o'clock, and from there came to this house.

"*He* didn't seem to learn much from the cut turf, but it helped *me*. For I had examined it, as you know, and, after my talk with the hostler to-day, I know that the turf was cut between eleven-thirty last Monday and two o'clock on Tuesday. Allowing four hours for cutting—it's a fair-sized patch—we find that the Major vanished between eleven-thirty Monday and ten o'clock Tuesday. It's not much to know, perhaps, but it's something. Particularly if 'Mary,' whenever we find her or any of her men folk has such a thing as a recently used turf spade."

THE detective shook his head ruefully.

"I wish I'd arrived at Stony Cross Hotel on Monday instead of Wednesday," he said. "If only I'd decided to see Rufus' Stone before Stonehenge, it would have made a difference."

I gathered that Waynill had been taking a bleak holiday seeing the sights of Wiltshire and Hampshire, when, arriving at Stony Cross Hotel (the hostelry near Rufus' Stone), he had chanced upon the mysterious disappearance of Major Stark.

"Well, the next thing was to see if I could find 'Mary,' or at any rate, the owner of the locket, and it seemed to me that I couldn't go far wrong if I started among the maids at the only house with women in it near the spot—No-Man's Court. As there's been enough time wasted in this case as it is, although it was nearly dark when I started, I set off to have a look at the household at No-Man's Court."

CHAPTER IV

THE MAN AT THE WOLF-DENS

"I HAD been told about the wolves that the Princess keeps—queer pets, but I've heard of queerer," he continued, "and I don't mind admitting that if I'd brought a revolver I should have dropped it in my pocket before I started from the hotel. I'm not one of the brave ones where wild animals are concerned. I'm not ashamed to admit that bad-tempered big dogs worry me if I'm unarmed, and the fear of the wolf seems to me to be thoroughly implanted into every kiddie before he gets away from

his mother's apron-strings. Red Riding Hood and all that stuff—I suppose it's something that's come down generation by generation from the time when mothers really did have to warn their youngsters against real wolves. Anyhow, they make me nervous. Still, I understood from the people at the hotel that they were tame enough and that the Princess always had 'em kept well under control, so I started off.

"It was pretty gloomy by the time I got there and an occasional howl—sort of sorrowful—that I heard as I approached the house along the private road didn't cheer me up. I remember I hoped I should get on well with the Princess. I felt that I wanted friends—you know how these great black spaces make a townman feel, and the night, where there are no trees, is like a great black mouth and you're walking into it.

"Then you come to a lot of stark naked firs and, if there's any wind, they moan at you and the heather and bracken hisses and chuckles under your feet. It gives me the hump. I prefer a murder investigation in and about streets and houses to one in a forest round about a dark old haunted-looking mansion ten miles from anywhere and with a dozen wolves singing mournful lullabies to themselves round the back.

"I sent in my card, marked 'urgent,' and a string of reasonably humble verbal apologies. I don't know whether the butler offered up the apologies or not but he came back regretting that the Princess was 'indisposed and unable to see me.' I could see Madame Dolgourki however. I gathered that Madame was a kind of lady secretary to the Princess and I saw her. She was very amiable. She had known Major Stark, she said, and was very upset about his disappearance. I believe she was sincere. The Princess was very anxious that I should be given every assistance, she explained, and—what could she do for me?

"Well, I ran through a list of the maid-servants, and Madame had them paraded before me one by one. I had the 'Mary' locket before me on the table. I saw them all, from a splendid old white-haired housekeeper (she was like an elderly clergyman's wife) down to a strapping, big under-housemaid. Not one of them could have been 'Mary.' You know there's a touch of blood about the girl in the locket. At least she looks different from the ordinary run of girls.

"Well, that finished my business at No-Man's Court. I wasn't badly disappointed, for I had not expected to find my lady of the locket right away, and, anyway, I couldn't quite see why I should connect Major Stark with one of the staff of a Russian princess who is visiting England for a year or so. It struck me as curious that with the exception of Madame Dolgourki and the Princess every woman in the house should be English. But, after all, that's their affair. I had noticed a big colored photograph on a table, and when we had finished the servant's parade I took a look at it, with Madame's permission. It was a portrait of the Princess in all her glory, crown or tiara, robes, ermine, jewels. She's wonderful. In my business we come across some beautiful women, but the Princess Komorzekovna, if that photo spoke the truth, is the most beautiful woman I ever remember seeing.

"I ventured to say as much to Madame. But, after all, the Princess wasn't 'Mary.' That child is unusual enough in her way, but she couldn't have grown into such a woman. So I thanked Madame and prepared to get out. My back was to the window and Madame was facing me. Just as she rose her face changed, the way a woman's face changes when she sees some one behind you she recognizes. I turned pretty quickly, just in time to see a whitish blue disappear from the window.

"'The man Lovell!' said Madame. 'Oh, but I recognized him. He was peering in.'

"IT STRUCK me as funny and I asked a few questions. Who was Lovell and why was he so anxious to see me? I knew, of course, that the servant's hall would be humming with gossip, but it did not strike me that any ordinary servant would be so keen to look at me as to climb a veranda and peer in through the window.

"Lovell, it seems, is the kennel-man and wolf-keeper at No-Man's Court. Madame does not like him. Once or twice, it appears, she has noticed him staring too familiarly at the Princess. She told me he was always quiet, willing, deferential, and very capable in his line. But Madame dislikes him. She thinks he's a Gipsy. Well, there wasn't much in that—women are curious about men staring; sometimes it's right, sometimes it's wrong—but I thought I'd take a look at Mr. Lovell on my way home.

"I bowed myself out and asked the butler where I could find Lovell. He told me to go to the kennel-house, and pointed to a light at the back of the house (we had come out of a side door) and left me to find my own way. I think his dignity was hurt at the idea of a detective running his eye over the maids.

"I went along down the dark side of the house to where the wolves are kept, and, passing through a shrubbery, came out all at once to a biggish building that had a wire run stretching away from it like a very long fowl-run. The wire seemed to me to be very little thicker than a telegraph wire. Half a dozen big, dark shapes—with eyes—were trotting up and down this run. Every now and then one or other of them would stop and stare at me and let out a little howl.

"There was a light in a doorway at the side and I went in. A man—Lovell—was sitting there in a sort of kennel-kitchen reading a paper by the light of a hurricane lamp. He was smoking and had his feet cocked up one each side of the fireplace. He stood up civilly enough when I came in. I noticed that he had a pair of heavy hob-nailed country boots on. He was better dressed than the ordinary Gipsy, but any one could see at a glance that he was Gipsy to his finger-tips.

"'Sir?' says he, very quiet, putting down his pipe and paper.

"'Are you Lovell?' I asked.

"'Yes, sir.' For a Gipsy he had very steady eyes. He kept 'em fixed on me all the time, quite respectfully, you understand, but not the least bit nervous or afraid.

"'Why climb on the balcony, Lovell?' I said. 'It's not nice—Madame Dolgourki thinks it's impertinent. And, anyway, it's irregular.'

"'I beg pardon, sir, climb on the balconies, sir?' he asked. And he did it well—he's over intelligent for a kennel-man. His eyes led mine, in the most innocent way, to his heavy boots.

"'Quite so, Lovell,' I said. '*You* don't understand what I mean, I know. *You* don't climb balconies—in hobnail boots. That's all right. Where have you put the rubber-soled shoes you used? Oh, it doesn't matter. Call it my joke.'

"His face hardened a bit at that.

"'Excuse me, sir,' he said. 'Have you had permission to come here?' He gave a sort of little click with his tongue when he said this. I didn't like his tone.

"'I have, my friend,' I said.

"'From Her Highness?' he clicked his tongue again.

"'From Madame Dolgourki, representing Her Highness.' I was mild enough, for I wanted to see how far he would go.

"'Where is your pass, sir? We have had accidents at the kennels'—'dens' was the word *he* used—'before, and it is a rule now that visitors have to get a pass.'

"'Pass, my man?' I said. 'My name and business is my pass, if necessary.' I think I was getting angry. He gave a sort of grim smile.

"'Scotland Yard, or Y. M. C. A—it's all one to the wolves,' says he and something in his eyes suggested to me that I should turn round. I did so quickly—and I'm bound to confess that a chill fluttered along my spine. Four great wolves were sitting quietly in a row against the wall behind me. They had, I suppose, come out of their 'dens' when he clicked his tongue. They sat there, quietly enough, like four big, grayish dogs, their eyes half-closed and their tongues hanging out.

"'It's all one to the wolves,' says Lovell. 'I'll tell them you're from Scotland Yard, sir, if you like.' He let out a gleam at me from his eyes.

"'I see that you are a wag, my Romeo,' I said, 'only take my advice and don't overdo the wit. It's a bit of a boomerang sometimes.' It occurred to me that the reception he had given me spoke ill for his conscience and I decided to make a long shot.

"'Lovell,' I said, one eye on him and one on the four fiends by the wall, 'you're a Gipsy—and a man can't disappear in the forest under your very nose, so to speak, without your eyes and instincts showing you something about it. You've seen the spot where that turf is cut. What do you make of it? What do you know about it?'

"He signed to the wolves and they cleared off through an open hatchway in the wall. Then he looked at me.

"'I've seen nothing—and I know nothing,' he says. 'What do I care about Major Stark?' He moved across to the stove where he seemed to be boiling food for the Princess's pets.

"I got up.

"'Lovell, I believe you're lying,' I told him. 'If you are, look out! Do you think

because you have a few circus friends there behind the wall you can play with the law? Listen to me, my man, if I don't learn a little more about the disappearance in a couple of days, I'll arrest you on suspicion. See?'

"IT WAS a bit high-handed, I suppose, but the covert insolence of the man had riled me. I doubt really if he had anything to do with it at all, but he'll probably bolt. He's a Gipsy and no Gipsy will wait to face a thing, innocent or not, if there's a chance to bolt. It's in their blood—practically every time one of his race shifts camp he's bolting from something trifling, as a rule, but serious sometimes. I'm going to have him watched by some one in the house and if he gives one little sign of flitting I'll arrest him and chance it.

"Well, I left him with that. You needn't tell me I tackled the man the wrong way. I know it. But there's something superior about the fellow. Intelligent. He's not the sort of man to be deceived by the ordinary offhand, round-about-the-bush inquiries.

"I came back again past the house and struck the carriage-drive. You know the drive there, a wide, gloomy place. No hedges—just a strip of turf each side with firs running up close to the edge. I came fairly quickly, thinking that I had not got a tremendous lot out of my day's work after all, when, about half-way down the drive I got a cold, beastly idea that I was being followed. It was brutally dark, and you can believe I turned round pretty smartly. Nothing there.

"'Wolves on the brain,' I told myself, and stepped out again. But I'd started looking behind. It's a rotten trick that. I went the next hundred yards with the skin of my back crawling. I nearly ran. I began to sweat and then all at once my fear took me by the throat and twisted me round. In the darkness behind, about two to three feet off the ground and twenty yards away, there were eight spots of light. They hung there, perfectly still.

"I went clammy. I've read about that sort of thing—but it was the first time I've experienced it and I'll see to it that it's the last.

"I hesitated and then moved on again, looking back. The spots of light moved on too, swinging up and down a little. I knew then they were eyes, all right. It occurred to me that Lovell was probably there with the wolves, too, but *his* eyes didn't show and it was just guesswork. I came on, sideways, like a crab, and the eyes came too. Only they seemed to me to come quicker—to be gaining. Well, I couldn't stand that. I knew I was very near the end of the drive and I ran. There are no gates, you remember—the drive turns in off the road; and even as I set foot on the highway one of the wolves jumped for me and 'chopped'—that's the only word, I swear—at my throat from behind.

"It missed, but I felt it rip the cloth of my coat. I heard a sort of angry shout behind that was Lovell, I suppose, and then the light from your window beamed up across the flat. I headed for it in a bee-line. Scared cold I was. I fell a dozen times. I remember thinking vaguely that the wolves weren't following me beyond the road, but I didn't want to stop. I wanted to keep running, and I did, but I couldn't have gone another yard when I struck your casement——"

Waynill ceased, breathing rather quickly. That sudden wolf-leap and the slash of those long jaws were too vivid in his memory to allow him, as yet, to tell his tale without emotion. Then he looked at us with a pale glare in his eyes.

"I'll arrest Lovell to-morrow if I have to shoot every wolf the Princess owns!" he swore.

There was a momentary pause.

"But perhaps Lovell was not responsible," said Torrance, "I believe the wolves are as tame as dogs. It may have been an accident."

The Inspector smiled, rather grimly.

"Yes—the sort of accident men get penal servitude for not preventing!" he said, rising. "I must strike out for the hotel—it's getting late."

"I think you'd better spend the night here—there is plenty of room. Gregg will see to you," said Torrance cordially.

Waynill hesitated, and even as he considered the invitation, a long, low howl, inexpressibly eery, floated across the forest, filtering through the casement into the room.

"Yes," said Waynill, all the color suddenly stricken from his face, "I think I'd better stay—and I'll get to bed now. It's just possible that the bloodhounds will provide us a long day's work to-morrow."

Torrance agreed, rang for Gregg, and the Inspector said 'Good-night.'

CHAPTER V

MORANT, A NEW FOREST SNAKE-CATCHER

TORRANCE closed the door carefully behind his guest and took a chair by my side.

"There you have the affair from the official standpoint," he said softly. "I have known Waynill for a long time or he would not have spoken so freely. He has told us something of what I intended to tell you, but *his* attitude toward the business is very different from mine."

He paused for a moment, thinking. Then, "I wonder what he would do if I told him exactly what happened at the place from which the turf was removed when Stark reached it on Monday morning; if I told him why Stark's horse galloped away, why the turf was cut and by whom; if I told him what happened to Stark, and where I suspect his body lies at this moment. And I could, *I know.* I saw all that took place at that spot which has interested the Inspector so much." His voice had dropped to an agitated whisper, and he stared before him like a man who sees some fearful vision.

"Herapath, you are my friend," he whispered, and then I realized what an effort of will he must have made to remain so calm, so carelessly interested, so undisturbed, during Waynill's story. "Herapath, you are my friend, but, as yet, I do not even dare to tell *you* the whole of the thing I saw that morning. It is incredible—unbelievable!" He looked at me with eyes that had become suddenly haggard and almost tragic.

"If I told you what I saw I might come to believe things which, for the sake of my whole happiness and peace I dare not believe."

He stared again into the fire, clenching his hands on the arms of his chair.

"Let the bloodhounds find what they can! Let Waynill find 'Mary' if he can! How can a man find a woman from the portrait of a child? And Lovell? Lovell will be at the other side of the Forest to-morrow."

Then he turned to me suddenly and took yet another photograph from his pocket, a common picture-postcard of the earlier kind.

"Do you observe anything worthy of comment about that picture, Herapath?" His voice was tense with anxiety.

I looked very carefully at the photograph. It portrayed a man past middle age, who stood holding out a handful of small snakes—dangling, distorted things—as though to exhibit them to an onlooker. Over one shoulder I saw slung a small canvas bag, over the other was a square tin box. In the left hand he held a long forked stick. His dress was rough, such as foresters wear. At the bottom of the card was an underline, "Morant, a New Forest Snake-catcher."

But it was the face of the snake-catcher that held my attention after the first comprehensive glance. The face—for vaguely, vaguely, behind, as it were, the keen, clear-cut, wild, aquiline features of the man lay a likeness. It may have been some little chance similarity of one line, one feature merely, or it may have been a resemblance of general effect, but, whatever it was, I knew I had seen quite recently a person or a picture of a person who resembled this snake-catcher. Then suddenly a name rose to my lips.

"Why, it's like 'Mary!'" I said.

"Her father. Anything more?" The anxiety had not gone from Torrance's voice.

I had felt that the resemblance of the old man to "Mary" was less than his resemblance to some one whom I could not name. I thought for a moment and my mind turned to the photograph Torrance had looked at so often during supper. I turned to the mantelpiece, but the photograph had gone. I felt myself entering a maze.

"What have you done with that photograph of the Princess that was on the mantelpiece, Torrance?" I asked. "I'd like to see it for a moment."

He took it from behind a queer-shaped barbaric looking clock. "I slid it there when Waynill was wondering where he had seen some one resembling the girl of the locket," he said, and handed it to me.

Then I saw. The Princess resembled the old snake-catcher far more, in that vague, uncertain way, than she resembled "Mary." But now—*now* I saw how like she was to "Mary," also. I looked at Torrance.

"Then the Princess is the snake-catcher's daughter—and 'Mary' grown ten years older?" I asked.

"Yes," he said, and took the photographs again.

"In that case it was the Princess who

dropped the locket—*her* locket?" I suggested.

Torrance hesitated.

"I do not say that," he answered curtly.

I saw that he was overstrung. Plainly, he knew far more of the affair than he had told Waynill or me. It was obvious at any rate that he was shielding, or trying to shield, the Princess. From what? And equally plainly, he feared to tell what he knew until he knew all. I did not press him.

"Tell me what you know when you like—if you want to tell at all, Torrance. Or tell me nothing," I said. "I only stipulate that you use me if I can be useful."

Torrance's grip was very friendly when we said good-night.

"I hope to tell everything to-morrow" he said at my door. "I am only waiting for a certain letter."

CHAPTER VI

THE END OF THE TRAIL

TORRANCE and I breakfasted by electric light at half-past seven on the following morning. Early as we were, Waynill was earlier. He had left the bungalow at six o'clock, said old Gregg uneasily, as he brought coffee. He had asked Gregg where his master kept his revolver and had borrowed it.

Torrance looked over at me and smiled.

"He's gone after Lovell," he said, "but he might as well go after a hare or a grass-snake with a revolver and handcuffs. Lovell knows the Forest to an inch, and Waynill's a townman."

He had no more than finished speaking when Waynill came in.

"He's gone of course," said Torrance.

The detective nodded.

"Yes, gone from No-Man's Court. But he's still inside our wire fence," he replied.

"Wire fence?"

"Telegraph wires—oh, I shall get him all right. It's 'Mary' of the locket I want to find." He drank off a cup of scalding hot coffee and became more human.

"It's beastly cold out here," he said. "I don't think Colonel Shafto's bloodhounds will do any good at all. It's frozen again and the ground's like iron. I hate the New Forest; it's the bleakest place in England." But, nevertheless, he began to eat expensively procured red mullet with an appetite that was a compliment to the forest air.

"You know, Waynill," said Torrance composedly, "speaking as a student of logic, or say a theoretical detective, in this case, it seems to me you are starting on the wrong side of the locket. You have two photos, one of which you have identified, one of which is entirely unknown. Surely the simple way would be to follow up the clue you have instead of hunting for the clue you merely suspect. Why don't you shelve the 'Mary' picture for a time and work back along Stark's history and among his friends, hunting for a reason why he should be killed or caused to disappear?"

To me, after the discovery of the previous night, Torrance's idea was obvious enough. He wanted to distract the detective's attention from the "Mary" picture at all costs. Sooner or later, he argued, the detective would see the Princess, dressed simply as a country lady, and might observe in her then the faint likeness to "Mary" that he could not see when looking at the Princess in her court dress.

Waynill nodded, rather eagerly.

"I believe you're right, Mr. Torrance," he said. "It struck me that way, just now. I'll think it over from that point of view—after breakfast. I wonder what time the hounds will be here."

WE HAD no more than lighted cigarettes after breakfast when old Gregg, coming in to switch off the electric light, announced that a motor had just turned in off the main road and was on the way to the bungalow.

Waynill stood up.

"Well, the Colonel evidently believes in an early start," he said, and began to study a little plan of the place where the turf had been cut.

But it was not Colonel Shafto and his bloodhounds that stepped out of the motor. It was another kind of bloodhound—a representative of the *Daily Post*, a lean, self-possessed, youngish individual, with quick eyes and a thin, clever face.

He knew Torrance, for he asked for a cup of coffee almost before he was in the room.

"The first of the vultures," he said, pleasantly enough for a "vulture." "Dropped down from town this morning; hired a car at Salisbury and came across these New Forest tundras to Stoney Cross Hotel, look-

ing for you, Inspector." He seemed to know Waynill also.

He drank the coffee Gregg brought him, lighted a cigarette and produced a damp, smeary copy of the *Daily Post* for that day.

"There's a column about Major Stark on the fifth page," he said, handing it to the detective. "Column seven. I only got the stuff late last night. Perhaps it will be news to you?"

Waynill looked through the column and passed the paper on to Torrance.

"Is this right?" he asked the pressman.

"Quite; I got the story myself." There was a little pause before he added: "It's plain sailing, Waynill, after that, isn't it?"

Waynill did not reply. He was thinking now, I imagine, how his own clues could be explained away.

It was Torrance who spoke, handing me the paper.

"It is quite obvious to me that Major Stark has either committed suicide or quietly left the country," he said, with an extraordinary certainty in his voice.

The journalist nodded. "Perfectly," he said.

Waynill remained silent. I read the column. Concisely enough it explained that a representative of the *Daily Post* had learned from reliable sources that, less than a week before, Major Stark had been requested quietly, but very unmistakably, to resign from the two prominent clubs of which he had been a member. With the skillful veiling which decency and the English libel law, demanded, the writer of the column gave "financial affairs" as one of the reasons for the forced resignation. "Card troubles," apparently, constituted another reason.

The representative of the paper had also discovered that Major Stark was so heavily in debt to most of the big bookmakers that the best enclosures on any race-course were practically shut to him until he had settled his accounts. Next came a statement which had an even more ugly look about it—a point-blank paragraph to the effect that the disappearance of the Major coincided remarkably with certain steps which two money-lenders were taking in the matter of money lent to Major Stark on the strength of securities alleged to be forged.

Truly there were grounds for believing that the missing man had either committed suicide or absconded. The column concluded with a paragraph stating that, despite the lapse of time since the actual disappearance, Colonel Shafto's bloodhounds would be employed on the scene that day.

But Waynill looked unconvinced.

"Come, Waynill, who on earth would murder a man on the edge of ruin—and worse?" said the pressman lightly, his inquisitive eye on the detective's face. "I believe you've found a clue or two you hate to part with."

Waynill nodded, as another big motor drove up. It was a man from the *Morning Herald*. And from then on reporters dropped down thick and fast "precisely like vultures over an ox that the army has left behind."

They interviewed Waynill, they interviewed Torrance, they interviewed me, they interviewed old Gregg, they interviewed one another, some dashed off to interview the Princess, her household and her wolves, they interviewed Torrance's whisky and cigarettes, and one enterprising gentleman who broke into the scullery, for reasons known only to himself, I discovered wandering about the back interviewing (I verily believe) the oil-engine. Finally, Colonel Shafto, his brother, two helpers and three magnificent bloodhounds arrived and were interviewed before they set foot on the threshold.

BUT at about eleven a start was made. Two shoes had been taken from the horse Stark had ridden and sent over, together with a number of articles of clothing and a favorite pair of boots belonging to the missing man, from a relative's house at which he had been staying. Then Colonel Shafto, a gray, grim little man, very quick and erect, explained, not too politely, the rules necessary to be observed when working bloodhounds. Chiefly, the crowd was requested to keep well away behind the hounds and to be reasonably quiet.

I saw that the tense look had come again into Torrance's eyes as, just before the start was made, he watched Colonel Shafto and Waynill talking earnestly together over by the hounds. The detective appeared to be pressing some point, and presently the Colonel seemed to agree. He nodded and turned to his brother, the very counterpart of himself, who stood fondling a grand tawny brute nearly three feet high with a grave face, deep-set eyes and ears so long that one looking at the hound was reminded of a bewigged and aged judge. The Colonel

mounted his horse and, riding some yards behind the hound which his brother held in leash, set out across the heather and gorse-patched turf.

We followed at a discreet distance.

"They're going to start at the place where the turf is cut," said Torrance softly in my ear, as we went. We were walking alone together; the pressmen had formed a little crowd of their own.

I felt a sudden surge of curiosity.

"Who cut the turf, Torrance?" I asked on the impulse.

"Gregg," he answered in no more than a whisper. "*Gregg and I!*"

I think he saw my bewilderment, for he smiled faintly.

"No more questions, Herapath, yet," he said. "You shall know what I know—when I know everything."

And we followed the big hound and his attendants in silence. Presently Colonel Shafto's arm went up and we all halted. They had arrived at the spot that mystified Waynill. The Colonel dismounted, a piece of clothing in his hand.

What followed then was strange and a little sinister. I think most of us then expected the hound to fail. The scent was four days old, at least, and the bloodhound is a very much more disappointing worker than those who have only read of the wonderful brutes in romances would imagine.

Certainly no one, the Colonel least of all, expected the hound to do his work with the extraordinary quickness and precision that he actually did. He nuzzled the boots and odd articles of clothing that Colonel Shafto offered him, put down his intelligent head, made a short eager cast round the patch of cut turf, hesitated for a second, and then, running perfectly mute, nose to the ground, padded swiftly away through the heather. Furiously waving us all back, the Colonel gave the hound some fifty yards start and then followed him at a canter.

For some distance the bloodhound traveled over level ground. He seemed to be going along a rough cattle-path and I felt a queer little kick of the heart as I remembered Waynill's remark that he had found the cigar-case at the edge of a cattle-track. Then the ground tilted, sloping down, and the bloodhound disappeared over the slope. Colonel Shafto followed, quickening his pace.

We had come nearly half a mile, running at the best pace most of us were capable of, and when we reached the beginning of the slope most of us stayed there, panting. Indeed, there was little to be gained by running farther, for the slope continued for nearly a quarter of a mile, dropping gently down to the floor of a wide, shallow valley, then tilted up again and, continuing up for another furlong, reached the level. It was like a very shallow, dry river-bed magnified several times over.

Those who waited where we were standing could see practically everything that occurred within a distance of nearly half a mile—if anything was going to occur. Not one of us, except Torrance, who stood there staring out across the forest, would have been astonished, I think, had the bloodhound suddenly come upon the dead body of Major Stark lying among the heather. All were tense with expectancy. But Colonel Shafto rode steadily on down the slope without a check.

THEN presently a small dark speck sped out from the heather at the bottom of the slope, nose to the ground, and ran silently straight across the bottom of the valley. It was the bloodhound, wonderfully following the four-day trail, and excited little murmurs broke from the knot of pressmen. Torrance was staring through a pair of binoculars and suddenly I heard him draw in his breath with a hiss. Almost at the same second the bloodhound stopped dead at the edge of an expanse of smooth level turf and, throwing up its head, uttered a series of short choky cries, very different from the deep bay my romance-readings had taught me to expect.

And there was no reason why the hound should stop that I could see. It stood at the beginning of about a half-acre of turf so smooth and clear of heather growth as to look lawn-like at that distance. There was a volley of quick questions and ejaculations from the journalists. Then Colonel Shafto rode out from the heather toward that level half-acre. But he also stopped suddenly, some eight yards behind the bloodhound, He slipped from his horse and, turning, began to beckon excitedly. I saw him turn again to the bloodhound, whose cries now had changed to a frenzied howl—a long agonized yell of terror. Colonel Shafto frantically tore off his riding coat, but even as his white sleeves flickered like a waved flag, the hound vanished.

"Good heavens!" I said. "Where's the bloodhound?" Only Torrance remained with me—the rest were running down the slope, shouting.

Torrance took the binoculars from his eyes and, white as paper, faced me.

"Where?" he said, in a sort of whispered scream. "Three feet deep in No-Man's Bog; the quickest and most dangerous quagmire in the forest! Although the bloodhound does not know it, he is following the trail of Major Stark to the very floors of the morass!" His eyes burned like jewels. "And if ever No-Man's Bog bursts and gives up its dead, the bloodhound will arise not far from the body of that card-cheat, roué, swindler and fortune-hunter, Major Stark—food for the bog this four days past!"

I stared, dazed and cold, at the string of reporters running, running eagerly down to that smooth, tempting, lawn-like death-trap at the foot of the hill.

"The end of the trail, indeed!" I said weakly, over and over again; "the end of the trail, indeed"—with a vapid and foolish laugh that I was helpless to check.

Presently they all turned, plodding up the slope toward us. Waynill's face was hard with disappointment, for the bogs hold their secrets inviolate from Scotland Yard as from the rest of the world. And the gray little brother of Colonel Shafto had tears in his eyes, for he had reared the big bloodhound from puppyhood; he had taught it almost all it had known; he had come to love the beautiful brute and at the end of it all he had laid it on the trail to its own death.

CHAPTER VII

THE WOMAN WITH THE WOLVES

I THINK that day's happenings left no doubt in the minds of those who witnessed them that Stark had been engulfed in the quagmire by accident—save only Waynill, Torrance and myself.

Torrance put forward a plausible theory that Stark's horse had shied at the black patch of mold where the turf was cut, leaped over the patch, twisting as he landed—probably owing to a sudden jerk of the bridle—thrown Stark and bolted. Stark may have lain stunned for a time, and then, recovering consciousness, and, perhaps gravely injured, crawled away in the direction of No-Man's Court for help. Missing the way in his dazed state, he had blundered into the bog, not realizing where he was until the treacherous mire had gripped him fast. Colonel Shafto was very warm in support of the theory. Had Stark walked into the bog, it was in the highest degree improbable that the scent would have lain for over four days. But if he had crawled, the scent might have been heavy enough to justify the extreme certainty and confidence the bloodhound had exhibited.

The reporters, also, accepted the theory. It was certainly plausible and, further, lent itself to effective "writing-up" for next morning's paper. Only Waynill, walking restlessly round the room with a puzzled scowl on his face, ignored the theory. He was the last to go.

"Well, Mr. Torrance, I'll accept your theory when I've found 'Mary' and Lovell—if they do not provide me with a better one," he said, on parting. Torrance watched him from the window as he strode away toward Stony Cross.

"HE HATES the forest. It is strange country to him. He did well at the patch of cut turf for a town-bred man, but he will not get much farther. It would be child's play to a black tracker, but to any ordinary detective the secrets of the forest are not easily learned from the trails. And daily the signs that the black tracker would look for are disappearing. Every blade of grass, dead leaf or twisted heather sprig is gradually slipping back into its place. In two days' time any clue which the ground may offer now at that spot will be gone as though it had never existed. And Waynill must look elsewhere for clues." Torrance came away from the window.

"Well, the letter I am waiting for has not arrived," he continued in a different tone, "and you must be content to wait for the truth until I get it."

I thought of the flamboyant and impulsive promise I had made to ask nothing on the previous evening and frankly regretted it. The ominous disappearance of Lovell, the unquieted suspicions of Waynill, reaching tentatively in all directions, the sinister-seeming descent of the "vultures" of the press, the evil fate of the bloodhound, and, not least of all, Torrance's obvious and desperate sheltering of the Princess, stirred my curiosity to an extremity.

"At least, Torrance, tell me, if you can, whom you are sheltering—and why," I blurted. "You know that I would do anything possible to help."

Rather to my surprise Torrance smiled a little.

"Very well," said he. "If you will understand that I endeavor to shelter her not from the result of any ill-doing—of which she is incapable—but from official suspicion of ill-doing."

"That is understood, of course," I said.

"Then, unasked, I shelter from that suspicion the Princess Komorzekovna. Because I love her. Listen to me. Before Stark came I had almost won her. But with his coming she changed, withdrew, as it were, into an armor of reserve. She was never less cordial to me after Stark's appearance, but nevertheless she changed. We had been good comrades before; then, suddenly, the sense of comradeship, the *camaraderie* vanished like a quenched candle-flame. We had been accustomed to take together, with the wolves following, quite long explorations across the forest. The walks ceased. Stark came like a blight to flowers.

"She leased No-Man's Court from him, or rather, from those to whom it was mortgaged. She loves the forest and pays heavily for the house. The rent must have been enough to pay interest on other more doubtful loans than that on No-Man's Court. Stark was attracted to her by the heavy sum his agents had extorted from her for rent, I am sure of that, and he called ostensibly as landlord, enquiring as to her comfort in the place.

"He saw her, and, more important to Stark, he recognized the obvious signs of wealth with which she is surrounded. It was plain to me that, from the first, Stark laid siege not to her but to her wealth. To him, she was no more than an appanage to her wealth. He reversed the lover's order of attraction. He came as a fortune-hunter, nothing more.

"But she seemed not to observe it. She appeared to like the man, to welcome him. Against my will, and bitterly protesting in my spirit, I found myself in the background —more and more and more—until finally I kept away from the place. She seemed content to let me go—heaven knows there was never an overture to indicate that she missed or regretted the old days! And Stark came almost daily. They rode together, walked together, where once I had walked and ridden with her. Oh, yes, I had dropped out!

"Stark and I remained on terms. There was a pretense of friendship. I think Stark considered me too rich to lose touch with. That was all, up to last Monday. And now Stark is dead, and I have new hope." He paused. "Oh, not because he is dead—his death could not alter her feelings to me—but because of the manner of his dying. Herapath, I saw him die—and before he had ceased to breathe I knew that I could hope. Some day you will know why—soon, perhaps."

He picked up his stick. "Come for a walk," he said, in a new, restless tone. "We've got an hour of daylight yet."

HE PASSED out through the casement and I turned to get a cap and, incidentally, my automatic pistol. I had carried it all the morning; indeed, I usually carry it. One of my few hobbies is revolver-shooting, and I think I am entitled to say that it is one of the very few things I can do really well.

It was certain that the wolves of the Princess were given considerable freedom and, although they seemed to be unusually tame, nevertheless one of them at least had attacked Waynill. In any case, the pistol was not inconvenient to carry and there was a remote possibility that it might be useful. As things fell out, I can never be sufficiently grateful I took the weapon.

Torrance was waiting and we set off in silence. Our direction lay toward No-Man's Court. It seemed to me that Torrance's suggestion that we still had an hour of daylight was exaggerated. The light was failing even as we started. There was a somberness about the landscape, a graying pall that darkened slowly. The air was bleak and icy. One could not feel any breath of wind but nevertheless the sense of intense cold lapped about one. It was such an evening as ushers in a bitter black frost.

The rusty heather lay still and silent, there was no motion nor sound from the lonely clump of naked, bark-flaking firs, and the hardening turf rang under our boot-heels like iron.

"The forest in Winter," I said, "is uninteresting until one gets accustomed to it."

Torrance did not answer at first. He was

staring intently at a small fir clump before us but slightly to our right. He swung round a little, heading for the trees.

"Yes," he said presently, in an absent voice, "but it has its charm also." He had quickened his pace.

"Gently, man," I said, as we came up to the edge of the firs. "Why are we racing?"

But I knew before I had finished.

A woman in furs was standing among the tree-trunks, gazing out toward No-Man's Bog. She turned suddenly as we came up, a pale, pale face, set with dark, splendid eyes that, against the cold ivory complexion, seemed huge.

But it was not by that white face I knew her, nor by the wonderful eyes. Her attendants introduced her to me as they rose with pricked ears from where they lay about her feet—four great, gray wolves, yawning elaborately, observing us with oblique, half-closed eyes, without fear as without dislike. A turn of her hand sent them padding a few paces behind her—one, the biggest, it seemed to me, jealously reluctant. But he went, looking sideways at us with eyes that for a moment I saw wide and lambent.

CHAPTER VIII

THE PRINCESS EXPLAINS

SHE gave Torrance her hand and there was a gladness in her voice as she greeted him.

"To meet you wandering again," she said, "is like opening a long-closed book."

"I had not dared to hope it would ever again be open for me," said Torrance, agitated. "The flowers we put among its pages I thought were dead."

She smiled—a little, tender smile—and looked at me. Torrance presented me and, with one eye for the wolves, I fear, I endeavored to express my sense of her amiability. I found it not easy under the slanting eyes of her gentlemen in waiting.

Torrance spoke again and I fell back a little, affecting—it was no true affectation—absorbing interest in the wolves. One rose suddenly, and its coarse, dark, mane-like neck- and shoulder-bristles stirred as though lifted a little by a puff of wind. The others turned their big heads, looking steadily at him. I gave them all my attention. The brutes fascinated me, and I think they knew it. Against my will I felt my forefinger stealthily pick back the safety-catch of the automatic pistol in my pocket.

It occurred to me that the Princess was talking more and more quickly with Torrance, more and more in earnest. I glanced at them. Their eyes clung to each other's; Torrance's lips were open slightly like those of a man on tiptoe to ask a question. They had forgotten my presence, I believe.

"Oh, men are blind—blind!" she was saying. I suppose Torrance had taken courage to reproach her. "They have no faith, no trust. 'Explain the smile for that man—the look for that,' they say. Ah, jealous! How jealous they are! It is cruel, because of the unhappiness for us. I know—do *I* not know if any woman ever knew! Have I not paid for my knowledge in the last few months?

"Why did you not wait—and trust, too? I prayed that you would not think ill, that you would be kind and patient. Why, it has been to me as if the sun had never shone since that man came!" Her arm swept out toward the valley of No-Man's Bog. "I can tell you now—now that it is too late. Years and years ago, so long it seems, when I was only Mary Morant, a little wild forest creature, I met another of the forest—a Gipsy, a boy. To me he was beautiful, wonderful, a companion sent me by the forest. And his people roamed the South of England, but I remained with my father always in the forest.

"My father was a snake-catcher. My companion was called Boy Lovell. He would not tell me his Romany name, for he said that as I was not Romany he would leave the tents for my sake when the time came. We were young; young and so happy. We planned our future. What did we know of the future? We loved each other, and we had the forest. I will not tell you of all that, so soon after that man——" again she pointed to the bog. "I could not bear it.

"I DO not know now whether I really loved my Gipsy companion. I remember him as always kind and tender and gay—so gay. And we were just two wild things of the forest. I believed I loved him. He would leave the tents, suddenly, at times, and hurry back to me and the forest from as far as Cornwall—alone, impulsive, hungry to see me, to surprise me.

"And then Stark came home to No-Man's

Court—the Starks were richer then and lived there—and saw me. He was always wicked. He was wicked then although he was little more than a boy. He had just left the military college. He wanted to be my companion. I laughed at him. But I sometimes allowed him to walk across the heather with me. He had a camera and took my picture, and showed me how to take his. He put the two pictures into a little locket and gave it to me.

"But in the end—one day—he was insulting and my true companion came out from behind a heather clump like a swift snake and beat him. I had not known Boy Lovell to be in the forest at all. I thought him to be with the tents in Gloucester. He beat Stark terribly—as he deserved—when two foresters saw and came up. They held Boy Lovell and Stark looked at him like an animal before he spoke. Then he pointed to a pheasant which Boy Lovell had flung down when he came out from the heather and swore that, because he had discovered him taking a pheasant from a snare and had remonstrated, Boy Lovell had tried to murder him.

"They found snares on Boy Lovell, of course—a Gipsy must live—and took him to prison. Ah, but how Stark lied! His people were important and powerful in the forest then and Boy Lovell was only a Gipsy. They sent him to prison for five years, and because I and my father tried to help him, to speak well for him, my father was dismissed and a new snake-catcher came.

"So we left the forest and went into a town. I welcomed that, for to be in the forest when my boy was in prison hurt me so. He died soon. He loved the forest—he had never slept under a roof—he loved the forest and he loved me. But they did not understand his spirit. One week in prison was to him more than five years would be to many men. They kept him there inside the walls. He could not come to the forest and to me, and so he died—my boy, my companion of the forest, who had been so kind to me—who had been so gay!"

The Princess paused for a moment. The forest was all gray now, and under the firs it was full of shadow. The lights in the eyes of the wolves were plainer and all the brutes were standing up, their heads hung low. The Princess had forgotten them, I think.

"In the town we nearly starved until the snake-woman of a traveling menagerie was killed by a cobra from which the fangs had not been removed. I heard two men talking of it and I hurried to the menagerie, hungry, eager, poor little wretch that I must have been, and begged them to let me be snake-woman instead. I did not fear the snakes—a snake-catcher's daugher who had handled vipers. They listened, and so I became the snake-girl and wandered with the caravans.

"But I despised the snakes and learned to understand the animals—the wolves, the leopards, the lions, and presently became a 'Lion Queen.' Oh, but what a 'Queen'! And after a few years I grew famous in my way. It was because I was not afraid. I was never afraid after I knew my companion was dead.

"So I drifted to the Continent, in time to Vienna, performing with leopards and lions and my wolves. I kept the locket with the picture of the man who had killed Boy Lovell with lies. In Vienna Prince Komorzekovna saw me and fell in love with me. I do not think I loved him, but he was so kind and urged me so, and I married him. It made the Prince happy and I was not unhappy.

"At the end of three years he died, and I came home. I heard that the Starks had become poor, and I took No-Man's Court. I had never forgotten to hate Stark—he was a Major now—and I wanted to avenge Boy Lovell. My heart was quite empty then. I thought that if I could meet Stark again I could make him suffer. I hoped to lure him. I was rich and he was poor and greedy. Oh, I had agents who found out many things about him. I had grown beautiful, and he always pursued a beautiful woman. So I took his house—he did not know me, of course—and waited to see what would happen. Then you, my neighbor, came to see me——" her voice faltered and the wolves stirred uneasily "—and—and my heart was no longer empty."

I heard a muffled inarticulate cry from Torrance and he stepped forward to her. The wolves rumbled softly in their throats. The Princess signed to him to stand still and listen.

"I WAS happy with you in the forest. Then Stark came, and he loved me, he said. I think he believed he spoke the truth. At least he loved my money. He did not remember Mary

Morant. I lured him—lured him—until he was certain that I would marry him. It was not easy for me—*you* did not understand; but I remembered poor Boy Lovell and I was firm.

"Last Monday came—last Monday—when I had promised to give him an answer. Oh, but he was very confident, he was very sure of me, sure of himself! I did not wait for him to come to the house. I walked out and met him—with my wolves. I had not taken them out for several days. Besides, I knew that Stark was cruel—perhaps he would try to be cruel when I had given him his answer. But he would not be violent—my wolves would see to that!"

I swear the brutes knew she was talking of them. They watched her like jealous dogs.

"He came riding up, confident, assured, certain. He slipped from his horse, putting his arm through the bridle, smiling. 'I have come to learn my fate, Princess,' he said, and suddenly the smile left his lips. He was looking at my eyes and his confidence was all gone—in that one short second.

"Then I told him who I was, and I told him what he was. I spoke of poor Boy Lovell, and told him how he had died. He saw that it was hopeless for him, and sneered. I became angry then—that was wrong, for my wolves were getting angry, too. I did not notice. All the unhappiness of the past ten years came back to me then—I was thinking of Boy Lovell, of my father, banished from his hut in the forest, of our life in the airless, dreadful town, the squalor of the caravans. To this hour I remember the smell of the snakes I used to perform with. All, all, all came back to me in anger, in bitterness, and I charged him with all I—we—had suffered.

"What I said I can not say again to you or to any one. And he stood at his horse's head with a pale, wicked smile on his lips, repenting nothing, grieving for nothing, regretting nothing but the rich marriage he had lost. When I spoke of my agents and showed him that I had known him to be a ruined fortune-hunter from the first call he had paid me, he only laughed. Ah, but he was without heart and without honor! So in the end I gave him his answer. I had the locket in my hands.

"'You ask me for myself,' I cried; 'I give you this!' and threw the locket in his cold, bitter face. *And my wolves were at him*—ah, I had not meant that!" The Princess shuddered. "I had forgotten them. They thought when I threw out my hand with the locket I set them at him. But I meant no more than to humiliate him, to reject him so contemptuously as to make him suffer. In spite of all that he had done, I could not do more than that. The rest was for God.

"The wolves were mad with rage—I had cried, I think, and they understood—and before I could do anything he was dead. The horse had galloped away wild with fear. I flogged the wolves off with his riding-whip. But he was dead,—torn, and the wolves kept edging in and in.

"I was stunned for a few minutes. Then I saw Lovell across the heather and beckoned to him. He is a brother of Boy Lovell. I met him by chance in the forest when I first came here and I saw how like he was. I told him the story of his brother and Stark. He wanted to serve me and I made him keeper of my wolves. It was what he asked.

"I beckoned Lovell and he came. He saw the body at my feet—and I told him. *He* was not sorry.

"'Take the wolves home,' he said, 'and I will bury the body. The bog will take him—and keep its secret!'

"AND that is how it ended. I returned to the house and Lovell—took Stark. Next morning he came to me, puzzled and uneasy and told me that he had gone to the spot early, very early, that morning and he had found the turf newly removed from the spot where Stark had been killed.

"He did not know who had done it. But I guessed. I remembered you had told me that from your window the view extends for miles in that direction and it came to me that you had seen. That night Lovell came to your house and searched. He found a turf-spade in Gregg's room—Gregg slept soundly and Lovell moves like a cat. And I knew who had cut the turf, because it was torn and blood-stained, and I feared, as I fear now, that you had believed I——"

Torrance spoke suddenly.

"Yes, I saw it all, from my window, Princess. I saw your hand go up, and how the wolves followed it. But I did not see the locket thrown—how could I at such distance? I hated having seen—and I would not believe what I thought I had seen. Any

man might have believed that you urged your wolves to attack him—any man but me. But I could not understand. I, too, was stunned, I think. I turned to leave the room just as Gregg came in to ask about some things. I talked with Gregg—I had decided nothing as yet, and I dared not let Gregg suspect. When I turned again to the window you were gone—nobody was in sight. I came out and saw the turf all torn and stained. I found nothing but a tuft of wolf-hair here and there on a patch of gorse near by. Those I removed.

"I went back to my house, not daring to think. Remember what I was mad enough to fear I had seen—— That night Gregg and I cut the turf. Took it and dropped it in the bog. I could trust Gregg. I did not come to No-Man's Court, but I hoped you might send for me. Then Waynill, the detective, chanced along, and since then I have never lost sight of him. I watched him come near the truth—for he found the locket but did not recognize you from it—but I think he will learn no more.

"For my own peace I made inquiries, too. I had heard the story of Boy Lovell once, vaguely. It was when I bought pictures of your father. And I had inquired as to what had become of Mary Morant. I am expecting a final letter from Vienna even yet, but that will tell me nothing that I do not now know."

"Then you believe?" There was hope and a sort of glad wonder in her voice.

"Believe! Ah, you shame me—I came so near to doubting——"

She moved blindly toward him, reaching. "Thank God! Thank God!" she sobbed, and Torrance's arms were round her at last.

I heard a snarl and whirled round. The big wolf was half in the air, springing at Torrance. The brute was not two yards from me. I pressed my trigger not an instant too soon. He dropped, snarling, biting at the ground. Believe that I blessed my pistol practise then. The remaining three crouched back, glaring up with blazing eyes. I heard the Princess say something sharply—it all happened quick as light—and I picked them off one by one.

"Quite time they were dead," I heard myself say, in a small, scared voice. "They're not safe, you know. First Stark, then Waynill, then you——" One was kicking a bit still and I put another bullet through him. I hated the brutes so that I could have riddled them. Then my fear suddenly left me and I turned. The disgraceful taste of the thing I had said struck me then,—'First Stark'—and I turned, very humbly, to the Princess. But she smiled wanly through the twilight. Her hand was in Torrance's.

"Pardon, Princess——" I mumbled.

"Please say nothing, my friend," her voice sounded sweet with gratitude. "The folly was mine—to bring them. And you have given me his life!"

Torrance gripped my hand hard over the little pistol. So we stood for a moment. Queerly, it was only then I realized that the jealous brutes might have killed Torrance—hitherto it had been quite a personal matter between me and the wolves. I feared them for my own sake—all the time I had been yearning to shoot the devils. Well, now they were dead, and the Princess and Torrance had come together again. So I left them, holding hands like happy children.

THERE it ended. Waynill came near to the truth—but he could come no nearer. The Princess went to Italy a few days later, and Torrance followed her. The cigar-case that Torrance had claimed is now in my possession. It had fallen from Stark's clothing as Lovell took him down the cattle-track to the bog.

Waynill drifted discontentedly about that part of the forest for a fortnight, learning nothing more, it seems, and then suddenly gave it up and returned to town. He went in the morning, and in the afternoon Lovell, the Gipsy, appeared at No-Man's Court—apparently from nowhere—and fell unconcernedly to work, straightening up the empty wolf-den. That was some months ago.

And now it is Summer and the forest is glorious in cloth-of-gold of the gorse, royal purple of heather, emerald fern and cool green of pine.

And Torrance and his wife return from Italy to-morrow. They will not live at No-Man's Court but at a place with gentler memories which Torrance has bought in the forest. And if ever they ride out toward the bungalow and the old Court they will not encounter that grim, turfless patch to awaken in their minds that which is better forgotten. Gray old Gregg has seen to that—he has returfed it so carefully that it is impossible to tell the new from the old.

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