ARGOSY

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THE ARGOSY

Vol. CXII **ISSUED WEEKLY** NUMBER 1

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FOUR SERIAL STORIES

ONE COMPLETE NOVELETTE

SEVEN SHORT STORIES

Full of snap and go!

"CROSSES OF STEEL"

BY REX PARSON

Author of "Southwest of the Law," "Easy Garvin," etc.

Gets off to a flying start next week

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 Broadway, New York, and Temple House, Temple Avenue, E. C., London
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THE ARGOSY

Vol. CXII SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 6, 1919 No. 1

Everything but the Truth

by Edgar Franklin

Author of "Anything but the Truth," "Annexing Bill," etc.

CHAPTER I.

UNDER WAY.

"YOU are not leaving *again*, sir?" inquired Loomis, who was perhaps the leanest and most pessimistic head bookkeeper alive.

Bill Hervey grinned cheerily at him and buttoned his light motoring ulster.

"Yep!"

"For the day, Mr. Hervey?" Loomis asked, with increasing wonder.

Bill's grin faded slightly. He liked Loomis, of course. Loomis was efficient and trustworthy to the last degree, and utterly devoted to the youthful Hervey Manufacturing Company. But all the same, sitting up there on his high stool, frowning chilly and perfectly obvious disapproval, and using just that tone, one might have fancied that Loomis owned the company, and that William was one of the less-cherished employees.

"I shall be back this evening for a couple of hours," Mr. Hervey explained somewhat briefly. "About eight o'clock, I think. You needn't stay down-town, of course."

The Loomis lips tightened a little.

"To finish what you have to do personally on the Duncan specifications, sir, and get things ready for the gentlemen who are coming to-morrow morning to close the Morton contract, of course?"

"Naturally," said the head of the firm.

And now he glanced out of the window at the brilliant sunshine and smiled very absently. And he drew on his gloves and buckled them at the wrist and sighed very softly. And neither the smile nor the sigh were what one might have expected from a rushing, high-pressure young business man just after luncheon hour on a roaring business day.

Loomis, apparently, sensed the almost indecent unfitness of both, for he straightened up on his stool and went to undue lengths!

"It isn't my place to make suggestions, of course, sir," he said bluntly, "but wouldn't it be better if you stayed here and finished up those jobs—er—*now*, sir?"

"What?" William rasped.

"They are matters which can be looked after only by yourself, Mr. Hervey," the head bookkeeper informed him, and retreated not one inch. "They are matters that *have* to be finished before to-morrow morning. It would be most unfortunate, should anything make it impossible for you to return this evening."

"Nothing will," his employer said coldly.

"Nevertheless, it is hardly too much to say that the fate of the firm depends on the business we're going to do to-morrow morning, and if anything should slip—"

William's gloved fingers snapped suddenly and soundlessly at him.

"Say, Loomis! That 'll do, you know! *I'm* running this business. You're not!"

Two seconds Loomis stared at him. Then he offered a sigh of his own, which was neither soft nor sentimental. It was a sigh of pure, undisguised grief, portending the blackest and most inescapable disaster; it was the gloomiest sigh of which Loomis was capable, which is saying a great deal. He bowed his head toward the heedless youth who paid his salary.

"I beg your pardon, of course," he said monotonously. "It only occurred to me that the office needs you more than the plant to-day, sir. Oh, would you mind taking over a bundle of stock slips, Mr. Hervey?"

"What?" muttered William, and awoke from a momentary dream.

"I said, sir, since you're driving over to Jersey to the plant, would you mind taking over a bundle of the stock slips that have been checked up and entered and—"

"I'm not going to the plant this afternoon."

"*Oh!*" cried Loomis, as one exclaims at blasphemy.

Gazing at him, William chuckled suddenly, despite himself. The poor old soul! Gray-headed and desiccated at forty, with the stiff old legs of sixty and the stiff old brain of eighty—a middle-aged octogenarian with an adding-machine for a heart and a cuplike depression where his bump of romance should have been. His gloomy eyes were steady upon William again.

"Do you mind letting me know where you can be reached by phone, then, sir?" he asked. "It may be necessary to get to you, if anything comes up."

"Well, if anything comes up, it 'll have to go down again and wait till I get back," the head of the establishment said rather airily. "I'm going up in Westchester, Loomis—up to Blythedale."

"Oh. Where you're to live, sir, after—"

"After I'm married next week—yes, of course. And there isn't any way of telephoning that I know. And what's more, there will not be any need of telephoning, Loomis, and I sha'n't be killed in a wreck, and the firm can't possibly fail before I'm back. Cheer up! D'ye hear? Cheer up!"

"Yes," Loomis said perfunctorily.

"And I'll be back here at eight and you needn't stay. That's all, I think."

Loomis nodded slowly.

"I shall insist upon being here, sir," he sighed, "but—"

"But what?"

"But will you be here yourself?"

This time, there being some limit to his patience, William simply did not bother to answer at all. He stepped out and closed the door of the main office after him; and for a moment he paused in the corridor of the building and considered that door with a thoughtful grin.

For a person under thirty it wasn't so bad—that glass panel with the small gilt lettering, and all it signified. Not many young men of that age have progressed to a suite of four offices in down-town New York, with a leased factory in New Jersey running full tilt. Not that he wasn't going on limited capital this year, of course; not on a shoe-string, so to speak, but—er—yes, limited.

But that didn't matter. When to-morrow's business had been closed, any of the banks would gladly loan him an extra hundred thousand; and next year he would begin buying the plant; and two years from now, with even moderately good business, he would have it paid for in full; and ten years from now—William discarded further adventurings into the future: this was the sort of June day when the imme-

diate present claimed one's full capacity for the enjoyment of life.

Why, it was a crime even to consider working on such a day, William concluded as he stepped out of the side door and to the brilliant red roadster he had purchased last week. This kind of day was made exclusively for youth and happiness.

William beamed at the world in general and started his motor; for a little he listened appreciatively to its gentle whirring. Then he rolled around the corner and headed up-town—and so far as William's brain was concerned, Loomis and his glooms thereafter were dead and distant as the original Rameses.

In a car so perfect, a car that seemed to anticipate one's thoughts and desires, threading thick traffic was a mere pleasure. We may safely leave William behind for a little, with his trucks and his surface cars to dodge, and pass up to one of the West Seventies, where, in the window of a decidedly comfortable home, a girl stood looking out rather moodily.

She was an extremely pretty girl, dark and slender, and with a nose and chin which bespoke a rather positive character. She owned hair of a wealth that caused people to turn and stare in the theaters. She was tailored to the minute. She was, in fine, one of those fortunate beings, physically exquisite, to whom the high cost of living is no more than a rather stuffy topic of newspaper discussion.

Logically, she should have been happy. Visibly, at any rate, she was not markedly happy. The corners of her beautiful mouth drooped slightly; there was a thoughtful suggestion of doubt in her eyes.

Entered a decidedly middle-aged maid.

"Beg pardon, Miss Helen," she said. "Your mother just phoned up from your aunt's in Philadelphia."

The girl turned rather listlessly.

"Does she want to talk to me?"

"She's rung off, Miss Helen. It was about the new cook we're getting to-morrow that Mrs. Gray was speaking. But she said to tell you to make the one o'clock train down, if possible."

The young woman resumed her study of the street.

"I'll go down on the two o'clock, Hilda," she murmured.

One lovely cheek rested against the rather old-fashioned, dark hardwood paneling of the window-casing. Miss Helen Gray sighed and frowned, ever so faintly. Her slim left hand came up and she considered the diamond on the third finger.

It was really a remarkable diamond—about the size of a hazelnut, and with blaze enough to outfit an ordinary warehouse fire. It was the soul-expression in engagement rings of a young man who despised less expensive, less impressive, more modern platinum-and-ruby fripperies. His name was William Hervey.

The frown vanished. Miss Gray sighed shudderingly and, protected by heavy hangings from the vulgar gaze, smiled raptly and pressed the diamond to her lips. And then, with a delighted little squeal, the hangings were thrust apart and Miss Gray waved the slim hand and herself raced to open the door. At the curb stood a brilliant red roadster, and up the steps was coming William Hervey himself.

It is as well, perhaps, to pass over their greeting, there in the still, dusky corridor of the Gray home. Enough that, some five minutes later, William and Helen entered the shadowy drawing-room, his arm tight about her, and her head nestling against his square shoulder. Thus they passed instinctively to the little divan in the darkest corner and a double sigh of pure contentment rose. Then:

"I don't want to go down there to Philadelphia, Billy."

William laughed softly.

"It's only until to-morrow night, dear."

"But it's so far away from you, Billy."

"I know it. It's — it's an awful distance," William conceded rather gloomily. "I'll phone down to you to-night and again the very first thing in the morning, though."

"Surely?"

"Surely, sweetheart!" breathed the head of the Hervey Manufacturing Company, and if Loomis could have seen him just then, Loomis would have dropped dead!

Followed another little period of complete silence.

"Will you be all right, Billy?" Helen asked.

"Will *you* be all right, going off alone like that?" William asked pointedly and with some heat.

"I can take care of myself," Helen sighed. "But you—"

"I won't get into any trouble, chicken."

"If I were sure!" mused Miss Gray.

This was a very grave matter, you understand, causing her deep perturbation. William felt called upon to soothe her, and did so quite efficiently; but—queer as it may seem—the doubtful element *lingered* in Helen's eye.

"You're going up *there* this afternoon!"

"Yes, dear."

"Up to *our* house!" added Helen.

"Up to *our* house!" echoed William.

"I wish that I could go, too."

William laughed suddenly and mysteriously.

"Not this time, Nellie!" he said, with some firmness. "This is all my private trip to the house."

"Why?"

"Wouldn't you like to know?" chuckled William.

"Yes!"

"Well, I'm not going to tell you!"

"But—"

"Not about this! This is something that I have to do all alone."

"For—*us*, Billy?"

"For the sweetest little wife in the whole world, when she goes there to take her place!" breathed William.

This, Heaven knows, should have been assurance enough; yet it is cold fact that Miss Gray did not seem perfectly satisfied. She sighed and snuggled closer to William. She sighed again.

"Well, you be careful, anyway!" she said.

"Of what?"

"Girls!" escaped Miss Gray.

William's astonished laughter exploded suddenly.

"Don't be silly, Nellie," he told her.

"I'm not silly," Miss Gray informed him, and sat up quite indignantly.

"Don't be jealous, then."

"I'm not jealous, either, but I—I know you, and I know how many girls are crazy about you!"

"Bosh!" said William.

"No it isn't, Billy!" Helen corrected, and pinched both his cheeks and looked him squarely in the eyes. "You're so handsome and strong and—and gentle that you don't realize what an impression you make on them, and how *they*—"

There was a whole world of significance in what she left unsaid. William frowned impatiently and uncomfortably.

"That's all tommy-rot, of course," he muttered.

"It wasn't with that Carteret girl, Billy."

"Oh, that—baby vamp!" William snorted.

"All the same, she dazzled you for a while, Billy. That night when I found you sitting in the moonlight with her, up at—"

"I couldn't shake her without choking her, that night, and I've never yet beaten up a lady," laughed William.

"And they understand that! And that little cat of a Norma Bowers, too," Miss Gray added.

"She was never more than an acquaintance."

"Well, that wasn't *her* fault, Billy. She tagged around after you morning, noon, and night last summer. The only wonder is that her eyes didn't come straight out of her head, with all the ogling she did at you!" stated Helen, who rarely minced words.

"Oh—Nellie!" William protested.

"It's so, and you know it—or perhaps you don't know it, and that makes it worse, because it just shows how susceptible you are. And Martha Masters, too!"

"Oh—"

"Why, she was a positive disgrace, Billy! A positive disgrace! *Everybody* noticed it, and everybody was talking about it, too. That girl simply made up her mind to have you, willy-nilly, and it wouldn't have been beyond her to—"

"Now, we'll stop this nonsense right here!" William interposed, with a little force. "I'm not holding any brief for Martha or anybody else, but there's just

one girl in the world who lives in my heart and my head every second of every day and night, and you're the girl!" said William. "And no other girl has any particular use for me, so don't be ridiculous, sweetheart!"

"Billy—"

Kisses smothered this last protest. Another period of silence settled upon the big room. Presently William chuckled mysteriously again.

"I'll have to start, dear."

"I don't like your going up there alone."

"Nobody 'll kidnap me, Nellie."

"Nevertheless, I want you to promise one thing."

"Well?"

"You're not to speak to a single girl while you're gone!"

"But—"

"No! I'm not going to have you getting into trouble while I'm so far away, and girls mean trouble for you, Billy Hervey!"

"Oh, Nellie, you're such a dear, silly little kid!" cried William, as his arms engulfed her again.

It was not, apparently, just the reply Miss Gray desired. She looked directly at William again, and William just caught a sigh: there could be no denying the glint of actual suspicion in those lovely eyes.

"I wish you wouldn't try to be evasive," said Helen. "You never—never insisted on going off alone before, Billy."

"This time I can't take you, dear!" Billy grinned.

"Then promise!"

"I promise!"

"Not a single girl, Billy!"

"Not one!"

"You won't forget?"

"Dearest, when have I ever forgotten a promise to you?" William inquired softly and with much feeling.

It were possible, of course, to detail their parting; it were better, however, to veil it with the same careful consideration with which we veiled their meeting. They were to be separated for a long, long period—actually more than twenty-four hours—and more than a hundred miles was to stretch between them. Occasions of this nature are very sober matters; a few glistening little tears appeared in Helen's eyes, bringing soft laughter from William and, two seconds later, contrition for the laughter.

But eventually he slipped into the bright-red roadster again, brushing by the three loitering children who had paused to bask in its highly conspicuous glitter, and started his engine for the run to Blythedale. In the window Miss Helen Gray, her glorious head drooping slightly, waved the slender hand that wore the engagement ring; and Bill Hervey grinned happily, waved back, started his car, and grinned even more happily over his shoulder.

Happiness was in his blood this wonderful afternoon. He tingled with it, he thrilled with it, the warmth of the pure, unadulterated emotion glowed from his very soul. He was that rarest of all creatures: an utterly happy man!

And this—as the old reliable mid-Victorian novelist might have assured one—was largely because William had no premonition at all of the things that were to come to pass before they met again.

CHAPTER II.

SOULS ATTUNED.

ONCE past the thicker city traffic, the feel of his new, powerful engine penetrated William's being and set his foot to itching for a little harder pressure on the accelerator. He sailed up long stretches, slowing now and then to answer with his blank, bland, benevolent stare the suspicious gaze of a motor-cycle officer who had been regarding his coming from afar. He sailed on again, and presently he reached the long, lonely roads where motor-cycle officers are most infrequent, and let her out in earnest.

Little towns whizzed up to William, were passed at a slightly lowered pace, disappeared behind. He breathed deeply and happily; he beamed again on all the world; this was the kind of ride he and Helen would take together in the years to come, whenever just this kind of day appeared, and — oh, it was wonderful! That one

mere undeserving man should have acquired all this happiness was more than wonderful. William fell to sighing, deeply, shudderingly as Helen herself sighed. Only vaguely, since he was a really bustling and practical person, did he grasp the real underlying cause of all this emotion: the miracle of love.

And here—too soon, considering the fun he was getting out of the ride—here was Blythedale itself! Here was the sunny main street, with its handful of stores and its big trees, with the wide bordering of grass on either side; and beyond, some two or three blocks, began the really better residential section. And up there on Griston Avenue—by no means the most imposing, but by far the prettiest and coziest street in town—stood the future Hervey home. William almost held his breath as he turned into Griston Avenue; so much happiness could not be real, and he rather expected to find the house missing.

It was not. There it stood, with its hedges and all the quaint, little, old-English touches. William bowled gaily up the driveway toward his little red-and-white garage; and while there was no earthly necessity for such a procedure since he could stay no more than two or three hours, for the mere pleasure of the thing he found padlock key, gravely opened his new garage, gravely ran the car inside, and then stood away a few paces to view the effect.

Well, it was perfect! Even that garage was perfect! A tornado of whistled melody came to William's lips and burst forth. Hat on the back of his head, hands in his pockets, he sauntered to the front of his new home, found another key, and entered—and there he stopped and held his breath again.

It, too, was even more perfect than he had expected. The local caretaker had done her part; every stick of the lovely furniture selected by himself and Helen Gray had been delivered and put into place. The three wonderful rugs were already down in the living-room; the men had draped the windows precisely according to orders, and the effect was exquisite; the smell of much new varnish tickled William's nostrils and broadened his grin. Yes, and—by George! the blessed little Swede caretaker had unpacked and washed every dish of the new set and tucked them all away in their closet; and the little white kitchen, with all its funny little electrical contrivances, fairly sparkled under William's fascinated eye.

However, he hadn't come here to feast his eyes. There was practical work to be done up-stairs. William ascended, two steps at a time, to the big, sunny bedroom at the front. He looked around. It was there—the big pasteboard packing-case on the floor in the corner.

Whistling, William cut the cords and took off the heavy paper, to disclose and reverently to draw forth those four superb little aquarelles over which Helen had clasped her hands in admiration last week—the four she had visualized as hanging in this very room, and from which she had turned away resolutely. They were far too expensive, and she and William, really, were spending altogether too much of William's money as it was on this furnishing proposition.

There they were, nevertheless! William laughed richly to himself as he drew them out and removed the lighter wrappings. There was wire in one of his pockets, and little hooks in another, and the wire-cutters he had brought in from the car tool-box; William went to work.

This one Helen had pictured as hanging over here—and this one over there, with the other two on opposite sides of the far wall. Half an hour or more William labored deftly and carefully, and then, again, stood back for a view. Helen had been absolutely right; had the artist himself been commissioned to paint for this particular room he could have done nothing more perfect. And when, returning from a necessarily brief wedding tour, Helen came in here and saw them—ah, that would more than repay William for the rather unwarranted cost of the water-color dainties!

And now his mission had been accomplished and, as a business man, there was really no further excuse for lingering around Blythedale. More slowly, he would roll back to town for an early din-

ner, and after that the office again; but emphatically he did not wish to leave just yet. William sighed and examined his future home once more; not a single detail failed to come up for his attention. He passed out into the sunshine again and paused to light a cigarette on the little veranda.

Across the way, a properly uniformed nurse was wheeling a baby-carriage. Across the way, too, a perfectly genuine French governess was chattering at an older charge. Could one have asked more, in the way of atmosphere? Yes, one could, William thought suddenly. One could ask that some really nice people would buy or rent the vacant house next door. He turned his gaze rather accusingly toward the supposedly empty cottage, which was nearly as pretty as his own and quite as expensive—and his eyes opened wider.

Somebody *had* acquired it since his visit of last week; somebody lived there now! He turned squarely and stared at it; and whether we assume that William was naturally observant or concede that some real, small-town curiosity as to one's neighbors had already entered into him, it is the fact that in a matter of thirty seconds he had formed some sort of estimate as to the family next door.

They, too, were new! Their furniture, as evidenced in three porch chairs and divers bits of gleaming varnish at the windows, was brand-new. The hangings at the windows were new—because Helen had informed him on one of their recent shopping tours that just that kind of stuff had never been used at windows before this year. The lawn-mower was new, and the coil of hose beside the porch still white and fresh; and as his gaze wandered toward the rear it found another of those electric percolators in the kitchen window—brand-new!

So there was something to tell Helen when he phoned, and, meanwhile, a little load lifted from William's mind. He had been uneasy about that house, as he realized for the first time; now he understood that the last needed touch had been added to make Blythedale ideal and—he understood, too, that time was passing steadily, and that, with whatever reluctance, he must depart. He strolled back toward the garage—and paused again, for a careful study of the sprouting garden, planted and tended by the caretaker's husband.

Green and uniform, every shoot was in its place. There was not even a weed for William to pick. He grunted to himself and gazed over the hedge, at the sprouting garden next door; and as he gazed the screen door at the rear of the cottage opened and—she appeared and hurried down the path!

Bill Hervey may have been engaged; he was, in fact, and he was most tremendously in love with Helen. At the same time, his eyesight had been affected not at all, and as he looked at the girl over the hedge a little, under-breath exclamation of real appreciation escaped him inadverdently.

She was rather small; she was blond, and, if one admired just that type, one would have had a considerable task to find a more perfectly beautiful example. She was delicately rounded; she was swift of motion; her pink-and-white features just now were puckered in thoughts of her own—and *now* with a little start she had perceived the staring William, and she stopped, just on the other side of the hedge.

"Oh!" said she. "You're looking for the people who live there?"

What shall be said of Bill Hervey and the thoughts that hurried through his brain at that moment? He had promised, fervently and earnestly enough, not to address a single girl on this little expedition. Tacitly, of course, that meant young and attractive girls and quite excluded middle-aged girls with freckles and pug noses. There was never a freckle on this girl, and she could hardly have passed twenty-one. Keeping to the strict letter of his promise, then, William should have shut his lips and kept them shut.

On the other hand, this young woman was to be their neighbor—perhaps for a term of years. In places like Blythedale, solid friendship with one's next-door neighbor is rather essential. Could William, then, in this crisis, refuse to utter a single word, without making an utter ass of himself, or,

perchance, being taken for a maniac? Was it not, in fact, his duty to Helen and their Blythedale future to establish at once the best of relations with the folks in the next cottage?

"The—the people don't live there yet," the young woman said, after a wondering ten seconds. "If it's something you're delivering, you'll have to go to the little green house, three blocks down and around the corner—*that* way—and ask for Mrs. Olson. She's the caretaker."

Again she paused, her blue eyes widening and—oh, it was too infernally ridiculous, of course. Bill Hervey's hat came off and his lovable grin appeared suddenly.

"No, it's nothing I'm delivering. *I'm* the people—one of them, anyway. My name is Hervey. William Hervey!" he said.

"Oh!" cried the girl, and swept him again with her really wonderful eyes and then smiled very real pleasure at the result of her survey. "*You're* Mr. Hervey?"

"I am he!"

Three exquisite dimples appeared, all at once. A little pink hand was extended in charmingly frank friendship over the hedge.

"I'm Mrs. Elton," she said. "Er—Annabel Elton. Welcome to Blythedale."

Well, she was *all right!* She was very much all right! Given a whole world of possible neighbors from which to pick, William would have selected a young woman just like this, who looked one directly in the eyes and shook one's hand with a boyish grip.

"I'm mighty glad to know you," he said candidly, and his grin persisted. "You've just moved in?"

"Monday morning. When are you coming?"

"Well, we're not even married yet," William confessed. "That happens next week, Thursday, and we'll turn up here about ten days later, I suppose."

"*We've* only been married three weeks," said Mrs. Elton.

Then they looked at each other and smiled; and presently, for no conceivable reason save the sheer happiness that was in them, they laughed together. After which William took one short step, bringing him directly against the hedge; and they gazed at one another and smiled again—and they were friends.

It was odd enough, to be sure, when one considers that they had met for the first time not three minutes back, but it was very much the fact. Two souls, each utterly in love with love, each living in a world that can be understood only by the few, and only temporarily by them, had drawn together as naturally and as innocently as magnet draws needle. It really seemed to William that he had known this young woman for ages, and her expression indicated that she entertained much the same impression as regarded William.

"Do you know, we were so afraid that somebody—somebody old and stuffy was going to live next door?" said Mrs. Elton. "Somebody all settled down and—you know what I mean."

"I know exactly what you mean," said William. "I had the same fear about your house. But there's nothing exactly settled about us. I hope there won't be for some time to come."

"Well, this is the first night *I* haven't been down to the city since we've been here! You're going to stay up till evening?" the young woman asked suddenly.

"Not quite. Why?"

"Oh, it's so horribly lonesome, having the house next door empty. That's all."

"But you're not all alone in there?"

Mrs. Elton nodded with a gravity that was almost childlike.

"Yes. We haven't been able to get a cook or a maid yet. And—and Jack's away on business."

"Your husband?"

"Mr. Elton, of course. It's the very first time he's had to leave me since we were married, and he isn't coming back till to-morrow night, either."

Genuine concern caused William to frown. "You're not going to stay there alone all night?"

"No. Aunt Fannie's coming up from the city on the six twenty. I hated to ask her, but she was awfully nice about it."

"Why should she be anything else?" William inquired with odd warmth, and

quite as if he had known Aunt Fannie all his life. "You couldn't be expected to put in a night alone in a place like this."

"Oh, it was just the idea of having to ask her—mother and dad being down in Washington this week, and all that. Aunt Fannie's a dear, though."

William's little snort dared Aunt Fannie to be anything else.

"She's rich—frightfully rich," Mrs. Elton mused on, confidentially. "She lives all by herself, in a big hotel, and everybody's afraid of her. She bought me this house for a wedding present!"

"Good for her!" said Mrs. Elton's neighbor heartily.

"And she wanted to furnish it, too, but Jackie wouldn't allow that."

"Ah?" said William blandly, although for the moment he had forgotten that there was a Jackie.

"Goodness! I hope she doesn't miss that six twenty!" the bride murmured. "I don't want to be alone here after dark."

Her soft gaze roved toward the western horizon, doubtless in the direction occupied by the missing Mr. Elton just then. She dimpled and, briefly, passed into a little meditation of her own; and William, on his own account, floated away for a short trip through the land of day-dreams—which silent communion in itself may indicate something of the perfect understanding they had reached in such remarkably short order. William stirred and blinked his way back to earth. Mrs. Elton sighed.

"Well, I must run back. I'm awfully glad to have met you—even in this informal way."

"And I'm glad to have met you, in any old way," said William cheerily, "but—"

"Oh, I must go now." Mrs. Elton assured him, without waiting for the rest of the sentence. "I have ever so many things to attend to before Aunt Fannie arrives."

"Getting ready for her?"

"Getting ready for Jackie to-morrow night!" Mrs. Elton corrected, quite indignantly. "He likes to have things just as he likes them, and I try to look after them. He—he's such a dear boy!"

"Yes," William smiled understandingly.

"Such a dear, sweet—" Mrs. Elton began, and suddenly blushed and grew almost normal. "Oh, isn't this silly!" she exclaimed. "Good-by, Mr. Hervey."

"Good-by," William said, rather reluctantly.

"And just as soon as you move in, you're to bring Mrs. Hervey to call—remember that!"

"The very day we move in!" William grinned.

Mrs. Elton stepped back two paces and dimpled mischievously again.

"And thank you ever so much for not being middle-aged and settled!" she laughed. "I think we're going to have an awfully good time out here, with all our honeymooning and silliness and everything."

"I know darned well we are!" cried Bill Hervey, and also stepped back a pace.

Not that he wanted to go, by any means. But he had a big evening's work ahead, and on it much of the next year's bill-paying possibilities depended.

And in spite of all that, because she was so wonderfully a part of that glad mental picture he had painted in advance of Blythedale, he did wish that little Mrs. Elton would pause and chat just a minute or two longer. He looked after her somewhat wistfully, as she moved away. She was almost at her own back door; her hand was on the porcelain knob—but now, with a whisk, she had turned and was hurrying toward the hedge again.

"Oh!" she cried. "I meant to ask you!"

"Do!" urged William.

"You haven't looked over the marketing end of things yet?"

"Eh? No."

"Then you don't know the milkman?"

"That is a pleasure I still hold in anticipation," William admitted. "Why?"

"Well, he seems to be the only person living who knows where the Dobson chicken farm is, and I haven't been able to catch him in the mornings! Several people have told me about it."

"I never heard of the place."

"Well, it's somewhere over toward Heathervale, seven or eight miles away, and they have the most perfectly wonderful

eggs. *Wonderful* eggs! Jackie's so fond of really fresh eggs, you know."

"Ah, yes," agreed William.

"I wanted to get some of those Dobson eggs before he comes back."

Bill Hervey said nothing at all for the moment. He was busy looking at her and reflecting that, two or three weeks hence, Griston Avenue, Blythedale, would have the distinction of housing America's two loveliest young women side by side—which was a pleasant reflection, when he was to marry one of them and, apparently, to have the other for a friend.

"They 're not going to deliver our new car till next week!" Mrs. Elton said, very distinctly, but somewhat irrelevantly.

There was nothing irrelevant about her gaze, though. It rested, as William discovered by following it, squarely upon the glittering rear end of his red roadster. Nay, it caressed that crimson expanse lovingly; it seemed to beckon to the motionless wheels.

"If the old thing was only here now," Mrs. Elton reflected.

William chuckled.

"You'd hop right in and hunt up that chicken farm?"

"I would!"

"Get your coat and hat!" said William.

Over the hedge the glorious eyes sparkled at him.

"Oh, you're a dear!" rippled from Mrs. Elton. "I won't be two minutes—really!"

She turned and fled headlong. William smiled after his little new friend.

Four o'clock, to be sure, was the very last minute he had set mentally for leaving Blythedale. It was now about ten minutes past the hour.

But that mattered very little. Sixteen miles is nothing to a good car, and he could make time going home.

CHAPTER III.

CHICKENS ELUSIVE.

ONLY the fool makes his decisions and then fumes doubtfully over their wisdom. William was no fool. Once having determined upon a thing, he never looked backward and repined, whatever the outcome. He was not regretting his impulsive offer of a lift to Mrs. Elton.

Time, of course, was very precious that late afternoon and evening. Really, he never should have left the city at all—sunshine, romance, and everything else notwithstanding. And he would *have* to be in the office by eight o'clock, even if he skipped dinner; and, at that, he would be working well after midnight. And the importance of having that work all ready before to-morrow morning could hardly be overestimated, and if anything should slip up — William shook himself together and grinned again. Nothing would slip; he was doing a simple and neighborly act which would cost him, at most, an hour's time; that was all, and he did *not* regret his sudden proffer.

Whistling again, then, William made for his garage, filled his new water-pail at the new faucet, replenished his new radiator, set the motor to whirring, and backed down to the street, thereafter to swerve about and then swing up before the Elton cottage in quite impressive style.

The two minutes had passed, though. Two more had gone, for that matter, and another ten after them, as a glance at his watch informed William. He frowned and shifted in his seat; and then, despite his impatience, he smiled suddenly and brilliantly, for she was coming now, and she was a sight to soothe the eyes.

She had changed to a tight little gray-cloth afternoon gown, a light affair with "bride" written all over it in invisible letters. She wore a jaunty little hat to match, and over her arm was thrown a long, light-gray coat. Unhurried, Mrs. Elton locked the door of her home—unhurried she paused beside the open door of the car to sniff the air and beam artlessly at William.

"I wasn't even two minutes, was I?" she inquired.

"You weren't one!" stated Mr. Hervey.

"It isn't cold riding?"

"It was hot, coming up?"

"Then will you please slip my coat through the rack?" asked little Mrs. Elton, and having hummed merrily while he did

it, entered the car and slammed the door. "Thanks, ever so much. You know you're a perfect darling, doing this, don't you?"

"Nonsense!" said William, and then, since laughter came so easily this afternoon, threw back his head and laughed. And Annabel Elton, for much the same reason, echoed the laugh—and the car started and they were off.

Somewhere, perhaps, in these United States, there exists a spot where the natives are acquainted with their own local landmarks — where, inquiring for the Brown cottage, one can be directed straight to the Brown cottage and find it without first making fruitless journeys to the Jenkins home, the Potter boarding-house, the Methodist orphanage, and the abandoned brewery three miles beyond town. Somewhere, perhaps; but more frequently the motoring inquirer encounters the quaint and pretty custom, following which the native smiles blandly, sends one up the wrong street, around the wrong turn, out the wrong road and, with almost mathematical accuracy, to exactly the wrong place.

These things William knew, because it was not his first car; but the general direction of Heathervale was safe enough. One had only to follow the State road to make Heathervale and, since getting there meant covering a full ten miles, the Dobson chicken farm must lie this side of the town. Very cheerily, then, William located his State road and whizzed along.

Swift, merry chatter assailed his right ear. Chatter as swift and as merry came from his lips. Now — they laughed; again — they laughed. Only once, when William essayed a little burst of speed that precluded conversation, did he have opportunity to pause mentally and shudder at the thought of just what view Helen might take of this ride.

He pushed the shudder aside as ridiculous, even unworthy. Helen would understand perfectly; Helen would be anxious, as he himself, to do any possible little service like this for a neighbor; there could be no earthly doubt about that. But, just the same, William slowed down again and took to talking quite rapidly and with even greater merriment.

And now, at a guess, they were somewhere near the chicken farm. William slowed down still further and looked around. Ah! The old man on the porch of yonder little farmhouse! His whiskers had passed the two-foot mark; he had been sitting there, apparently, since the beginning of time; he was the true oldest inhabitant and he would know.

"Hello the house!" cried William gaily as he stopped.

"Wot say?" queried the elderly one, and cupped his ear.

"Where's Dobson's chicken farm?"

The aged man nodded and set his corncob aside carefully. He found his cane after a little fumbling and came down to the gate.

"What 'd you want?"

"Dobson's chicken farm," William said gently.

The other nodded and considered heavily.

"Keep right on the way you're going. Then take the first turn to the right and go straight uphill."

"And then?"

"You can't miss it," said the oldest inhabitant and dismissed the subject. "What's a car like that—"

"Yes, but how do we know this farm when we come to it?"

"Sets 'way back from the road. As I was saying, what's a car like that worth, young feller? My son's been thinking some—"

"Three thousand seven hundred and fifty dollars, f.o.b. somewhere or other in Michigan. Thanks!" said William, as one word, and although the other had settled down for a comfortable conversation, he rolled straight on.

Not that he was ungrateful, of course. Quite the contrary, for the directions were simple and the way must be short. But inside that house, as they paused, a clock had struck the hour of five, and William's skin had prickled a little. Sharp eyesight and much care were going to be necessary on that homeward trip now were he not to receive a neat paper from some traffic officer directing him which court to visit in the morning!

It is possible that his smile may not have been so glowing as they rushed on; if so,

it was doubtless due to the strain of driving. Five o'clock should have seen him crossing the city line and heading down-town, and—well, there was the road, anyway, and a wretched one, at that! He swung into it and started up the grade, while little Mrs. Elton chattered on, happily as ever.

Houses here, spaced well apart, seemed to be set on the very edge of the road. Not one of them stood back; not one of them owned so much as a single small chicken coop, and they had covered certainly another two miles now, too! William peered anxiously ahead; there, in the hazy distance, was one abode which, at least, did not threaten to topple over on the highway. He aimed at it, much as a racing-driver might aim at the home stretch, and sought to push his accelerator pedal through the floor, while Mrs. Elton clutched her hat and squealed quite delightedly.

And now that they were here, brakes having creaked to a violent standstill, he fancied that he would hurry matters a little by getting the eggs himself. He bounced out and smiled happily enough.

"I'll get 'em!" he stated. "How many dozen?"

"Why—two dozen, I think. But you needn't bother, Mr. Hervey. I'd like to see them—"

"If they're no good, I won't get 'em. I know eggs as well as I know my own name!" William hurled at her. "Sit still!"

Nobody was visible at the front. The chicken specialists would be at the back, then; William raced down the length of the house and to the rear door. It was a screen door and he peered in. A large lady was bathing a very small boy in a washtub; she squinted at William Hervey and snapped:

"I don't want to buy anything!"

"I do, though!" said William with equal crispness. "I want to buy two dozen spick, span, fresh eggs!"

The large lady stood erect and dried her hands on her apron; after which, with one hand on either hip, she looked Bill Hervey up and down.

"Why'n time don't you go buy 'em, then?" she demanded very harshly. "What do you come here and tell *me* your troubles for?"

"Er—isn't this Dobson's?" William faltered.

"No!" said the lady, and returned to her tub. "This ain't Dobson's!"

"Well—ah—where is Dobson's, if you wouldn't mind telling me?"

Suds splashed, the lady's shoulders heaved up and down as she manipulated a brush, bringing small, wet, stifled shrieks from the unfortunate infant.

"You're on the wrong road," reached William, however. "Go back half a mile and take the first turn to the left."

"And Dobson's is there?"

"It's along a piece. Sets 'way back on a knoll like."

Onward she scrubbed, but William was not there to see. He had caught sight of the clock on the little shelf in that kitchen, and he knew that the clock was approximately right! With a series of bounds, then, he regained his red roadster, to find Mrs. Elton wide-eyed and rather scared.

"Did a—did a dog chase you?" she asked.

"No, it was just the wrong place. That's all. I've found out where it is now, though," William announced as he whirled the car around backward, and then whirled into the road ahead on the return trip.

They were going in the teeth of the wind now, and conversation was well-nigh impossible. It was as well, too. Somehow or other, after a sight of that clock, William's fund of merry words seemed to have been dammed. Doubtless they would break loose a little later, but for the immediate present the dam seemed quite high.

In the wind-shield, too, a queer little vision of Loomis bobbed up and down—Loomis, even more mournful than usual, with the corners of his mouth dragged fairly down to his jawbone and his head shaking slow accusation at his employer.

However, William smiled again presently. They had attained that first turn to the left without touching earth more than half a dozen times, and he was making around it on a slightly better road. But—where on earth were the houses that should have been there?

William's eyes opened. There were wooded hills in the distance and stone walls

along here; there were fields, some of them cultivated, some of them otherwise; but of even one dwelling there was never a sight.

He shut his teeth and pushed the roadster on—and on—and on. Grim wonder crept into him; deserted stretches like this one might have encountered in Idaho or the upper portions of Canada; that whole counties existed uninhabited within commuting distance of New York he had never known.

"Isn't it beautiful in here?" Mrs. Elton queried dreamily.

"Yes, it's gorgeous," William agreed, "Only—hah! *There* it is!"

There it really seemed to be, this time, too! Assuredly it was a farmhouse; assuredly there were chicken-coops a plenty; assuredly it set far back from the road and upon a knoll. There was only a foot-path leading to the house itself; William stopped at its end and set his emergency brake with a metallic, ripping sound.

"Now, I'll—"

"No, *I* will, this time!" Mrs. Elton corrected very positively, and she was already out of the car. "You've done running enough, and I want to see the eggs myself, anyway. Jackie's so particular about how they look—almost as particular as he is about how they taste. I won't be one minute!"

She waved one gay little hand at him and sped away, and William settled back with a grunt. Anger was surging within him. Not anger at Mrs. Elton, by any means; no man living could have felt anger toward that glittering sprite. But William, as he smiled grimly after her twinkling feet, certainly addressed to himself several remarks of the most unflattering nature.

Racing and all it was nearly six o'clock now. At six he should have been dining in his little apartment hotel. Instead, he was sitting alone in his car—Heaven alone knew how many miles from the city!—waiting for a very charming girl to buy two dozen eggs! On another day it would have been a happy little experience; to-day it was close to suicide.

Still, as has been noted, William's whole shedding of tears over spilled milk would never have filled a fairy's thimble. He grunted again, after that first hot five minutes, hunched down comfortably and lighted a cigarette. It was entirely his own fault. He would have to work all night, possibly enough, and turn up for the important conferences to-morrow morning looking rather like a limp dish-cloth—and serve him perfectly right! He grinned sourly up at the sky and, this being a habit, thought of lovely Helen. Helen had been dead right, after all! Girls spelled trouble for William, even if not the kind of trouble Helen feared.

Only—where in thunder was this particular girl? William stared at the house, around which she had vanished. There was no sign of her. He considered for a little and tooted his horn gently. She did not appear, and he settled down once more. She was probably picking out the infernal eggs, one by one, making sure that each was esthetically fit for introduction to her Jackie. William glanced at the house and tooted his horn again.

And time rolled on!

Thrice, in these last ten minutes, had William tooted his horn afresh—thrice in vain. He wore the aspect of a man attacked by fever, too; his color was rising steadily and his eyes were queer. He breathed with apparent difficulty and nervous twitches attacked him.

He drew out his watch and gasped aloud. He cursed, also aloud and quite deliriously, for several seconds. He jammed his hand on the horn button and held it there. He removed it after many seconds and stared again at the house, which revealed never one human stirring.

"Well—hell!" said William Hervey, which was certainly an impolite way of addressing an invisible lady.

Overhead, in the spare tree, little birds twittered sleepily. On the far hill the shadows were creeping upward. Soon it would be night; after that, if he happened to wait here so long, morning!

William, glaring at his watch, jabbed the horn again—waited an even minute and jabbed it once more—waited another minute and jabbed again. This he did just eight times, and suddenly a chill came upon him.

Had something untoward happened to her? The thought took shape for the first

time and stood his hair upon end. Had little Mrs. Elton been murdered in there? Mouth open, he snapped back the door and prepared to descend for a dash to the house and a very prompt investigation and—she was coming!

Yes, sweet and cool as ever, she was hurrying down the path. He summoned a smile of welcome; her own smile was brilliant as ever.

"Isn't it wonderful how many cars go through a lonely road like this!" she said as she stepped in.

"Eh?"

"Yes, I heard them blowing as they went by," Mrs. Elton beamed. "There must have been one every minute."

William swallowed.

"Where are the eggs?"

"Oh! That isn't Dobson's, after all!" the girl explained sweetly.

"It isn't—what?"

"No, it's just the farm of a dear old lady named Stevenson. They used to keep chickens, but they don't any more. I was wishing so much that you'd come up to hear her."

"But—"

"She had to sell them all because it cost so much to feed them. Mr. Hervey, have you any idea how much chicken-feed costs nowadays? She was so lonely and willing to talk that I just had to stop and listen to her, and—good gracious! Is your watch right?"

"Yes!" said William as he thrust it back into his pocket.

"We'll have to hurry, then!" Mrs. Elton informed him with real concern. "If Aunt Fannie makes the six twenty, she'll be up by quarter past seven, and—oh, I found out where Dobson's is!"

Again William swallowed.

"Near here?"

"About two miles, she thought. We're off the road, but we can go straight down this one till we come to a gravel road crossing it, and then we turn to the left and go that way. You—you don't mind hurrying a little? I simply *have* to be home before aunty gets there, you know?"

With commendable self-control William Hervey nodded and smiled reassurance at her as his roadster rolled into motion again. For aunty's sake, he would indeed hurry. He gripped his wheel and drove on; and in an astonishingly short time he encountered the gravel road, which was really excellent, and headed off in a new direction.

Houses again were rather numerous as they whizzed onward; none of them stood on a knoll, though. A mile passed. Another mile, with the country rising on either side and suggesting their entry into America's wilder, more remote scenic portions. Still another mile, and William, sighting the rambling white hotel ahead, slowed down.

"I'm going to run in here and ask them if they know where Dobson's is," he explained firmly. "If they can't give us a pretty definite idea, I'm afraid that we'll have to turn around and go home eggless."

"Yes, because aunty's on the train, even now!"

Into the yard of the place rolled William, looking about. Nobody appeared just then. He rolled onward toward the open carriage shed that remained from the less strenuous days of the horse; indeed, he rolled into it and stopped.

"The Turnstile Inn!" he read from the somewhat dingy gilt sign along the side of the hostelry itself. "Well, I'll step into the Turnstile Inn and see what they know about—oh, here's somebody!"

A decidedly dense-looking boy of sixteen or seventeen, clad in greasy overalls, had appeared from nowhere in particular. He lounged toward them with a languid:

"Want gas, mister? Around on the other side."

"No, I want information!" William said very briskly indeed. "Where's the Dobson place?"

"Dobson?" echoed the lad.

"Yes, a chicken farm."

"*Dobson?*" the boy repeated, and frowned painfully with the effort at thought.

"Yes, it's a chicken farm," William reiterated. "It sets far back from the road and it stands on a knoll. Do you know where it is?"

In a way the light of reason seemed to flicker in the young man's eye. At any rate, he nodded quite sagely.

"Up there, I guess," he said simply.

"Up where?"

"Why, right up there!" repeated the lad, and pointed past the corner of the carriage shed. "That's the place you're looking for, probably."

Swiftly Bill Hervey stepped back and looked. At least there seemed to be a house in the grove up there; and if one owned a minifying imagination that young mountain might have been considered a knoll; and emphatically the place was far back from the road. To the best of William's guessing, it was all of an eighth of a mile back.

"How do you get up there?" he snapped.

"Well, you can go out in the road again and along till you see the gateway and then turn up. Or you can leave your car here and take that path cross-lots. It ain't so very good, but—"

"It's good enough," said Bill Hervey. "You'll stay here, Mrs. Elton?"

"I'll come right along," corrected Mrs. Elton with her smile. "I want to see 'em first." Lightly she hopped from the roadster. Lightly she hurried along beside him to the end of the shed and around it and then on to the overgrown, uphill path.

It was more than overgrown, in fact; as a thoroughfare it seemed to have been obsolete for a long time. In former years feet might have trod its steep way; latterly only rain and snow had surged down, washing out the dirt and leaving sharp rocks exposed. One tripped over them with conscientious regularity; one slid into little gullies and stumbled headlong, on an average of once in seven steps.

But the need of haste was behind them like a hot pitchfork, and they plodded on irresponsibly, laughing now, now gasping. Of necessity one of little Mrs. Elton's hands clasped William's tightly; he grinned covertly at the touch, sought to anathematize her mentally as a dear infernal little nuisance, failed even in that and dragged her onward. And here, at the edge of the thick, shabby old grove, was the top of the hill—and decidedly they had come some distance into the air!

Why, the Turnstile Inn, off there to the right, was no more than a dot in the distance! Beyond the road stretched away ribbonlike, and—William ceased studying the landscape and led his lovely little charge straight through the trees. And then, coming to the house itself, they paused and stared.

Of all possible chicken farms this was the queerest. Huge, tall and dark, in the architectural mode of twenty years ago, the place might have been the country mansion of some peculiarly morose millionaire. It was badly neglected, too. The whole house shrieked for paint. Curtains at the few unshuttered windows were yellow and aged. The drive itself seemed to have gone unused and untended for a long, long time.

"Is—is any one in there?" Mrs. Elton hesitated. "I don't see any coops or—"

"Well, there's smoke coming out of that chimney, so somebody lives here," William said hurriedly. "Come along. This is the egg place, fast enough, and we'll have to grab 'em and hustle back now."

Here was the stately old entrance, with its tall, weather-beaten door. A knocker revealed itself, and William, having raised it pounded it emphatically.

This—there was occasion for a similar remark some time back—was largely because of William's limitless, blissful ignorance of the things that lay beyond that tall, unvarnished door!

CHAPTER IV.

WHAT?

THAT grin of William's was a very warm and cheering and generally reassuring expression. Annabel Elton, after a swift, puzzled survey of the whole exterior, as revealed from the wide doorstep, turned to him with lips parted for a quick question, but she met the grin and closed the lips again. It was all right, of course.

On the other hand, it may as well be confessed there was not perfect sincerity behind this particular grin. The place was Dobson's, certainly enough, but William was not enamored of it as a spot to visit. Sinister gloom seemed draped over everything; even the birds were still; and the sound of a motor horn in the highway floated up as a sound from another world, so faint and distant was its note. The trees

seemed to be closing in on them, too, more thickly with every second; surely an eccentric trick of trees that must have been rooted. Overhead a shutter creaked almost uncannily in the light evening breeze. William, since Mrs. Elton was looking away again, shut his teeth and sighed inaudibly.

And now, somewhere inside, soft steps had come into being. They approached the door and a chain rattled and a lock squeaked and rasped. Then the door opened and, with the vast, shadowy corridor as a background, they were permitted to view as large, as expressionless a man as either of them had seen for a long time. Clad all in black, with a low, flat collar and a little black bow-tie, his hair smoothed down, his hands large and white, he might have been an unusually powerful butler—and he might have been almost anything else on earth as well, for he owned a countenance which told absolutely nothing of the mind behind.

Rather keenly, even expectantly, he looked at the pair outside as William said crisply:

"We want two dozen fresh eggs!"

The man in black leaned forward a little, and the slightest trace of a frown appeared.

"Eggs?" he murmured, slowly and heavily.

"Yes! Yes! Eggs! Hens' eggs!" William repeated quite violently. "This is the Dobson place, isn't it?"

Very visibly, sudden, wild agitation was upon him; it is not too much to say that William danced up and down! Because here was another of the slow-speaking, slow-thinking idiots who seemed so abundant this afternoon! Here was another imbecile-consumer of time—time—*time!*

"Oh—er—yes, the Dobson place, of course," the big man smiled readily. "Will you step in?"

William nodded sharply and entered; Mrs. Elton, hesitating for an instant, followed him. And the door swung to with a low, grinding squeak of hinges. The lock grated again. The chain was put up. And whether they liked it, exactly or not, they were in the depths of the musty foyer, with shadows stretching away to darkness in every direction!

"If you will just step this way, please," the expressionless one said quietly and rather pleasantly.

He moved away a pace or two. William did not immediately follow.

"Er—ah—" he began.

"It's pleasanter in here, sir, while I'm looking after the eggs," smiled the heavyweight person, in mild astonishment as he passed the great stairway and opened the door at the other side of the corridor.

William collected himself quite abruptly. For no earthly reason the instinct of flight had been upon him for a few seconds. Now, however, he turned with a smile to little Mrs. Elton, a mere dot of humanity in the overhanging gloom, and nodded toward the door.

And, at least, it was a little brighter in here, William noted as they entered the big library. Bookcases lined the walls. He gazed speculatively at the yards of glass doors for an instant; they gave one the impression of having been hastily dusted off after long disuse. The mighty leather furniture, too, was in much the same condition. And—William concluded with sudden impatience—if he chose to get down on his knees and examine the rug and take away dust samples there would doubtless be fifty-seven varieties of germs revealed, each presenting its own problem.

As it happened, however, he was not there to conduct a *Sherlock Holmes* examination of the premises; he had come to buy two dozen fresh eggs for a lovely little bride, and he turned to the large, black person with:

"It won't trouble you too much to hurry a little?"

"With the eggs, sir?"

"Yes—with the eggs!" William almost shouted, for his nerves seemed to have been dragged out taut. "Two dozen!"

"Just so, sir," said the other, and his grave smile grew in suavity. "I'll see that they're hurried right along."

"How much are they?"

"They're—er—forty cents a dozen, sir," responded the big man, and backed out quickly. And with the dying of his soft footfall silence seemed to settle on the high-ceilinged apartment with an audible thud!

Far away, in the outer world, trees sighed

mournfully. In here no tree would have dared even to sigh. The stillness was that of a tomb, not that of a house. The air, thick and moldy, was the air of a long-dead generation. Over there a strip of wall-paper had peeled away and now curled downward; and so long ago had this happened that the plaster behind was a brilliant yellow, with a thick, gray murk of cobweb overhanging.

"Isn't it—queer?" Mrs. Elton whispered nervously, coming closer to William.

"It's all of that!"

"I don't believe this is a chicken farm at all!"

"The boy down there said—"

"Never mind what he said. They're never selling fresh eggs for forty cents. Why, in Blythedale they're asking sixty for the fresh ones and—"

Her voice was altogether too loud for this room! Its echoes boomed back and sent Mrs. Elton into sudden silence. Lips parted, color decidedly less pronounced, she looked at William Hervey.

"I—I don't *like* this place!"

"I'm not at all infatuated with it myself," confessed her neighbor. "If you weren't so keen about those eggs—"

"I'm not! I don't want them nearly so much as I thought I did!" the bride said with remarkable readiness. "That is, I want them, of course, but I don't think Jacky 'd like my being in a queer place like this."

"And you want to get out?"

"Oh, I do!"

"Well, you're no more anxious to leave than I am," said Bill Hervey with real feeling. "Let's go!"

"Without saying anything?"

"Without making a board squeak, if we can help it. This is all too odd for me!"

One of a truly lovely nature's earmarks is its readiness to fall in with the other fellow's suggestions. Nothing, then, could have been more lovely than the way in which Mrs. Elton reached for William's arm and, gripping it, led him toward the door. Nor did he lag!

It was not, be it said, that William felt any particular terror on his own account, but the idea of his responsibility for getting another man's bride into this mysterious mausoleum sent a chill through him.

His arm tightened on Mrs. Elton's hand. He listened. He heard nothing at all, which was easy in here. He smiled reassurance at the white little person beside him.

"Don't talk out there," he whispered. "Come along!"

On tiptoe they crossed the vast room. On tiptoe they listened again, and this time, for an instant, it seemed to William that somebody was walking around in the corridor. But the sound failed to come again, and he laid a hand, light and cautious as the hand of any burglar, on the knob and twisted.

And although he had not yet put forth the slightest effort, the knob turned just ahead of his fingers! It was a weird phenomenon, as if the thing were actuated by some hidden, uncanny mechanism which anticipated his touch. William gasped soundlessly and removed his hand—and the door swung inward and the way to the free, outer world was blocked by another total stranger!

Broad and tall as the first man, this one was decidedly different otherwise. A quiet business suit hung well enough on his big frame; his thick brown hair, streaked with gray, was bushy and impressive; his close-cropped, pointed, gray-brown beard lent him added dignity. And if the first human mystery had lacked expression, this later one abounded in the quality.

His sharp blue eyes twinkled, inquiry and humor mingling, through rimless glasses; little wrinkles played about the corners of his eyes; tiny twitches about the corners of his mouth betrayed a rather high-keyed nature. He was every inch the professional man of some sort, but—

"You were going out?" he asked in a soothing and musical voice.

"Well, we were—just walking around," William explained rather sheepishly. "The eggs—"

"The eggs, of course," agreed the other, and stepped in, causing them to back toward the center of the room once more. He closed the door after him and smiled faintly again. "Don't run away. Let's visit a little while."

An instant William caught the astonished, warning gleam of Mrs. Elton's eye. He laughed rather uncomfortably.

"Well, we'd like to, awfully well, of course, but we're pretty late now, and we'll have to be running along. Your man—that was your man?"

"Yes."

"Well, he said he'd hurry up the eggs."

"Doubtless he will, then," the stranger said smoothly. "Meanwhile we'll sit and chat comfortably. Just—be seated!"

There was something downright commanding about him as he indicated the pair of big armchairs. Mrs. Elton collapsed into one of them. William, albeit plain rage came up within him at the further delay, perched on the edge of the other—and the professional gentleman took his place behind the great old flat-topped desk, flicked away some dust-particles, and then tilted back, slim, strong finger-tips touching as he considered them.

"You had a pleasant trip up here, I trust?"

"Oh, yes. Some difficulty in finding the place," William explained.

"Really? You're not tired?"

"Not at all," said William.

"And you?" the mystery inquired of Mrs. Elton.

"Why, I—I'm not tired," the bride said blankly.

"No particular headache after the journey?"

"Of—course not!"

"Huh—that's good!" mused the man at the desk, and stroked his beard and seemed to search for further words.

It was nice of him, of course, to want to make conversation and keep them entertained. This William appreciated fully, and he also understood that the unusual chicken-farmer had no means of knowing how very important were the minutes to both of them just now. But that wasn't holding back the setting sun or giving pause to even one racing minute.

"No, we—we both feel fine, thanks!" William said feverishly. "But if you wouldn't mind having the man put a little speed behind packing those eggs we'd appreciate it very much, Mr. Dobson."

The other started slightly and smiled as if to himself. He leaned forward, resting his elbows on the dusty desk-top, and fixed a steady smile on William.

"Suppose we cease worrying about the eggs for a little?" he suggested oddly enough; and added curiously: "Why did you call me Dobson?"

"It's your name, isn't it?"

"Not at all," the other said quietly. "My name is Baiswell."

William bounced to his feet.

"We're in the wrong place again!" he cried. "We beg your pardon ten thousand times over. We've been doing it all afternoon."

"But I'm sure—"

"Yes. We're looking for a chicken farm," William laughed apologetically. "We've used up hours doing it, and now we'll have to race for home. Come along, Mrs. Elton!"

She rose with alacrity. The mystery at the desk rose with even greater alacrity and stood between themselves and the door! He smiled, of course, but there was something weirdly determined about him!

"Just a moment, please!" he urged. "You're not in the wrong place."

"But we are, of course."

"But I insist that you're not, Mr. Otis!"

"Mr.—*what?*" said William.

"Mr. Otis—and Mrs. Otis," responded the mysterious one, and indicated Mrs. Elton with one lean hand; and then, with the blandest of smiles, he pushed the bride gently back into her chair and, largely because sheer amazement had turned his knees limp for the moment, performed the same simple service for Bill Hervey.

"Well—wait a minute!" William stammered. "We—"

"No, *you* wait a minute and let me explain," smiled the other. "You're both perfectly safe and in the best possible hands. Mr. Marlowe has made every necessary arrangement."

"Who in the name of common sense is Mr. Marlowe?" escaped William.

"The very devoted cousin who brought you here, Mr. Otis."

And now, since the gentleman was so perfectly in earnest about it all and still so

completely tangled about—whatever it was—William controlled himself and spoke more gently, although very firmly:

"Hold on—*please!* You're mistaking us for some other people. My name is not Otis, and this lady isn't my wife. I have no cousin named Marlowe, and nobody brought us here. You can take my word for that much; and while we'd like to hear all about the real facts and laugh over them with you, we're in such an infernal hurry this afternoon that we'll ask you to excuse us now and—"

"Mr. Otis, *sit down!*" thundered suddenly from behind the desk.

More than this, the person pounded with his fist most emphatically—and William sat down once more!

Even now, though, the stern frown was fading from the stranger's countenance; calmly as before he placed his elbows on the desk; calmly as before, but with just a hint of added force, he addressed William:

"Will you be so very good as to permit me five minutes of uninterrupted speech?"

"I—guess so!" William muttered.

"You are—both of you, I am convinced—quite capable of grasping what little I wish to say to you now."

"Hey?"

The other pursed his lips and nodded.

"My methods are not the methods exactly of others," he stated slowly. "That is to say, I draw a line between certain types of cases—obviously hopeless and helpless—and certain other types where, by the most reasonable appeals to self-help, the full cooperation of the patient is made perfectly feasible."

"What patient?" William demanded dazedly.

"I employ perfect frankness. I try to reach—and so far in such cases as I have selected for this mode of treatment, I may say that I have not failed to reach in one single instance—those normal mental forces, perhaps only slightly latent, upon which, once they have been stimulated and strengthened, we aim to build the whole rejuvenated structure. You follow me?"

"I hear you, without having the slightest idea of what you're talking about!" William gasped.

"Is that really the fact?" the other said sharply and rather annoyedly. "Is that really your own accurate estimate of your mental condition?"

"It certainly is, so far as this chatter of yours is concerned—and that's no reflection on my mental condition, either!" William informed him with much acerbity and rose again. "Now we'll get out!"

"Now you will remain here and listen to me and—"

"We will not!" William cried wildly. "You—confound you! You made me feel as if I was *crazy!*"

"You are, Mr. Otis!" the other said placidly.

"*What?*"

"Both you and Mrs. Otis!"

A small scream came from Annabel Elton.

"Why, I—I'm not crazy!" she protested. "I—he isn't, either!"

"You are both slightly affected mentally," the mystery assured them in the most soothing of voices. "You have both been brought here for treatment. Under it you will both recover—so much I guarantee you. Now that we understand each other, will it not be best to set aside the nonsense and the subterfuges and all the rest and—"

It seemed to William Hervey that an invisible hand had clasped his throat. For some seconds breathing was next to impossible; and cold chills ran over him, too; and then, as never before in all his life, the burning need for utter calm came upon William, and he even forced a ghastly smile.

"Pardon me, but—but who are you?" he asked hoarsely.

"I am Dr. Stephen Baiswell, of course," the other said almost chidingly. "So much Mr. Marlowe told you, as I happen to know."

"And what is this place?"

"The Baiswell Sanitarium, Mr. Otis."

"A private lunatic asylum?" creaked thinly from William.

"That is one of the vulgar misnomers for such an establishment," the doctor said coldly.

"And how—long are we supposed to be in for?" William went on doggedly.

"Not more than six weeks, I'm sure."

Behind him, one dreadful, hysterical little squeal indicated that Annabel had comprehended the full horror of the thing. The doctor stared at her with black disapproval as other little squeals followed; but William did not pause to comfort his fellow sufferer. Instead, he hastened to the big man and laid a hand upon his arm.

"Listen, doc!" he said after one fevered gulp. "You've got this whole thing wrong—d'ye hear? All wrong! We're not the people you think we are. We're not a couple of maniacs. We're just two suburbanites looking for eggs and—"

He jumped, for the doctor had gripped him firmly by either arm and was transfixing him with a hypnotic eye.

"My dear Mr. Otis," he said steadily, "can't we have done with this nonsense now—in the beginning? It is for your own good, remember! You understand that?"

"I understand anything you like, doc, only let's get out of this!" cried William. "You've got the wrong people and—"

"Nevertheless, I have the people I shall cure," the alienist smiled serenely.

His grip slid off the arms. William swallowed again and then found the blood pounding in his temples.

"Do you mean, then, that you refuse to let us out?"

"You could not have put it more aptly, Mr. Otis."

"Well, you have one more guess coming your way, mister!" William shouted excitedly. "You open that door and let us out of here, or I'll keep you in court till I've sold the darned old establishment over your head and put a mortgage on every cent you ever make from now to your dying day! That's what *I* can promise *you!* Well, well?"

"You will both remain, Mr. Otis," the doctor repeated with a slightly bored smile.

He had folded his arms now. William, considering him, found the difficulty with his breathing returning. Misguided the doctor might be; but in his error he was still hard and implacable as a man of granite.

William turned to little Mrs. Elton, who was sobbing pure terror; and suddenly guile came to his rescue, and he hurried to her side and, taking her in his arms, drew her close to him! Ostensibly he was comforting her; actually, when his warning wink had stilled her first indignant struggle, William was whispering somewhat as follows:

"These big ones haven't got much steam, as a rule. You leave him to me and make a break for the door if I knock him out. Don't stick around outside. I'll get loose, all right." And more loudly: "There, there, *there!*"

Then he turned away again. Slowly, miserably he approached the doctor, as if seeking further words—and like a bursting shell Bill Hervey had risen from the floor, right fist swinging upward! One shout and the doctor stepped backward, having missed by perhaps two millimeters an uppercut that would have sent him into oblivion!

Another shout came, too, and the name "Peter!" but William paid small heed to that. Red rage boiled in his bosom. In the moment of need his pet blow had failed of its aim for the very first time. But there were other blows! He crouched, eyes swimming. He gaged his distance—and just then, with a swirl, something yellow-white was whirling about William!

Powerful arms had gripped him on either side. Powerful hands were pushing his own down into canvas bags! After that he seemed to spin for a few seconds, and then the room steadied again; and William Hervey, who rarely indulged in even an odd thought, was tight and secure in a straitjacket!

The big man who had admitted them, and who seemed to be Peter, was steadying him. Over there Annabel Elton, white, shaking, too scared to weep now, was fast in the grip of a middle-aged, uniformed nurse—a massive, hard-featured lady who would have rolled Annabel into a ball with one hand and crushed her with the other!

Dr. Baiswell was scratching his pointed beard reflectively.

"I said six weeks," he mused. "H-m!—hardly. Er—Peter—remind me to write Mr. Marlowe this evening that they will have to remain here three months, at the least."

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

A Romance in Redemption

by William Dudley Pelley

This is the second of a series of three stories having to do with an up-to-the-minute subject, put into fiction form by a man who not only knows the ground thoroughly, but is also one of the most popular writers of stories in the country. The first story of the series appeared in our last week's issue.

II—Red Guards and White Promises.

I.

A RIFLE-SHOT snapped on the keen, cold Siberian night. The echo was lost in the vast reaches of moonlit winter country that sloped away to vaster reaches below the town to the south.

A moment of ominous silence followed.

Then another shot split the stillness. Two came in succession. Again quiet.

Suddenly a great Manchurian locomotive, far up the frosty tracks amid a huddle of snow-crusted freight cars, emitted a series of excited blasts.

They stopped as suddenly as they began. Across the quiet night came long-drawn cries, hoarse shouts, bewildered replies.

The locomotive whistles started again; stopped.

Then all was quiet.

From under the trucks of an idle empty cattle-car shoved off upon a spur that ran along a deserted warehouse wall, crawled a human figure. The figure came from its concealment warily and immediately flattened itself against the cattle-car. It did not move away. It waited.

It was a man's figure, a tall, lithe, middle-aged man dressed in a black overcoat with silk lapels. The coat afforded him scanty protection from the bitter temperature. The collar was turned up about his ears; a soft felt hat was pulled down over his eyes. He wore no gloves and his hands were beety red with the exposure. He could not warm them, at least not both of them at once, for in them he bore a leather satchel. He hugged this satchel to him as though it contained half a million dollars—which it did!

Gaining the end of the cattle-car, treading on the balls of his feet to soften the crunch of his footfall on the frozen snow, he slipped around the end. Softly he cursed the white Siberian moon that turned the landscape

into semiday. He forgot that the same light also enabled him to keep track of his pursuers. From his position he glanced anxiously around the corner into the distance from which he had come. He could detect no living thing.

The man with the satchel paused there then, thinking dynamically. Only half a mile to the northward the sky was illumined with the reflection of the Russian-Siberian city's arc-lamps, which blended into the long shafts of the aurora borealis. The rifle-shots, the engine whistles, the cries and commands, had come from this direction. To the fleeing man, pausing for a moment in the shelter of the cattle-car, they indicated that Archer had broken from cover in order to join him and had been apprehended.

A great stab of remorse filled the man.

"Poor Archer!" he whispered bitterly. For with quiet restored up the tracks he assumed that Archer had been felled, captured, and carried back for something worse than death.

He was an Englishman. Archer was an American. But they were Anglo-Saxons in a land of Tatars and Orientals and he knew well enough what happened to Anglo-Saxons who were foolhardy and gamesters with the Terrible and attempted to remove money out of Russia without permission from the Soviets—and were caught in the conspiracy.

As he stood there flattened against the end of the car, his hands were numb with the cold, his teeth were chattering cruelly, his body quivered convulsively with his shivering. But he was not excited. He was never excited. He owed his life and the life of his friend—thus far—to his ability to keep a clear head and a cool demeanor regardless of the complexity or excitement of his predicament.

For three weeks, since the Soviet government had been organized in the district, he had escaped the death-sentence by keeping his wits. Perhaps the fact that he had turned the Universal Harvester Company's effects into rubles of large denominations and buried it where the Red Guards stood a poor chance of recovering it if they shot him, had also had much to do with the stay of that sentence. But it had taken brains to think of that, and still more brains it maneuver the cash out of the ground and into the satchel and make his getaway in the long journey toward Vladivostok under almost incessant surveillance. He had done it by a cold-blooded display of unruffled nerve. Now what next?

As he stood trying to decide "what next," and equally trying to control his ague, his keen eye caught sight of something moving down the tracks.

The Englishman worked across the end of the car to the other corner, the corner nearest the warehouse, for the moving figure was keeping closely to that same warehouse wall. He was in a nightmare of a situation indeed. To leave the car would be to outline his black figure against the white of the snow.

He waited.

Closer and closer drew the figure.

The Englishman knew he was freezing. Yet he bore the punishment grimly. He could not leave the car or get into motion. He must wait until the moving figure came close enough to disclose his identity.

Once the figure dipped into the buildings out of sight. Later he reappeared, much closer.

Suddenly Briggs nearly dropped the half-million dollar bag.

"Archer!" he cried.

He stood out in the white light then.

The other saw him, started forward, tripped on a switch and sprawled headlong.

Briggs ran from his car and helped the man to his feet.

"Have you still got the money?" were the American's first words.

"I have, old man," confirmed the Briton grimly.

"You're a brick for keeping your head. They shot at me four times, but I gave 'em the slip. We've got to get out of this hornets' nest. I've fooled 'em for a minute, but when they see they're fooled, they'll be down this way!" He dodged in out of the moonlight behind the cattle-car and began beating his hands. "If we only had an engine, like Terry and Woolwich captured, we could put a thousand

verst between this burg and ourselves before sunup!"

"I don't know about the thousand verst, old man. You want to do a lot of territory, too much at one jump. Twenty or thirty verst would do me plenty just at the minute, thank you. And now I have an idea, old chap."

The American, a stocky, middle-aged man with a derby hat, a club-mustache, and about him indications aplenty of good living, turned his blue-white features to the other.

"What is your idea?"

"We can escape without an engine."

"You mean starting out afoot?"

"I mean by using this car. We can loosen the brakes and let the old girl roll. The best part will be that we'll leave no tracks behind."

"Can we do it?"

"We can do anything, after what we've done already."

"But when we abandon it—if we are able to abandon it at all—we'll have to leave it standing on the track and some of the up-trains may crash into it."

"We should mind what the up-trains might do, old fellow. We're taking the chances of war, now, and to stay in this burg means death. Come on!" He beat his hands desperately for the moment and then sought the iron rungs by which to climb upward. "*We've got to knock the* pin out. Find me something to use for a hammer. Hurry, man, hurry!"

The American hurried.

There came some sharp knocking, the driving of the pin, the creak of chains, the sharp pry as Archer used an old piece of rail protruding from the snow to start the car forward. Then he leaped aboard.

The loosened car started with agonizing slowness at first, down the slight grade straight southward, for miles down and down into the distance. It gathered increasing momentum.

"Every foot she goes is one foot nearer Vladivostok!" cried the American exultantly. He had to shout it over the noise of the bowling, swerving car and the roar of the icy wind.

"And maybe, old chap, it is a case of 'out of the frying pan into the fire,' if the car stalls somewhere down the flats and the cold gets us. But it certainly is one way to escape without leaving a trace. They'll never miss it. Let's huddle down. The wind will kill us!"

The wild cattle-car rocked crazily now. It was dropping down the long incline with a mighty, continuous growl.

Back in the town a company of Red Guards hunted the night out for two Anglo-Saxons who had suddenly appeared among them and found them not. For verily, with the fortunes of war, they had departed!

II.

THOSE of us who have been in Siberian-Russia, with the war as an excuse, know that this thing is true: When there is work to be done and no organized department or dignitary to attend to the same according to orders made and delivered, the answer is easy. Call the nearest man in khaki with a red triangle on his sleeve.

Like the proverbial George, he "does it."

Lieutenant-Colonel Smolchak, of the Czech-Slovak forces, sat at his desk in the drawing room of his private car, a mass of reports before him. He was a big, blond, blue-eyed viking of a man in the olive-gray uniform of the Bohemian army, *black trousers, patent-leather boots, a smart* military cap shoved backward from a fine forehead.

The private car was attached to Special Troop Train 14 *en route* from Harbin, Manchuria, to Omsk—if Lieutenant-Colonel Smolchak could fight his way through. There were reports that the Red Guards had cut the line south of Tomsk. There was no confirmation. The telegraph system was useless. Colonel Smolchak, acting under orders from General Gaida, would go and see.

Outside, the brilliant Russian winter landscape was grinding past. A wildly beautiful landscape it was, if Colonel Smolchak had been in the mood for landscapes. The crisp morning sunshine glinted on a thousand square miles of snow, across which the Trans-Siberian railroad cut with the sharp-

ness and directness of a draftsman's pen. Verst after verst the train moved onward, seemingly making no progress across the face of the scintillating monotony.

It had turned slightly in a northwestern direction and Colonel Smolchak was about to rise from his desk with a sheaf of papers when the brakes were applied so suddenly that the colonel was thrown forward, striking his head on the wall and scattering documents all over the carpeted apartment.

Immediately the train stopped. Several under officers rushed out from the private rooms along the car hallway. There came the shouts of soldiers running alongside the train outside. The colonel recovered his cap from the floor and picked up the papers with a scoop. He thrust them hurriedly into his private safe and reached for his automatic. His orderlies made way for him.

"Is it an attack?" he demanded in the language of his country.

"We do not know yet, sir," replied Captain Semnovk, a dapper little man with gray temples and a Charlie Chaplin mustache.

Before the colonel could reach the platform, a private mounted the steps and saluted.

"An obstruction on the track, sir! Our engineer came around the curve in the slight hill to the right to discover dead ahead, a cattle-car, sir."

"A cattle-car!"

"Without locomotive, dead on the tracks, sir."

"How did it come there?"

"We do not know, sir."

"Come with me." He addressed his officers. "We will see for ourselves. The usual precautions. It may be a trap."

"Yes, sir."

A large number of officers were already off the train, running up front, clutching their swords to keep them from stumbling. The locomotive on the troop train was steaming furiously, the vapor mounting high in the keen morning air, as though impatient over the delay and highly incensed at the plebeian thing which had obstructed its lordly progress.

As the private had said, ahead on the tracks stood a cattle-car. It was a puzzling circumstance, miles out in the open country. There was no ambush near by behind which an attacking column of Red Guards might be waiting. The officers, assured that trickery had nothing to do with its location, examined it closely, looked at its couplings, which appeared to be intact, squinted past beneath its trucks and wheels.

"Undoubtedly lost from the end of the last train, sir," declared a captain to the colonel.

"Impossible," the latter retorted. "The last train over this track was Captain Knaida's, composed entirely of box-cars and *chah'stny vago'n.*"

The colonel was nettled, but not half so nettled as the engineer.

"We will have to couple on and push it to the nearest siding, sir," declared the latter angrily. "It is many, many verst and we cannot make good speed. Being empty it might leave the rails." And he swore in weird Russian profanity, regardless of the presence of a superior officer.

The car was too heavy to think of overturning. There was no other way—it must be pushed ahead of the locomotive, back to the nearest spur.

"Couple on," ordered the colonel concisely.

He started back for his car and his papers when his steps were arrested by a shout. One of the trainmen had climbed into the car. He was gesticulating crazily. The colonel came back.

A Russian cattle-car resembles an American coal car, being roofless. Its sides are built up four feet, with iron braces across at intervals of seven feet, to which the cattle to be transported are tied. High up in the rear over the brake-crank an iron chair is built. In this chair the caretaker of the cattle passes his journey—a perilous but picturesque location. Head to tail, four in a row for the length of the long conveyance, the beeves are placed, and from his high seat the caretaker watches that none of them lie down or get trampled.

A dozen officers barnacled the sides of

the car now, looking down in over the edge.

"Yes," declared the colonel. "And what is it which you have found?"

"Two men, sir!"

"Two men? Bolsheviki?"

"Englishmen, sir."

"*What?*"

"Englishmen, sir."

With the assistance of his officers, the colonel was helped up so that he also might look down onto the floor of the car.

Archer and Briggs lay there, blue men.

"Frozen, are they?"

Two officers made examination.

"One is alive, sir. The other is dead."

"Bring them to my car, together with all papers or other *amunss'tsya*."

"Yes, sir."

The forms of the two Anglo-Saxons were being lifted down from the high car walls to a score of hands waiting below, when there came a figure running alongside the train that was not clothed as were other officials of that military expedition.

He wore the olive-drab.

"*F chom' de'lah* (What is the matter)?" he demanded in his awkward Russian.

"It iss unfortuneet, uncle from America," declared the colonel sadly. He spoke English brokenly. "We have find bodies Engleesh very frozen with bad cold."

"Englishmen? Frozen?" demanded the Y-man, using his own language. "Let me see."

They made way for him, for in the late Siberian intervention the Red Triangle men were honorary officers in every Czecho-Slovak detachment.

"Great Godfrey!" he cried a moment later as he arose from a cursory examination of the dead man's pockets. "This man isn't an Englishman. He's an American! *Americansky! Americansky!*" he cried vehemently so that the others might understand. He turned to Colonel Smolchak who bent above him. "You have no room for these men in your private car, sir?" He managed to make himself understood by a combination of both languages to the Czech. "Allow me to take them down to the Y-car. The life of one may yet be saved."

The officer so directed.

Ten minutes later the train was again in motion.

III.

JAMES HERRING, popularly known in Bagdad-on-the-Hudson as "Jimmy"—Japanese-hater, traveler, war-correspondent for a sensational American paper whose patriotism had been a thing for a great nation to conjure with, now by force of circumstances, the love of a girl and the fortunes of war, a Red Triangle man who was discovering himself—James Herring sat by a cot in his "Y." club car and with his military cap shoved back on his head, his elbows on his knees, watched anxiously the features of one who had been coaxed back from the Valley of the Shadow.

For the first time in eleven hours, the man on the cot opened his eyes. It was night. The train was still grinding monotonously onward. The car was lighted by weird candles and by two oil lamps swinging from the roof.

Across from Jimmy Herring sat the company doctor, a man who had taken degrees in two German colleges of medicine, yet served out here as a private soldier. He was a young man. He looked like a movie hero.

The man on the cot blinked weakly, strangely. His lips moved. He made a faint motion with his hand. The other hand was—missing! The surgeon had taken it off, at nine o'clock that morning.

Jimmy Herring bent over.

"Jump around, old man! Keep moving or the cold will kill us. Damn it, man, you can't lie down! You can't, I say! Listen to me! The cold is getting you, that's why you want to lie down."

The prostrate man's eyes swam. He closed them again. His lips moved but he made no sound.

"I'll watch him," Jimmy told the surgeon, who spoke English with a slight French accent. "For half the night, anyhow," he begged. "You can watch him the other half."

"As you will," said the surgeon. He arose, rolling down his sleeves.

It was daylight again when Briggs again

opened his eyes. His face was pitiful with agony. Slowly the pain was sapping his strength. He looked at Jimmy blankly, beseechingly.

"You're all right, old top," Jimmy called out. "You're in the hands of friends."

"Where?" whispered the other weakly.

"In the company Y.-car, aboard Lieutenant-Colonel Smolchak's train headed for Omsk."

"*Back* to Omsk!"

"That's it! Back to give the Bs hell. What of that?"

"You can't get back to Omsk. They have blown the bridge at Blagovyeschensk —the Red Guards. They have cut the line —at Kgarvominsk—"

"Hold on a minute! How do you know?"

"I—came through there—there—last week—with—Archer. Where is Archer?" The sick man's eyes closed. "Oh, I know! They shot poor Archer—one shot—two shots in quick succession—"

"Do you mean—well, just who are you talking about?"

"Archer was with me—"

"Well, he wasn't shot—if you mean the chap we found with you in the cattle car. He was frozen to death, and if you hadn't been a bloomin' Englishman, too gritty to give up even to death, you might have been found frozen too."

"Where—is—Archer—now?"

"We buried him, when we stopped yesterday noon. Sorry, old fellow, but this is war."

Suddenly the sick man's face took fire. Intelligence came into his eyes. He made as if to arise, despite his terrible condition.

"Where is my money?" he cried.

"You mean all that boodle we found in your valise? Say, old man, how did you come by all that swag? There's half a million rubles in there and it sort of looks bad for you unless you can explain it satisfactorily."

"I am the Universal Harvester Company's man. I turned—the company's effects into cash—I was trying to get it out —to send to your country—to Dayton—Ohio."

Relief came over the Y.-man's face.

"That listens good," he said. "There's some on this train didn't know but you might have been a plotter or a looter. Traveling around Russia these days with half a million dollars in your bag in great thousand-ruble notes of perfectly good old Czar money, is a mighty ticklish operation."

"My papers—will prove—what I say. I have permission—from the British consul —who went out by way of Archangel—"

"All right; I'm not making it an argument. All you've got to do is lie still and see if you can pull through this scrape; you're in a mighty bad fix. We found you frozen like a log of wood, you know."

The other did not reply at once. Jimmy thought he had lapsed into unconsciousness. But after several moments, with his eyes closed, he suddenly asked:

"Where is—the money?"

"The colonel's got it in his private safe up ahead."

"I—would like to see—the commander."

"Go call the doctor back," the Y-man ordered his Czech helper. "And tell him to bring the colonel. The doc will act as interpreter because this chap has got some military information."

IV.

THREE great American newspapers, enterprising enough to have correspondents on the Siberian battle-front during the recent intervention, contained on the 23d of October of the past year, a graphic account of a battle near Blagovyeschensk, Siberia, wherein six hundred Czecho-Slovak soldiers, equipped with Allied munitions, defeated and cut to pieces two thousand German-led Red Guards in one of the most romantic battles of the late war.

What the newspapers failed to record, and what the waiting world did not learn until several weeks later, was the maneuvering of the remnants of the disorganized Bolsheviki immediately afterward, the rapid movement eastward of their forces and the cutting of the Trans-Siberian line in the vicinity of Tomsk so that for weeks the Czecho-Slovak forces were marooned in the heart of great Siberia with no communication or assistance from headquarters at Vladivostok.

On the thirtieth day of October at four in the afternoon an American Red Triangle man stalked hurriedly down a long line of *tepluska* freight cars just outside the town of Blagovyeschensk until he reached finally one car that was different from the others—a great Manchurian freight-car with a huge Red Triangle painted on its side and an American flag drooping at one corner. Out of a chimney in the center of this mammoth vehicle came a tiny furl of smoke that curled up sociably through the softly falling snowflakes.

The Y.-man swung up the ladder and opened the door.

The darkness was already falling. A solitary candle burned on a bench along one wall, filling the place with fantastic shadows. It disclosed two men in that room-on-wheels. One of them lay on an improvised cot, his features emaciated with suffering, his eyes closed with weakness. The other in the gray Czech uniform, watched by his side.

"How is he, Joe?" the Yankee demanded.

"I am believe he is death," responded the watcher with pauses between his words, as he sought the terms to express his idea. "Doctor have speech so. He is express want to talk with you—*Anglee-chah'neen*."

The American went up to the cot. As though he had overheard, the Briton opened his eyes. He tried to smile. His suffering made the effort a grimace.

"I'm glad—you have come—old man," he said. "The doc says I'm—going west."

"I'm sorry," replied the Yankee thickly, pulling the end of a bench over, seating himself and shoving back his military cap. "You were pretty far gone when we found you in the cattle-car, you know. But there's—there's—worse things than 'going west,' old man."

"Yes," said the other in a whisper. "But I have done the best I could. I had hoped to die in England. I didn't mind living away from old England all my life; some of us may have to live—away from home because some of use must keep the home factories going, don't you know. But I wanted to die there; I had always hoped to die—in England."

The American discreetly said nothing. But his soul was touched by the declaration the Englishman had made. "Somebody must keep the home factories going." There was a patriotism in that statement that birthed a lump in Jimmy Herring's cosmos and started it upward into his throat. There is the patriotism of war when, under the excitement and stress of a great national predicament, men will leave their homes and loved ones to go forth and offer their bodies in the sacrifice sublime that the honor of the land which gave them birth may remain unstained. That, indeed, is one kind of patriotism. But what shall be said for the brand that takes the Englishman away from his home for a lifetime and send him into the far places to pass his days in an existence little short of exile, that millions in an overcrowded little island may have the raw materials and the business to sustain their lives?

Jimmy Herring saw the heroism in it all and for the moment kept silent. The Englishman appeared to sense that his hours were numbered. By force of splendid will he fought away the growing weakness of his exhausted flesh. He tried to converse evenly, calmly, consistently, for there was much that he must say before he bade the other good-by.

"I am told, Herring," he went on, disregarding the pauses he should have made for breath and strength, "that you are going back eastward."

"I am starting back for Vladivostok tomorrow morning with a load of 'empties' for supplies," the American replied. "Headquarters at Vladivostok needs the cars and some one must take them through."

"And the line? It is open—clear through?"

"We don't know. We believe that it is. But if it is not, we can fight!"

The Englishman's lack-luster eyes sought the American's face. There was a savage grimness in the declaration that compelled his attention and respect.

"Herring," the Briton demanded, "you have not always been a Red Triangle secretary—or a missionary—like so many of the boys in the Y." He waited a moment

and then asked: "Herring, what is your business at home?"

Jim Herring straightened up suddenly. He turned his glance the other way.

"I'm a—a—newspaperman," he said curtly. He spoke the words as though he were ashamed of them. The Englishman detected that shame. With the grim stoicism of his race in the face of the great adventure, he was interested.

"A press writer? And how did you come out here at this job now, old man?"

Jim rose up suddenly, thrust his hands quickly in his pockets and took a turn down the length of the car. Twice he seemed on the point of making a clean breast of everything and twice his better judgment intervened.

Then an idea came to him. If he could not tell the story of his shame in its entirety, he could at least confide to the other the incentive that had resulted in his coming from Japan up into Siberia in the uniform of an organization which Jim, as a "live one," had always despised at home. The Y.-man threw himself down on the end of the bench again. He bent over with his elbows on his knees and examined his finger-nails minutely.

"There was—a girl," he began lamely.

"I beg your pardon, old man," said the Briton quickly. With fine good sense he added: "You do not need to tell me."

"But I'd just as soon tell you, now that I've gone thus far. I came out to Japan to get some articles for my paper. I met her on the steamer. I—I fell in love with her, you know. I couldn't help it. None of us can, of course. But this was different. She was coming out for the Red Cross—out to this land of chaos, blood, and junk. She was homesick, terribly homesick. But she would not turn back. I must have loved her for her altruism as much as I grew to hate myself for my selfishness. It was in Japan that we settled the question. I asked her to return to America with me and give the whole crazy idea up. You see, I had not seen the sights or known the conditions as I have seen and learned them since."

"And she refused? Some of your American girls are bully."

"Yes, she refused. But she did more than that. She made me feel what a cad I was—to sit idly around Japan punching a typewriter when the world was afire and the greatest drama in the history of the human race was running its course."

"Yes."

"It was partly because she was coming up here that I followed. I wanted to be near her and protect her. The only way I could get passage up just then was by joining the Red Triangle. I thought I was casting in my lot with an organization of mollycoddles. But," he added contritely, "I have learned how very mistaken I have been all along. They were not mollycoddles."

"No," the other agreed. "They have not been—they are not—mollycoddles."

"I got interested in my work. No red-blooded white man could help it. There was so much to be done and it seemed such a man's game to put over—this job of helping Russia come back. And as I got deeper and deeper in, so much I grew to hate myself for the man that I had been. I am trying to make up—now."

"I understand, old man," said the other. "I am sorry I am going west. I feel that we should have been bully comrades. I had an American pal—the one you say you buried. He came out of Moscow when the Red Guards first took hold. He picked me up on the long journey east, just this side of the Urals. For three months we fought our way through together—until the winter came. He was a sportsman, even though all his life he had given himself to business. Being a good sport and a pal comes natural to the Anglo-Saxon. I suppose it's our common heritage. But I liked Archer. I have learned to like you Americans. We're not so very different—after all. But tell me, old man—what became of the girl."

Jim Herring straightened backward suddenly.

"I don't know," he said thickly. "I wish that I did. She's somewhere in this land of junk and chaos to-night, I suppose, doing her duty. I hope to find her somewhere when the war is ended, and as the story-books say, 'live happily ever after.'"

There came a long pause. The wind

sang in the flue of the little sheet-iron stove which warmed the place. The snow-flakes tapped against the panes. Finally the Englishman said simply:

"When you find her, old man, give her my regards."

"I will," the Yankee answered. "Thank you, Briggs."

More silence.

The Englishman made a motion, a weak painful motion, with his one good hand beneath the blankets. He pulled something bulky out from among them. The American was startled. It was the valise of money.

"Why!" he exclaimed. "Where did you get—your baggage?"

"Old man, the colonel turned it back to me this afternoon. They are bricks, these Czechs—the salt of the earth, you know that. Think of holding a million rubles in these chaotic times and turning them back to the man they found with them, just on his say-so. But the colonel did that. He said, of course, he had no right to them. As I had brought them out thus far, they were mine to do with as I pleased."

"Yes."

"Old man, this money—must go back—to my company in your country. For sixteen years I have represented them out here—their British factory. But the money—this money—must go back to their headquarters in Ohio."

"I understand."

"When the first revolution came in Petrograd, I turned all our goods and property into cash, for I was not sure just what was coming. I buried the money. The second revolution came and I was glad that I did so. I was arrested for not turning the money over to the People's Government. I was tired and sentenced to be shot. But if they shot me they would lose the money forever. They kept me alive, hoping I would divulge the place where it was hidden. I used to argue it with the Russian dumb-heads by the hour. Finally I dug it up, brained the guard they had set to watch me, joined Archer and escaped.

"I can go no farther. The money must reach Vladivostok and be transferred to America. There is nobody here that I can trust, except the Czechs. They may never go back; that is, to Vladivostok. I hear the Bolsheviki under Trotzky are reorganizing, and the supplies and soldiers from your country or Japan may get in here too late to save them. There is one chance—a big chance—of getting the money through. As I have lain here I have thought it over. You are going back to Vladivostok with the trainload of empty cars for the Red Triangle. You can carry it though."

The American could not keep the surprise from his features.

"A million rubles! Half a million dollars! You are trusting me with half a million dollars!"

It was the Englishman's turn to be surprised. His hot eyes searched the other's face.

"And is there any reason why I should not, old man?"

"You would trust me—to carry through—half a million dollars—simply because I happen to be in a Y. uniform?"

"Yes." The reply was concise, final, given in absolute confidence.

Jimmy Herring flushed deeply.

"No one ever trusted me in that way before," he said clumsily. "You'll forgive my confusion. It's somewhat out of the ordinary."

"I have no other alternative anyhow," the other went on with visible effort. "If I leave the money here, the Red Guards may wipe out this detachment. Our Czech friends may not always have the good luck that attended them Saturday. It will then fall into Bolsheviki hands, anyhow. By putting it into the hands of an American, there is the chance—more than a chance—that he is an honest man and a gentleman."

Again Jimmy flushed.

"Let me see the money," he requested.

The Englishman handed over the satchel. Jimmy opened it, and his eyes looked upon the wealth of Crœsus in Russian currency. Great, beautiful Czar bills were inside, tied in neat bundles—bills as heavy as parchment, five inches wide and ten inches long—five-hundred, one-thousand, five-thousand-ruble notes. Holding them up to the candle the American could see the water-

marked pictures of ex-Czar Nicholas. Peter the Great, his wife, Catherine, under the lithography.

"But man," protested Jimmy weakly, "suppose I shouldn't get through; suppose, as we fear, the lines are cut between here and Lake Baikal; suppose my train was captured or annihilated? If the money never turned up in Vladivostok or America, I would always have the stigma of losing it upon me."

"No," said the other, "because no one but you and I and Colonel Smolchak knows that I have it."

Jim Herring was flabbergasted as he had never been flabbergasted in his life.

"And you could have taken this money and gone anywhere in the world with it, and your company would always have believed the Red Guards got it," whispered the Y-man.

"I could. But I am not a rascal," replied the other with strange dignity.

"Forgive me," the other pleaded quickly, "but I could not help the thought. The temptation must have been terrible."

"It never occurred to me," the other replied. "It was simply my duty to salvage what I could of my company's money, and get it to them. They have lost millions in Russia already. This salvage is little enough."

Jim Herring considered the situation. Finally he blurted out:

"I've heard of such honesty in story-books, old man, but never believed it could exist in real life. You see—well, perhaps I've been raised in a little different school."

"What kind of school?"

Jimmy hesitated. Yes, what kind of school, indeed! Jimmy had a momentary flash across his mind of some of the adventures as a city reporter on a great American newspaper through which he had gone—the villains, and thieves, and scoundrels, and double-dealers he had hounded and exposed; the rotten side of life as the employee of a great sensational paper had come to know it.

"The school of cheap journalism," he said honestly, "where nothing has been sacred in human life and every man was guilty until a sharp lawyer had proved him innocent. But I'm getting rather ashamed of my—my education," concluded the American.

"And you will take the money out and send it to Dayton?"

"I will try." Jim Herring replaced the wealth in the leather bag, pulled out his handkerchief and wiped his forehead. "But I can't guarantee, old chap, that it will be delivered. You know Russia in the terrible times on which this world has fallen."

"Yes," said the other, "I know Russia. But if I have put the money into the hands of an American messenger who will carry on, I shall go west feeling I did what I could. I cannot ask for any bond. That, of course, is impossible. I am simply trusting—to your honor."

"I will try to get it through," Jimmy reiterated after a long time, "but I cannot guarantee it."

"The only guarantee I ask is your personal promise."

The camouflaged newspaperman arose again and paced the car. Cold sweat came out on his forehead. Three, four, five times he walked up and down.

When he finally realized that he was making a show of himself, perhaps exciting the Briton's suspicion, he returned to the bench from which he had arisen. The Englishman's eyes were closed. The American never knew what the effort to talk had cost his fellow white man. He had done it on sheer will-power. Now he was completely exhausted. He did not respond when Jim Herring again addressed him.

The American decided he had fallen asleep. He picked up the satchel of money and checked it over, his long, slender, cigarette-stained fingers running through the massive bank-notes greedily. He was thus engaged when the will-power of the Englishman mastered his body again. The eyes opened, somewhat delirious eyes. He had a short period of consciousness.

"You may use — whatever you think necessary—as expenses in getting the money home. You may take out—what you think is right—for your trouble. The company would expect to pay it. I trust you."

"But what would Smolchak think of me lugging this money away?"

"I have already arranged it with him. He understands. There will be—no question."

Again the Englishman drifted away toward the purple. This time he did not rally.

He stayed in that final stupor until four o'clock the next morning. Having confided the money to the American, he seemed to feel he had done what he was able and realized he could do no more.

At six o'clock the company doctor came in to see his patient. But only the husk of the man lay under the blankets.

And ne'er-do-well Jimmy Herring, whose brilliant writing ability could be bought by any employer with the appropriate number of silver pieces, whose meat was the world and the rascals in it, who had wasted his substance in riotous living, and come up to Siberia with the secret purpose in his heart of "getting something on the Japanese" and sowing discord back home between the Allies, ne'er-do-well Jimmy Herring was left in personal possession of half a million dollars and accountable to no one but his conscience and a blue-eyed girl in a Red Cross uniform somewhere back eastward over the bloody, wintry miles.

V.

It is a seventeen-day journey from Blagovyeschensk, the spot where his English acquaintance had been buried, to Harbin, Manchuria, where Jimmy would find his own people. It is another week's journey to Vladivostok. Twenty-four days of eternal riding over expanses of dazzling white, with the wind howling over the steppes at night and the peasants trying to board the train and muttering threateningly as it went by. It is a ride for strong nerves, for self-control. And Jimmy Herring had neither.

Sewed into the mattress of his cot upon the rough berth planking was a fortune, an added worry to fray his nerves, along with the reports of Bolshevik activities ahead in the country through which he was going. Jimmy would never come into possession of so much wealth again. True, the Russian ruble, which in normal times was worth an American half-dollar, was then worth but eleven cents. All the same, the consul at Irkutsk had assured him that the Russian ruble would come back. The power of the Leninites would be broken—some time. Russians would be compelled to pay every cent for the damage they had done in their hysteria of new-found freedom. All around him foreigners had bought up Russian rubles to hold for an investment. He had but to keep the money, to wait a couple of years after the war was over, and the half-million should be his portion.

And long before he had reached the lower edge of Baikal on that Golgotha, Jimmy had laid his plans.

At Knovkal had word come that one week after his leaving, Colonel Smolchak had been shot by a fanatic. Briggs was dead, and so was Archer. No human being on earth knew that he possessed the half-million dollars. When he finally reached Vladivostok he could resign from the Y. He could start for Japan, or Shanghai, or the Malay peninsula. The baggage of a Red Triangle man was immune from investigation, until he was far enough away from Siberia to find that the possession of these rubles caused him no embarrassment; he could give it out that he had bought the rubles as an investment—pose as a wealthy young American who was taking advantage of an international financial opportunity. All about the Far East hundreds of foreigners would continue to do it for months.

He would travel down among the South Seas until the conflict was ended; his passport permitted him to do that, for his original intention had been to encircle the globe before returning. When the world fire had been extinguished, he would return to Japan and spend a year turning the rubles back into spendable American money or Japanese yen. Then he would try to pick up the trail of Madelaine.

It was all so very easy that Jim Herring was half frightened. Hours and hours he passed, turning every contingency over in his mind. There was no slip, no accident possible anywhere. And he had small scruples taking the money from the great Universal Harvester Company. This half-million would be all charged up to the loss of war; besides, it would hardly change the

figures in their annual statement of profits, anyhow.

The gods were with him. The gods had carried him to Russia to permit him to bring a half-million for his personal use out of the chaos. He tried to argue it into his own heart finally that even the Universal Harvester Company officials themselves would rather that he have the benefit from it than that a company of Red Guards should dissipate it in an orgy of Bolshevism.

And so the train moved onward over the miles an infinitesimal amount each day, it seemed. And Vladivostok grew nearer and nearer.

The train stopped suddenly. The night was deathly quiet. Jim Herring raised himself on an elbow and listened. Had the engineer stopped merely to take on water at some lonely tower, or had the unexpected happened? It would be decided by the length of time the train lay motionless.

Through the little oblong window up close to the car ceiling, from where Jim Herring lay, he could see the stars. He had hard work to convince himself they were the same stars which he had wandered beneath in a very far-away and bygone New England. Would he ever see that little New England home town of his boyhood again? He wondered.

And as Jim Herring lay there wondering, thinking many sad thoughts, turning over and over in a self-accusative way, his fugitive future, he heard—a cry.

At first it was a very faint cry. For a moment Jim thought it some prowling, whimpering animal of the Siberian night. Then Joe, one of the guards, heard it, too.

Jim's room was partitioned off at one end of the club box car with fine wire screening, the door opening in the center. Through this screening now the Y-man could see a match flare suddenly.

The guards were sleeping out on the benches at the other end, the compartment next to the stove. Joe had been a clerk in a London mercantile house before being called home to join the Austrian army, from which he, with eighty thousand comrades, had deserted to the Russians. He spoke English well.

"What is it, Joe?" the Y-man called.

"It is some person in trouble. It is near at hand."

"It doesn't sound near."

"They are calling weakly. Wait. I see."

Joe felt for his boots and drew them on. He gathered up a coat and cap. Jim was out of bed. He fumbled for the flash-light near his pillow and swung his service-automatic around within easy reach. Then he followed the Czech out of the door, and they stood there a moment listening in the starlit night.

And the cry came again—a cry back down the track.

"We can't go back!" Jim protested. "We can't, Joe. Come on. The train may start and leave us behind."

But Joe, the dependable, had suddenly gone crazed in his wits. He had broken into a run away from the train, an awkward effort in the heavy boots that carried him quickly from sight.

Jim Herring swore righteously. He turned back to the car. To another of the guards he cried:

"Go up forward and tell the engineer to wait until I give the word. We've either lost somebody off the train or we've run somebody down. Hurry! The engineer may be starting up and leave us all behind."

The man started forward. Feeling certain he would make the engine before the proper amount of water had been loaded—if that was the reason for their stop—Jim followed Joe swiftly.

They had stopped on the open steppes. Only over to the northeast two low roofs, undoubtedly of peasants' huts, showed against the sky-line. They were on the outskirts of some nameless Siberian hamlet.

Far down the track Jim hastened, wondering with each step if he were not doing a foolhardy thing. For the thought of the thousands of rubles stored away in the mattress was ever uppermost in his mind.

The weather was milder than the night preceding the morning when the Czechs on his train had found Briggs and Archer. It was cold, but the cold was not killing. A coming momentary thaw hung in the night air. Jim slept in his clothes, fully prepared for such an emergency. All the same, it

would be tragedy indeed to have the train-crew abandon them there in the heart of the Siberian wastes.

Long before he came upon Joe, the American heard piteous cries, and Joe's answering profanity. Finally he drew near enough to discern their figures in the starlight. Joe was bent down over the track. On the ground, prostrate, lay another man, moaning.

Jim drew near fearfully, calling for Joe to tell him the trouble.

"It is Czecho-Slovak!" cried the other. "Please, Meester Herring, have you got knife?"

Jim came up.

Tied to the switch of a spur at right angles to the track, so that his feet were against the pedestal, lay a man. Jim cast his flash-light down and went weak all over. He emitted a cry of horror. Joe swore again and hacked at the ropes which bound his discovery. They came free. Then the Czech guard lifted the other without a word.

The man they had found was heavy, but Joe heaved him over his shoulder after the approved manner of carrying the wounded, and with no explanation, back toward the train he started.

They had a thousand feet to go to reach the latter. They had made half the distance, Joe swearing, the victim moaning or crying out piteously in pain, Jim running along behind to keep up, when the tragedy happened.

"Holy saints!" cried Joe hoarsely. "The train, she start!"

The train had started, indeed.

At first Jim thought it only a feint to get a better position, perhaps to dislodge the brakes. Then his heart sank, sank terribly, with a descent which only increased the illness which had seized him at sight of the man Joe carried over his shoulder. The train was actually going on—*going on without them.*

He shouted, shouted blasphemously at the top of his lungs. The effort was only silly. Joe stopped with his burden. He lowered the man tenderly to the ground. There were shouts up ahead, somebody—probably the man who had been sent to the engine and failed to deliver his message—was coming at a run down the snow-packed ties.

"It is so," Joe declared as he recognized the shouting. "He did not reach locomotive engine, Meester Herring."

Jim Herring hardly heard him. His thoughts were more on that money fast fleeing away eastward, now going out of sight around a slight curve in the distance. They were more upon the loss of that than on his own predicament.

He suddenly slumped down and repressed a foolish desire to sob. Instead, he caught himself and groaned:

"Three of us! Left behind! My God! now we *are* in for it!"

The messenger who had missed the engineer now reached them. In his native tongue he told Joe his brief story. He had strained his leg by slipping. He had not been able to run fast enough to gain the locomotive.

Under the stars were four men—the American, the two Czech guards, and the victim.

It was to the victim that Jim turned his attention when the first shock of his predicament had passed.

He was a young man with fine features and wavy, golden hair. He also was clothed in the regulation Czech uniform, gray blouse with the heavy belt, the black trousers stuffed into light Russian knee-boots. But he had neither coat nor hat, and his clothes were spattered with blood that showed black in the starlight.

There on the cold tracks, the three bent over him.

"Bolsheviki!" pronounced Joe significantly. But it was in a voice terrible with loathing that the Czech said it.

Between his pain and his writhing, the man they had rescued told a voluble story in his native tongue. And Joe, the Czech guard, wept like a woman.

"He have money," he explained, the great man-tears rolling down his face. "He have money and hide so Bolsheviki could not take away. To make him tell where was money, they tie him with ropes to switch, wrist over track. They run locomotive engine up. He not tell. They make go engine over wrist to tell where was

money. See, they left him. *Da!*" And the Czech lapsed into profanity—foul profanity.

Nauseated, Jim Herring turned away.

What new form of torture would these insane Russian devils think of next?

The man's right hand had been crushed off at the wrist. He had fainted many, many times before the Red Triangle train came through. He had bled to almost a husk of a man. But with wonderful physical and mental stamina he had clung to life.

There was little enough medical attention that the three could give him. Jim reeled. He went off a little way and sat down on the tracks, his face in his hands. Joe left his brother soldier in the care of the other private for a moment and came over.

"We must be—in country Bolsheviki," he declared anxiously. "I think so from what Czech fellow say. *Da.*"

Jim looked up a bit helplessly.

"What are we going to do, Joe?" he asked miserably.

"Get out from cold," suggested the other. "You see hill. Over hill is house. Maybe no Bolsheviki here. If not so, we stay here. Maybe Czech train come back east; perhaps so. We watch."

"Yes," said the American, "I think perhaps it's the best thing to do. But if we're in Bolsheviki country, and if there's any of the damned head-hunters in this hamlet, our name's mud. All the same, we won't give up without a scrap—so long's there's any cartridges in the little Bertha."

They took counsel among themselves. After a long time they started from the tracks, Joe carrying the injured man. They crossed the gully and bore up the long hill to where the roofs of the peasants' shacks were outlined against the sky.

They were half an hour making that trip. Part of the way Jim assisted his Bohemian comrades with their burden. They approached the hilltop with revolvers drawn.

But they found—nothing.

There were just two huts up there, and they were both deserted, the snow piled almost up to the northern eaves. They broke their way in.

The place was foul with filth, but it was shelter. There was a long brick, Russian stove, and clutter aplenty lying about for firewood. The third Czech started a blaze.

Jim went over in a far corner and sat down with his head in his hands.

What to do he did not know. He was up against the primal, and he was a man of the cities. He had never been up against the primal before. Hitherto he had used his wits in his work. Here he must not only use his wits but brute force as well.

Death, stark and sinister, stared them all in the face. Death from cold when the fuel ran out; death from starvation; death from roving bands of Bolsheviki if they should come that way. And that they would come that way Jimmie and his companions never doubted. They had been in the vicinity the day before when they committed the atrocity on the helpless Czech lying unconscious now in the other corner.

According to the latter's disjointed story, as interpreted by Joe, there was a town not far southward, off the railroad, where they congregated to sally out in marauding bands and terrorize the countryside or commit terrible vengeance on any Allied sympathizer that might fall into their clutches.

Jim Herring tried to think, to reason. But his head refused to work. So in the dark, excepting for the light from the brick oven door, excepting for the stars showing in through the little smoky window or the matches they lighted from time to time to find their way about, they waited for the long coming of morning.

And in those eternal hours, the American thought thoughts which had never come into his head before.

In the back of his brain lurked an accusation—a self-accusation that rankled and hurt.

This was his punishment—his chastisement for giving his word of confidence to a dead man and deliberately planning to break the promise. It seemed as though a higher Power had taken Jim Herring in hand, determined to teach him a lesson.

For three days he had planned out every move of his future, for up to that time his

lightly given, soon-to-be-broken word had not bothered him. And because he had determined to pursue his yellow course, not only had the wealth been snatched from his greedy fingers, but he had been discarded and abandoned on the killing Siberian wastes.

The man was superstitious. His training had made him so, for in his heart he was a gambler and gamblers are ever superstitious. And he believed sincerely that the gods had double-crossed him for his treachery.

He knew that he deserved it. He would almost have taken his punishment of losing the money if the death-threat could somehow be omitted. But it could not. He was hundreds of miles from any friendly habitation, without food or water, with only a handful of cartridges in the jacket of the automatic. He was in for it.

And a great fear slowly grew on him—a fear that stampeded his common sense and led to mental panic.

"God, what a cad I am! God—what a cad!" he cried aloud, so that the two Czechs turned toward him in bewilderment from where they sought to ease their wounded countryman.

Joe came over.

"What is matter, Meester Herring?" he demanded.

"Nothing—only I was thinking that at heart I'm only a dirty, sneaking crook, whose bluff has been called by a higher Power. You wouldn't understand, Joe, and I can't tell you! I've got to face it—and fight it out alone!" Again he buried his hot forehead in his hands.

The Czech discreetly said nothing. And while they waited, over in the corner, the wounded man began to talk. The other Czech replied. Joe went over. He knew, Jim did, that the victim had regained consciousness again and was being interrogated as much as his strength would stand. Why the man was not dead already was something that the American could not understand.

Joe called to him, and, hardly knowing what he did, the Y. man came over. There in the darkness—which was a mercy in that it hid the terribly injured arm—they crouched about the one they had found at the switch. And Joe interpreted.

Suddenly the latter uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"He has been—he has been with Y. M. C. A.!" he cried.

"With the Y. M. C. A.?" echoed Jim Herring. "Where? There's none around here."

Joe held converse with the other for a time and then translated.

"He was with Meester Tolliver in Ukraine," the Czech declared.

Jim came to attention then, indeed, for he had heard from the boys far eastward in Vladivostok of the wonderful work which Leslie Tolliver had carried on for the Russian prison-camps in the south before the second revolution. "And he say Meester Tolliver send him to Vladivostok with much money—to bring back supply cars."

"With money? How much money?"

Joe put the question and then replied:

"He say fifteen hundred your money, what-you-call-'em?—dollar! Fifteen hundred dollar—three thousand rublay."

"Where is this money now?"

Again the question; again the reply:

"He say he travel through all right along with Czech fellows. Come Blagovyeschensk, have fight, escape eastward. Come to Bolsheviki again, and they make capture. Use *steek* (bayonet)."

"You mean they stuck him with their bayonets?"

"They make capture him with bayonet. He throw money away in snow."

"Hereabout? Near here? Where did he throw the money?"

"*Vist. Da, da!* Leetle way off from here by town where make capture."

"Was that why they tortured him—because he threw the money away and could not find it for them?"

"*Net, net!* Say threw money away so Bolsheviki no make capture of Y. M. C. A. money."

"Why didn't he go and get it for them and save his good right hand?"

"Say he had make promise to take money Vladivostok. He make promise, he keep it. They could torture; he would not make information."

"You mean to tell me this fellow had three thousand rubles of Y. M. C. A. money he was carrying through for supplies at Vladivostok and when they captured him and invented this new form of torture, he wouldn't tell them where the money was, not even for his good right hand?"

"*Da, da* (yes)," the Czech confirmed.

"Why not?"

"He had make promise; besides, money not his money. Belong Y. M. C. A., buy many supply Czech soldier-fellow. Lose hand, maybe Bolsheviki go off. Byme-by come rescue, find money, find way to go on deliver rublay, maybe. You understand, Meester Herring. I forget much Eengleesh, not four year yet I work London; talk Czecho-Slovak all time."

"Yes," said Jimmy, slowly, thickly, the words gall and wormwood on his tongue, "I—understand—very—well—Joe."

Then silence. Silence broken only by the hush of the warming winter night wind with thaws in its treacherous heart.

"But all the same," added the American, "a man can make money and get money; but he cannot get a good right hand."

"Czecho-Slovak make promise to Americansky—he keep promise, same as white man all over. Czecho-Slovak not Bolsheviki."

More accusation. Joe did not know how much.

Here was a poor Czech private who had given up his good right hand rather than forfeit the money that had been entrusted to his care. Joe's inference was that only the detested Bolsheviki broke their promises.

What if the Czechs had known that he, an American, from a country to which the Czechs were looking with an almost childish confidence as the embodiment of righteousness and a square deal, was planning up to an hour before to break his word with an Englishman and become an absconder with a million rubles simply because there was no one in existence to know of his villainy and apprehend him before it was too late? What if they did? And that promise of his had been between white men—blood brothers—an Englishman and a Yankee whose countries were linked by the common bond of a common enemy, facing together the peril of a wavering civilization. What a scoundrel he was; not fit to associate with the humblest Czech private when it came to a test of honor.

And Madelaine! What a fool he had been to think he could ever look into the girl's steady blue-gray eyes again after the war was done and won, and be happy with her.

Jim arose and went outside the hut. Around him for eternal miles stretched the barren desert of white into the vague and treacherous distance. Above, the passwords of the Almighty, the twinkling stars, looked down upon the world that man's mischief was ruining, calling to those who could be men, to rise in their stature and show their divinity.

Deeply of the night air Jim Herring breathed, and as he stood there he called up the life which he had lived and weighed himself and found his soul wanting. He pulled his cap from his fevered forehead. He turned his gaze to the stars. As a great surge of emotion went through him, he cried aloud with none but the night wind to hear:

"If I can't come through with clean hands because of the things I've done—I'll come through with a heart that 'll do different if the chance could come again!"

To the stars he made his confession. It did not come quickly, nor easily. One cannot throw off the habits of a lifetime in a moment. But into the American's soul came a great longing to respect himself—an overwhelming desire to feel in his own heart that if he could be given another chance, he would not be found wanting again. He was facing death by starvation or capture afar on the snow-bound Siberian wastes populated by fiendish fanatics without one shred of fellow-feeling in their souls. But at least he would meet that death like a man and not like a simpering coward who had planned to steal half a million dollars simply because nothing stood in his way but his conscience.

There was a strange, quiet confidence, a poise about Jim Herring that had not been there the night before, when as the east was turning into a sickly, clammy gray, he came back into the hut where the three Czechs waited stoically. Through the hours

under the stars, he had fought out the fight with himself—and won. He was prepared for anything.

And in proof that he was prepared for anything, he walked up to Josef, squared his shoulders, jerked his gun around, commanded himself and his situation.

"Day has come, Joe," he said tersely. "This day we've got to fight for our lives, somehow. But we'll do it like white men. We'll make the attempt to get out of here, not hide and rot like vermin in a hole because we're afraid to show ourselves outside."

"Yes, Meester Herring," responded the Czech, his admiration shining all too plainly on his countenance, fitting comrade for the one who had found himself.

"And Joe, before we make the break—that may hold fatal consequences for one or both of us, or all of us—there's something I want to say in order to be sure I've got control of myself for good."

"Yes, Meester Herring."

And with a full realization of his renunciation, the American declared in a steady voice:

"In that Y. car that left us behind last night, in the mattress of my bunk, there's half a million dollars in my country's money—a million rubles in yours. That money belongs to the Universal Harvester Company. I'm taking it out to Vladivostok to send to America and the corporation to whom it belongs."

The Czech's eyes grew large, but he said nothing, only another "Yes, Meester Herring."

"Josef, I charge you, that if anything should happen to me, try to find that car and that mattress, get the money out and see that it reaches its destination. And if—if nothing should happen to me, and I find it myself, please ask me if I have sent it—to America, Josef."

"Why, Meester Herring?"

"I—might—I might forget it, Josef."

Then the American turned on his heel, motioned the Czech to follow, and went out.

The sun was coming up.

A new day was dawning. A new day meant a new opportunity, another lease on life. The American breathed deeply of the keen morning air. He was not dead yet. There might be a chance. He had control of himself. And that gave him confidence—a confidence he had never known before, a self-reliance that birthed an exhilaration within him.

And as though the angel of the Almighty had passed that way through the depths of Siberian night and beheld the Golgotha and Gethsemane through which the bogus Y. man had gone and borne off a report to Heaven, a kindly God decided to give Jim Herring another chance.

A wild, queer cry arose from Josef's throat as they came down the hill toward the railroad.

Jim turned where the Czech was pointing crazily and uttering inarticulate sounds.

Down there in the long valley to the left, in plain sight, was a railroad-train, *their train!*

There is no connection on some *tepluska* Russian-trains between the cars and the engine. When the next station had been reached, the Czechs they had left in the car had doubtless communicated with the locomotive-cab.

The forty coaches were backing up. The train-crew was looking for them!

The third story in this series—"The Man from Chaos"—will appear NEXT WEEK.

As powerfully fascinating as its title!

"Princess of Plunder"

BY C. ELEANOR and RAYMOND S. SPEARS

Authors of "Islands of Stone," etc.

BEGINS SEPTEMBER 20

The Single Track

by Douglas Grant

Author of "Booty," "The Fifth Ace," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

ON her twenty-first birthday, Janetta Gildersleeve, society butterfly, found herself heiress to trouble, hearing for the first time from the old family lawyer, Andrew Geddes, the story of the Gildersleeve Copper Company, of which she and her brother, Oliphant, absent in France, had been the owners after the death of their father. Now, due to the machinations of the unscrupulous Gordon Winfield, an old enemy of Gildersleeve, Sr., the company had failed, her patrimony was threatened, and all her bright and brilliant world suddenly plunged in a gray gloom.

A ray of light, however, was furnished by the fact that Ollie and Geddes had been able to purchase, under another name, the new Northern Star Mining Company, near Katalak, Alaska, a true bonanza, but sustaining the fierce and unscrupulous competition of the Unatika Mine, a rival company. A single-track railroad to Katalak Bay was the goal of each—only one company could have the right of way—and the company building first established the right of possession. Either mine was, of course, without transportation for its ores. Work on the Northern Star had been stopped pending the completion of the railway.

So it was to develop in a race against, not only rival skill and ingenuity, but also against trickery, which would stop little short of—murder. Geddes, however, had finally found an engineer whom he could trust—one Barney Hoyt—and there remained still a chance. The ownership of the new mine was a secret to all but Janey, Geddes, MacLeod, Eastern office head, and Hoyt.

Janey resolved on the strictest economy—among other retrenchments the dismissal of her paid companion, Mrs. Everton, who, however, saved her the trouble by the astonishing announcement that she was going West in Grace Winfield's private car. This gave Janey food for thought, and after a near auto accident, in which she met a personable yet uncompromising stranger who intrigued her curiosity, she decided suddenly, since Ollie was unable to do so, to go to Katalak herself with Peddar, the Gildersleeve butler, passing as his daughter. There she expected to assume the duties of assistant storekeeper, a position which was at the moment vacant, in reality to spy out the land. They were to leave in two weeks. In the mean time she expected to visit her friend, Persis Cheever.

Going over a packing case of books, Janey found in one of them a map of Alaska, and on it, in Mrs. Everton's unmistakable hand, was written: "Northern Star." So Mrs. Everton had known all the time of the true owners of the dummy company! And in a month she was going West with the Winfields!

CHAPTER V.

THE FAR TRAIL.

DAZED from the unexpected revelation, Janetta held the book closer to the light and examined the map with minute care. It had not occurred to her before to look up the little town to which her mission was taking her, yet she would have had no difficulty in locating it, for a circle had been drawn with a faint pencil stroke around the little star labeled "Katalak."

Could it have been Ollie himself who had so marked it? Andrew Geddes's remark when she had told him of Mrs. Everton's revived friendship with the niece of the man who was their enemy recurred to her: "I would not put it past her to accept a commission from Winfield to try to find out if there is anything in the wind."

This story began in The Argosy for August 30.

He had said, too, that he would have sent her packing long before if he had known that she was a friend of theirs, and he was no alarmist. Perhaps he should be told now of the evening's discovery.

Even as the thought came to her, however, Janetta negatived it. She would not take any one into her confidence. With Adam MacLeod's reluctant backing and Peddar's moral support she would see her self-appointed task through alone.

Persis and William Cheever welcomed her whole-heartedly the next day, but before the week was out her hostess was conscious of a change in the girl, subtle but unmistakable. She was no longer the flippant, frivolous Janey of the past two seasons; there was a glow of serious purpose in her eyes, a new dignity which seemed to forbid an intrusion upon her unwonted reticence.

"The infant has something on her mind," Billy remarked one evening to his wife. "I'm hanged if I don't think there is something queer about the whole business, her closing up the house like this, and shaking that Everton woman and coming to you. Has she told you anything, Sis?"

"Not a word!" Mrs. Cheever exclaimed. "I cannot understand her these days at all. She won't play about with us any more, but keeps going off every day on private expeditions of her own and claims that it is business. What in the world has Jane to do with business? Old Mr. Geddes takes care of all their affairs. She used to tell me everything, and now I can scarcely get a word out of her. I mean to try to-morrow, though. This mysterious air of hers is getting on my nerves."

Yet when the opportunity came while they were having tea alone together on the following afternoon, Mrs. Cheever did not find it easy to approach the subject. Janetta, with that new and maddening preoccupation of hers, was staring straight before her, and roused only when her hostess leaned forward and laid an impulsive hand upon her arm.

"Janey dear, what is it that is troubling you?"

"Nothing, Persis; what should there be?"

"Well, I didn't know, but you have seemed so changed since you came to us, I was afraid that perhaps I had offended you that day when you told me you wanted to do something really practical to help, and I discouraged you."

Janetta laughed lightly.

"You didn't. If you only knew it, you gave me just the right advice." She paused and added: "If I seem rather quiet and absent-minded, please don't mind me. It is because I am trying to plan something out, and there are difficulties in the way."

"Couldn't I help, dear?" Mrs. Cheever asked meekly.

"Perhaps, but the trouble is that I can't tell you the whole truth. You see, it isn't my own secret. If you did help me you would have to act rather in the dark."

"I don't mind that, Janey. You can be trusted not to do anything foolish. Of course, I am simply dying with curiosity, but perhaps you can tell me everything some time. What is it that you want me to do?"

"You are going to open your camp up in Maine on the 1st of June, aren't you? I wonder if you will mail some letters for me from there."

"'Mail letters for you!' You mean—" Mrs. Cheever sat very straight in her chair, and eyed the girl before her in growing wonder.

"Yes. You are going to be there all summer, aren't you?" At her hostess's nod Janetta continued hurriedly: "I would like to have sent to you once a month from New York a plain manila envelope with your address typed upon it. Inside you will find a batch of letters from me addressed to Ollie and to Mr. Geddes. There will be a little date written very faintly in pencil on the corner of each. Will you erase that and mail them on the dates named? And for goodness' sake, don't get them mixed!"

"You mean, of course, that you want them to think you are with me all summer? But Janey, child, where are you going? What are you going to do? Surely you can tell me that."

Janetta shook her head.

"That is just what I cannot tell you, Persis. Only you may be sure I am not

going to do anything very dreadful. It is just something which Mr. Geddes with his old-fashioned ideas would not approve of, and he would be sure to stir up Ollie and make him unhappy over there, when there is really no occasion for it. I am of age, and have a perfect right to do as I please, you know, but I simply don't want any fuss made about it."

"Janey, I—of course, I am willing to do anything I can for you, but I do want to be sure that you are acting wisely." Mrs. Cheever was plainly disturbed. "Couldn't you just give me an inkling of the sort of thing you are contemplating? You know, I shall have to fix Billy, too, for he is bound to come to town and run into Mr. Geddes, and he will have to pretend that you are in camp with me. Billy isn't very good at pretending."

"I can tell you this much: I have found some real practical work for myself in spite of, or rather because of, what you said to me that day, in a way. It is something that will really help, Persis, and you will be helping, too, if you will mail those letters for me, and coach Billy."

"But where is this work? Here in New York?"

"No, but you mustn't worry about me. I shall have the very best of chaperons." Janetta sighed, and added in a monotonous tone as though she were repeating a lesson: "Some one years and years older than I am, and eminently respectable, some one whom Ollie loves and trusts implicitly. Does that assurance satisfy you, Persis?"

"It will have to, Janey." Mrs. Cheever smiled. "I am doing a perfectly mad thing in consenting to this, and if Mr. Geddes ever finds it out I suppose he will all but eat me, but I will do it."

A week later, in the bright sunshine of an early May morning, Janetta took leave of her friend. At the curb a taxi burdened with two battered trunks and an ancient bag stood chugging impatiently.

As Mrs. Cheever's arms folded about the girl in her strangely shabby suit, she felt her trembling.

"Oh, Janey, can't you tell me what it is all about, dear?" she implored for the last time. "I am so worried and anxious about you! I feel that there is something underneath all this which I should understand. Won't you, at least, write to me?"

"Yes, I will slip a little note for you in one of those manila envelopes now and then. Buck up, Persis; I'll come back with flying colors, you'll see! Good-by."

Yet it was a suddenly miserable Janetta who huddled in a corner of the taxi and fought back the tears behind her neat, dark-blue veil. Through all the time of waiting and planning she had been filled with confidence, but now with the moment actually at hand a feeling of utter dismay swept over her. What possible qualification had she for the task which she had set herself? Dared she face the immediate future?

Then in a swift revulsion of feeling she straightened herself with a little shake. Ollie was doing his share; she would do hers. As to qualifications, well, she could at least "sell goods over a counter."

She carefully smoothed down the blue suit of two seasons ago, wriggling her fingers at the unaccustomed touch of the silk gloves which incased them, and when the station was reached it was Jane Peddar who descended from the taxi and started upon the far trail.

CHAPTER VI.

KATALAK.

"STEAMER in sight yet?" Jud Pittinger came to the door of the company store as a tall, lanky figure paused for a moment in the slanting drizzle of rain outside. "She's late again, by cracky! Well, I don't care if she never comes this time!"

"What's eatin' you, Jud?" The tall figure looked down on the shorter, rotund one with slowly dawning amusement. "You're always a lookin' for the old boat as if your best girl was comin' on it."

Jud's ruddy countenance flushed a deep crimson.

"I been naturally anxious about my new stock, with you boys whoopin' around for stuff that 'd run out a month before she opened up," he asserted with dignity. "Wish I had your job now, Harve, in spite

o' that jolt you got the other night. Find out yet who it was you almost caught trying to bore holes in your pile driver?"

"No, but the ——— left his ship's auger behind him, and it don't belong to any of our outfit." Harve Dugdale swore with picturesque fluency as he glanced down at his bandaged hand and arm. "I'd have dropped him, too, orders or no orders, if he hadn't been close enough to bring that ——— auger down on my wrist!"

"What does the new chief say about it?" the storekeeper asked curiously.

"Not much of anything. He's layin' low, I reckon, till they show their hand a leetle mite more." Harve shrugged. "But what's the matter with your job here that you're so anxious to change? You act like bad news was comin' in on this here steamer."

"Bad news is right!" responded the storekeeper with unwonted bitterness. "I ain't said anything about it until the last minute, because I knew gosh blamed well how you boys would give me the laugh, but my new assistant is gettin' in on her to-day so I might's well let it out. Harve, what do you think the big boss has wished on me?"

"Dunno." The superintendent of dock construction shifted his cud impartially from one leathery cheek to the other, and gazed out over the swarming horde of workmen at the water-front.

"It's a girl! A lady assistant!" Unmitigated shame and disgust sounded in the little man's tones.

Harve Dugdale nearly swallowed his cud, but by a mighty gulp retrieved it.

"A what?" he demanded incredulously.

"A female!" Jud Pittinger amplified, for the benefit of his astounded listener. "Hell, ain't it?"

The last observation would have been staggering under other circumstances, for the storekeeper was known throughout the outfit for his religious avoidance of any but the most innocuous of expletives, but it passed unnoticed under the spell of his cataclysmic disclosure.

"A woman!" Harve gasped. "You—you feeling all right this morning, Jud. Ain't been hittin' up the red-eye over at the Full Blast, have you?"

"Wish I had!" Jud retorted recklessly. "What in time I'm going to do with a girl in here on Saturday nights, when all the wops and Chinks and Polacks pile in to get rid of some of their dough before the Full Blast gets it, is more than I know! Remember the night they tried to rush me? That would have been a fine time to have a hysterical female hidin' behind the counter, wouldn't it?"

"There's plenty of 'em hanging around the Full Blast and the Happy Days that wouldn't have batted an eye—"

"Not this kind," declared Jud firmly. "She's a lady; leastwise that's what the big boss says."

"The hell he does!" Harve remarked soberly. What the general superintendent said usually carried weight. "What the blazes put the notion in his head of gettin' a woman up here for, anyway?"

"Well, he says it's on account of the shortage of men, and you know yourself what a time we've had gettin' an outfit together, but I guess maybe it's a poor relation of somebody higher up. I've got to teach her the business, too!" Jud added indignantly. "Bet I won't know where half of the stock is inside of a week!"

"A lady!" repeated Harve, adding in some alarm: "How old is she, Jud? What will we do with her? She'll have to go to Ma Heaney's; I can't take a single man off the job to knock up a shack for her."

"She's young, I guess," Jud hazarded gloomily. "Young enough to have a father living, anyway. He's comin' up with her."

"Has the big boss got a job lined up for him?" demanded Harve, with sudden interest of quite another sort. "I can use him, if he's out of a wheel-chair! I'm as shorthanded as—"

"Don't know nothin' about that," the storekeeper interrupted sourly. "I got my own troubles! I keep this place neat as I can with the gang tromping in an' out, but what if she's one of these here death-on-dirt females? This ain't any dod-gasted department-store!"

"We've got to turn out and give her a reception, anyways," Harve remarked. "Got any open-faced shirts in stock, Jud? We'll have to—"

He broke off as running feet sounded upon the plank sidewalk, and both men turned to see a snapper hastening toward them.

"What is it, Bert?"

"Loam in the concrete sand again!" the snapper announced. "Joe Zurak swears it was all right when they knocked off at seven last night, and he's about ready to knife somebody! Ivan Mirko, on the night shift, don't know anything about it. Says it's the third time this week."

"I'll have to see the new chief." Harve hurried off, his assistant foreman at his heels, and his curses died away in the sudden clatter of the pile-driver.

Jud stood still where they had left him, staring out through the rain upon the familiar scene at the water-front, where the bustling activity never ceased even for the short two hours of semitwilight which separated one long day from another during the summer season which was just upon them.

At the end of Main Street, where formerly it had meandered down to the bay, the land had been filled in to meet the new dock for which the last of the piles were being driven, and across the way, almost at the water's edge, the Northern Star storage yard was stacked high with kegs and boxes, lumber, girders, and all the raw material which would go into the building of the single-track road.

In its midst the full swing crane reared its head, the creak of the long boom as it sorted the material with mechanical precision breaking in upon the incessant rattle and clamor of the pile-driver.

And everywhere there were men. On the string-piece near the government breakwater, where the company barges were moored, in the storage yard, swarming over the half-planked dock; Russians and Chinese, Italians and Hungarians, with here and there the leathery, lantern-jawed face of the Yankee. Low above them all through the misty drizzle hung the smoke from the salmon cannery just beyond.

It was a scene for the master hand of a Pennell, but to Jud Pittinger's accustomed eyes it meant merely the dreary monotony of everyday existence, and he gazed once more seaward.

There was still no sign of the belated steamer, and Jud turned and reentered the store preparatory for the three o'clock shift, which would bring fresh trade. He was piling pouches of tobacco on the shelf behind him, when a heavy step sounded on the door sill and a deep, hearty voice hailed him.

"Hello, Jud! Steamer's late again?"

Jud turned and greeted the general superintendent with an air of reproachful resignation.

"Yes. I ain't particular 'bout this boat, Mr. Bowers; we got up the supplies we needed most by the other two that came in since the season opened," he replied.

"Well, you're getting some new brands up with this cargo; class of goods you never saw in a company store before, Jud. Regular white man's cigars, and high-grade candy and razors with honest-to-God steel blades."

Jim Bowers was the biggest man in the Northern Star outfit: standing six feet six, his breadth of shoulder and depth of chest would have been worthy of a Hercules, and now as he leaned over the counter and stared down at the astonished little storekeeper, his deep-throated laugh boomed out above the vibrating roar and rattle of the machinery outside.

"What for?" Jud demanded. "The boys are satisfied now, and only the other day a feller sneaked in that I hadn't seen before and tried to get some flannel shirts. I had a hunch that he belonged to the Unatika outfit, and I sidetracked him."

The general superintendent's heavy, good-natured face grew serious.

"I guess that's what for, between you and me," he said confidentially. "You hit the nail on the head, Jud. When I got notice from the New York office in the last mail that the goods were coming up, together with the inventory and the fixed prices we were to sell them for, I saw that it was a little below cost, even back home. There was a quiet tip handed me to pass on to you, too, that if any of the other outfit should get wind of the new stock and try to edge in, you were to sell to them, letting on you thought they belonged to our crowd."

"Well, may I be eternally hanged!" Jud ejaculated. "Is that bunch crazy back at the head office? What in time do they want to sell to that rotten gang for, and below cost at that?"

"Search me!" Jim Bowers shrugged. "Orders are orders; that's all I know. You're to keep this under your hat, you know, Jud, and be kind of sparing with the new lot at first, if you don't want the store stampeded."

"I'll be sparing of it!" Jud promised grimly, adding: "I s'pose the flossy candy is for my new assistant! Say, Mr. Bowers, what did you hang her on me for, anyway? Ain't I got enough on my hands as it is?"

"Don't kick until you see how she turns out," the superintendent advised. "Here's your list of the new stuff that is coming in."

Jud glanced hastily over it and groaned. "Only a while ago I said to Harve that we weren't runnin' a department-store, and now look at this! What do they think this place is—Paris? Neckties, silk handkerchiefs, tea! *Tea!*" he repeated bitterly. "I'd like to know who the lunatics are that we're working for, anyway!"

"The Northern Star is all I know." Jim Bowers straightened as the whistle blew. "See you when the Queen comes up the bay."

For the next half-hour Jud was kept busily employed by his patrons, but soon the slouching crowd of weary workmen disappeared to seek their bunks, and the clatter of the pile-driver and creak of the long-boomed whirley, which had momentarily ceased, shattered the stillness once more. Jud set his counters and shelves to rights; and then, with an eye to the arrival of his new assistant, he swept the freshly accumulated mud scrapings carefully from the floor before taking up his post again at the door.

As he did so a young man emerged from the main office of the company, which was situated between the store and the waterfront, and nodded pleasantly to him.

"The Queen is just in sight," he said. "She'll warp in before supper."

Jud shaded his eyes with one leathery hand, and, descrying a small dark object trailing a plume of smoke behind it far out on the sullen, gray waters, he nodded in his turn, but gloomily.

"Reckoned she'd get in to-day, Mr. Hoyt," he assented. "You've heard about my new assistant who's comin' in on her?"

The chief engineer smiled, showing a flash of white teeth in his brown face.

"Yes, you are going to have a saleslady, I hear. I wish I could remedy the deficiencies in my organization as easily, Jud."

"Looka here, Mr. Hoyt," the storekeeper observed eagerly, "if there's any place in any of your crews that a woman could fill, you can take her and welcome. I don't need her no more 'n a cat needs two tails. It was just an idee of the general superintendent."

"No, thank you," Barney Hoyt laughed. "I've got enough trouble right now in the outfit without introducing any new elements."

"I heard you had." Jud's face sobered. "Bert said Joe Zurak found loam in the concrete sand this morning that wasn't there last night, and, Mr. Hoyt, Zurak's a pretty steady man. Before you come—"

"I know." The chief engineer spoke shortly, and the boyishness died out of his face, leaving a look of grim tenacity. "We'll get that road built, though, Jud—make no mistake about that."

As he turned with a brisk gesture and crossed the street for a word with the boss of the bull gang in the storage yard, the storekeeper watched him with an expression half admiring, half commiserating. The new engineer was there, all right. He had nerve and undaunted courage, and he had sailed into his job with an assurance of conscious efficiency which many an older, more experienced executive might well have lacked. But he was little more than a boy, and the influences at work against him were strong and ruthless.

Jud Pittinger was not by nature a timorous man, but he had seen enough of the machinations of the Unatika outfit since he had been storekeeper for the Northern Star to realize that trouble lay ahead.

Would the boy be equal to th

emergency? Brief as had been the time since his arrival to take charge of the outfit, he seemed already to have attained a definite degree of popularity amid the horde of mixed races and nationalities. But would they follow his leadership in a moment of possible stress and violence if it came to a show-down between the two factions at war for that single-track road to the mines?

The trail of smoke upon the horizon grew steadily nearer, the dark object resolved itself into the outlines of the sturdy little Queen of Alaska, and just as the seven o'clock whistle sounded from the cannery the steamer drew in and anchored as near as she dared to the breakwater. The men from bunk-house and mess crowded down with one accord to the water-front, joined by the employees of the canning factory, and Jud Pittinger locked the door of the company store and followed.

The hatches were open and the crane was already bringing the cargo from the hold to pile it upon the decks of the steamer, but as Jud reached the filled-in ground behind the dock space a horse-cage swung out from the side of the Queen to the string-piece, and a shout rang out from many brawny throats.

Harve Dugdale clutched his arm.

"Here she comes!" he shouted in Jud's ear. "Here's your assistant. By ——, it's only a girl!"

Willing hands moored the cage close to the end of the string-piece, and there emerged first an elderly man of dignified appearance and a decided paunch, who stepped gingerly out and looked about him with bewildered, shocked gaze. A little impatient push made him step quickly aside and extend his arm, but the trim, slender figure in blue spurned his aid and, with a gay little gesture for him to follow, tripped down the string-piece to the shore.

The men drew back, eying her curiously, but from among them one stepped forward with outstretched hand.

"Is this Miss Peddar? Glad to meet you, miss. I'm Jim Bowers, the general superintendent."

The girl laid her hand in his powerful grip and favored him with a smile which brought a deep, crimson flush to his broad face before she turned and beckoned to the reluctantly approaching elderly man.

"This is my father, Mr. Bowers. He—he's a little upset from the trip. It was rather rough." A little unmistakable giggle escaped her. "But he will be all right by to-morrow. Will I—will it be necessary for me to start work to-night?"

"No, indeed." Could it be the big boss speaking in such dulcet tones? "Take your time and get rested up, miss. You've come a long way. You can start with the seven o'clock shift to-morrow morning, if you like. Glad to know you, too, Mr. Peddar. You'll like it here. Katalak's small, but it's wide open, and if you'd like a job yourself later on I can fix you up."

Peddar surreptitiously wriggled his fingers as they emerged from that crushing grasp, and regarded the smiling giant before him with eyes of honest horror.

"This is Katalak?" he asked feebly. "This—all of it?"

"You said it," Jim acquiesced with pardonable pride. "You can't see it all from here, but up Main Street there we've got two saloons with as stiff a game going as any north of the line, and a restaurant and general store besides the cannery you see over there. There's nothing slow about us, and when the railroad goes through—" He broke off and added: "But you'll want to be getting on up to your lodgings. Sorry there's no shack ready for you, but I've been short-handed ever since Mr. MacLeod's letter came. You'll be all right at Ma Heaney's, though. She'll take quite good care of your daughter and make it comfortable for you till you can get quarters of your own."

"You are very kind, Mr. Bowers." The girl spoke with an air of finality. "But you mustn't take any extra trouble on our account. I've come up to work for you just like any other employee of the outfit, and I—we—we'll get along all right. Where is this Mrs. Heaney's? Is it a boarding-house?"

"Lodging-house," the superintendent corrected her. "It's just up Main Street; I'll show you. Your baggage will come off in the next trip of the cage."

The men who had crowded about again, drinking in every word, fell back silently and made a path between the storage yard and the shore-line as big Jim Bowers turned and led the way.

"Peddar—father!" The girl gave the elderly man's arm a little shake. "Come along, and don't look so shocked!"

"Yes, miss, but I'd have a few words to say to Mr. MacLeod if he was here! To send you to a heathen place like this! Oh, miss, we shall never be able—"

"'Jane'!" the girl whispered fiercely. "How often have I told you not to call me 'miss'? Play up; you know how much depends on you—father."

A hollow groan was her only answer as Peddar followed her to the planked sidewalk of Main Street, where the mud oozed up between the boards upon his immaculate shoes; and strange, rough-looking characters, in nondescript costumes of toil, eyed him with what he took to be baleful antagonism on every hand.

The Full Blast was living up to its name as they passed. Through the swinging door the rattle of chips and odor of stale liquor drifted out to them, and above the clink of glasses and shuffle of feet a raucous voice was already raised in unmelodious and decidedly ribald song.

Peddar's gait quickened until he reached the side of his self-elected daughter and her companion. Neither had noticed the figure which stood outside the main office of the company across the way and gazed after them with a speculative look in the deep-brown eyes.

"Where in thunder have I seen that girl before?" murmured the construction engineer, Barney Hoyt.

CHAPTER VII.

THE "WORKING MAN" AGAIN.

THE huge, square, two-storied, unpainted shack before which their guide paused reminded the girl of a forlorn country orphanage which she had once seen, and involuntarily she gave a little shudder; but a dolorous groan from Peddar warned her not to betray her own sinking spirits lest he collapse altogether from the accumulated shock of their journey's end. With a reassuring pat upon his arm, she started up the shallow steps, when the door flew open and its space was veritably filled by a wide, uncorseted figure which promptly extended two fat arms in greeting.

"Come right in, deary! This your pa? We've been expectin' you all day, but the Queen's allus late. I'm mighty glad you got here safe and sound."

"Jane Peddar" suddenly found herself clasped in a warm and none too clean embrace, from which a short month ago she would have recoiled in amazed resentment; but now a little inaudible sob welled in her throat, and for an instant her head drooped against the capacious bosom. The coarsened voice held a motherly note which struck a treacherously responsive chord in the girl's lonely, dismayed heart, and for the first and last time she was perilously near a breakdown.

The next moment she had set her little teeth resolutely and drew herself with gentleness from Ma Heaney's friendly arms.

"Thank you, Mrs. Heaney; I'm glad to be here." A backward glance at Peddar's scandalized face brought a hysterical giggle almost to her lips, but she fought it down. "Come in, father."

"You, too, Jim," Ma Heaney supplemented hospitably. "There's a little something behind the desk that you know you're allus welcome to; and I guess a couple of fingers wouldn't go bad for your pa, either, Miss Peddar. He looks sort o' done up." She led the way into a dingy office walled with thin, unpainted pine boards and furnished with a few uncertain-looking chairs, a long counter which evidently served as a desk, and a huge stove from which a roaring fire sent out cheering waves of heat.

"Take a drink if she offers it, Peddar; you've *got* to!" Jane whispered in a peremptory aside, and, crossing to the stove, warmed herself while she watched the ceremonial with amused eyes.

Ma Heaney produced a bottle and two glasses from beneath the counter, poured a copious drink into each, and offered one to the miserable Peddar. Big Jim Bowers lifted the other.

"Here goes!" he said, including the girl in a sweeping wave of his arm. "Hope you'll like it here with us in Katalak."

She nodded smilingly, while Ma Heaney beamed, and Peddar, concealing a grimace, heroically drank the contents of his glass in one desperate gulp. Instantly a rich purple hue mounted to his brow, and as a strangled gasp emanated from his outraged throat their hostess turned to Jane.

"Come on up and I'll show you the room I got fixed for you," she invited. "It ain't much, but it's clean, if I do say it. Your pa'll have to bunk in with the boys to-night, but he looks plum wore out, and I guess he won't care so long as he gets some sleep. I've warned 'em not to start no rough-house with him."

The room to which Ma Heaney conducted the girl was a narrow, cell-like space thinly partitioned off from the others in the long row after the manner of a dormitory.

Jane looked about at the iron cot, rickety wash-stand, and single chair which the room contained, and her fastidious soul rose in anguished protest.

How could she ever endure it? The whole episode of their arrival seemed to her like some horrible nightmare from which she must soon awaken to find herself back amid her own familiar, luxurious surroundings once more.

But Ma Heaney's hoarse, good-natured voice brought her back swiftly to the grim reality.

"You ain't never been round a mining town before, have you?"

Jane shook her head.

"Well, if you hear a kind of a racket up here round about eleven, when the last shift goes off and the first goes on of the Northern Star outfit that you're goin' to work for, don't get scairt or nothin'. I got a few of the foremen lodgin' here with me, and they're bound to skylark a little, though I warned 'em. There ain't a mite of harm in 'em, and they'll treat you right."

Ma Heaney broke off, and added:

"You don't look like the kind of a girl that would pick out Katalak to work in when there's so many stores back home, but they tell me there's no limit to what our seck is doing in place of the men folks now they're all gone off to war."

Jane braced herself warily. This was the first note of suspicion.

"Well, you see my father has been dreaming of getting up into this country ever since the first Klondike rush, and the Northern Star people offered me such good wages that we thought we would come and he could look over the ground a little." Jane lied glibly. "Then when my brother comes back from the war, maybe we could stake out a claim somewhere."

"Good land! Your pa got that notion, too, at his time o' life?" Ma Heaney sighed. "If you knowed how many of 'em I'd seen come and go—I've grubstaked more 'n one of 'em, too, when I was a newcomer—you'd get that idee out of his head! This part o' the country is staked out already like a buryin'-ground; and a buryin'-ground it's been for most o' the poor suckers."

"Yet a new copper-mine was discovered up here only recently, right near the Northern Star, wasn't it?" Jane glanced covertly at her landlady as she spoke. "The 'Una'—something it is called, isn't it?"

Ma Heaney thrust back a wisp of hair in which gray battled with the glint of peroxid, and a certain grimness made itself manifest about her generous mouth.

"Unatika," she supplied the name shortly. "Can't tell how good it 'll be yet—the ground ain't hardly scratched. I'll go show your pa where to wash up, and when you're ready the eatin'-house is right across the street."

Left alone, Jane approached the bed and turned it down with two shrinking fingers to inspect the thin red blankets and coarse, gray-looking sheets, and then shudderingly perched herself on the edge of the chair. Never, never had she supposed that it would be as dreadful as this!

The impressions of the last hour had been so vividly, deeply stamped upon her consciousness that they had quite obliterated her vague preconception of what had laid before her.

She had taken it for granted that there would be many workmen about—workmen

in neat overalls, brisk and smiling and respectful. The sea of faces which had pressed about her at the landing-stage—Latin, Slavic, and Mongolian, but alike unshaved and lowering—had struck the first dismay to her heart; and now this bare, hideous place, and the common creature who presided over it, filled her with unutterable disgust and loathing. Could she bring herself to live the life of these awful people for the weeks and months which lay ahead?

But it was for Ollie! It was to do his work that she had come! The thought made her straighten in her chair, and her small chin thrust itself out dominantly. What did dirt and squalor and loneliness and a horde of savages matter when it meant taking up the task which he had relinquished for a greater, higher one? She could not fail now; she had come far to keep watch and ward over what was Ollie's and her own, and she would not turn back like a coward at the first glimpse of the field of her future work.

The thought of her brother reminded her that she must hasten to apprise Peddar of the new addition to his recently acquired family, and after rearranging her hair she descended to the office. Peddar, still slightly flushed from the effects of his unusual libation, awaited her in a stoical silence.

"Come along, father; we had better go and have dinner—er, supper," Jane announced cheerfully. "The restaurant is just across the street, Mrs. Heaney says."

As he allowed himself to be drawn toward the door, Peddar vouchsafed with the calmness born of desperation: "I've never gone against you, miss, but if your grandfather was to see you now he would turn in his grave!"

"Oh, bother my grandfather!" Jane snapped. "You've had all my ancestors turning in their graves ever since we left New York! They must be a restless lot!"

"Miss Janey!" Peddar halted, shocked at the sacrilege, but she dragged him remorselessly on. "When I saw that impossible person put her arms about you, I made up my mind to one thing: I shall write to Mr. Geddes to-morrow. I know my dooty, miss—"

"You'll do no such thing!" retorted his self-styled daughter. "You're not thinking of me at all, Peddar, or of Ollie's interests that are at stake; you're just thinking of your own comfort. You want to go back to New York, and you don't care what happens—"

"Miss Janey — Jane, I mean" — his tone was filled with honest reproach — "I'm thinking of what's due to a Gil—"

"If you are, you will stay right here and write nothing to any one," Jane interrupted firmly. "By the way, Ollie's your son, too; I had to invent a brother who was going to come up here and stake out a claim after the war, to account to Mrs. Heaney for our presence here now."

Peddar's only answer was a faint groan as they entered the Elite Restaurant and seated themselves at one end of a long, linoleum-covered table.

Jane looked about her with frank interest. The place was sparsely filled at that hour, but scattered about at the other tables she found many types wholly new and strange to her. Near the door two heavily bearded men, with the rain dripping from their rubber coats and turned-back hat-brims, lounged over the remains of their meal, smoking villainous pipes and staring at her with a wondering, compelling gaze.

She moved her eyes hastily, to encounter the curious, half-resentful glances of a girl seated alone at the next table—a girl dressed in tawdry, cheap finery, who shrugged her thin shoulders beneath the sleazy silk gown in a gesture of utter weariness as she turned sullenly away. There was an indefinable sense of pitiful youth about her—yet her eyes were as old as the world.

Jane wondered if this could be one of the dance-hall denizens of whom she had spoken so airily to Adam MacLeod. If it were, then the movies had revealed but a travesty of the truth.

Through a swinging door she could see two impassive-faced Chinamen moving with incredible swiftness from stove to pantry-shelves, and a solitary waiter in a grimy apron limped about the table at the rear, where a group of brawny young men were eating with audible gusto. Their collarless

shirts, rolled up at the elbows and turned in at the throat, revealed powerful brown arms and thick necks upon which the muscles stood out like cords.

Jane wondered if they could be her workmen, hers and Ollie's, and with the thought she felt a queer, democratic impulse of friendliness steal over her. They looked so young and strong, as if they could be good workers and good fighters, too, if the need arose.

The waiter came to them, and she ordered a simple meal from the choice he submitted to her in a nasal monotone; then turned to her companion: "Isn't this fun, father!"

"Fun!" repeated Peddar sepulchrally. "It's a disgrace for you to be in such a place! I don't know what's come over you, miss—Jane. I don't, indeed! You aren't the same young lady as you were; your brother would never know you in the world! To see you eating with steel forks, from china that wouldn't be allowed in your grandfather's kitchen, and food that's enough to poison you—"

"Nonsense!" returned Jane briskly. "This salmon is good, and as long as we don't know *what* the potatoes are fried in—"

She paused as a newcomer entered and, after a cool survey of the room, advanced deliberately to their table and pulled out a chair. He was tall and dark, with pale, glinting eyes, and the bluish tinge about his heavy jaw showed that he was freshly shaved.

He favored Jane with an insolently appraising stare, and as the blood rushed indignantly to her cheeks she became aware that the mingled clatter of voices and knives at the rear table had ceased.

"Evenin', ol'-timer." The man nodded casually to Peddar, who bowed frigidly in response. "Good trip up on the Queen?"

Peddar cleared his throat.

"Very fair."

"You and the lady aimin' to stay here in Katalak, or hit the trail for the north?" The stranger leered at Jane. "Not much around here to amuse a lady—"

Peddar rose to the occasion and his feet with unexpected aplomb.

"My daughter has come here to work, sir." He beckoned to the waiter. "Come, Jane."

"Peddar, you old dear!" Jane squeezed his arm affectionately as they emerged once more into the strange, eery daylight. "You sat on him beautifully! What a dreadful man!"

"It's only to be expected," Peddar responded mournfully. "If we've got to stay in this wretched hole, miss, you are not to go outside the door without me. One step, and I shall write to Mr. Geddes, I shall, indeed!"

"Don't you worry about me; I can take care of myself," she asserted, but her tone was a shade less confident than before.

The insolent stare of the man with the curiously light eyes had shaken her more than she would have admitted, and long after she had carefully peeled the covering from her bed and laid herself upon it beneath her steamer rugs, his leering face rose before her.

The task which she had assumed grew more and more stupendous, more and more unlikely of achievement. How could she, a mere girl, hope to discover and frustrate the power behind the men who were working to delay the road and finally wrest it and the Northern Star with it from Ollie and herself?

This was a strange country, the people alien and horrible! Even Ma Heaney, who meant to be kind, and that bluff, hearty superintendent, were impossible, as Peddar had said. She had never come into contact in all her sheltered existence with individuals of such a class, she did not know how to touch them, reach them; there was no common ground upon which they could meet, and she shrank from the thought of such a meeting.

The daylight which still flooded her room made sleep impossible to her unaccustomed eyes, and she waited in terror for the eleven o'clock whistle which would mean the change of shift. The partitions were so thin that she could hear above the subdued but never ceasing clatter of the pile-driver a chorus of snores in innumerable keys all about her.

Ma Heaney had told her of the

"racket" that would ensue, but was that all she had to fear? Suppose some blundering giant, drunk, perhaps, should come crashing through her flimsy door? Where was Peddar?

With the first screech of the whistle she started up in bed and then fell back, burying her face and head in the thin pillow, but no pandemonium such as her apprehensive fancy had painted came to her. There was a stir of movement and sound down the length of the hall; boots scraping cautiously upon the floor, noisy yawns as quickly suppressed, hoarse, grumbling monotones that were meant to be whispers, and at last a tread of heavy feet tiptoeing clumsily down the stairs. Ma Heaney had warned them, she said: could it be that they were keeping quiet because of her nearness?

Even as the thought came some one stumbled, and a rumbling voice reached her ears.

"Can that, you! Remember the lady!"

And they were the foremen of the Northern Star, *her* foremen! Again that warm, comforting glow stole up in her heart. Why, they were friends already! Surely her task would not be impossible with such men to back her up.

She did not realize the change which circumstance had wrought, the miracle which was taking place within her. The Janetta Gildersleeve of a month before would have taken it for granted that all things must be subjugated to her will, all people subservient to her comfort, but Jane Peddar was grateful for the rough chivalry of road-builders, nor did thought of caste disturb the slumber into which she fell even before the weary feet of the men of the last shift plodded up the stairs.

With the morning, although the dreary drizzle of rain still fell uninterruptedly, Jane felt a reaction from the despondency of the night before in a sweeping tide of renewed courage, and she descended the stairs in high spirits to find Peddar waiting doggedly below.

"Good morning, father." She patted his head roguishly, and he submitted to the mutual indignity with the meekness of resignation. "Did you have a nice sleep?"

"Not a wink," he assured her gloomily. "What with no night-time at all, and the men all crowding in—but were you quite all right, miss—Jane?"

"Absolutely, and I think you are an old fraud! You look as if you had slept for a month! Nevertheless, I think you had better look about to-day for a little shack where we can keep house. If you don't know how to cook, I can learn, and I don't like that restaurant."

"I'll have some sort of a place by nightfall—I mean the time that would be nightfall in a Christian country—if I have to turn out the people that are in it!" Peddar promised darkly. "That restaurant is no place, and neither is this tramps' lodging-house! If they only knew who you were, miss—"

They were crossing the street, and no one was in ear-shot, but Jane pressed his arm warningly.

"You must be careful and try to remember not to call me that," she said. "And Ma Heaney's is no tramps' lodging-house; those men are as self-respecting as you or I, and of quite as much use in the world. I'm beginning to see a lot of things that I've been blind to before."

Peddar gasped at such rank heresy to the caste at whose shrine he had worshiped all his conventional life, but he made no direct comment. Instead he coughed deprecatingly and remarked:

"I've not seen the young man that's in charge of it all up here, yet; the new engineer you were mentioning to me, m—Jane."

"Why, that's so! I hadn't thought about him—everything has been so new and strange." Jane paused; then added with a little laugh: "We'll see him later, but we're not important enough to meet him right away, you know; we are only—at least I am—among the minor workers, and quite beneath his notice."

Yet when they emerged from the eating-house after a hasty breakfast amid a noisy crowd of laborers and returning miners from up-country hurrying to catch the "Queen," they found Jim Bowers waiting before the door, and he was not alone.

A tall, young man, slight in comparison

with the superintendent's massive frame, but with a lithe springiness about his easy poise which bespoke the athlete, stood talking earnestly with him.

"Good morning, miss." Jim Bowers swept off his drenched rubber hat. "This is Mr. Hoyt, the construction engineer, and boss of the whole Northern Star works."

Jane placed her hand in the outstretched one and glanced up with a smile to meet a pair of quizzical brown eyes bent upon hers. One startled flash of memory, and the smile froze upon her lips.

There was no mistaking those brown eyes nor the carriage of the head with its slightly curling chestnut hair and clean-cut features.

It was the insufferably rude young man of that chance encounter which might have been so tragic on that Westchester road at midnight weeks before! The "workingman" again!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LIGHT-EYED MAN.

JUD PITTINGER took one look at the vision in the rubberized mackinaw with the red-gold hair shimmering from beneath her waterproof hat, and dodged precipitately behind the counter as big Jim Bowers led her forward.

"Mr. Pittinger," the superintendent began with due ceremony, "this is your new assistant, Miss Peddar. I told her you would take charge of her and show her the ropes."

"Howdy, miss." Jud drew a deep breath as he carefully wiped his hand on his trousers before extending it to meet the little one held out to him. "Glad you g-got here; I've been terrible short-handed."

"Where shall I put my hat and coat? On that peg up there?" Jane asked in a businesslike way, nodding toward a row behind the counter. "Now, I am ready to start right in."

"Gosh!" Jud was still staring at her as if hypnotized, and his tone was filled with wondering admiration. Here was a female that didn't make a fuss, but got down to brass tacks just like a man. She was a lady, too; a regular lady, if he was any judge. What in tarnation was she doing up here in a mining company's store?

The deep-throated voice of Jim Bowers awoke him from his reverie.

"Well, I got to get on down to the docks. That new stock of yours that I told you about yesterday is all unloaded, and as soon as it's sorted out from the rest I'll send it on up. So long, Miss Peddar; if there's anything I can do for you, just you let me know."

She smiled her thanks and then turned to the storekeeper.

"How shall I begin?" she asked simply.

"Oh, I guess I better show you where things is and give you the list of prices." Jud added in a careful tone: "Ain't you ever worked in a store before?"

Jane started to shake her head, and then a sudden memory made her dimple.

"I—I've sold things over a counter," she admitted.

"What sort of things?" Jud blinked at the glimpse of that dimple, but pressed home his question.

"All kinds, but it wasn't at all like this. I'm afraid you will find me very stupid at first, Mr. Pittinger, but if you'll just have patience with me I'll learn, I know."

"Say!" observed Mr. Pittinger in utmost sincerity. "You could be stupid, miss, and it wouldn't make a mite o' difference!"

Realizing that cryptic as his speech was he had paid a bald compliment to this amazing young woman, Jud colored to the roots of his hair and covered his embarrassment by plunging into the business at hand.

Jane listened to his directions, following him docilely about the store, and apparently examining the stock with the greatest interest, but in reality her thoughts were still busied with that encounter of a half-hour before. That Barney Hoyt, the young engineer on whom Andrew Geddes had staked everything, should prove to have been the same man upon whom she had, in a moment of resentment, bestowed the most opprobrious epithet which came to her mind, was a coincidence which in her wildest dreams she could not have imagined. Her cheeks burned at the memory

of it, and it seemed to her that she could hear again the good-humored, unruffled tones in which he had assured her that he was just a working man.

Had he recognized her? Nothing in his manner, or smile, or the simple words with which he had greeted her showed that he had, yet she felt that in any event his bearing under the circumstances would have been the same. She must find out. She must know!

"That's about all." Jud's voice broke in upon her meditations. "Only we've got to make room some'eres here for a lot of fool stuff that the big boss is sending in; neckties and silk handkerchiefs and good cigars and such. Never heard nothing to beat it in my life."

Jane suppressed a smile.

"Why, don't the men want some finery and a better grade of tobacco and things now and then?" she asked.

"'Tain't what they want, it's what they can get up here," Jud responded. "There's never been any kick from them unless the stock ran out. You don't know anything about prices, do you?"

"Not on—on men's things." Jane was busied with a box of cheap razors, and she did not look up. "They make good money, don't they? They could afford to pay for almost anything they wanted?"

"They can afford to pay the prices we're asking, that's sure," Jud broke off, and grumbling half inaudibly, he moved to the back of the store.

Jane wondered how much of her little scheme had been guessed by the rotund, easy-going shopkeeper. Evidently it did not meet with his approval, whether he divined its real purpose or not. She had seen the letter which Adam MacLeod had written to the superintendent, merely issuing the new orders without explanation in the name of the company, but the genial, clear-sighted Jim Bowers was by no means a fool, and she suspected that Jud Pittinger himself was more astute than appeared on the surface. She must pretend ignorance, of course, but meanwhile she could feel her way.

"Mr. Pittinger, this store is only run for the men employed by the company, isn't it? Do you sell to the miners passing through, and the townspeople, also?"

"Not if I know it." Jud wheeled a heavy barrel across the floor, and deposited it with a resounding thump. "I have hard enough work keeping enough in stock for our own boys, the way the steamers are runnin' now."

"But there are so many of them!" Jane expostulated. "When you're away, how am I going to tell, if a man comes in for something, whether he belongs to the Northern Star outfit or not? Have they cards or anything?"

"They have; but I've got so that I know them all." Mr. Pittinger seemed to remember something, and continued hurriedly: "Don't you worry your head about that, miss. It's a long time since any outsider tried to put it over on me. If anybody comes in, they've got a right to buy here."

Mr. Pittinger had evidently received his instructions, and meant to obey them despite his personal disapproval. Would the scheme work? Would it serve to win the confidence of any of the rival outfit and wean them from their allegiance to the Unatika Company?

Unaccountably her thoughts drifted back to the man who had tried to engage Peddar in conversation at the restaurant the night before, and on an impulse she turned again to her superior.

"Mr. Pittinger, you say that you know all the men in the Northern Star outfit?"

"By sight, anyway." His voice came to her, muffled from behind a huge crate.

"Is there one among them very tall and dark, with bluish-looking bristles on his chin, and queer, light eyes? He speaks like an American—a Westerner, and he has a way of staring—"

Jud's face popped up suddenly from behind the crate and his sleepy eyes flashed.

"I know him all right, but he don't belong to our outfit. He's Hugh Malison, general superintendent for the Unatika people, and if I was you, miss, I—ahem—I wouldn't hold no truck with him. He ain't just fit for a lady to speak to. Excuse me for not minding my own business—"

"But I want you to advise me, Mr. Pittinger." Jane smiled upon him. "You see, we don't know anything about anybody up here, my father and I. He tried to talk to us in the restaurant last night, but I—somehow I didn't like him."

"They're no good, any of them—that Unatika crowd." Jud waved a pudgy hand expansively. "There's bad blood between them and us, miss, as you would be finding out soon enough."

"Oh!" Jane caught her breath effectively.

"I don't want to scare you none, miss, but—you see that gat under the counter?"

Jane looked where the fat finger pointed, and shrank back.

"A pistol!"

"Reg'lar gun." Jud spoke with evident pride. "I'm heeled—that's only for emergencies. Now, if I shouldn't be here, and anybody comes in and tries to start something with you, just you reach under and bring that up level with the counter as if you meant business, and you'll see 'em fade away. Ain't afraid of it, are you?"

"N-no." As if to reassure herself, Jane took up the ugly looking weapon gingerly, and Jud promptly effaced himself behind the crate. "It's all right; you needn't bother about it now," he assured her hurriedly. "You'll never have to fire it, anyway. Just let 'em think you're going to blow 'em to—to kingdom come. Did you put it back?"

Jane replaced it and the storekeeper rose.

"'Tain't safe to get foolin' round with it; it might go off," he warned. "Here comes the new stock now."

In single file a row of Chinese coolies were crossing Main Street, each bent almost double beneath a heavily weighted crate or box or barrel.

Jane viewed them with satisfaction. Here was the concrete result of the long mornings during her stay with Persis Cheever when she had ventured alone into strange, foreign quarters of the city which she had not known existed before. There she had found the peculiar scented hair-oil dear to all masculine Italian hearts; tins of salty Russian food; lichi nuts and bamboo shoots for the Chinese, and the weird-looking instruments which alone can bring out the true spirit of the czardas.

Jud Pittinger had decried the better grade of American goods; what would he think of these importations? When the coolies had departed, Jane watched him going from crate to box, from box to barrel, with bewilderment written large upon his countenance, and waited for his comment, but none came.

Instead he knocked the top off a crate of cigars, placed a box or two prominently on the counter, and then struggled into his rubber coat.

"I got to go see the big boss a minute," he announced. "The price of them cigars is a nickel apiece, six for two bits, and no more 'n six to a man. One or two of the boys from the night shift may come ramblin' in for a smoke, but there 'll be no rush until the three o'clock whistle. Think you can keep store for a while?"

"Yes—sir." Jane added the last word as an afterthought, and Jud reddened. "I have the price-list here if they want anything else, and I can find whatever it is."

When he had departed into the warm rain, Jane emerged from behind the counter and made a round of inspection on her own account, bringing up at the cases of new stock at the rear.

Mr. MacLeod had executed her order faithfully; every item that she had chosen was before her, and she longed not to sell, but to give of this bounty to the men who had come so far from civilization to work for what seemed to her to be so pitifully small a wage that she and her brother might retain possession of the mine.

That they might have resented such charity did not enter her head. Sympathy had been born within her, but not understanding, and her mental attitude was still that of Janetta Gildersleeve. The rôle that she was playing pleased her by its sheer novelty despite the loneliness which tugged at her heart, but it was only a rôle; she was not yet awakened to the forces allied here against all her former theories of life, blissfully unconscious of the fire through which she must pass before she could enter wholly into the spirit of that world into which she was newly come.

As she turned back to the counter she saw a man striding rapidly along the plank-walk, pause—then suddenly wheel and enter. He was huddled in his coat with upturned collar and down-drawn hat, and not until he swept off the latter in a slightly ironic bow did she see his face. He was the man of the restaurant, Hugh Malison, the superintendent of the Unatika!

"Good morning, miss." He spoke civilly enough, and Jane fancied there was a subtle change from the night before not only in his manner, but in his mode of speech. "This is what your father meant when he said you had come here to work!"

"My father?" Jane asked the question with her eyebrows.

"In the Elite last night; you haven't forgotten," he replied with easy confidence, resting one elbow on the counter so that his pale, oddly bright eyes were on a level with her own. "I've been scouting around for you all the morning, but I didn't think I would find you here."

"Why not?" Jane tossed her head and drew slightly away from him.

"Well, it's pretty far for a little girl to come just to tend store." There was an underlying significance in his laugh which repelled her still more. "You're something of an innovation, you know."

"There have to be pioneers everywhere." She tried to speak lightly, but the words seemed to stick in her throat. "Did you want to buy something?"

"Perhaps." He glanced down the counter, and a box of the freshly opened cigars met his eye. "Hello, 'Reina Dolores,' eh? Say, we're getting some class up here."

"Nickel apiece, six for two bits," Jane announced promptly, wondering at the same time what mysterious coin the latter might be.

Malison whistled.

"That what old Pittinger told you, is it?" His shoulders shook with amusement. "I'll take a dollar's worth."

"No, you won't; only six at a time," she retorted. "Are you one of the Northern Star outfit? I'm not supposed to sell to any one else."

A swift, keen glance shot from the man's pale eyes, but her face was blandly inquiring, and he shrugged.

"Sure. I'm one of the outfit that is going to put the single-track road through."

If the girl sensed the ambiguity of his answer she gave no sign, but calmly took possession of the quarter he spun upon the counter.

"Only six!" she cautioned, as he helped himself from the box. Then upon a swift impulse she leaned slightly toward him. "How long do you think the job will last up here; the road-building, I mean?"

Again that glance swpet her face.

"Ask the chief; he can tell you better than I can. You mean to stay till it's done?"

"That depends." Jane drew a deep breath and plunged: "I hear there have been so many accidents, and nobody seems to understand. It is almost as if there were a jinx on the work, isn't it?"

"Maybe there is!" Malison leered and then leaned suddenly over the counter, bringing his face close to hers. "Say, little lady, don't something else go with these cigars?"

"Coupons?" Jane parried, retreating a step or two until unseen her hand could reach to the narrow shelf below.

"No. A kiss!" The man spoke in a low, hoarse tone, and he followed her swiftly, the counter between. "Come, now, will you give it to me, or shall I take it?"

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

MAKE A NOTE OF IT!

"THE RED ROAD"

BY GEORGE C. SHEDD

Author of "Cold Steel," "The Legacy of Adventure," etc.

BEGINS SEPTEMBER 27

The Origin of Camouflage

by

J. E. Grinstead

HOLD it, podner! Matches is shore gettin' too high to waste 'em. Thanks!

As I was saying, when it comes to inventing things, the United States has got 'em all skinned, and the hides tacked to the end of the cabin. When any other country thinks they have invented something, if they'll look real clost they can see the marks of an eagle's claws on the model.

Now, take this here camerflooge thing. When I first hear about that I think the French has discovered a new booger. Then when I find out what the word means, I know it has been used in America years ago at least one time. I reck'n I'm the only livin' party that sees the first genuine success at camerfloogery.

Who, me? My name's Dink Orr. I rides the ranges of the West from the time they are built ontel—ontel right recent. Gimme a match!

This here first case of camerfloogistery is prob'ly the greatest the world ever knowed. She comes up thisaway:

Along in the 90's the part of Texas where I'm livin' at gets a wave of moral rectitude, and wants me to go before the grand jury and tell something. Well, the gents is all friends of mine, both the grand jury and the other parties. I knows if I stick around and don't tell, the grand jury is goin' to do something to me. I also knows, if I sticks around and do tell, the other parties is goin' to take that case out of court and turn it over to the undertaker. Them bein' the horns, I nacherly decides she's a dilemmy, and rather than to have any hard feelings among friends, I goes across into the Injun country.

I settles, temporary like, in a hamlet close to Red River. Safe from the grand jury, who wants me, and my friends who don't want me, but in hailin' distance of a hooch house. Not that I drinks regular, but snakes was bad in the West in them times. The name of this village is Alexandria. She's got two general stores, a cotton gin, blacksmith shop, a graveyard and the accessories.

Right across the river is another right thrivin' place called Springer. This Springer town consists of one general store, more or less shot up in front by general hilarity, who hypothecates around Springer frequent and sundry. The only other house in the town is one good-sized shoat that is more or less blind, and dispenses hooch about eight thousand seven hundred and sixty-six hours in the year, and is blamed nigh an all-night house. They used to be a plain train between the two towns, but I reck'n it's growed up with button willows and swamp grass since the big drought in Texas.

I gets a job in Bill Riley's general store at Alexandria, removes the evidence of my former profession and puts it in the desk drawer.

Now, Alexandria bein' the metrupulus of the Sandy Land section, naturally she gets a newspaper. The Alexandria *Argus* don't rivail the New York *Sun* much, but she's a newspaper—occasionally.

The *Argus* don't prosper much for some time. Three, four editors forsakes the journalistic ship before she goes on the rocks. Some of 'em leaves town because they wants to, some because they has to, and some both. Then John Fiddler, he comes along, and sticks, plumb, good, and permanent.

When the first issue of the paper comes out under this new management, it's plumb plain that Fiddler is the brains of the burg. He makes the town look so good that folks that has already hitched up they waggins to leave, and is trying the chickens, onloads, and swears it's the best town in the whole I. T. country.

Mis' Wheeler, up on the hill, that runs a little store where they sell ladies', misses', and children's hats, hairpins, ribbon, and pencils, has got a girl. This Effie Wheeler comes grown about that time, quits chawin' licorice, smokin' grape-vine, and rough rompin'. She puts on long clothes, does up her hair like maw, and is plumb pleasin' and pretty as a collie pup with its ears trimmed.

Fiddler ain't runnin' the *Argus* a month ontel Mrs. Wheeler's got a advertisement in its valuable columns that looks like she's runnin' a wholesale house, and buying the factory output. John, he has to go up to the widow's house about three nights in the week to discuss this publicity campaign, but he does most of his talkin' to Effie.

Now, you might have noticed that women are queer. The biggest fool I ever heard forget to shut his mouth before he said it, was a fellow talking about women "acting natural." Why, dang it! they don't none of 'em act natural! Each one of 'em makes her own precedents, and busts 'em whenever she wants to. Effie Wheeler was that way a heap.

Miss Effie Wheeler can read some in the Second Reader, and goes about as far as three short syllables in spellin', maybe. But inside of a month after John Fiddler gets to discussing publicity and the printed word with her, she's a plumb ravin' literary nut. She stacks all her chips, white, blue, and any, and shoves 'em plumb reckless over onto the little square marked "brains," in life's game of chance.

If Effie is goin' to tie in with John, this is the first evidence of sanity she shows. The only bet she can make on John is brains. He shore draws a blank in the beauty deal. He's a little more than middle-sized, hump-shouldered, and has got what folks call a strong face, when they are afraid to tell the truth about the matter.

They's something else in his face that most folks don't notice. It looks like the tide has went out and left hooch stains on the shingle. He don't drink none, but they is evidence that they has been times when.

Fiddler is a regular fellow, and becomes a naturalized citizen from the jump off, borryin' most anything he wants—if the other fellow's got it. When he goes with Effie about a month, he trades a year's advertisin' for a quit-claim deed to a lot. Soon as John turns this real estate deal, the populace tries to figger that old two-and-two business, and make a wedding out of it.

Some of the citizenry offers to bet me some that they marry, but I don't take none of it. Looks to me like they want to take the south side of a cold clinch—if nothin' don't happen to break the clinch.

Time slips by, and summer comes on. The first peaches is ripe. A little watery, and not fit for preservin', but right good for cobbler, as the old woman says. All the farmers in the country is running a race to see who can find the first cotton blossom in the field. Promise is good for a fine crop, and this is one time that old Mis' Nature just nacherly makes plumb good on her promises.

When fall comes, corn is so cheap the hawgs won't eat it. Cotton makes a bale to the acre, and every boy in the country has got money in his pocket. But I don't want to get ahead of the story. I just mentions this as showing that Alexandria is a good place to come to just then, and somebody comes.

I'm settin' out in front of the store 'long to'ds night, just waiting for supper-time. A fellow drives up in front of the store and stops. The outfit ain't nothin' to swell up about, bein' a old one-hawse, side-bar trap, but, podner, that fellow has got him some hawse!

He's the whitest hawse I ever see, his hair is fine as silk, and his mane looks like silver fiddle strings in the moonlight. He's built like the pictures of Washington's war hawse in the hist'ry books, and his nose is as pink as Effie Wheeler's cheeks.

I sizes up that braunk, and I knows in a minit that nobody that ever owns that cayuse ever would sell him; so naturally I wonders where this hombre steals him, and how he manages to dodge the sheriff so long. Just then the fellow speaks.

"Good awfteh neune," he says. "Can you direct me to the hotel in this village?"

"No, seh, I cawn't," I says. "They ain't no hotel in this village. They's a kind of an intermittent bo'din' house here. Lafe Perkins is runnin' it right now. It's right at the top of the hill. Right across the road from it is the O. K. waggin yard. You can take yo' choice. I'm givin' you this information, but whichever place you goes, you take yo' life in yo' own hands, without recourse on me."

He just kinder humps his eyebrows and says: "Indeed, really."

I reaches for my gun, but I ain't got it. It ain't natural for no real human to see a growned up man hump his eyebrows and say "Indeed, really," and not want to shoot him.

Just then Mr. Indeed Really takes his hat off to wipe his moist brow, and I sees that his hair is curly, and parted in the middle. Then he goes and drives on up the hill.

Old Doc Ellis is sitting in front of his office with a bottle of chill tonic in his hand, waiting for somebody to come get it, so he can go to supper. I turns to him, as the fellow drives off, and says: "What's yo' bet, doc?"

"Singin' teacher," says doc, 'thout ever takin' his cigar out'n his mouth.

Doc wins. When the *Argus* comes out the next evening, she carries the message to Garcia. On the front page is a advertisement as big as a spring millinery announcement, when they's two milliners in town. She reads:

> Professor Clyde Walter Sprague will open a class in vocal music at the Alexandria Schoolhouse Saturday evening. Private lessons in voice. Rooms two and three, Perkins's Hotel.

Business begins to pick up right away. Seems like everybody in the settlement has got a girl or two that just needs a little trainin' to make Jenny Lind sound like a crow tryin' to play mockin' bird. Sprague sees Effie Wheeler, and she looks as good to him as the promised land did to them folks Moses led out'n the wilderness.

Clyde Walter is a good looker, and Effie slips a blue chip, kinder cautious like, off'n her stack, and puts it on the square marked "beauty."

The game goes on, and by the time cotton pickin' comes, she's got her stack split. Half on beauty and half on brains. John gets three night a week, Professor Sprague gets three, and they draws high card for Sunday.

Up to now the *hoi polloi* has just sweated the game and said nothin', but when she begins to get close thataway they all goes to placin' side bets, plumb natural and human like. The odds is all on Sprague, but I don't take none of it. I'm John Fiddler's friend, strong, but I know it don't pay to bet on sentiment.

I lost four dollars and a hat once, on a sheriff's race, bettin' on a friend. He only gets nine votes. He was captain of the baseball team.

They's another thing that keeps me out of the game. I don't never put up nothin' on no game where there is two men playin' and one woman dealin'. Not me. As I says, a woman makes her own precedents and rules, and busts 'em *ad libbytum*, as the lawyer says. She's apt to rule that a bobtail beats a royal flush.

Things rocks along this way ontel folks kinder loses intrust again. Everybody is busy, the gin's runnin' nights, money's plumb plentiful, and the hackimo's off. While folks has got they minds on other matters, Effie, she raises her stack on

beauty, and lowers her stack on brain—just a little. It ain't much, but it's enough to put John on the slide.

Who blames him, dang it! He's fit a good fight, but it ain't in nature for a fellow to keep on sluggin' after he's been hit a sockdolager below the belt, and they ain't as much wind left in him as they are in the bottom of a well.

John he takes the count, collects eight dollars on subscription and goes to Springer. He buys two gallons of personal liberty, brings it home and caches it in an old box of exchanges in the back of the *Argus* office.

About the time John leaves that morning for Springer, two fellows comes in and goes to putting up posters, announcing the greatest show on earth. They gives me a bill, and I learns therefrom that she's a hippydrome, menagerie, circus, side show, and concert, with trapeze performers, pink tights, peanuts and printed programs, all reg'lar and natural. They don't send out no advance man. The show comes at the same time the bill posters do, and they all camps together and waits for the crowd to gather.

They's two elephants, a old, moth-caten camel, a giraft, and a zebry that takes it afoot. Then they's some cages of coons, badgers, bobcats, and other monsters, some gilded chariots and the rest of the normal equipment.

The greatest show on earth drives in and camps in the flat just below the gin. They take it easy, and don't 'low to give no show until the next day. They plays a few tunes on the band, and beats the drum some, and everybody that can make it to town in a day knows about the circus before night, and gets up early the next morning to go see it.

When I comes back for supper that night I see John Fiddler sitting in the door of the *Argus* office, lookin' kinder sad. I don't know then that he's been to Springer, and I don't know nothin' about his belief in personal liberty. I'll tell a grand jury that.

I goes over to the *Argus* after a while, just because I know what John's up against, and I feel sorry for him. When I gets there, John he gets up, and we go in and lock the door.

John is cold sober, onless the bartender at Springer gives him a road bottle, 'cause them two gallon jugs is both plumb full and the corks driv in tight. John, he strikes a attitude, like one of them orators, and says:

"Brother Orr," he says, I welcomes you to my midst. I'm goin' down the steep and stony ways right rapid, and I needs a friend. I was just gettin' ready to erect a neat little altar to Gambrinus, and pour out a small libation to temporarily strangle, if not drown, some of my troubles. As I says, I need a friend. I know you are my friend, 'cause you ain't been betting agin me, as some has. Therefore I welcome you."

Then he pulls the cork out'n one of the jugs, and hands it to me—the jug, not the cork—and I says, "How."

Well, we drinks some. John he cusses Sprague right smart at first, and seems real cross. Then he gets sad and soulful, and tells me his troubles.

"Dink," he says, "I hope you ain't never suffered enough to be able to sympathize with me in this sad hour. I loved Effie with a great passion. I laid my brains, my two strong arms, my quit-claim deed to the lot, my aspirations for life, and my hope for the future, my all, at the toes of her number four side-button, cloth tops, and she spurns them like they was a bananny peel on a wet day. She had about made up her mind to become Mrs. Fiddler. I dreamed of a cottage on my lot, a bower, with Effie for its goddess. In my mind I could see the purple morning glories blooming by the door, could hear the clucking of an industrious hen in the door-yard, and could smell the delicious aroma of hot biscuits, fried chicken, and cream gravy, in my own home. Think of it, man! Then this Sprague busts into the game, gums the deck, and takes the stack. It is too much, vastly too much," and John weeps some.

Then, under the spell of environment, I gets poetic. I ketches the jug handle with two fingers, swings her over the back of my hand and gives a representation of a section hand drinkin' water on the four-

teenth day of August. When I quits stranglin', I says: "Cheer up, my friend and boon companion. The sea is full of fish. You are not the first one that ever got the hook."

We drinks some more, after that, and then I reck'n we falls silent. Anyway, we falls—several times. Then John he takes me over to the store, and when he gets me all fixed for the night, I takes him back to the *Argus* office and puts him to bed.

The next forenoon I goes to the front to see if the peerade have started, and John is standin' in the door of the *Argus*. He motions me and I go over, thinkin' maybe he wants something. We takes one, and then he says something about a bird with one wing, but I tells him no, I got to get back to the store.

"Farewell, friend of my bosom," he says, "but meet me here at this portal this afternoon. The head and shoulders of this great tented attraction gave me two tickets, for a press notice to be printed next week. Arm in arm we'll join the giddy throng, and forget our cares while watching the glittering pageant."

Everybody closed up at noon. I goes by and gets John, and we attends the circus in a body. Before we starts we pours one last libation on the altar of friendship, and it makes John happy.

He enjoys that circus from ticket waggin to tarpaulin. They got a clown that's about as funny as chippin' in two dollars to bury a fellow that owes you a grocery bill, but every time John sees that clown he howls with joy.

Sprague and Effie is at the circus, with bells on they bonnets. They got reserve seats, peanuts, little walking canes with striped ribbons on 'em, and the whole works. I see 'em, but John don't. They's just one individual that stands out from the crowd, for him, and that's the clown. The rest is just a mess of people. He can't tell whether they's two hundred or two million.

We stays to the after-show and the concert, and then goes back to the *Argus* to keep Gambrinus from getting lonesome. At a late hour I puts John to bed, and then seeks my own humble couch, more or less weary with the day's revelry, and things thataway.

The next day is Saturday. The circus is gone, and the town is lonesome. It reminds me of what Mr. Tom Moore said about broken bottles, beer stains, and blush roses gone to wilt, the next morning after the night before, and I almost weeps.

'Pears like the only bright spot in all the world is the heart of Professor Clyde Walter Sprague. He has collected some, and has bought a new buggy, with a two-foot seat, new harness with shiny buckles, and the next day being Sunday he is going to take Effie out riding, and perhaps ask the one great question.

Sprague hitches that white hawse up to the new buggy, adjusts the harness, and pats the hawse on the neck. Dang his sorry soul, the only streak of human he ever shows is when he admires that hawse.

When Fiddler gets up, pretty late, he comes over to the store, and says to me:

"Dink," he says, "somebody has robbed me of my personal liberty, and both jugs is empty. I got a awful head. Ain't you got nothin' a tall?"

I tells him I ain't got nothin' but some lemon extract. My own head ain't on plumb straight that mawnin'. I takes some of it, and it helps. I slips him the bottle, he gets behind a stack of flour and kills it, then goes on back to his office. I don't see him no more ontel about night.

Now, here's where the camerfloogery comes in. I want it distinctly understood that I don't conspire at homicidin', mayhem, or man-slaughter. What happens later is the results of the discovery of camerflooge, and it's first application, which leads to war, riot, and general bolshevikness.

Late in the afternoon I goes out to the well, at the back of the store, to get a fresh drink. Water's been tastin' oncommon good to me all day. While I'm drinking the third dipperful, I casts my eye down the hill to where a freight waggin is standing, and witnesses the origin of camerflooge, in all its primitive and pristine glory.

Two little boys had got a white bull pup, with a pink nose. One of the boys is holding the pup, which seems more or less displeased with the performance. The

other boy is scraping tar out'n a waggin hub, and painting stripes on the dog, to make him look like the zebry they sees in the circus. When they gets through, that pup don't look much like a zebry, but he don't look like no dog, at all.

I goes back into the store, walks to the front, and sees John Fiddler. I'm shore sorry for John, him being on the slide that-away, and nothing to scotch with. I calls him, and he comes over.

"Don't you want a good drink of water? I just drawed some," I says.

We walks back, he goes to the well, and I stands in the door. 'Bout the fourth dipperful, when she kinder quits sizzlin' as she goes down, John cuts his eye down the hill and sees them originators of camerflooge, and the result of their work. John looks up at me and grins. Then he throws out the water, 'cause he can't hold no more, but still wants it, and we goes back into the store.

"Dink," he says, "some danged garroter from Spain has been stealin' my wood. Ain't you got ary gun you could let me have?"

I tells him plumb frank and honest that I ain't got nothin' but a old forty-five that I brings in off the range when I reforms from the cow business. I'm usin' it mostly for a door prop, and things like that. I gives him the old gat, and cautions him special not to point it at anything he don't want to kill plumb dead.

He buys about a quart of ca'tridges, and starts out. When he gets to the door he turns around and comes back. He buys a couple of candles and a dime's worth of beeswax. Then he goes out, and I don't see him no more that night.

Courts and lawyers is always talking about accessories before the fact, *paticeps criminis*, and contributory negligence, and things like that, but I'll tell any old Writ of Sasharary judge in the world that I don't have no idea of aidin' and abettin' when I loans John that blunderbuss. I don't think about nobody gettin' shot, onless it's a wood thief, and they ought to be shotten some. I loans John that gun because he's my friend, and wants it. I sells him two candles and some beeswax, as a matter of business for the firm that feeds me. That's as far as I go.

I don't give a single petrified damn what Lafe Perkins's wife, old Mis' Chestnut, and a lot more says, I don't have a thing to do with what transpires, takes place, and eventuates, later and subsequent. But, they's mostly women, and too old to fight, by this time.

As I says, the next day is Sunday, and Professor Clyde Walter Sprague is going to take Effie Wheeler out riding in his new buggy. He gets up early, goes over to the O. K. waggin yard, where he keeps his horse in a box stall, and pokes some corn through into the feed-box, without opening the door.

'Long about nine o'clock he decides to hitch up and drive around some. He ain't going to take Effie out ontel after dinner, but he wants to see that things is in good shape, and then he's prob'ly heard that about nine-tenths of the fun in this world is the pleasure of anticipation.

The professor is feeling right gay and festive when he rolls his new buggy out of the shed in the waggin yard, and props up the shafts. He's thinking, as he looks at that narrer seat, that he is going to ride about as close to Effie as the skin is to a shin-bone.

Red Patterson keeps his freight outfit in the O. K., and he's hitched up a team of mules to take a little jag of cottonseed down to a pen in the bottom, where Bill Riley's got some yearlin's. Red, he just drops the lines on the ground and goes into a shed after a scoop shovel.

Now, this horse of Sprague's has got more sense in a minute than Clyde Walter would have by the resurrection, if it was put off a week. Sprague calls the hawse Silver Boy, and talks to him like he was a human. Professor Sprague opens the door of the box stall and says, in kinder soft tones, like a man does when he's talking to his sweetheart, or like he'd talk to a sick baby:

"Come out, Silveh Boy."

Silver Boy comes out, and the professor suffers an immediate attack of brainstorm and mental St. Vitus dance. That once lovely white hawse is the first attempt at

improving the original effort at camerflooge, and she's a success.

Silver Boy has got a black ring around each eye about the size of a waggin hub. Black ribs about two inches wide, sets in at his ears and follows in orderly procession to the root of his tail. Black rings is tastefully painted around his legs. They ain't no use in trying to tell what Silver Boy looks like, because he don't. He's camerflooged, and he shore don't look like no horse.

Patterson's old Roman-nosed off mule gets one good eyeful of Silver Boy, and says to his mate, "Look what's comin', let's go somewhere." Them mules starts sudden for the open gate. As they passes they scoops up Clyde Walter's new buggy. That buggy is wrecked ontel it would be a mean deficiency expert that wouldn't give the mules a diploma.

Red comes up just then, and Sprague jumps onto him about the mules tearing his buggy up. Red he cusses some, and then he looks at Silver Boy and laughs.

"Them mules ain't never been worked to no chariot in a circus," he says, "and they ain't used to wild animals, and things thataway."

Silver Boy don't know how he looks, so he ain't even ashamed of himself. Sprague looks at the stripes and says, "Tar."

"Tar, hell," says Red. "They ain't that much tar in the whole I. T. country. It don't smell like tar, nohow."

The O. K. feller that runs the yard, comes up and takes a look and a sniff, and says: "She shore looks and smells a heap like that sticky mess that John Fiddler uses to print the *Argus* newspaper with," he 'lows.

"That's what it is!" howls Sprague. "I'll make him take it off!" and he starts on the run, out the gate and down the hill toward the *Argus* office. He don't look back, so he don't know that Silver Boy is following him.

I'm sitting on a washing machine, out in front of the store, trying to figger out what makes my watch stop. I looks up and sees the procession, and danged if I don't think for a minute that the circus has come back to town. Then I sees Red and the O. K. feller kinder inchin' down that way. John Fiddler comes out in front just about the time Clyde Walter arrives.

"Whuh—what do you mean by painting my horse with that nasty ink," splutters Sprague.

"I ain't seen no paint hawse," drawls John. "Oh, is that him? Danged good job, I calls that."

Then Sprague loses his head and goes to calling John names. He don't get started good to show how rough he can talk, when the old gat bellows. Clyde Walter and Silver Boy starts back up the hill in a right smart hurry. John follers, and shoots as he runs.

I can't tell what prevents casualties. Maybe John's eyes ain't got back in focus good, or maybe he ain't used to a runnin' target. John stops to reload, and Sprague beats him into the Perkins House, still alive, and goin' strong and active.

John he hangs around in the offing, and pretty soon Lafe Perkins comes out under a flag of truce, and asks for terms. He says Sprague prays for a cessation of hostilities, and agrees to hitch Silver Boy to his old buggy and get out of town in sixteen minutes. John signs up with him, but holds his lines intact, thataway. The professor uses twelve minutes of his time, and he's got four minutes of life in Alexandria coming to him, if he ever wants to come back and use them.

Outside of one of Red's mules throwin' a shoe, and the other bustin' a belly-band, they ain't no personal damage, except the breaking of the Sabbath calm in a few places. John comes over and hands me the old cannon, and says:

"Here, Dink. I don't need this no more. I found my wood. Better put some different ca'tridges in it if you want to kill anybody."

I breaks it open and pulls a ca'tridge, and blamed if the bullet ain't been drawed and the hole all dobbed up with beeswax and taller.

Them's the origin and early stages of camerflooge. That's all I— Who? John and Effie? Oh, they marries subsequent, and when I leaves them parts, the Fiddler family is a string-band.

The Sunwise Turn

by H. A. Lamb

Author of "The Red String," "Yellow Elephants," etc.

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.

CHAPTER I.

WHEN HEALTH FAILED.

IT was a motor-car that took me to India. Not that I crossed the Pacific in one; but I was sent there to sell motor-cars—the Robles roadster. And it was the Robles roadster that brought me to John Coyle, at the Koh-i-Darband house—the house outside the back door of India. I didn't know it was there until I saw it, sliding around the base of a gray cliff. But then there were a good many things I didn't know.

The Robles sale went through several dozen roadsters and trucks—at the Calcutta agency, and when the signatures were blotted on the contract forms and the specifications agreed on, I cabled the good news to Dayton, Ohio, and thought pretty well of myself.

The trip to India with the handsome demonstrating machine had tickled my vanity. It was my first big sale—although the Calcutta agency had sent Dayton a pretty specific and urgent inquiry for our cars. Later it developed there was a matter of minimum tariff my Calcutta friends had not mentioned, and the contract wasn't such a splendid thing as I'd pictured it. Not knowing this, I was congratulating myself over again when I heard of another prospect for the Robles truck. One of our consular trade reports mentioned a reclamation enterprise near Lahore that needed trucks. That was what sent me to upper India—that and the heat. It was midsummer then, and midsummer in Calcutta is a sizzling proposition. Likewise, that city is a trade seaport without much in the way of sightseeing. I never learned whether the Lahore tip was straight or not; because I never got there.

As for the sightseeing—before I had finished with India I'd seen more than any of the guide-books mention; more than Baedeker ever dreamed of. I'd gone through the back door of India and lived in the valley under the Roof of the World. Yes, that's what the natives call the Himalayas.

Mind you, at the time I cabled Dayton I was going to hunt up a prospect, between steamers, and asked the company to put more funds to my credit at the Calcutta bank. I knew as much about the inside of India as the average native of that country knew about the inside of my Robles. At that, I wasn't in the ignoramus class, because I'd read more than the average young fellow of twenty-four, trying to acquire a self-starter in the way of an education.

But, outside a vague idea of temples and a battle or two, I'd only the memory of some Indian movies to go by: a snake-charmer gazing into a crystal, and a Hindu *yogi* doing a sword-dance—or maybe the

other way around. No, the movies gave me a bad idea of India.

I saw that as soon as the Punjab Mail pulled out of the narrow Calcutta streets. The roadster had been shipped ahead to a station called Julundur. This was where I'd been told to hop off for the reclamation plant.

The car was waiting for me—the Calcutta-Peshawur Railway is efficient—at the freight warehouse; so also was a crowd of about half a thousand natives. The sight of a motor-car was no novelty in Julundur, since some thousand machines are registered at Lahore, near by; but in one way or another the rumor had got around that a young American *sahib* with money was the owner of the roadster. It wasn't my car, and it wasn't my money; they didn't know that.

About half the beggars in town were there; also every coolie from a day's run; also self-appointed guides, money-changers, porters, interpreters, and what not. The sight of a tall man in moderately clean duck and sun-helmet—I'm a trifle under six feet and weighed in at one hundred and seventy before the heat got to work on me—started the whole gang to jabbering and grabbing for my bag.

It was a modest valise, bearing the initials F. B. W.—Frank Brownley Weston. But it took all the strength left me after that heat-blessed train ride to keep the bag in my hand.

I'd thought, back in Dayton, that all natives were about the same; they weren't and aren't. At least in India there are two dozen races—from swaggering Sikhs who won't touch baggage, to dwarf Swati who'll steal the nails from your boots—and two dozen religions, and twice that many kinds of graft.

Julundur was pretty well up into the northern hills, and cooler than Calcutta; but by the time I'd redeemed my car from a bored station-agent, stocked it with a triple supply of gas, gulped down a hasty lunch of rice curry, and shaken off most of the native pack, the sweat was dripping off my coat.

And still the home volunteers carried on their offensive. I started the Robles through the mob, and turned out into a highway that I thought would lead to the reclamation field.

Even then a fat robber, with a turban askew over one ear and one slipper missing, jumped onto the running-board and shoved a letter in my face.

"*Sahib,*" he mouthed from bulbous lips, "*sahib,* I offer you my services! I am, indeed, priceless. I have waited long for your coming. *Sahib,* I have guide Americans who came to see the wonders of our hills. I am a cook without merit. I am competent *syce* for automobile." According to his statement, there wasn't much my fat friend couldn't do.

He hung to the running-board, grunting when we hit a stone, and informed me that the letter was from the local *babu*—a kind of superrobber. Being busy in avoiding the native children and buffalo-carts—no easy task in that interminable curtain of dust—I didn't catch more than one line of the letter: "An excellent, honest man. His honesty is unbleachable."

I had to laught at that, and my tormentor interpreted this as a favorable omen, and slid his greasy bulk into the seat beside me with a grin. I questioned him as to the reclamation area. He said he had been there only the other day, and his brother was servant-in-chief to the *sahib* engineer. He directed me along a road running nearly due east.

That letter was part right, anyway. My fat friend's honesty was of the unbleachable variety. As a matter of fact, he didn't know the first thing about the engineering field—had never been there—and had no brother.

Late in the afternoon, when the road petered out into a dirty mud village, he admitted as much, under close questioning. Naturally I was mad.

I stopped the Robles in a nest of half-naked unchins and told the turbaned liar to get out and count the extra tires clamped behind the luggage. He did so, grinning all over.

Then I started the Robles on high. The machine left the village in a cloud of dust, through which I dimly perceived my former guide running after me and wailing. It

turned out to be a mistake, leaving him like that.

At the worst, he could speak English, and I couldn't speak anything else. So I had no means of asking my way.

The cart-trail up which I headed led to a highroad of sorts, thick with red clay dust, that wound into a line of foot-hills. Of course, I should have gone back to Julundur; but the return route was uncertain, and I'd have made a hundred-mile circuit rather than run into my unbleachable pirate. Likewise, the red clay road must lead somewhere, and—I was sick. It was a combination of heat, change of food, and dysentery. My head was throbbing, and my pulse was 'way ahead of the Robles speedometer.

By that time it was near evening. The sun dipped out of sight somewhere without relieving the heat haze that seemed to be wrapped around my temples. The road stretched ahead, with fewer mud villages and more forest. I switched on the lights, rumbled across a bridge which creaked dangerously under the weight of the car—and shut off the gas.

A road-house, or what looked like one, came into view. It was one of those *dak* bungalows—wayside resting-places which provide a cot, kitchen, and cook for the traveler. It looked good to me, with its whitewashed walls, nestling under a grove of poplars.

That was how I met up with John Coyle. He came out of the bungalow and watched me walk up with my bag, feeling dizzy.

"Sick, aren't you?" he asked, adding: "You're not English."

"American," I informed him, glad enough to set eyes on a white man. "Can I sleep here?"

He took my bag, hefted it, and went inside. In one room stood two cots. John Coyle tossed the bag down on one.

"Right here, American," he said shortly. "It's nearer the window. I bunk in the other one. My name's John Coyle. I live hereabouts."

"American?" I inquired, sitting down, because I was weak.

"You can say so; I've my papers. I live out here, though, most generally. Travel's my weakness. You're new to the country, and due for a spell—or I'm a liar. Kallick!"

He clapped his hands, and a short, swarthy servant appeared in the doorway.

"Bath-water for the *sahib*, Kallick," he ordered carelessly, "and my medicine-kit."

So far as I know or have been able to find out, John Coyle spoke the truth when he said he was American. He had been to my country, but had stayed only long enough to take out his papers. He might have been born anywhere in Europe; spoke Turki, Persian, and Hindustani fluently; had plainly lived for some time in England, Egypt, and South Africa; and understood many of the secrets and all the knavery of the Eastern corners of the earth.

He was taller than I, with the build of a man who had been an athlete; a broad brow, gray eyes usually bloodshot; a well-trimmed yellow beard, and blond-brown hair—the kind of man newspapers describe as leonine. Also, he was taciturn, quick-tempered, gifted with excellent manners when he chose to use them, and a domineering personality that showed itself in a hard, thin-lipped mouth.

His clothes were good—far better than mine. He seemed quite at home in the *dak* bungalow, and played the part of a host.

In fact, John Coyle took mighty good care of me. I was pretty sick for some hours. He said I must not think of traveling the next day.

The rest-house looked good to me, after the train and the heat of Julundur. So did John Coyle. We sat outside the next day under the poplars in our shirt-sleeves and talked. Kallick and the bungalow caretaker waited on us.

CHAPTER II.

AT INDIA'S BACK DOOR.

JOHN COYLE asked a lot of questions. He wanted to know the speed and general qualities of the Robles; also what I was doing in the Punjab, and if I had friends expecting me.

"How d'ye figure to get new gasoline, Weston?" he observed quizzically, puffing at a foul pipe. "Ain't any of the stuff east of Julundur or north of Simla."

"I'm pretty well stocked up," I told him. "The Robles is an economical user of the juice. That's one of the reasons I made the big Calcutta sale. I've gas enough to go near three hundred miles, perhaps more with the spare cans. And the people I want to see aren't far."

"No, not far." He seemed to turn this over in his mind. He was the older man, and had seen much of the world. I was green. I talked a lot about my success in Calcutta, and how little I knew of the country.

"You'd best steer clear of Julundur and the heat for a while, Weston," he informed me judicially. "You came within a hell's breath of a stroke yesterday."

"Oh, I'll be fit to-morrow."

But I wasn't. Dysentery takes some time to shake off. Coyle dosed me with whisky and quinin, and examined the Robles closely.

"Tell you what, Weston," he decided. "You'll take quite a bit of doctoring 'fore you're in decent shape again. No use tryin' to do business while you're a sick man. My bungalow is just beyond here, up in the hills. Come along with me for a spell. When you're in shape again I'll lend you a trustworthy fellow for a guide."

"I don't want to bother you," I hesitated, because I did want to do just that. John Coyle was a mine of information about the country, and I thought he could give me a valuable tip on the market for motor-cars in the Punjab. Likewise, I was still rocky.

"No trouble," he said curtly, and ordered Kallick to pack our bags. He settled with the *dak* bungalow fellow and superintended stowing his luggage on the rumble while I was putting on my coat.

"It's the cool of the afternoon, Weston," he said, "and we have four hours to travel in."

Still talking, he helped me into the front seat, instructed Kallick to follow with the horses, and slipped under the wheel himself.

"Oh, I've handled autos," he laughed as I protested. "You can tell me about the controls, you know. Road's rutted, and you haven't strength in your wrist to steer out for a pebble, young un. Besides, I know the way."

He did know how to handle a car. He pushed up the winding road at a sharp pace, turning into a trail through a pine forest, and from there back into a mountain-path that tested the Robles's springs.

The character of the country changed. We left the mud villages and the jungle mesh, and struck into forests where we met few natives. These, too, were different, being shorter. They wore no turbans.

We came out along a river which we followed under rising mountain-peaks. In the distance the setting sun behind us shone on summits that blazed a curious crimson. It was grand scenery, but I wasn't enjoying it overmuch.

For one thing, the car was being pushed along miserable roads that tore the tires. And we seemed to be leaving the populated part of India.

"Don't let that worry you, youngster," he said indifferently. "The thing to do is to get rested and well."

It was cooler that night, and I slept better than for some time, but still with a slight fever. No, we had not reached Coyle's bungalow. We stopped at another *dak* joint.

"Look here, Coyle," I objected at breakfast next morning, when we'd had our coffee, "aren't we getting farther away from the people I want to visit?"

"Oh, they're within reach." He grinned at me amiably. "Don't worry yourself, Weston. Stick to me, and you won't come to any harm. I want to show you my bungalow, my summer bungalow. You can trot back again when you're in better shape."

He had his way, as he generally did with me. Coyle always had a good reason why people should do what he wanted. And what else was I to do? Insist on going back alone? I didn't know the way. Besides, I was sick.

Stay at the *dak* bungalow? Coyle managed to give me the idea—like that first

afternoon—that his house was a short distance ahead. If I'd known it, the caretakers of the bungalows all spoke English, and could have given me intelligent directions; but Coyle took pains that I shouldn't know this.

The Robles car had a worse test the second day out than the first. It was a real endurance run, winding among the rocks of the river-bank, fording mountain streams, climbing hill trails that seemed built for donkeys or goats—as, most likely, was the case.

The hills soared and closed in on us. The oaks and pines crowded in on the road, their trunks laden with climbing wild rose-vines and junipers. The air was heavy with the scent of them. The snow-peaks stood out against the clear blue of the sky.

We'd crawl along the base of a sheer cliff, and the next hour wind along what Coyle called a *khad*—a cliff road—with not a yard's clearance between our tires and a drop of a thousand feet. Coyle certainly handled the car with nerve.

I was wondering what would happen if we met bullock-carts going the other way. But we didn't—only groups of gray-clad hillmen with peculiar, peaked caps. Coyle made them jump as he swept past, and they eyed us savagely.

It was evening when we followed a *khad* to a cleared space on a mountainside—a kind of flowery terrace set in the rock-slope, with the river winding below and a clear view of the finest of the peaks.

On the terrace stood a white stone house.

"The Koh-i-Darband, Weston," Coyle grinned. "The Mountain Gate. My bungalow. Some house, ain't it?"

It was a sizable, square edifice, with a peaked roof of cedar slabs, a garden of sorts in front, and some outhouses behind. Over it the forest side of the mountain rose steeply.

"Yes, it is," I admitted, feeling rather out of humor because of the long jaunt he'd taken my car. "I haven't seen one like it before in India."

"For a good reason, my young American," he admitted coldly as he clamped home the brake. "You aren't in India now; you're in Kashmir."

"Kashmir!" It didn't mean much to me. "But we didn't pass any customs station."

"Again, for good cause. We came by my back door, outside the usual caravan routes. Some trip, young un. Use your eyes! See those peaks over there?" He pointed out the distant snow-range. "That's China—Tibet, rather. You're at the back door of India. Natives call it the *dawan* pass."

He climbed down and yelled for a servant. One came running, staring at the car.

I guessed it was the first one that had come to the Koh-i-Darband.

Stiffly I stepped down and walked to the edge of the terrace. In the valley below the evening shadows darkened the river. Across from me the level glow of the sunset was red on a great stone cliff. There was nothing moving on the cliff or in the valley.

I watched a pair of big-winged birds circle overhead. I must have swayed a little toward the slope, for Coyle's iron grasp closed on my arm.

"Those are vultures, Weston. Be careful. If you ain't, you might fall, and they'd see it. Come in and make yourself at home."

That was my welcome to the Koh-i-Darband.

And that was how I came to what the political reports call the no man's land of India, the hinterland of India, at the *dawan* pass. And to Yi Fen Huan, and Yussuf, the legend-teller.

With these two I could gladly have omitted the introduction. But Coyle willed otherwise, and I soon learned his will was law in the *dawan* pass.

CHAPTER III.

MYSTERIES.

THE Mountain Gate House was quite a wonder in its way. I slept badly, turned out early the next morning, and went for a stroll around the premises. My room was one of four sleeping-chambers that faced up the valley, to the east. A

strong flood of light was swelling into the bungalow from over the mountain-peaks; the living-room, dining-room, and Coyle's study in the front of the building were so chilly that a native boy was kindling fires in the granite hearths.

The furnishings were first rate, being a kind of painted bamboo, with ebony and lacquered settees and tables that must have come from China. Latticework screens and silk hanging-lamps also looked as if they were brought from that country.

Rugs, of very dark and fine coloring, were on the floors. I know little about such things, but they appeared to be costly. Trophies and tiger-skins were in evidence, the former being mostly sheep heads, with an ibex or two and several fine antelope.

The door of the study was open, and I glanced in. John Coyle had not appeared as yet. I saw a modern desk, closed, with a stand of businesslike rifles beside it. Rifles always interest me, and these were excellent, being Winchesters, with an Enfield sporting model, several Mausers, small-calibered but powerful, and a brace of English big-game types.

Over the desk a large scale map of the Himalayas was pinned. I studied it carefully, hoping to get the lay of the land—where the Koh-i-Darband was located. No use. Julundur didn't come into the scope of the map—which, as I learned later, was the fine compilation by Lord Curzon—nor was I able to trace the turnings of the roads we'd come by. But, by following out some of the river courses, I guessed that Coyle's house couldn't be far from the Chinese border.

Just then I looked up from the map. I'd heard music of a familiar sort. It floated in from the living-room.

There was no one in that chamber, but the door to the porch was open. The tune went ahead briskly, a woman singing the words.

Squatting in front of a *de luxe* edition, mahogany phonograph was a stout Chinaman. His head was up against the open door of the machine, his slant eyes were tight shut, and two fingers of his left hand were beating time to the melodious strains of the "Blue Danube."

He was a handsome, soft kind of a fellow, wide around the chest and waist-line. All the Chinks I'd seen in the movies had pig-tails and extension finger-nails. Not so this one. He wore a black, quiltlike coat and blue-silk trousers, tucked into high, velvet slippers.

And he looked happy, though he wasn't smiling. His broad, brown, Mongolian face was lit up by a sort of inward grin, like the world looked mighty good to him. All he seemed to be thinking about was the old waltz.

"Good morning, Mr. Weston," he said in good English. "I am Yi Fen Huan. Will you pardon me for not rising until this auspicious music is ended?"

It gave me something of a start, his speaking like that before I thought he'd realized I was there. Later I came to know that Fen Huan had an uncanny knack of keeping track of what went on near him without seeming to do so.

So I stood, shifting from one foot to the other, until the "Blue Danube" petered out, and the Chinaman rose, shutting off the record.

"What can I do for you, Mr. Weston?" he asked, giving me one sharp look.

"I was—taking a look at the scenery."

Without a word fat Fen Huan waddled off the porch, and I followed. The morning mist still hung around the bottom of the valley. The other slope, though, was clear. It was maybe a half-mile off, and seemed to be a long wall of cliff with the faint line of a path running across it.

Up the valley the sunlight glinted on a shallow river and showed a nest of dark openings in the opposite cliff wall like some of the Aztec cliff-dwelling-places I'd seen in the movies.

And farther up the valley— Well, I'd traveled a bit in the old U. S. A. and toured the Rockies once or twice, selling Robleses, but that vista made all the home mountains look mighty small. First, there were the round bases of the mountains, with their forest dress; then a bare, towering peak that ended in a snow summit looking like it could see above the clouds. I guess some of the peaks were above the cloud level.

And the whole thing was deathly quiet. There wasn't another village or shack to be seen.

It was like looking up into space.

"The Roof of the World," said Fen Huan, who'd been watching me.

"Looks as if it was," I admitted. "Any people live hereabouts?"

"A few Paharis and hillmen, Mr. Weston. The Tibetan villages are not far away. But they are not on the mountains. In this part of the world the higher places are celestially sacred. Temples and tombs —yes; but not villages."

"What temples?"

"The Hindus have a saying that the rivers fall from the feet of the gods; that a man may find happiness or death in the hills. But in the place you are looking are only the lamaseries of Tibet—the monasteries of the lamas."

He spoke with the smooth, quick eloquence of his race, choosing his words with care. I felt as if he was smiling at me and studying me at the same time. It wasn't altogether pleasant.

"Anything of the kind across the way?" I asked, looking at the cliff-dwelling spot.

For half a second Fen Huan did not answer.

"No one is there, Mr. Weston," He caught sight of a native boy on the porch and turned to me politely. "Breakfast is ready. We will not wait for Mr. Coyle."

It was a good breakfast, but I hadn't much appetite as yet. Fen Huan had. He didn't use chop-sticks, either, as I expected. Only, he drank several little bowls of strong tea instead of coffee.

He had excellent table manners, and was neat in everything he did. The table-boy, who was a Chink, waited on him as if he was a lord. He puzzled me. A big, catlike, lazy Chinaman, who wore a mandarin's button—and seemed to be part boss in Coyle's shack.

What was he doing here? Why hadn't Coyle told me about him?

It was really none of my business, and I was beginning to learn to think twice before I spoke. Besides, I expected to be off down the valley the next day.

"It's funny to find an American spending the summer in this corner of India," I said once.

Fen Huan didn't show any surprise at the word "American." He was too shrewd a customer to catch off-guard.

"Mr. Coyle rented the bungalow for the big-game shooting," he responded smoothly. "He is quite a sportsman."

It seemed reasonable enough. The only thing was that Fen Huan didn't size up as a mountain sheep-stalker—or a hunter of any kind.

When breakfast was finished he came over to me and put his fat hand on my pulse. His skin was as smooth as that of a woman. He shook his head gravely.

"You have fever still, Mr. Weston. You should rest during the day. It will be some time before you recover from the heat."

That was just what Coyle had been telling me. True, I felt far from fit, but somehow it set my back up. I have a contrary streak in me and considerable obstinacy inherited from New England ancestors.

"I'll be well enough to leave to-morrow, Mr. Huan."

He shook his head again. "I do not think so."

Well, so far I hadn't had anything from the people of the Koh-i-Darband but decent hospitality. Of course, Coyle had taken me miles from where I wanted to go; still, he treated me fairly enough. I didn't see him that morning. Not until late in the afternoon. Then I was smoking a pipe on the porch and playing some of Fen Huan's records to kill time—and he had a high-class assortment of modern opera tunes.

Down in the valley I sighted some figures moving out across the river-bed. They were a good quarter-mile from the house, passing among the boulders and splashing the shallow water.

There had been a pair of field-glasses in Coyle's study that morning, and I thought of getting them. Beside the desk sat Kallick, scowling, a rifle over his knee.

It brought me up on the emergency clutch, before I realized that he was merely cleaning the guns. Fen Huan had said Kallick was a *shikari*—a game-keeper or gun-bearer.

"Where has Mr. Coyle gone, Kallick?" I asked, reaching for the glasses.

"Him hunt, *sahib*."

"Where?"

"*Dawan*."

The man spoke sulkily. He was a close-knit, dark-faced rascal, with cheek-bones that near covered his eyes, and a trick of avoiding my glance. He seemed to resent my taking the glasses.

Out on the porch I trained the glasses on the figures in the river. Sure enough, the tall one with the sun-helmet was Coyle. And after him waddled Fen Huan. Both were carrying what looked like long sticks on their shoulders.

Something about these sticks was mighty familiar. The sunlight glinted on metal—what looked at that distance like a miniature gun, at the end of the stick Coyle carried. Huan's pole was colored in white and red checks, like a mottled barber-pole.

A sound behind caused me to turn sharply. Kallick was watching, his scowl deepened. He held out his dirty paw for the glasses, signing that he wished to clean them. Now, those binoculars had been in a case; they were spotless. It struck me that Kallick was more anxious to get the glasses in his own hands than to clean them. I handed them over without an argument, because just then I'd remembered where I'd seen those poles before.

Part of the education of a mechanical engineer is surveying. Back in the good old days at Dayton I'd lugged a theodolite and its companion-piece, a graduated sighting-pole, colored red and white.

There was no mistaking a surveyor's outfit. I put a fresh match to my cold pipe and considered the matter, while Kallick retired somewhere inside the bungalow.

When a man's sick, or just getting over it, little things have a way of taking on importance. It was only a detail that Kallick had said Coyle had gone shooting when the master of the Koh-i-Darband was actually surveying land. The servant might easily have been mistaken.

And it was a small thing that Fen Huan should have gone along. But the idea of the overweight mandarin lugging his pole through the ford didn't seem altogether natural. Why hadn't Coyle taken along a servant to do the dirty work—Kallick, for instance?

It was just possible that the *shikari* had been left behind to keep an eye on me. Then, again, why in the name of common sense were the two making a survey of these God-forsaken mountain slopes? Coyle might want to check up his boundary posts—but Kallick had said he rented the bungalow.

Of course, for some wild reason or other, Coyle might want to buy land in the vicinity. They had gone, however, far up the valley. I could see them, under the opposite cliff, climbing upward; then they were lost to view.

Where they had gone there was hardly a level foot of ground to be seen. Any surveying Coyle might do would be on a vertical, not a horizontal, basis.

One point I was determined to put to the question. I walked down from the porch and around to the outhouse in the rear of the bungalow. In one of these—a log hut—the Robles had been left.

Sure enough, in a minute Kallick's black head appeared in one of the kitchen windows which commanded the shack. I bent over the car, as if I'd come to give it the once-over, and lifted the hood. Then I forgot all about Kallick and being watched. The spark-plugs from every cylinder were missing.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WHY OF THINGS.

THEY had been unscrewed and the electrical connections detached. They were not to be found under the hood or elsewhere in the car. Without those spark-plugs there was as much chance of starting the Robles as of driving it up the cliff where Coyle had gone.

I sat down on the running-board and swore. It looked very much as if some one had made sure that I wouldn't take the car away from the Koh-i-Darband. Except for the missing plugs, it was just as I'd left it.

Then I remembered that there was an extra set in the box under the seat. I jerked off the cushion and dived into the kit-box. The spare plugs were missing also.

Whoever had monkeyed with the car had done his job well. And Coyle had shown a lot of curiosity about the Robles. Back in the *dak* bungalow he had quizzed me about whether I carried spare parts. He might easily have learned of the extra spark-plugs then.

Well, it was in no pleasant frame of mind I went back to the porch. But I'd made sure of one thing before doing so.

I'd screwed off a length of the feed-pipe, and hidden it in a ball of cotton waste under one of the gasoline-cans; I'd taken the carbureter apart, fitted a wood plug in the filter, and put the carbureter together again; then I'd dissembled the battery connections so that nobody else could make them good—since several of the vital parts were in my coat-pocket.

If I couldn't start the Robles, I was reasonably sure no one else could do so without my consent.

When Coyle came back, followed by Fen Huan, who looked as if he'd done a good day's work, I brought up the matter of the spark-plugs at dinner.

"That's rotten luck," Weston," responded Coyle coolly. "Some native's taken a fancy to the copper in the plugs, I expect."

"Those plugs happen to be made of tempered steel, Coyle," I pointed out, keeping my temper in check. "And no native knew of the spare set in the tool-kit. You did."

His brows went up. "Why should I damage the car?"

"That's what I want to know. And another thing, I'm going back the way I came to-morrow."

"Without the plugs?"

"No; with them. I'll thank you to hand over my property." My temper was rising, under the irritation of sickness and anger at Coyle. "You took me near a hundred miles out of the course I wanted to go. I came here relying on a white man's hospitality—not to be robbed."

"You're too ill to start back—"

"Ill be damned! I'm sick of this place and of being watched."

Oh, I didn't make any noble figure alongside Coyle and the impassive Chinaman. They looked at each other. To my surprise, Coyle answered mildly. I didn't realize then that he was sure of his position—certain that I was helpless. It took me some time to size up the men I was dealing with. Yes, I was green as they make 'em, stacked up against Coyle's breed.

"Steady, youngster," he purred, pulling at his yellow mustache. "Your freckles have made you bad-tempered. Just sit in your shirt and listen to what I'm saying. You don't know why you're here. I do."

"I'll thank you for the information," I said, trying to be cold and dignified.

"You'll get it. I presume you understand by now that I need the loan of your machine. Fact is, I was on my way to Lahore to try to buy one when Providence left you in my path. Knew you wouldn't part with your car, so—here you are. Now I ain't here for my health exactly."

"Or for the hunting."

He threw me a quizzical glance.

"Maybe not. I can offer you something." He looked at Fen Huan. "Mr. Huan here is a merchant, and a successful one. He operates along the northern caravan routes, from Kashmir into China, by way of Khotan and Kashgar. I'm his partner, in a way. If you'll give us some of your time, you'll not be the worse for it."

"No, thanks."

Fen Huan leaned forward, tapping the table gently with his stout hands.

"We are going to trade in something, Mr. Weston," he murmured, "that has a happy market in China. No one knows that more than I. It will be profitable for you to stay here."

I looked from one to the other. They were dealing with me as they would with a half-grown boy. The knowledge didn't improve my spirits any.

"I tell you," I insisted, "I've got to sell Robles, at Lahore. I can't stay in Kashmir, and Chinese trade profits don't interest me."

"A thousand pounds might, Weston."

"A thousand what?"

"Pounds. Five thousand dollars." Coyle's seamed eyes narrowed. "Look here, young un, you ain't sized up the way the cards lie. I've got you at the Koh-i-Darband. No one else knows you're at my house. What's to prevent my calling Kallick to push you off this cliff? Then the vultures 'll dine off your eye-sockets and the devil will keep you company."

"I'm an American, not a Kashmiri, and I have a darned good right to go where I choose."

Coyle laughed, rubbing his beard.

"You're a rum un, Weston. When you grow up—if you have that good luck—you'll know it ain't wise to butt in some places. How far d'ye think the nearest American consul is—hey? Or the British Resident of Kashmir, even. Three hundred miles. A hundred miles to any white man. You'd best be civil to me and think over what we offer."

The innate common streak of the man showed up, broad as a service stripe. I swallowed hard, and changed my tone.

"You don't want me, Coyle," I told him. "You want my car. All right. I can't kick—as long as you've got my spark-plugs." He was silent, as good as admitting he had them. "Well, for how long? What's this trade venture?"

He poured himself a stiff measure of gin. Both men drank with their meals, although neither was affected much by it.

"You're comin' round, young un." He rolled the neat gin around his tongue with relish. "Right! It's the car we need. For how long? Well, I'd say about eight days. The trade venture? Well, I'll be frank. Fen Huan and I think we've spotted a direct caravan route through from northern India, by way of Simla, into Kashmir and to China, that 'll beat hell out of the old way by the Karakoram Pass. You don't know how much rich trade passes by caravan over the central Asia routes. Ain't no railroads, y' know."

"Silks, jewels, ivories, ginseng, my friend," purred Fen Huan, "to the value of millions of rupees annually. I know the caravan routes well and the customs. Since the days of my ancestors, for two hundred generations—and more—they have been the same. The trade of Asia is fabulously rich."

"All right." I nodded and rose from the table. "I'll expect my car and five thousand dollars commission for my time, Coyle. You're sure of that eight-day limit?"

"Oh, maybe ten." He answered carelessly, watching me keenly.

"I haven't much choice," I reminded him. "And I'm sick. But how do you know I won't complain to the British authorities when I get back?"

"We'll trust you for that, Weston. And—you'll have a thousand pounds."

With that, I left them.

I didn't believe Coyle's last remark. But I felt that they really needed the car and wanted nothing of me. Which proved to be a mistake, partly. Still, as Coyle had said, I was new to this kind of game.

What I decided to do was this. By pretending to join them, I might induce Coyle to replace the spark-plugs—or root them out for myself. That offered the chance of a getaway. If I'd balked flatly, as I wanted to do, they would have taken the car and dealt with me as they saw fit. You see, I still reasoned that the only thing they were after was the use of the Robles.

CHAPTER V.

FINDING THE WOMAN.

THE next day I tested out Coyle a bit by walking away from the bungalow, up the valley, in the direction they'd taken. It was late afternoon, and both Coyle and Fen Huan had been missing. Kallick was not to be seen.

As nearly as I could judge, dodging down among the rocks, I was not followed; so I struck out quickly as I could in my weakened state for the river. I wanted to think out what had passed the evening before.

It was a mixed proposition. Coyle's statement seemed to lend color to the theodolite. And to his renting the Koh-i-Darband. Also, to Fen Huan's presence here.

So far, so good. Granted also that the matter of a more direct route by caravan into China was a valuable discovery. This

would explain the large scale map in the study.

But I'd seen that map. I might be green and young; still there was nothing the matter with my brain. All the caravan routes had been outlined in red ink in the Curzon map. Any new route passing near the Koh-i-Darband would have to cross central Tibet. According to the map, that was a stiff proposition, leading over mountain wastes where were only the temples of the lamas and the felt tents of the hillmen.

There were other objections. No motor-car could make the trail into Tibet. In fact, so far as I could judge, even the fine Robles couldn't negotiate farther than the Koh-i-Darband—farther east.

"It 'll be a first-class advertisement for your machine, Weston," Coyle had assured me.

Looking up at the steep cliff across the river, I smiled. No car could do it. It had been some feat to get as far as we had. Likewise, how did Coyle expect to map out his route and use the Robles, all in eight or ten days? And how were great profits to be squeezed from such a game?

If they had promised me five thousand, it must mean ten times that for each of them. Of course they might not give me the five thousand. Still, the thing had a queer look.

It was farther across to the other cliff than appeared from the house. I wanted to get there, to see if there was any evidence of what Coyle and his partner were surveying. The river was rapid, but shallow; on the other bank great poplars clustered up the slope, and I threaded a tangle of sweet junipers. It was the season of the year when vegetation dies, and the forest is—as some poet once said—a many-pillared tomb.

Above the poplars were more rocks, and the pines—*deodars,* Coyle had called them. It was a stiff climb to the cliff-path where I'd seen my two friends the other day, and, being still convalescent, I sat down presently for a rest. And for another reason. I felt that others were moving through the *deodars,* keeping pace with me. I thought other eyes watched me.

Apparently I was alone in that pine forest. Unlike the woods at home, no birds were to be heard; the sun hardly reached through the branches; in fact, it was already shut off by the cliff overhead.

There was something mighty big and stirring in the giant, lonely vista of the *dawan* and the distant Himalayas; but it wasn't a cheery spot, and my spirits weren't exactly rising when I heard the cry.

It came from somewhere—and nowhere. A high, drawn-out call that quavered in the air. My nerves were not in good shape, and the thing sent a tingle down the skin of my back, because it came from above and behind me.

The call was answered by another, shriller but more melodious. The first had been a man's voice; this last was certainly a woman's. I waited for an encore. None came.

On account of the infernal echoes of the place, there was no telling how near those voices had been. Just the same, when I resumed my climb, I kept one ear and eye out for signs of human beings in the rocks. I was no longer alone on the cliff. Neither of the voices resembled that of Coyle or Fen Huan.

I came out on the *khad,* and now the going was easier. The path was wide enough for horses to pass, and led up at a gentle slope. By and by I could see the other side of the valley, over the pine tops, and the Koh-i-Darband house, back down the valley.

I've called the thing a path. It was more of a ledge of rock, with the granite cliff nearly sheer overhead and below; it wasn't straight, but curved gently inward, that is, the cliff swelled away from the river. Instead of walking due east, I was now headed gradually southeast.

And I had company—of a sort. On the cliff beside me were a line of man-size letters, carved in the granite, that looked like a continuous row of shorthand notes and scrolls.

The inscription was green with age-rust. It was no language I'd ever heard of; in fact, it looked like no language at all, except that portions of the scrollwork seemed to be repeated. Somebody had worked

mighty hard to leave an advertisement like that on the cliff.

I was so interested in the scrollwork that I came near falling several hundred feet to the rocks. The path ended where a cleft broke the rock wall. It was maybe a hundred feet across the cleft, and the only way to get over, apparently, was by a decayed rope.

This rope was fastened at each end to a stout beam which was wedged into the cracks along the face of the cliff. On my side of the apparatus a heavy loop was attached to the rope. A tight cord ran from the loop to either side of the ravine.

The idea was simple. All I had to do was to sit in the loop and pull myself and it across by the rope. Naturally, I hesitated, not knowing the condition of this form of rapid transit.

On the other side, however, I could see quite a wide sweep of the precipice. And it was no ordinary cliff, but a series of terraces hewn in the granite, with rising tiers of walls and small embrasures for windows.

This was the cliff-dwelling site I'd seen through the glasses yesterday. I tested the rope, guessed that it was sound, and sat down gingerly in the loop. Down below a small waterfall boiled. It certainly beat any scenic railway I'd ever tried.

It wasn't altogether a pleasant sensation; still, I'd made up my mind to get across and see the cliff-dwellings. They were worth a little aerial ferrying.

Standing on one terrace, I could look up and see three or four tiers overhead. The stone was crumbling in many places and littered the ledge. Lichens and moss grew around the embrasures. I was wondering how to get to the upper tiers when I noticed a narrow gate.

This gave into the wall. Entering, I saw a long, pillared cavern which was dimly lighted by the small openings. Clearly it had been built by men, for crude stone images ran along the wall facing me, half obliterated by age.

We're all pretty much like children when it comes to curiosity. I wandered through those rock chambers, over piles of débris, up and down half-crumbled steps, into passages that were almost dark and others where the sunlight came in directly—the ceiling having fallen in.

It was a regular burrow of passages, with doors at odd angles, and those stiff images running everywhere. Moreover, it looked as old as the hills themselves, except where some of the rock piles had been displaced and turned over.

And then I heard a woman laugh.

There was nothing spooky about it—not counting the fact that no woman was visible. It was a bright, rippling laugh, and the echoes took it up and fondled it as if they hated to let it go. The rumble of a man's voice joined the echoes; then the woman's laugh again.

The sound seemed to come from in front of me, and I pushed ahead cautiously, wondering what kind of natives would be around such a place. I came to a doorway between two carved stone pillars and stopped dead.

Five yards away a white woman was drinking tea. A clean tablecoth was on the floor, with a plate of *chupatties* and some kind of thermos bottle, and a wicker basket beside it.

She wore a natty flannel riding-habit. She sat very straight, nibbling at the refreshments and chattering to the lean, hawk-faced Indian servant in a spotless turban who stood by her shoulder.

CHAPTER VI.

AN UNSATISFACTORY INTERVIEW.

I DON'T know how old she was. But I do know she was a girl to look at twice, dressed with the quiet taste of a person who doesn't have to worry about what kind of clothes to wear — her dark, chestnut hair brightened by a tiny wild rose over one ear — her profile as delicate and dainty as that of a child.

She had quiet gray eyes that didn't match her hair, and a nose that turned up more than a little—especially when she noticed me. The servant scowled at me and took a long stride forward.

"Go away!" he cried blackly.

Now I hadn't meant to butt in. And I

certainly didn't look like a dangerous character. But both the girl and servant eyed me as if I had been one of the snakes that crawled around the ruins.

The man was thin, with bones showing through his brown skin; he was as tall as I, and wore a light, curved sword slung to his sash.

"You cannot stay," he ordered. "Go!"

"Why should I?" I answered. Left alone, I would probably have taken off my hat and apologized for the intrusion, but the man's manner grated. "I was looking through the ruins. Is this your property?"

His scowl deepened, and he gnawed at his mustache, fingering the hilt of his weapon.

I don't know what would have happened if the white woman had not spoken. I was in no shape for a fight; yet I had no mind to crawl before an Indian.

"Now that the *Feringee* is here, Yussuf," she said quickly, "he can remain—if he likes. I thought you told me he had turned back."

Her voice was musical and controlled; she spoke like one who is accustomed to giving commands and being waited on. After that first glance from her cool gray eyes, she paid no further attention to me. Yussuf retreated, with a glare that showed his discontent at the situation.

I'd have been spared a bad half-hour if I had left at this point. However, I did not. I wanted to know why I was treated like a mongrel dog on sight, and why a decidedly pretty girl in a riding-habit was taking tea in the cliff ruins, after John Coyle had told me there wasn't another white man or woman within a hundred miles.

This particular white woman was regally unconcerned at my scrutiny. Most girls show that they know when they're being stared at—for various reasons on which I'm not an authority, being afflicted with shyness.

But the girl of the ruins finished her tea and *chupatties* as coolly as if I'd been the stone pillar at her back. And Yussuf eyed me with the aimiability of a chained watch-dog sizing up a tramp.

Now, in the movies, the hero always pulls off some engaging stunt that opens the way to conversation when he meets a pretty woman. I couldn't think of anything to do except fill my pipe—force of habit. I was going to light it, but reflected that this might be construed as bad manners. So I took off my sun helmet instead.

"My name's Weston," I observed, "and I'm an American."

I think Yussuf grinned under his beard at that, but the girl stared at the roof over my head. She was humming gently to herself.

"I'm a stranger in this part of the country," I added aggrievedly. "I was curious to see the rock dwellings. But if I'd known I was trespassing, I would not have intruded on your hospitality."

Yes, I accented the last word a bit. You see there were a dozen things I wanted to ask the girl—badly. Surely there must be white men in her party, and I saw a chance of getting out of the pickle John Coyle had got me in. Under the circumstances, though, my pride wouldn't ask any favor of the girl of the ruins.

She looked at me then steadily, her chin cupped in her hands.

"I rode over to visit the ruins, too," she responded. "Since you are sight-seeing, you will doubtless be glad to know some of the history of the tombs."

Now that was polite, on the face of it. But she seemed to be making fun of me—hinting at something I didn't understand.

"They are the tombs of the ancient kings of Ladakh, Mr. Weston. In the medieval ages the Himalayas formed the citadel of one of the great empires—that of Kashmir, Ladakh, and Sindi. This structure is believed to have been a palace, and was once embellished with handsome stone, of the semiprecious variety; much of that has been plundered, and you can see how the place has decayed."

She glanced about whimsically at the carved pillar behind her which rested on a single iron support.

"In the rock-passages is the tomb of the Ladakh kings. Now, of course, the place is the property of the Maharaja of Kashmir and the British government. Yet the hill-tribes are interested in it, and hold it in

reverence; they dislike strangers coming here."

"Aren't you taking a chance coming here alone, Miss—"

But she would not take my lead.

"Oh, really, no! You see the hillmen know me. Is there anything else you would like to know, Mr. Weston?"

"What is the meaning of the inscription on the cliffs?" I asked, for no other reason than to prolong the talk.

"*Om Mani Padme Houm.*" She studied me from under sheltering lashes. "A phrase of the Ladakh priests found on tombs. It means something about 'the holiest lotus flower,' and is some manner of charm in the Ladakh hills. They believe a man is blessed by repeating it nine times; every native hopes to live to say it or turn it a hundred and nine thousand times."

"Turn it?"

She looked up impatiently at the servant.

"Tell the tourist *Feringee* the meaning of the prayer-wheel, Yussuf."

Yussuf didn't seem to relish the idea.

"Here is one, *Feringee*," he said shortly. "Behold, on the stone cylinder are carved nine prayers." He pushed the ponderous pillar contemptuously, and it revolved with a rusty creak. "Thus it is possible for the people of these hills to pray nine times with but one motion of the hand."

"And the legend of the nine prayers, Yussuf," persisted the girl maliciously. "Mr. Weston will be glad to repeat that to his friends."

"It is said," the man assented, "this is a sacred spot, and that the prayer on the cliff wall will point the way to the wealth of kings. I have heard old men of the villages in the valleys say that this is true, also, of the prayer-pillar which will afford forgiveness to a sinner. I know not. They are not followers of the Prophet."

I paid little attention to his explanation—which was far from clear. For some reason the woman seemed to be enjoying my discomfort. Yet we had not met before, and my conduct of itself could hardly have offended her. It was plain that she was a resident of this country. If so, she must know how I could reach some one in authority.

Moreover, I did not think that John Coyle and Fen Huan were desirable neighbors for the girl of the ruins.

"May I ask if you are staying here—or near here?" I observed with this in mind.

She smiled cheerfully.

"Oh, that is my secret, Mr. Weston, you know. Do you really think I would tell you?"

The gray eyes mocked me tantalizingly.

"I was going to say that it might not be safe because—"

"Because of your armed retainer, Mr. Weston?"

"No," I blundered. "I came here alone—"

"Really?" Her brows went up coldly. "Yussuf, you said—"

"The *Feringee* lies, *mem-sahib*," Yussuf growled. "When I called to you the warning, I confronted one who came after him. It was a low-born Kashmiri with an excellent rifle. I tumbled him backward, down the rocks, and he was not seen again. But in doing this thing I lost sight of the *Feringee* who came here."

So Kallick had followed me, after all! I had to smile when I thought of his mishap at the hand of Yussuf.

"That man was sent to watch me—" I protested.

The girl rose lithely to her feet, shaking out her long skirt.

"Really, Mr. Weston!" Her nose seemed to turn up even more than nature had ordained. "You are too stupid, even, to be amusing—with your clumsy threats and explanations. I am surprised that Fen Huan should engage such a man. Please give Mr. Fen Huan my compliments, and say that I trust the stay at the Koh-i-Darband is proving enjoyable."

She turned a well-trained back squarely.

"Yussuf, will you take Mr. Weston to the *jula?*"

That was my dismissal. The *jula* turned out to be the rope bridge. That infernal servant escorted me there by a short cut, and gripped me by the shoulder as I felt for the loop.

"It will not be well," he whispered angrily, "to come spying a second time. If you do—"

He stooped, picked up a pebble, tossed it down the cliff, and watched it sardonically as it vanished into the tops of the pines below.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BRUTAL COYLE.

AT the river, Kallick pounced upon me and strode home at my side, scowling at me darkly. Neither of us spoke. What I wanted to say Kallick would probably not have understood, and there's no satisfaction in swearing without its carrying home. It caused me no small satisfaction, though, to note that his uniform was soiled and one cheek bore evidence of a rapid passage through thorn bushes.

John Coyle and Fen Huan were through supper, and at their after-dinner cordials.

"Here's the lost lamb, Fen Huan," Coyle glanced up and chuckled. "Trying to escape, and, by the horn of Satan, bashing up Kallick into the bargain! Ain't you ashamed to act like that, youngster? Speak when you're spoken to!"

"I'll eat first," I said.

Coyle refused to order fresh dishes for me, and I was forced to make the best of what was on the table. I had a good appetite after my walk for the first time in several days. As I ate I watched the two.

Coyle was plainly out of humor, and consoling himself with gin. Fen Huan was inscrutable as usual. He lit a long pipe of odorous Turkish tobacco, and drew it into his lungs silently. Few men could have inhaled that stuff.

"Well, what you goin' to say for yourself?" Coyle noticed me presently. "You don't know what you're doin', Weston. That cliff over there ain't safe because of the hillmen. They knife any one who wanders there, specially after dark."

"You didn't tell me, Coyle, that I was a prisoner."

"Well, you're bloomin' well told now," he snarled—a small-minded man taking out his spite on one in his power. "Hereafter, Weston, this house is your limit. A step outside and Kallick and the other boys have orders to tie you and—"

Fen Huan lifted a fat hand calmly, and Coyle broke off. It was curious to see the ascendency of the Chinaman over the other.

"Are you a technically trained engineer, Mr. Weston?" he asked placidly.

I nodded, wishing for a chance to show Coyle what I thought of him.

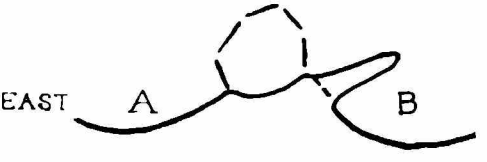
"Then you understand trigonometry?"

"Yes, some."

He fanned himself, considering this.

"Then you can solve a problem for us." He drew some papers from his sleeve and laid them on the table, sweeping away the dirty dishes with a *hiss* of disapproval. Fen Huan was a most fastidious man, even in his sins.

Several of the sheets of rice-paper were covered with figures, written with the utmost neatness. On one was the diagram shown below.



The problem Fen Huan wanted solved was difficult. On his map "A" was the easterly circle of the cliff where the prayer-writing was, and "B" the westerly. The dots were the rope bridge across the ravine to the ruins. He was trying to trace the prolongation of the sector "A" into the ruins.

It was no easy matter, as I saw at a glance. For some reason Fen Huan said the compass-bearings of the cords of A and B could not be learned. He had estimated the general bearing of the sectors.

Now, I'd forgotten most all the trigonometry I'd learned. Still, I saw no reason to tell the other two as much. I mulled over the sheets and looked wise, by pointing out to Fen Huan where he'd made his mistakes—something he knew already. That man was no fool.

Meanwhile Coyle, who couldn't concentrate on anything, called for more gin. The boy who brought it spilled some on his wrist in filling his master's glass.

"Put down that bottle!" said Coyle quietly.

The native did so, cringing. At once Coyle slid from his chair and struck the boy heavily over the mouth, felling him to the floor.

"Now, get out!" he growled. The native went.

"What're ye mooning about, Weston?" he cried at me, a dangerous flush under his bleared eyes. "You heard what Mr. Huan wants. Do it, or—"

I pushed away the sheets of paper and faced him squarely. Quick anger made me heedless.

"I'm damned if I'll do that or anything else for you, Coyle!" I told him. "You've got no right to my services. You've treated me like a dog."

He smiled at that, unpleasantly, and fell to twisting his beard. He was plainly glad that I'd rebelled. Fen Huan continued to fan himself gently.

"So you're complainin', Weston?" he grinned. "Think you ain't bein' treated like a white man should? God Almighty, you're a fool! Ain't I taken you in and cared for you when you were sick—"

"That's not true. You brought me here against my will. You damaged my car. And set a black to watch me. Also, you lied to me—"

"Really?"

"Yes," I cried hotly, "you did! Told me there wasn't a white person within three hundred miles, when I just saw a white woman across—"

I broke off, cursing my thoughtlessness. I had not intended to mention my meeting with the girl of the ruins Not that she had any claim on my silence. But instinct warned me that it would not be well to admit to Coyle that I'd talked with a stranger.

"A white woman!" He stared at me appraisingly. "A young, over-dressed chit, brown hair, and a temper like the devil's own?"

I was silent, not knowing what to say. He turned to Fen Huan.

"Hear that, my friend? Remember Kallick said that scion of Pluto, Yussuf, had tumbled him down the rocks? Well, Yussuf's with his mistress, as usual. Weston's seen Helen Bryce."

Fen Huan bent his head without a flicker of expression in the slant eyes that went from me to Coyle.

"What did she say to you, young whelp?" Coyle asked me aimably.

"She said to give Fen Huan her compliments, and she hoped he was enjoying his stay at the Koh-i-Darband."

The Chinaman waved his hand politely, as if I'd given him high praise.

"Was Miss Bryce alone?" he inquired.

"Alone!" Coyle wheeled on him angrily. "Of course she is. Doesn't she ride from Simla to Srinagar without other attendant than that Mohammedan, Yussuf? Ain't that her favorite trick—pretendin' she's out looking at the country? Being own cousin to the Resident himself, she can do it unhurt; likewise she's curried good-will among the hill-tribes."

"Were any others with her, Mr. Weston?" Fen Huan ignored Coyle's irritable outburst.

"I don't know."

I regretted my slip, because it was clear that the two attached importance to the presence of the girl. Why, I did not know. But if I'd understood what my carelessness was to mean to Helen Bryce, I'd have been utterly miserable.

Coyle and Fen Huan fell to talking rapidly together in some language that was strange to me—Turki, perhaps. Coyle was plainly angry, and seemed to be objecting to something that Fen Huan wanted done. It was curious to see the way the Chinaman overruled his companion without raising his voice or showing even the least sign of temper.

Finally Coyle subsided in his wicker chair with a shrug.

"Oh, have it that way, if you must!" he grunted in English. "But you're a soft-livered fool! I tell you starvation would bring him to do anything we want."

It was pleasant to hear the way they discussed me, like some animal already marked for quartering.

"But not this, my friend." Fen Huan tapped the papers on the table with his fan gently. "We could not be sure he was not deceiving us. And he has talked with Miss Bryce."

"Go ahead, then!" Coyle reached for his bottle. "I wash my hands of it."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE REAL FACTS.

IT was a surprising thing Fen Huan had to say to me, or rather to offer. And not the least surprising thing was his earnestness. Either the man was a most excellent actor, or he was telling the truth. Later, it proved that it was a mixture of both.

To begin with, Fen Huan admitted that Coyle was not here for the big-game hunting.

"As you have already guessed, my friend," he pointed out suavely.

Then he confessed that the tale of the caravan route was false. He said that they hadn't wanted to deceive me, but circumstances had compelled it. I didn't quite swallow that—remembering how Coyle had practically forced me to come here when I was sick. But by now I'd learned the wisdom of silence, and I didn't interrupt that arch-liar.

He said it was really a business venture brought them there; that he was Coyle's partner, all right—had financed the trip, and stood to gain two-thirds of the profits. Added that he was a merchant, as he had said, in good standing in China.

They had chosen the Koh-i-Darband because of something on the other side of the valley. Coyle looked up resentfully at this, but Fen Huan glanced at him, and he didn't say anything. What they were after was jade.

"In the temples of China, Mr. Weston, jade is a most valued article. You of the west do not understand how highly jewels and the semiprecious stones are esteemed in my happy country. Jewels are the wealth of Asia. Our money, as such, is worthless. It is but a medium of exchange. Rare stones are hoarded by every native from Persia, where they take blue topazes from the hill mines to Badakshan, with its rubies, and China with its—jade."

He felt again in his capacious sleeve and drew out what looked like a square of dull-green stone—something like what we call soap-stone. It was veined with tiny red streaks. Little enough, to all appearances, but Fen Huan fondled it, and even Coyle glanced at it covetously.

"A piece taken from the tomb of the Ladakh kings, Mr. Weston," he said softly. "From the Gumbaz—the domed tomb—in the cliff across the valley from the Koh-i-Darband."

This jade, he continued, was a kind not obtained now in the Chinese quarries. It had come originally from the bed of a dried watercourse near Khotan, at the edge of the Gobi desert. Quantities of the jade had been carried during the medieval empire of the Ladakh kings to the palace on the opposite cliff. This piece had been bought from a native who had picked it up in the rock caverns.

"The man did not know the location of the tomb itself," explained Fen Huan, "because he did not confess after his fingernails and toe-nails had been pulled up from the skin and molten silver poured under them."

The baser jade of the outer palace corridors had been stolen at various times in spite of the vigilance of the hill-tribes. The tomb had not been entered. Fen Huan was sure of this. The British government had warned off all despoilers of the ruins, and the hillmen had seen to it that the warning was enforced.

"How can you be so sure that there is a tomb in the ruins, and that there is this jade in the tomb?" I asked, to test his story.

Fen Huan smiled.

"In the monastery of the Holy Lotus, in Tibet, are stored the annals of the Ladakh priesthood, Mr. Weston. Scroll-writing—each manuscript bound with a red-silk tassel. It was not difficult for an eminent scholar to visit the monastery and interpret the annals. By reading a year and a half, this scholar—I will not mention his name—came upon a detailed description of the building and ornamenting of the tomb. No location is given except to say that the tomb was closed and sealed and inaccessible except by the sunwise turn."

He resumed his methodical motion of the fan, lighting his pipe, after stuffing its bowl

with some pungent stuff that smelled strongly as if it had opium in it.

"That is not an absurdity, Mr. Weston. There is a saying in the book of the great Confucius that the slight words of our ancient ancestors are more precious than the finest gold-leaf. The ritual of the sunwise turn still exists in these hills. It is a relic, perhaps, of the very old sun-worship."

Fen Huan moved a finger slowly in a circle through the smoke from his pipe.

"Thus," he resumed gravely, "beginning from the east the shepherds of the Himalayas sometimes assemble their flocks and lead them slowly about the village. Again, when a man is dying, or very ill, they lead a goat or sheep about his tent in the sunwise turn before slaughtering it, as a sacrifice to the gods."

"In the time of the Ladakh kings the sunwise turn formed part of the religious ceremonial. That is revealed in the annals."

"How does that help you to find the tomb?" I asked.

"In this manner. You no doubt saw the inscriptions on the cliff. They begin at the eastern end. It is not unreasonable to believe that by following the eastern inscription in its circuit, the tomb can be found. Since the inscription ends before the ruins are reached, it is necessary to follow the sweep of the cliff—which makes a perfect segment of a circle at this point—into the ruins. That is what we have been trying to do. So far, our mathematics have failed us."

I raised a last objection.

"If it's too much for you to find, Fen Huan, how could the designers of the tomb locate it at the correct point—"

He saw my reasoning and smiled that slow, bland smile that just touched the edges of his lips under the scant mustache.

"Have you forgotten, Mr. Weston, that astronomy was first understood in Asia? Who were the makers of the zodiac? Whence came the first astrolabe? Who were the readers of the stars before the birth of your apostles?"

Something flashed back into my mind: "The prayer on the cliff will point the way to the wealth of kings," Yussuf had repeated.

The thought stirred me quite a bit. But it all looked pretty thin to me. The ruins across the valley were only broken heaps of stones and tumble-down rock-passages. The legend of the tomb wasn't much to go on. And that broken piece of jade looked far from valuable.

"Just fix your mind on this, Weston," observed Coyle suddenly. "The account of that tomb gives the walls as more 'n ten feet square. Jade of that quality fetches about a hundred pounds a square foot in China, and the buyers ain't curious where it comes from. The customs officials won't need to know anything about it—Fen Huan will see to that."

He hefted the fragment of stone in his fist.

"Five hundred dollars a foot, your money, Weston, and more 'n four hundred square feet of the stuff tucked away in the ruins. Figure it out for yourself. Some profit!"

If what he said was true, they stood to clear some two hundred thousand dollars if they carried the jade safely into China—granting that they found it.

"Why haven't the hillmen got at it?" I asked, wishing to appear skeptical—which wasn't hard, for I was just that.

"Oh, they won't tear down their own tomb," he explained carelessly. "Takes a Chinaman to plunder a thing like this."

For once Fen Huan was touched. His dark eyes widened in their slits.

"The tombs of our fathers are sacred," he hissed, "to all but white men, who are wanderers on the face of the earth without traditions or faith!"

Coyle scowled; then carried it off with a laugh.

"No offense; these ain't your ancestors, nor mine, either." He vented his resentment on me. "Now your job is to trace out that circuit through the ruins for us, Weston. Do that and we'll blast the place open. And if you make a mistake, or try underhand work on us, your carcass 'll jolly well go up in the blast."

I leaned back in my chair comfortably.

"What do I have as rake-off if the venture succeeds?" I asked.

"The five thousand we promised you, a

whole skin, and a tight mouth—'specially that, Weston. Despoiling a bloomin' tomb is a penal offense in Kashmir."

He grinned at me sardonically, enjoying my silence.

"Likewise, Weston, the British authorities know you've come up here by your lonesome; that you met me in a *dak* bungalow; Helen Bryce saw you searchin' the ruins, and what she knows the Resident knows."

I thought of my conversation with the girl; and it wasn't reassuring.

"Likewise," continued Coyle, accenting his points with the gin bottle, "Fen Huan and myself can prove you worked out the way to the tomb, and we'll admit, if we're questioned—which won't be likely, as we'll be safe over the border with a caravan load of good jade—that you were the leading spirit in the little enterprise. If you have the luck of Satan and keep your mouth shut, you may get back through India safe. I don't know."

With that he got up and shoved the rice-paper sheets toward me. Fen Huan nodded slowly, to show his satisfaction with what had been said.

After I'd gone to my room to think things over, taking the papers with me—Fen Huan had a copy of the main diagram—Coyle poked his yellow head through the door.

"Forgot to tell you, young un, Kallick and the boys have orders to shoot you if you *should* stroll off the porch, or away from the house. Kallick's a dead shot. Think it over—five thousand dollars an' a whole skin. That's generous treatment, Weston."

"Suppose I don't do it?"

"Oh, you will—one way or another."

It was some time before I understood how confident he was. But then it was clear enough. He vanished, but presently bobbed in again.

"Forgot to wish you pleasant dreams, Weston."

He went off snickering at his own wit and stumbling down the passage. But not before he'd turned the key in the door.

I went to the window and looked out. Iron screening was screwed across the opening. Some bushes were just opposite the window. While I watched a shadow moved in the bushes, and the light from the living-room flickered on metal very much like a gun-barrel. Then I heard a sound, swelling and melodious.

Fen Huan was playing his phonograph before going to bed.

CHAPTER IX.

BRINGING IN A CAPTIVE.

THE next day I had the shack to myself. It was raining—one of those driving storms that drift down the mountains with a sharp wind that tosses the pine-tips like a choppy sea in a squal.

Why Coyle and Fen Huan weren't in evidence, I didn't know. I was grateful for the chance to think things over. Since it was permitted to go out on the porch I did so, to find Kallick squatted on the steps with a high-power rifle across his knees.

No, I didn't have any ambition to rush the *shikuri*. He seemed careless, but he watched me closely. John Coyle was a master whose commands were worth obeying. I fancied, too, that some of the house-boys had an eye on me. And if I should, by some chance, win free of the bungalow, I'd be afoot without knowing the way, and it would be easy for mounted men to hunt me down.

I puzzled over the diagram Fen Huan had drawn. Perhaps an expert mathematician could plot the curve of the prayer-cliff. It was too much for me—at least with my limited knowledge of mathematics.

Above ground the thing wouldn't have been so hard; but to figure out where the circle of the prayer-cliff would continue into the heart of those ruins wasn't possible. Once in the stone chambers you couldn't see twenty feet ahead.

Maybe the builders had worked out the spot before they put up the walls. But they hadn't put their secret on record.

That didn't bother me, for two reasons. I had no particular faith in the jade being where Fen Huan thought—or anywhere at all. Fen Huan believed it was there, and so did Coyle. The master of the Koh-i-Darband had probably taken his friend's

word for it, and lust for profit had done the rest. And Fen Huan set a lot of store by the old annals he'd mentioned.

I lit my pipe and considered the matter. It was beginning to be clear now why Coyle had taken the pains he did to get me there. First, he wanted the car. He admitted, after a while, that he thought it would be useful in case they had to make a quick getaway. You see they didn't know when the hillmen would get ugly, and in spite of their rifles, both men had a healthy respect for the tribes around the tomb. So far they'd been unmolested, for the reason they hadn't taken anything out of the ruins.

John Coyle had quizzed me dry, down in the *dak* bunaglow. He realized I knew enough mathematics to help them locate the tomb. The offer of the five thousand I didn't take seriously. I never expected to see the color of their money.

I didn't feel altogether happy over the prospect. I was losing valuable time that the Robles company was paying for; granting that I finally got back to India with a whole skin and the car, my story wouldn't be credited, most likely, and if it was, Coyle and Fen Huan would be out of reach of the British law — Fen Huan had a caravan camped over the border in Tibet, waiting his orders.

Human nature's a curious thing. Here I was, captive at gun-point in the Koh-i-Darband, with a black watching me who'd orders to drill me if I stepped off the porch, and who looked like he'd be tickled to death to do it—and all I was thinking of was some way to get back at Coyle for the way he'd treated me.

No, I wasn't trembling in my boots. Back home we don't have many of Coyle's breed, and men aren't shot out-of-hand because a bully orders it. Back in the U. S. A. we have law that is a law, and it hadn't penetrated even yet to me that Coyle or his men would risk murder. I looked on his threats and the fool schemes of Fen Huan as some stagy kind of a game that they wouldn't dare put across.

Before the next day I'd changed my mind.

But at that time I wasn't worrying much. I even got to thinking of Helen Bryce. She was a thoroughbred, a clean strain of girl, with a temper and beauty to match it. The more I thought of her, the more I wanted to set myself right in her eyes.

If I'd known where she camped I'd have risked a reckoning with Kallick to visit her and Yussuf.

Kallick had company now. The house-boys came around to the front of the bungalow. One of them was carrying a small package. I watched them, having nothing better to do. The rain—which came in sudden squalls—had let up for a while.

One of the natives dug what seemed a tunnel in the gravel by the steps. Then he hollowed out a hole in one end of the tunnel. He poured some stuff from the package into the hole, and patted the wet gravel into a kind of roof over the tunnel, leaving an opening at the other end.

Another native stuck a lighted match to the stuff in the hole, and covered it with a roof of wet clay. Then boy No. 1 lay down, with his face pressed to the opening, and drew two or three deep breaths. Boy No. 2 kicked him away and took his place.

It mystified me until I got a whiff of what was smoldering in the hole. The house-boys were having a smoke. They had borrowed a little of Fen Huan's doped tobacco and made a pipe to order.

After inhaling the stuff they'd go and lie down, keeping it in their lungs as long as they could. Even Kallick took his turn, leaving two of the others to watch me with the gun while he did so.

It gave me a line on the servants. There were four house-boys, one Chinese cook, and the *shikari*. Total six, and evil-looking young devils into the bargain. Fen Huan's tobacco must have been strong, for they reeled as they walked back into the house.

I began to suspect now why Coyle and the mandarin had such a hold on the servants. Natives of that breed would walk fifty miles, I'd heard, for a pinch of dope.

By the time they'd finished their smoking I had a rough plan of campaign thought out. Since Coyle and Fen Huan counted on me to do their calculations for them, I'd take my time about arriving at any results —bluff up some kind of figuring that would interest them.

Meanwhile I'd search the bungalow quietly for the spark-plugs Coyle had taken. It wasn't likely he'd carry the things with him, and the chances were that one set at least would be in the house. Then I'd wait until the house-boys were giddy with their daily dope, when Coyle and his partner were over in the ruins, and jump Kallick when he was off guard.

Once I had his rifle I could herd the house-boys into one of the outbuildings, lock them in, and take my time to repair the car.

I thought it was a good plan. It may have been. But it was never carried out.

The first part of it was easy. In fact it was more than that. I studied the diagram Fen Huan had given me. And I thought over all his dope about the sunwise turn.

"Follow the prayer-fingers by the sunwise turn—"

That was what the monastery annals had said. On the face of it, the words didn't make much sense. I put my finger on the eastern end of the diagram, at the beginning of the arc "A." Somewhere along the circle of which that arc was part, Fen Huan believed the tomb to be.

"The prayer on the cliff will point the way to the wealth of kings," Yussuf had repeated.

I ran the two sentences together.

"Follow the prayer fingers on the cliff by the sunwise turn to the wealth of kings."

Nothing much in that. There hadn't been any finger sign-posts on the cliffs. Nothing but the carved lettering. And that couldn't be followed, for the reason it didn't continue into the ruins.

But I had to think up something plausible to work out—to keep Coyle in a good humor, and gain time for my own purpose.

I ransacked my mind for forgotten mathematics. All that I hit on was the axiom—or whatever it is—that a point must be located by two lines.

And then the idea hit me.

Two lines. I had two lines in the diagram. Two arcs of two circles.

"Kallick!" I called. "Get me a compass—dividers!"

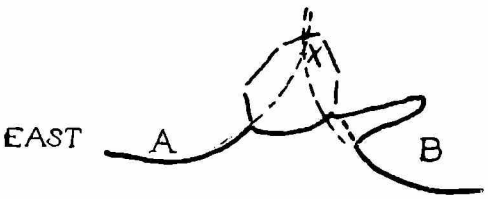
He didn't understand. But by dint of signs I made him realize what I wanted. He called another boy, gave him the rifle and went to Coyle's study. It was locked, because of the rifles inside, but Kallick had a key.

He brought out a set of draftsman's drawing implements. He was shrewd enough to guess I was doing work for Coyle, and he'd best assist me. In a moment, with the dividers, and a simple geometric process, I'd drawn the two complete circles, "A" and "B."

The point where they met I labeled "X."

"That's the unknown spot," I thought.

I now had the diagram shown below.



You see the idea now. Both Fen Huan and I had overlooked it. We'd both figured that the sunwise turn—beginning at the east—could only mean the prayer-circle on the cliff that began at the east. That was "A."

The circle "B" followed sunwise, seemed to lead *away* from the ruins. But when the complete circle was drawn it led through the ruins.

For just an instant I had a thrill at my own idea. Here was a point in the ruins located by following the sunwise turn of the "prayer-fingers." The ancient builders of the tomb had known geometry and astronomy.

Had I arrived at the solution of the problem? Was the tomb of the Ladakh kings at the point "X"?

The thing was not impossible. But I smiled at my own excitement. Kallick, who was watching closely, scowled. Whereupon I tucked the paper in my coat pocket.

Then the shots began. They came from across the valley. First a rapid burst of four or five; then scattered reports.

Kallick pricked up his ears, and I scanned the valley. The rain had set in again, obscuring the opposite cliff. The shots, however, had come from the direction of the ruins.

I knew Coyle was wary of the hillmen, and I wondered if he had been attacked. The interval between reports lengthened. Apparently two rifles had been heard at first. Now, only one was firing.

Silence settled down upon the *dawan*.

The rain pattered lightly on the cedar slabs of the roof. Beside my chair Fen Huan's phonograph leered at me with a familiar air. Impatient of the *shikari's* scrutiny, I fell to pacing the porch, wishing earnestly that the rain would let up and give me a sight of the valley.

It was late in the afternoon before Coyle returned. Fen Huan accompanied him. I heard Kallick shout and turned in time to see the two men coming up the path to the bungalow.

They were carrying a stout bamboo pole. Slung to the pole was a light cotton hammock. In it was Helen Bryce.

The girl's flannel clothes were wet, and her hair had come partly unbound. It fell to one shoulder in a chestnut flood. And I saw that her wrists were tied in front of her by Coyle's silk neckerchief. By the stains on her cheeks I suspected she had been crying.

Coyle helped her from the hammock to the porch.

"Welcome to the Koh-i-Darband, Miss Bryce," he said, and bowed. Then he noticed me.

"Hear that shooting, Weston? That was me. I was settling Yussuf's hash. The damned infidel shot first. It took quite some time before I scored a hit—tumbled him over the rocks with a bullet between his gullet and gizzard. Then I wasted some more rounds, making sure of him."

He handed his rifle to Kallick.

"I'm not a bad shot, Weston. Remember that. Now we'll have some supper."

CHAPTER X.

KNOWN BY ONE'S COMPANY.

I THOUGHT at first he was joking. But one look at the pale and angry girl showed me he wasn't. When Coyle and Fen Huan had changed to dry clothes, they made her come to the table with them.

Then I learned the reason for her presence here.

"I will not sit at table with a renegade." She looked steadily at Coyle, who moved uneasily under the light in her gray eyes. He stroked his beard and smiled.

"Oh, come now, Miss Bryce," he said loudly. "Yussuf shot at me. What was I to do?"

"He saw you sneaking up toward our tent. You had your rifle leveled. If I had had a revolver I would have done what he did."

"I am honored." Coyle tried to appear at his ease, and failed, being what he was. "You can hardly blame me, though, for defending myself." He looked at the servants, finding the girl's hot scrutiny unbearable. "Yussuf got his deserts. He shot to kill, only his sights were set for five hundred yards. A native doesn't understand the fine points of a rifle. Eh, Weston?"

Coyle seemed to be trying to make me out his friend.

"It was unfortunate, Miss Bryce," put in Fen Huan, who had been watching her silently. "But it has brought us the celestial happiness of your company in our unworthy house."

"Why did you bring me here?" She tossed her dark head and clasped her hands. If she had been crying, it was from anger, not fear. Helen Bryce was no weakling; and her pride was a thing that put Coyle to shame. She sat erect in her chair, without touching the food they offered her, or paying any heed to her wet clothes.

"You came to the *dawan* to spy on us," Coyle responded. "Ain't you pleased to be here? No fault of mine if your cousin, the Resident, sends you about his dirty work."

"I came because my people of the hill tribes sent a runner to me at Srinagar. A certain smuggler of hashish, who has been long sought by the British authorities, was seen in this valley. I came to see if it was really Fen Huan. The Resident does not know I came. He would not have allowed it—"

I saw a quick look pass from the Chinaman to John Coyle. The girl's frankness

was working her harm. Yet, in her splendid pride, she would stoop to no precautions against the two.

It was characteristic of her race and upbringing that Helen Bryce was fearless of the two scoundrels who had laid hands on her.

"I knew Fen Huan when I saw him," she said bitterly. "He has brought thousands of pounds of hashish from China, by way of Tibet, and he is one of the richest men of Khotan. If the troops at Srinagar knew he was here, he would not leave Kashmir without being tried for his crimes. Not if he turned a great prayer-wheel a hundred and nine thousand times, to purify his sin."

"Then," smiled Fen Huan, waving his fan gently, "it is well that your troops are engaged in patrolling the northern passes where there is trouble among the natives."

She bit her lip. I think she was beginning to understand that she must deal with these two as they deserved—something it had taken me long to see.

"Give me a horse at once," she cried. "Or you will answer to the Resident!"

"On such a night?" John Coyle shook his head. "We would be inhospitable. Mr. Weston can attest our hospitality. By the way, he is the one who told us you were in the valley—"

The girl glanced at me swiftly, scornfully.

"I did not mean to," I said lamely. Stupidity is hard to excuse.

"Mr. Weston is—working for us," put in Fen Huan with a warning frown.

Several things had become clear to me. So Fen Huan was a drug merchant, and smuggler to boot. I knew that the importation of hashish into India was under a ban. The Koh-i-Darband was a ride of only a day and a half from a telegraph-office on the Indian border. If the girl and her servant had ridden there, Fen Huan's stay would have been brief—and he and Coyle were half-maddened by the treasure lust.

They had gone out to find and capture the girl before she could send news of their presence here. No wonder she had treated me coolly the day before when I'd stumbled into her and Yussuf among the ruins!

She sat back, with an ironical smile, and looked from one of us to the other. Fen Huan had lit his pipe and was puffing at the drug. Coyle sprawled in his chair, fingering his glass uneasy, yet triumphant.

"How much money do you want?" she demanded scornfully.

"Money?" Fen Huan waved a deprecating hand. "Am I a hill-thief?"

"Worse. I have heard much of you, Fen Huan. Tales travel in the hill tribes, you know." Again her anger swept over her, and she gave full rein to it. "There were women taken from the Bhotias and Kashmir villages. Young women, who were not recovered. You will answer for every one of them."

For an instant Fen Huan's broad face hardened; then he closed his eyes as if blandly meditating on a pleasant thought.

"How much will you take?" She tried Coyle this time. "To give me a horse at once?"

"My dear Miss Bryce," the master of the Koh-i-Darband said bluntly. "We are not to be bought. We only desire to be unmolested while we complete our work here. Then I promise you Mr. Weston will take you back to Simla in his machine."

"How long will that be?"

"A week. Perhaps more. It depends on Mr. Weston's acumen. He is our—consulting engineer."

"You don't dare keep me by force."

"Unfortunately we must. You interrupted our work."

I was waiting my chance to speak. The sight of the girl sitting helplessly before the two was like a lash. Especially it angered me to see Fen Huan's intent stare, which seemed to drink in the girl's beauty. I knew the two were watching for any move on my part, and the thought rendered me cautious, for the girl's sake as well as my own. For I was the only one in the bungalow who would take her part.

So I sat well back from the table, waiting.

Helen Bryce rose and went to the fire. Standing near it, she fell to twisting her hair back into place, as a woman will. She took no further notice of us, but Fen Huan followed her every movement, his black eyes mellow with the drug.

Coyle began singing to himself, a raucous murmur that repeated the refrain of some music-hall catch. I waited, staring at the flicker of the fire in the hearth and wondering what I was going to do without coming to any conclusion.

To attempt to clear myself before Helen Bryce would only bring denials from the other two, and probably insure my being locked in my quarters—something I was in no mood for, because of an uneasiness that was growing on me.

"Which is my room?" asked Helen Bryce of Coyle.

She was tired out and hungry; but she spoke as mistress to servant, with a lift of the firm chin.

Fen Huan arose and bowed.

"You will occupy my room to-night," he said politely.

Coyle stretched himself lazily in his chair.

"Then you'll have to bunk in the study, Fen Huan," he muttered. "I've only a cot, you know."

The mandarin caressed the embroidered sleeve of his silk blouse.

"I shall be in my room," he said.

CHAPTER XI.

I START THINGS.

I THINK I was the first to grasp his meaning; because I'd been looking for something of the kind. Coyle frowned, then his jaw dropped and he stared at his companion.

"Miss Bryce will spend the night with me." Fen Huan laid his pipe aside, and the glance he cast at the girl made my teeth grit. Hashish, beyond heating his brain and stirring his passions, had little apparent effect on the Chinaman. "She is a delightful person."

"Satan's beldame!" swore Coyle. "I'm damned if she'll do that. Do you want to be shot on sight by the first English trooper that comes along?"

Fen Huan made no response, but his bland smile did not change. I heard the girl catch her breath softly. Coyle pounded on the table angrily.

"Ain't we taking risks enough as it is, Fen Huan?" he growled. "You're a Chinaman, ain't you? You know what that means? Love of God, man, don't put your hand on the girl! It's that dope, Fen Huan, that's workin' on you—"

His tone changed from threatening to pleading. Helen Bryce had drawn herself up, a white-faced statue of pride.

"I bid you good night, Mr. Coyle, and you, too, Mr. Weston," said Fen Huan.

It was too much for Coyle, renegade though he was.

"You can't do that, Fen Huan," he protested. "You can't do that. Why, you'll never get out of India alive."

"I go where I please in this country, and my own—and the white men do not know."

Fen Huan's soft voice had grown shriller. Into his face crept his racial intolerance of foreigners, linked with indifference to the fate of a woman, whether white or yellow.

"If this gets known—"

Coyle was pleading, but not for Helen Bryce. He was begging Fen Huan not to endanger their own safety.

"Why should there be talk?" Fen Huan's slant eyes were vicious. "Will she speak? Will we?"

He stepped in front of Helen Bryce, regarding her as he would one of his own slave girls. She met his gaze fairly, with a scorn that would have shamed another man, yet did not touch the drug-twisted soul of the mandarin. He swung angrily on Coyle, who was cursing under his beard.

"Did you think Fen Huan feared this woman?" he demanded shrilly. "Am I one to take notice of her, except to have her for myself? You are a weakling, Coyle, you are but a fool fumbling after riches! You are no more than a finger of one of my hands. If I do not help you out of Kashmir into China, where will you go? Into an English prison, unless you join my caravan. The servants in this house are mine, except Kallick. Ask Kallick if he will disobey Fen Huan, the merchant!"

Coyle's unsteady glance wavered from the impassive *shikari* to the mandarin. He did not look at the girl.

He shrugged his shoulders and poured himself a glassful of gin with a quivering

hand. It was plain to me who was the real master in the Koh-i-Darband!

The girl, too, had instinctively perceived as much. I saw her glance about the room pitifully.

"I will make a bargain with you, Fen Huan," I said.

They all looked at me. The Chinaman, sure of his power, had once more mastered his temper.

"Perhaps I've found the location of the tomb, Fen Huan," I observed slowly. "The odds are that I have. If you will allow Miss Bryce to have my room, and let me remain outside the door, as long as she is kept in the Koh-i-Darband, I will show you what I have discovered."

He smiled and drew his fan from his sleeve. I don't know whether I could have made good my point or not; but just then Kallick spoke to Coyle, who sprang to his feet.

"By the saints of hell, Fen Huan!" he cried. "Kallick says Weston used my drawing-instruments and wrote down his calculations on your map. It's in his coat pocket."

I cursed my stupidity in leaving what I'd done on paper. If I'd kept it in my head, my case would have been stronger. Coyle was aroused by the prospect of finding the jade. My idea of bargaining had been foolish and what I did now was more so.

The chair I was sitting on was heavy ebony. As I stood up I heaved it at Fen Huan's head. Mandarin and chair crashed to the floor.

I sidestepped, to avoid a possible shot from Kallick and to put Coyle between the native and myself. Coyle was prompt to act. His arm circled my neck from behind, jerking back my chin.

Now I'm not exactly weak, and I'd had one or two free-for-all fights before. Leaning back, I got my hands together behind Coyle's neck and swung forward from the hips, sending him over my head.

When Coyle struck the floor, my knees hit him in the ribs, driving the breath out of his lungs for a moment. I rolled him over while his arms reached for me feebly, and felt his pockets. He had no revolver.

Whang! The blast of a discharge filled the room. Kallick had missed me with his first shot, thanks to my rolling tactics.

"Do not shoot him!" I heard Fen Huan's voice from somewhere. "Call the servants."

"Run to the door, Miss Bryce," I panted, warding off Coyle's grip.

Then I saw she couldn't. She was gripped fast by two hundred pounds of Chinese bone and fat. My chair had ripped Fen Huan's cheek, but he was on his feet.

The girl twisted and wrenched vainly in his arms. I kicked Coyle loose—it being no time for niceties of conduct. Kallick had vanished, and I jumped for the open door of the study and the rifles inside.

A flood of brown natives swept from the rear of the house and closed around me as I reached the door. The first two went down under short-arm jabs. There never was an Oriental who could fight with his fists.

Kallick swung the gun-butt at my head, and missed. One of the boys had me by the legs and it took a precious half-minute to pry him away with my knees.

The light native boys could not have availed much against my weight, but Coyle was afoot now and enraged. He charged me with a bellow, and took two good swings to the jaw that straightened him, without hurting him seriously.

By that time I'd lost hope of getting clear of my enemies. It's easy to say that a sizable, two-fisted white man can hold his own with a half-dozen natives. But, with one on the back of my neck, two clinging to my waist and Kallick jamming his gun-butt in my face, my wind and strength were going quickly.

I saw Coyle snatch the rifle from Kallick. And my groping hand closed over the bottle on the table. It served to free me from the two boys at my hips, and it broke over the head of the second one. Coyle's first blow with the gun went amiss and crumpled the native on my back to the floor.

Ducking under his rifle, I closed with Coyle, pushing him back against the wall. I gripped the gun-barrel and hung my

weight on it. We were both gasping in the fight for the weapon.

Then came a dull pain in the back of my head, and a feeling as if all Niagara Falls were rushing through the base of my skull. The room swayed around, and a haze veiled everything.

CHAPTER XII.

A BARGAIN.

WHAT Kallick hit me with I don't know. Perhaps another gun from the study. Anyway, it ended my share of the fight. It was a poor sort of fight, a lot of mess that got me nowhere. I'd better have waited until there was a real opening.

But the sight of the girl confronting those two had been too much for me. I felt hands fumbling at my coat. When the haze cleared so I could see a bit, Fen Huan and Coyle were scanning my drawing under the lamp, while the three boys who could stand were holding me against the wall.

The mandarin's face was inscrutable, but Coyle plainly elated.

"I'm damned if Weston ain't found the spot!" he cried.

"Yes, perhaps on paper." Fen Huan shrugged his shoulders. "But how can we come to it in the ruins?"

"We'll search. We'll pull that part of the place apart, if it takes a week."

"Meanwhile—"

"Weston needs a lesson."

Coyle stepped over to me. I could see the girl watching him, her dark eyes framed in a drawn face. The boys gripped me tighter, but there was no need. I couldn't have lifted one arm to my shoulder.

Coyle raised his fist and began striking me heavily on the jaw and cheek-bone. Kallick grinned. My senses were so numbed that I felt little, except when my injured head struck the wall.

"You're a hound, Coyle, a mongrel dog!" I told him, grinning through a split lip.

I called him all the hard names I could think of. It made him more angry and he substituted the gun-butt for his fist, trying to strike my eyes.

The gun-butt was too big for that. My head was swimming, and it was hard to see the others. I heard the girl say something sharply to Coyle, and I heard him laugh. Evidently what she'd said was not flattering to him.

I'd been thinking about her, in the intervals when Coyle got tired, and my brains weren't jarred loose. About Helen Bryce and Fen Huan, and praying there was something I could do even now to help her.

Then an idea came to me.

"You want to break into the tomb—don't you?" I mumbled. I had to say it three times before he heard.

"You're jolly well right, Weston," he responded, grinning.

"Well, I'll show you the place, Coyle. I'll take you there to-morrow."

"The hell you will," he assented amiably.

"I can." I looked him full in the face—what I could see of it. "You see that diagram I drew. Well, how did I guess that?"

He was silent at that, looking at me thoughtfully.

"Because I knew where the place was before I drew it," I told him.

It was bluff, pure and simple—the last card of a desperate man.

"Remember when I met Miss Bryce over there?" I had to spit out some blood to frame the words. "Well, she was sitting by the door of the tomb. If she's allowed to stay safe in my room to-night, I'll take you to the place to-morrow. I can find it again."

Fen Huan came and stood by Coyle and stared at me intently. It was harder to face down the Chinaman; but I think I did it. I made the bluff good.

"Miss Bryce is a friend of the hillmen," I added, trying to think connectedly in spite of a splitting headache. "They've shown her the tomb—knew she wouldn't injure it. Yussuf wanted to kick me off the cliff, but she wouldn't let him."

Fen Huan stroked his injured cheek.

"If you are lying—" he began.

"You'll know to-morrow. I didn't aim to tell you this, but you've forced my hand."

The mandarin turned swiftly on the girl.

"Is this true?" he asked harshly.

I saw her start. I don't think before then she'd had a chance to realize what the two were after.

"She won't tell you," I said, before she could reply. "She won't see the tomb of her friends plundered. It doesn't matter to me."

For the space of a moment Fen Huan and his partner stared at me. Then Coyle lowered his gun.

"By God! We'll see if it's so."

"You'll see," I assured him.

No, I had no idea where the tomb was. But I knew my calculations on the map had interested them, and that they were wild for a sight of the jade. What would happen on the morrow, I didn't know, but it was a little time gained.

"You're right in guessing that drawing won't get you there," I told them. "Even with its help, it 'll be days before you strike the entrance to the tomb—unless you're shown."

Coyle nodded. He had made up his mind.

"Early to-morrow you'll go over to the ruins with us, Weston," he said slowly. "And you'll be sorry for the day you got inside your own skin if you can't show us what we want."

He and Fen Huan spoke together in whispers. I think Fen Huan wanted to torture me to learn the secret they thought I knew. But I heard Coyle say that I'd only lie.

They could afford to wait a day. They'd still have me and Helen Bryce. And the chance of laying hand on the jade appealed to both of them.

I don't think Fen Huan gave up his desire for possession of the girl. But a delay of a few hours would not alter the situation as far as he was concerned. Nor, I thought grimly, would it to me.

CHAPTER XIII.

TRUE FAITHFULNESS.

SO they let Helen Bryce go with me to my room. Or, rather, she followed as the natives carried me in and dumped me on the floor.

She asked Coyle for water and clean bandages. When he shrugged his shoulders she went herself to the kitchen and returned with some napkins and a jar of water. She made Kallick fetch a blanket and put it under me.

Coyle said good night, grinning, and locked the door after him. Helen Bryce worked away over my bruised face. I hate to think what I looked like, after Coyle's massage.

It was some time before she was satisfied. Then she propped a fold of the blanket under my head and sat on the cot. I could barely see her, because they had not seen fit to leave us a candle.

The back of my head felt as if it had been turned inside out, and my throat tasted full of sand. I lay there and wondered how long it would be before the room began to look a natural black, and not crimson.

"I'm sorry, Miss Bryce," I said, trying to speak clearly in spite of a swollen lip. "I never meant those two to know you were in the valley—"

"I think Fen Huan knew it," she returned quietly. "That was why Yussuf was watching for intruders on the cliff yesterday. I am the one who should apologize—for the way I welcomed you at *tiffin*."

She leaned over and felt the bandage gently.

"You are a brave man, Mr. Weston, and you have been—good to me."

It was the first praise I'd had from her, and—ill-deserved though it was—it stirred me. As I said, Helen Bryce was a thoroughbred. Most girls would have been crying their eyes out, or nagging at me to do something for them.

"What's that?" she whispered suddenly.

I listened, and laughed without being much amused.

"Fen Huan playing his phonograph, Miss Bryce. He never seems to sleep."

Through the remaining hours to dawn the mandarin kept the machine going, playing high-pitched violin fantasies that sounded like the wail of unrestful demons. I lay back, watching the girl hungrily as she sat on the foot of the cot, her head resting against the wall. The starlight was clear, and there was a crescent moon some-

where, so I could make out her profile and the sight consoled me for the hammer and tongs that contested in the back of my head.

"What made you offer to show them the tomb, Mr. Weston?" she asked once, turning toward me. "Did you know—"

"Nothing," I assured her. "It was a stall—a bluff. I doubt, even, if there is a tomb."

She was silent, looking at me in the half light.

"Have you any plan for—to-morrow?"

"To-morrow," I said as cheerfully as possible, "is another day. Or rather it's to-morrow now. Something will turn up. Fen Huan may fall off the cliff. I hope he does."

"They would be hard on you," she meditated.

"Oh, it takes a good deal to hurt me. I'm accident-proof. Besides"—I hesitated, because there was so much I wanted to say, and the girl's nearness made me tongue-tied—"I'm happy to be of service to you."

She sighed, and I wondered if she was offended. The fact that she was with me those hours was heartening. It was proof she trusted me. I could catch the scent of dried roses or something she had in her hair, or maybe it was the hair itself. It was restful, and—mighty nice.

Then came the voice outside the window. I heard it, above the wail of Fen Huan's infernal machine, and she did, too, for she lifted her head quickly.

"*Chota Missy,*" it whispered. "*Chota Missy.*"

"Stay where you are," I told her softly. "I'll investigate."

I crawled from my blanket to the window and stood up. Nothing was to be seen. Not even the sentry with the gun was visible in his bushes, although there was a hazy light over the whole place.

"*Chota Missy Bryce,*" came the whisper again. I looked down. A hunched-up shadow was directly below the window.

"*Yussuf!*" cried the girl softly, and stood beside me.

It was the Mohammedan. And he was wounded. Coyle hadn't put him out of action, but had hurt him badly. There was a bullet somewhere in his back, and the bone of one arm was broken.

That was enough to settle most men. Yussuf, though, watched them carry his mistress across to the Koh-i-Darband from the bushes into which he'd fallen, down the slope. It had taken him six hours to get here, crawling most of the way.

He had no rifle. Coyle had smashed the one Yussuf had been fighting with.

"Look out, Yussuf," I warned him, "there's a native with a rifle somewhere in the bushes."

"He had no rifle, *sahib*." The servant was more respectful to me than he had been—after talking with his mistress. "He had a long knife, such as the Chinese coolies carry. I have it now. The man will not see the day come."

It was hardly believable that Yussuf had killed the watcher without a sound that we should have heard. Yet such was the case. He spoke in a low hiss that I could barely understand. For some moments he and the girl conferred together. Yussuf's hiss became like that of an angry snake.

"May the curse of Allah be upon Fen Huan, his fathers, and their fathers. And upon the children he begets. May his spirit seek hell and wither as dried dung, beneath a blaze. *O chota Missy*, that this thing should come to pass, through the fault of Yussuf! I am dishonored, and the day that I was born was an evil day, for I have failed in my duty."

Yussuf had not even had his wounds dressed. Nor had he eaten for twenty hours. He had crawled nearly two miles, to find his mistress. And he considered himself little short of a criminal because of the misfortune that had been the lot of Helen Bryce.

It made my hurts seem mighty small, by comparison. And I wondered how the soul of Coyle—who was a Christian by breed—would stack up beside that of Mohammedan Yussuf.

His coming hadn't eased our troubles. He was almost helpless, and unarmed except for the knife which he had taken from the native.

"I shall stalk the fat pig who sits by the squealing machine," he hissed, "and if

it is my fate that it should came to pass, I shall slay him."

"No, Yussuf," the girl whispered. "I heard Fen Huan order a boy to watch with him."

"Fen Huan is in the shadow of the porch," I agreed, reluctantly, "and he would see you approach. He has the eyes of a cat."

Yussuf felt of the iron lattice that ran across the window space and groaned. Except for that lattice both Helen Bryce and I would have been away from the bungalow before now. But Coyle had chosen my room with care.

"There'll be another boy to relieve the one you killed soon," I warned him.

At that he and the girl fell to whispering together. I strained my ears for sound of movement on the porch. But the whimper of the phonograph kept up. Presently I saw Yussuf press his forehead against the grating where the hand of the girl rested. Then he crawled away into the bushes.

We sat down on the cot, Helen Bryce and I, and she lit my pipe for me while I watched the sky change from purple to gray, and from gray to pink. It was early dawn, with the chill of that hour, and the mist hanging close about the Koh-i-Dar-band.

I could see her face now. It was pale, but the eyes were bright.

"Yussuf has said that he will go for aid, Mr. Weston," she said, and I saw that she had taken hope from the fact.

It didn't impress me much. Yussuf could not go far. He must be too weak to ride a horse, admitting he could steal one from the stables.

"He says it is the will of Allah that Fen Huan shall be punished to-day."

"Amen!" I responded heartily.

"And there is another thing you should know." Her head was so close to mine I could feel the soft touch of a brown curl. "This morning you will show John Coyle the tomb in the ruins."

I stared at her, not understanding.

"Don't you see?" she whispered. "It is the truth that I know the location of the tomb. The hillmen showed it to me when I was a child. Fen Huan knew that." She shivered involuntarily. "And he hoped to make me tell him, I think, when we were alone to-night—without Coyle's knowing."

The news made my pulses leap.

"You prevented him," she said, and this time she did not look at me. "And I have two brave men to help me. I thank God for them."

It was good of her to say that.

"Then we'll score on Fen Huan & Co.," I promised. "If you are willing to lead them to the tomb. Is the jade there?"

"The inner walls are built of it. The tomb is precious to the hillmen, and so far as I know, I am the only *Feringee* they have taken there."

On the face of it, that was good news. But I saw that it would not help us much. Fen Huan could not afford to release us until he had plundered the tomb. And after that I did not expect mercy from him. Fen Huan would take Helen Bryce with his caravan into China.

Knowing the mandarin as I did by now, I didn't expect he would leave me behind—or take me along. I'd most likely remain in the ruins, perhaps in the tomb. And John Coyle would keep me company—after Fen Huan had ceased to need his services. And neither of us would be very much alive.

Fen Huan was not the one to leave witnesses to his crimes.

"Lie down on the cot, Miss Bryce," I said suddenly, "and get some rest."

The growing light had just shown me what was outside the window. As I had told Yussuf, the second native had come to relieve the first. And Yussuf had stayed until then.

Two Chinese servants, with their throats cut, stretched on the grass, made a spectacle I didn't want the girl to see.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TOMB OF KINGS.

THE rain had ceased and the sun was fairly over the mountain peaks when we started across the valley to the ruins. Fen Huan, Coyle, Kallick, and the two re-

maining boys accompanied the girl and myself. The temper of our hosts had not been improved by the discovery of the dead natives.

"Those devilish hillmen," Coyle snarled, fingering his rifle. "We'll take damn good care they don't pay us another visit. Fen Huan warned me he saw a brace of the murdering beggars sneaking off into the bush!"

Coyle had not guessed that Yussuf had been the offender. But his suspicions had a result bad for us. He armed his party heavily. He and Fen Huan and Kallick had automatics in addition to their repeating rifles. The servants had rifles. And by the way they handled them, I judged they could use the weapons.

You see, I'd had a sneaking hope some of Miss Bryce's friends of the hill tribes might show up and make trouble. But we forded the river and passed through the poplars without any opposition. I stumbled along, feeling utterly miserable. Even the plucky girl was silent as we climbed the slope to the ruins.

The valley was empty and desolate behind us. From the peaks that towered over us to the stones of the river-bed, we were the only human beings afoot that morning.

Fen Huan urged us ahead callously, forcing the girl through thorns that tore at her skirt and rocks that wore through her high-heeled riding-boots. She did not complain, but kept close to me, and I tried to help her as best I could.

Both men were inflamed with lust of the wealth they expected to lay hand on in the tomb. And they jerked the girl cruelly across the rope bridge. At the further side of it Coyle posted one of the natives as a guard. Another he sent ahead at a trot to the further end of the cliff path. With two men watching the narrow trail, no one could approach the ruins.

And he took good care to keep me ahead of his party, where I couldn't put up any fight. The girl was behind me and her instructions guided me into the ruins. I hated to show Coyle and his mate what they wanted. But what else was there to do? They held the cards.

We pushed on through the echoing passages, climbing over the rock débris. Helen Bryce led the way now, and Fen Huan and Coyle followed with drawn weapons. It was cool in the ruins, but sweat stood out on Coyle's forehead, and the mandarin's hands quivered from excitement and the great overdoses of hashish that he'd consumed in the past few hours. It was the first time I'd seen him show any feeling.

One thing caused me to smile after a fashion. The girl was taking us far from the point I'd plotted on the map. I could guess approximately where that point should have been, and she conducted us to the far end of the ruins.

So I'd been wrong, and Fen Huan's calculations had been wrong. And the monastery annals—well, their meaning was unfathomable. The secrets of ancient Asia are not easily read. As for Fen Huan, perhaps he meant to deceive Coyle. I don't know. Fen Huan, also, was inscrutable.

When we came to the prayer-pillar, Helen Bryce stopped.

"This is the place," she said.

Funny that neither Fen Huan nor I had thought that the tomb might lie near the giant stone pillar of the Ladakh priests. Coyle swore under his breath as the girl stepped to the wall. Here was the remnant of an altar, of granite blocks.

"Move this away," she said coldly.

The two sprang at the altar and examined it carefully.

"By God!" muttered Coyle. "It ain't fixed to the wall."

Fen Huan clawed at the stone block, hanging his weight to it. Coyle aided him. One side of the altar moved out. From behind it came a breath of cold air. And I saw a square opening in the wall, to the height of a man's shoulders. The mandarin panted in his eagerness, tearing his smooth fingers as he drew the granite block further from its position.

Somewhere within the aperture was a light. I could see two giant candles at the end of a short flight of stone steps, leading down. Thrusting Coyle back, Fen Huan scrambled down the steps. His companion was but a pace behind.

Bending down, I looked into the tomb of the Ladakh kings. The two candles, gut-

tering in the wind, showed smooth, dark walls that reflected the faint light; and around the walls an array of grotesque images of a hundred sizes, some as large as men, some miniatures. All were of jade.

On the floor stone slabs marked the resting place of the dead.

The girl had drawn back to my side, watched by the vigilant Kallick. Her hand felt for mine and gripped it tightly, even feverishly.

"Fen Huan has found what he sought," she said.

I heard Coyle's triumphant shout echo in the cavern. The flickering candles made the shadows move weirdly.

Then out of the shadows behind the images and from the corners came half-naked bodies that chattered fiercely and flung themselves on the two in the tomb.

CHAPTER XV.

THE TABLEAU AT THE RAVINE.

I CAUGHT the gleam of knives in their hands. I heard Coyle yell in sudden fear, and one report from his revolver thundered in the cavern.

One candle fell to the floor under the rush of men that filled the tomb. The shot was echoed by screams of anger. Then out from the stairway shot the fat mandarin, his cap and button gone, and his robe torn, and his eyes wide with dread.

After him several slender, brown-faced men in gray woolen garments ran silently. They looked for all the world like earnest terriers after a great bear.

"The hillmen," cried Helen Bryce, drawing me back beside the prayer-pillar. She spoke quietly, and, looking at her, I knew she had expected this. Kallick lifted his rifle, saw the flying Fen Huan and his pursuers and fled after the mandarin. Sounds of a struggle came from the tomb.

Between two natives, Yussuf limped from the stairway and fell on his knees by the girl. His lean face was twisted, and his eyes bloodshot.

"*Eh, chota Missy,*" he murmured, "as Allah willed and as you ordered, this thing has come to pass. I was very weak, but they carried me from the Koh-i-Darband to the *gumbaz*, and my longing for atonement gave me strength to tell to these low-born what must be done. Eh, my sorrow is as the sorrow of one who has been defiled, because of what was done to you—"

Some of the wolflike forms stopped to stare at us, and I stepped in front of the girl, fearing danger. But she touched my shoulder.

"These men are of the hill tribes, Mr. Weston," she whispered. "They will not touch me, or those who are with me—"

"*Sahib,*" implored Yussuf, "go after the fat serpent of China, where he flees. *Aie,* it is my fate that I cannot see what is done to him. But you can see, and tell me how he dies—"

I left the chamber of the prayer-wheel and sought the path along the cliff. By running I was able to come upon the tableau at the ravine.

The surprise planned by Yussuf and his friends had been complete. Even the vigilance of Coyle and the mandarin had been forgotten momentarily when they forced their way into the tomb. And now Fen Huan and Kallick, fleeing down the cliff path with the natives at their heels, prevented the guard at the rope bridge from using his rifle. Kallick had had no chance to use his until now.

The *shikari* was a cool beggar, though. He whirled and knelt in his tracks by the rope bridge, and shot twice, dropping two hillmen to the path. The others hesitated.

The guard had seen what was happening and had swarmed across the rope, by his hands and vanished up the further path. Fen Huan, with a glance over his shoulder, seized the loop attached to the rope, and started to haul his bulk to safety. But the hard-pressed Kallick was after him instantly. The rope bent ominously under their weight, and Fen Huan gave a squeal of fear.

I don't know if, in his panic, he thought Kallick was attacking him, or if he feared the rotting rope would not bear the two of them. Fen Huan whipped a knife from his sleeve, and, with teeth bared in a snarl, struck at Kallick.

The hillmen had remained perforce at

the rope's end. They had no weapons but knives. Kallick's rifle he had tossed down into the torrent that boiled through the ravine. And the rope would not bear another man.

Fen Huan's first thrust ripped across the *shikari's* tunic, as nearly as I could see. Then Kallick released one hand from the rope and plucked a curved dagger from his girdle.

Fen Huan had the advantage of position, with two arms free. But Kallick had the agility of a striking snake. I saw the mandarin lean forward and strike at the hand by which Kallick clung to the rope. He overreached, and the *shikari's* teeth gripped his sleeve.

I could see the wild dismay that overspread the oval face of Fen Huan—saw his eyes widen, and his cheeks twist in pain as the knife of the *shikari* thrust into his silk robe, just above the girdle.

The mandarin swayed in the loop, with idiotic dismay mirrored in his face. The hillmen chattered excitedly as he toppled forward, overbalanced, and shot down into the torrent several hundred feet below.

I saw a dark splotch, made by his wet robe, as the body swept down the stream and passed from view.

Kallick had disappeared down the further cliff path with the hillmen, who swarmed across the rope after him. I don't know if they caught him. Probably they did. But then Kallick was a shrewd customer and he may have escaped.

By noon that day Helen Bryce and I had been carried, with Yussuf, back to the Koh-i-Darband, in native hammocks. Within three hours we'd broken into Coyle's desk, found the purloined spark-plugs, repaired the Robles, and were driving down the valley roads toward civilization.

We were anxious to get a doctor for the Mohammedan. But what I told Yussuf of the death of Fen Huan seemed to help that cold-blooded individual more than drugs. He pondered on it, paying no heed to the jouncing of the car that made my head ache.

"It is written in the Koran, *sahib,*" he observed thoughtfully, "that what the evil store up for themselves they shall taste. *Inshallah!*"

Which made the end of my trip to the Koh-i-Darband.

Back in the U. S. A. I'm working hard and pulling the strings to get the Indian agency for the Robles car. I told the company India was a great field for motor-cars. It is. But I didn't say anything about Helen Bryce being there. Nor about a quarter-million dollars' worth of rare jade that's in a certain tomb in the hills. After what happened to Fen Huan I think treasure-hunters will be shy of that tomb.

Coyle? Well, I had a letter from Helen Bryce, and among other things that I will not mention, it said something about Coyle in the postscript. You see, she had felt it her duty to report that natives had attacked him, as he was a white man.

She said that Yussuf heard a rumor from the hills. It was that a white man was held prisoner by the natives of the Kashmir border.

And this white man was compelled to sit each day and turn a large stone prayer-pillar in one of the shrines.

When he has turned that prayer-pillar a hundred and nine thousand times he will be freed.

I don't know how true this is. But if it's so, there's no denying that some Oriental heathens have a sense of humor—if not justice.

(The End.)

A SHORT STORY WITH ALL THE MEAT OF A NOVEL IN IT!

"THE SNARE"

By William Merriam Rouse

SEPTEMBER 20

A Case of Applied Chemistry

by Frederick Walworth Brown

THIS is a story of a research chemist. That sounds to most people like a tale of a *megotherium giganticus*, no doubt, but that is the fault of most people and not mine.

Like Gaul, chemists are divisible into three parts; not each chemist, but the whole tribe. These three parts are the two extremes and the middle. At one extreme are the men who proudly announce that they make their heads do the work of their hands. Confronted with a chemical problem they study the literature, work out the thermodynamics to seventeen places of decimals, determine the vapor pressures, and triumphantly announce the result without coming near enough to a laboratory to get the odor thereof. They do not get very far, because no head can stand the strain.

At the other extreme is the man who is too lazy to work out the theory of his problem in advance, but who prefers to go into the laboratory and blunder along on the cut-and-dry method, hoping to strike something. Once in about three hundred and forty-five years he may hit the mark if his luck is good.

In the middle is the man who digs at the theory of his problem till he arrives at a working hypothesis, and then proceeds to the laboratory and puts that working hypothesis through its paces to make sure it is not blind or spavined or affected with the heaves. It is the man in the middle who puts things across, and wakes us all up with the information that he has found a way to see through a board, or make a genuine ruby out of clay and a pinch of chrome, or to take some of this thin stuff called air and make a bucketful of fixed nitrogen that you can pick up and sift through your fingers like sand and sell for so much a pound.

Bill was one of the men in the middle, but his situation was this: He was employed by Millard, Jenkins & Co., a big concern, the responsible head of which was old man Millard, who had not had a fresh idea for seventeen years, and was case-hardened against the possibility of admitting one. Bill and his laboratory occupied a corner of the top floor of the mill, and in the estimation of old man Millard were just about as important as the mill cat. The cat caught an occasional rat, and Bill caught an occasional mistake in mill practise. But as far as expecting any assistance in improving the operations or pointing out additional possibilities in the handling of their raw material, old man Millard would have called on the cat quite as quickly as on Bill. In other words, Bill was a check on the operations, and was paid accordingly.

Of course he ought to have got out and hunted up another and a better position. But ten years earlier, on the strength of

the Millard, Jenkins & Co. job, he had acquired a wife, and between them he and Maggie had acquired William, Jr., and Margaret and James Henry and small Helen, and whenever Bill thought of quitting the sure pay-check in hand for the imaginary one in the bush, he had a faint feeling in the pit of his stomach.

When the children were in bed at night, he and Maggie would sit down together and figure on the bills to see whether they could squeeze out a pair of shoes for James Henry this month, or whether it would be necessary to pray that the warm weather continue so that he could run barefoot for another thirty days. Maggie was getting little wrinkles round her eyes from trying to see Bill's pay as it flashed past and was gone each month, and Bill's hair was growing thin on top from meditatively scratching his head over the incomprehensible intricacies of the game of income and outgo.

Then one day Bill had a great idea. When it flashed on him out of the blue void it was so obvious to his chemically trained mind that at first he did not recognize its greatness.

The truth was that Millard, Jenkins & Co. were one of the great army of American manufacturers who still practise the rule of thumb methods. Old Millard, away back about the time of the discovery of printing, had devised a process, largely by blind luck, for producing a staple article, and had put up a small plant. Thanks to unlimited raw material, and a growing and prosperous population, the business had increased to its present large proportions.

But did growth bring improvements or refinements in the process? Not so. To old Millard his process in its integrity was holy. To alter it in any particular would be sacrilege, to suggest that an alteration might improve it was blasphemous heterodoxy. Part of Bill's job was to see that there was no deviation or shadow of turning from the path laid down by the Millard patent.

And now came Bill with his bald head gently seething with the dead-sure certainty that he had a method, so obvious as to be ridiculous; that would not only turn the Millard process wrong side out, but would make two dollars grow in the mill where only one had grown before.

Thirty minutes after the great idea slid out of the unknown into his consciousness, he had figured out the theory of it on paper, and two hours later had run the process through on a laboratory scale. It worked, just as he had known it must, and instead of one valuable end product he had two, the second of which the Millard process was passing daily down the sewer of the plant to kill the fish in the river.

Bill's foot was on the sill of the general manager's office, and on his tongue was an invitation to ascend to the laboratory and witness a demonstration, when he had a second great idea.

Having been married ten years, Bill knew the value of feminine counsel. It would be well to consult Maggie before going further. He reversed and returned to his top floor corner and spent the rest of the day planning how his process could be fitted into the plant with the least possible scrapping of valuable machinery and the smallest expenditure for new.

That night he ate his dinner with the preoccupation normal to a scientist, but quite foreign to his usual mood. He went through the accustomed romp with the children and helped get them to bed, but Maggie saw that his mind was elsewhere.

"Anything gone wrong to-day?" she asked when they were alone.

"Not a thing," he answered; "but, girl, listen. I've tumbled on something big, and I don't know just what to do with it." He explained the matter to her in an untechnical way and looked at her expectantly.

"Well?" she said.

"Seems to me we ought to get something out of it," he went on, "and if I explain it to Bailey, the manager, we won't get a thing."

The fine lines around Maggie's eyes grew a little deeper. "Why not?" she asked.

"Because they know I'm married and have a family and can't afford to act independent."

"Suppose you should offer it to them provided they would raise your salary," suggested Maggie.

"To offer it I'd have to explain it, and

it is such an obvious thing, once you see it, they could simply go ahead and use it and give me the laugh."

"But they wouldn't, would they?"

"Yes," said Bill, "I think that's just exactly what they would do."

"Are there any other firms who could use it?"

"Yes. They're little fellows, though."

"Why don't you talk to John Stone about it?"

"That's a good idea. I'll run in and see him to-morrow."

John Stone, attorney at law and classmate of Bill's at the university, sat comfortably in a mahogany chair behind a mahogany desk and greeted the somewhat seedy chemist with the cheerful condescension of the successful toward the less successful. Bill explained, and John Stone leaned forward on the polished desk with an interest that seemed to grow.

"You're dead sure the thing will work, Bill?" he asked finally.

"Oh, absolutely," said Bill.

"Then you do as I tell you and we'll make that old bluegill Millard yell for mercy before we're done with him. I've been laying for him for ten years, and now the Lord hath delivered him into my hand. Blessed is the patient waiter, for he shall receive his tip. That's me, Bill. Millard skinned me out of a five-hundred-dollar fee when I had just begun to practise and needed every dollar to put food in my stomach. Fact. Actual food, by thunder! Cheated me out of it and laughed in my face. It's really dangerous to laugh at a starving man. If it hadn't been for the personal inconvenience of it I'd have killed him.

"Now if this thing of yours is within gunshot of what you claim, we can make him squeal, and we'll do that same little thing. You leave it to me. We'll have to patent it first. Suppose I supply the money and the legal services and we divide fifty-fifty?"

"All right, John, that's mighty good of you," said Bill gratefully.

John Stone hesitated a moment.

"Bill," he went on then, "you need a guardian. I can't rob you the way I ought to. We'll make it seventy-five to you and twenty-five to me. I'll draw the papers, and you get back to the laboratory and dismantle that apparatus and destroy your notes. We don't want those buzzards getting wise to this before we get it covered up."

Bill obeyed orders, and several months passed. Maggie built air castles composed largely of clothes for Bill and the children, while Bill's castles ran to furs and jewelry for Maggie, and perhaps—oh, wild extravagance—a cheap car into which he could pack the family on Sunday afternoons and joyride over the landscape. Ultimately the wheels of officialdom at Washington, revolving with the slow certainty of ponderous machinery, ground out the patent.

"Now," said John Stone, as he placed the signed and sealed document in Bill's hands; "now the holy inquisition gets busy with old man Millard. Have you any suggestions?"

"I suppose the thing to do is to offer it to them and see what they'll give for it."

"No, son," said John Stone. "This is a thumb-screw and joint-rack proposition. They will give for it what we decide it is worth. They will have nothing to do about it till it comes to signing the check. Ever hear of Conrad Jones & Co.?"

"Yes, they're our competitors in a small way. They started up when Millard's basic patents ran out, but they never have been able to get much of the business."

"How about Hallway & Thomas?"

"Very much the same is true of them."

"Quite so," said John Stone. "I guess it would be rather worth while for Millard to keep this invention out of their hands, no?"

"That's what Maggie suggested," said Bill. "I hadn't thought much about it myself."

"No, Bill, you wouldn't," said John Stone. "Would it be worth one hundred thousand dollars cash down and a royalty of fifteen per cent of the net profits for Millard to own exclusive rights to this invention?"

Bill looked at him in silent, stupefied amazement.

"I think it would," went on John Stone.

"Millard does a million dollar gross business. I said we'd make him squeal, didn't I?"

"But the thing isn't worth that much, is it?" asked Bill in a bewildered tone. "I had thought of a raise in salary, perhaps, or something like that, you know."

"You say you *thought*," said John Stone. "Don't dignify your mental processes, outside the domain of chemistry, by any such term, Bill. Now, leave this to me. If Millard takes our offer he can put Conrad Jones and Hallway & Thomas out of business in six months. If he doesn't take it maybe one of the others will. If none of them will, we'll organize a company and put all of them in the ash-can. You go on with your chemistry and leave this to me. But first here's a contract to sign so I can't cheat you out of your share when it's paid over. You haven't even noticed that the patent's in my name. But it's all right. The contract covers that, too."

Two days later, Bailey, general manager of Millard, Jenkins & Co., walked into Bill's laboratory and slapped a letter down on the table.

"Read that," he said.

Bill caught sight of John Stone's letterhead and read eagerly. The letter stated that Mr. Stone owned a patent which might possibly be of interest to Millard, Jenkins & Co. A concise description of the new process followed. If they wished to consider a proposal for the exclusive use of the process, Mr. Stone would be glad to discuss the matter further. A reply within three days was requested, and if he did not hear from them within that time he would open negotiations with other firms.

"What do you think of that?" demanded Bailey.

"It ought to work," said Bill.

"Work!" spat out Bailey. "Of course it 'll work. But what do you think we pay you for? You call yourself a chemist, and you work around here for ten years and then let some outsider discover a thing like that and spring it on us. I guess we've wasted enough good money on you. You're fired, right now. You're the worst excuse for a chemist I ever met. You're fired."

"You mean I'm to go," said Bill in a dazed whisper.

"Clear out inside of thirty minutes or I'll have you thrown out, see?" said Bailey, and slammed the door behind him.

"Fine, finer, finest," commented John Stone when Bill pantingly told him the latest development. "Got their goat the very first crack. Also, we'll sue 'em for breach of contract. Had a contract with 'em, didn't you?"

"No," said Bill. "That is, nothing in writing."

"All right, we'll just hold it against them. It 'll mean one more twist of the screw when we're wringing the squeals out of them. Millard has entered into Bailey, and he's running down a steep place into the sea. Get that? Pretty neat, eh? Bet I hear from them to-morrow."

The first mail brought a letter suggesting a conference at Millard, Jenkins & Co.'s office. John Stone replied by stating that he would meet their representatives in his own office at two that afternoon, or failing this, he would take immediate steps to interest others in the patent. He had this reply delivered by messenger, and at two Mr. Millard, Mr. Jenkins, and Mr. Bailey appeared and were affably received.

John Stone seated them in his inner office and smiled the smile of the spider who has caught three flies with one puff of wind.

"I think we need no preliminaries," he began. "We can get down to business at once. I gather that you are interested in my proposal or you would not be here. Mr. Millard and I have had some previous dealings and have not—er—eaten out of the same dish, so to speak, for some years."

"What are your terms?" inquired Millard hastily.

"I was coming to them," said John Stone. "Let me state the matter clearly. The firm having exclusive control of this patent can put its competitors out of business. It means a saving of from thirty-five to forty per cent. You have already done your own figuring, no doubt. Am I correct?"

Bailey glanced sidewise at Jenkins. Jenkins passed, with a glance at Millard.

"Substantially," said Millard.

"Exactly. Then you see where you get off," said John Stone. "You either take it or you leave it. If you take it you have everybody on the hip. If you leave it—" He waved his hands, palms up, and raised his eyebrows. "Assignment for benefit of creditors. Six months at the outside."

"We came to talk business, Mr. Stone," said Millard testily. "What are your terms?"

"So you see," went on John Stone evenly, "this is rather a valuable proposition. In fact, a vital proposition. I realize the situation fully, and owning the patent, I might hold you up, so to speak. But," he looked Millard straight in the eye, "I am honest. I take advantage of no man, big or little. I never yet squeezed a poor man because he had not the means to fight me—"

"This is really quite beside the point," cut in Millard. "Come to your terms. That is all we are interested in."

"And I am interested in having you understand my position very thoroughly," said John Stone. "I once did some legal work for a client. It was a difficult job, and I worked hard at it. I was pretty green at the time, and I trusted the fellow's honesty. When it came time to collect my fee, he laughed in my face, and as a matter of fact, the fee is yet unpaid. Now I wouldn't do a thing like that. I am too confoundedly honest to get rich that way. Do you get my point?"

"If you couldn't collect," said Millard, "it seems likely the fee had not been legally earned."

"That is precisely what he told me. He said, in fact, to go ahead and collect it, and I told him I certainly would if we both lived long enough. The terms for the exclusive rights to use this patent are $102,250.03 cash in hand, and a royalty of twenty per cent of the net profits of the business."

The three stared for perhaps ten seconds and then Millard rose as though something had stung him.

"That is simply ridiculous," he stormed. "Preposterous! I won't listen to any more. This is blackmail!"

"Did you say blackmail?" broke in John Stone. "That statement is slander. A penalty attaches to slander. We'll assess it right now at one thousand dollars, and tack it on the price of the patent."

"Keep your patent," shouted Millard. "I'll show you you can't hold me up, you half-baked little shyster."

"Take it or leave it," said John Stone. "I must have your answer by three tomorrow afternoon."

The angry three filed out and Stone picked up his telephone and made an engagement to meet Mr. Conrad Jones within thirty minutes. He then called Mr. Arthur Thomas, president of Hallway & Thomas, and arranged to see him in an hour and a half. Closeted with Mr. Jones, he explained the patent, and pointed out how effectually it would close out the Jones company if a competitor secured it.

"You're not doing a heavy business as it is. You won't do any at all if Millard, Jenkins & Co. secure exclusive rights to this thing," he said.

"What are your terms for the exclusive rights?" asked Jones.

"I am not ready to talk terms," said John Stone. "I came to give you the facts and let you think it over. There is no hurry. I'll see you again."

He had a similar interview with Thomas, and with a satisfied smile called it a day and went home. He arrived at his office next morning to find that both Jones and Thomas had already telephoned requesting interviews. Instead of communicating with them, he notified his clerk that he was not to be disturbed, and spent the morning drawing the papers for the incorporation of the International Products Company, the list of incorporators comprising the names of himself, Bill, Jones, Thomas, and Millard.

At noon he called Mr. Jones, expressed regret at not being able to communicate sooner, and found that gentleman exceedingly eager to know his terms. He told Mr. Jones that matters had moved very rapidly since the day before, and that it now seemed the better arrangement to form a new company, to build a plant, and exploit the patent. Possibly he hinted they

might come to terms by which the Jones interests would be included in the new concern, and at that point he rang off and left Jones with a new set of ideas to think over. He then called Thomas and gave him a similar line of talk.

At twenty minutes to three Mr. Jenkins called him, and in a very conciliatory tone asked if he might have an immediate interview in behalf of his firm. He arrived a few minutes later.

"Mr. Stone," he said, "I have come expressly to correct the impression I fear we left with you yesterday. Mr. Millard is—well—of rather a—er—peppery disposition. He—that is—flies off the handle with very little provocation. Personally I see much justice in your proposal. The figures rather staggered us at first, but, for myself, I may say that I think we can come to terms. In fact, if you can extend the time, say for a week, I think we can bring Mr. Millard to see the advisability of closing with you."

"Sorry, Mr. Jenkins," said John Stone, "but my proposal expires definitely at three. If I do not have your unqualified acceptance in the next seven minutes I have already taken the necessary steps to proceed at once in another direction."

"But that is impossible," declared Jenkins earnestly. "To tell you the truth, I've spent all day arguing with Mr. Millard, and the utmost concession I could get was to come around here and see what I could do."

"All right," said John Stone smoothly. "I'd prefer to include you people in my plans. It seems a pity to close out such a business, but I cannot be hampered by Mr. Millard's caprices. The option will expire in three minutes."

"Then there is nothing I can do?" almost wept Mr. Jenkins.

"Oh, yes," said John Stone. "Wait one minute more and I'll explain."

He pulled out his watch and held it while the halting second hand made its revolution. As it completed the round the clock in the outer office sounded the hour, and through the open window came the solemn three strokes from the tower of the Merchants and Bankers Security Building across the square. John Stone slipped his watch into his pocket.

"The option has now expired," he announced, "and we take a fresh start. We shall incorporate the International Products Company at once to take over and operate the Conrad Jones & Co. and the Hallway & Thomas plants, using our patents. If you people want to be included, it will be comparatively easy.

"First, Millard pays me one thousand dollars on account of an old debt with interest to date. Second, he pays me one thousand dollars on account of slanderous statements made yesterday in your hearing. Third, the firm of Millard, Jenkins & Co. pays to William Cromwell, whom you discharged some days ago, and who happens to be a friend of mine, $1,250.03, being his salary for the remainder of the year. These amounts must be paid in advance of any further negotiations.

"Once these accounts are definitely settled, Millard, Jenkins & Co. will be admitted to the International on the following terms; they to turn over their plant and sufficient cash to effect the necessary alterations in the equipment to enable the new company to operate the plant by the new process, and in return they to receive International Products Company shares to the extent of thirty-five per cent of the total stock of the new company. How does that strike you?"

"Did I understand you to say that Hallway & Thomas and Conrad Jones & Co. have accepted similar terms," asked Jenkins meekly.

"What else could they do? All the papers will be signed to-morrow morning."

"May I ask what interest they will have in the new concern?"

"Fifteen per cent to Conrad Jones & Co., and ten per cent to Hallway & Thomas on the same terms I have offered to you. The remaining forty per cent goes to me as the owner of the patent. Again Mr. Jenkins, I say to you as I said yesterday, take it or leave it. This thing is bigger than Millard, Jenkins & Co. ever thought of being, and it is going through whether Millard, Jenkins & Co. comes in

out of the wet or stays out to be drowned. I can give you till eleven to-morrow morning to reach a decision. If at that hour I have your check for $3,250.03, to cover the three items first mentioned, we will consider the deal closed."

Maggie was preparing dinner when Bill burst in. William, Jr., and James Henry were holding a private and perfectly good-natured riot under the dining-room table, Margaret was cutting paper dolls, and the baby was hanging to Maggie's skirt and bewailing the fact that dinner-time had not arrived. Upon this scene of domestic felicity burst Bill, waving a slip of pink paper.

The boys suspended hostilities, and each encircled a parental leg and started upward as though he had been a double-trunked tree. Margaret seized his free hand, Helen forsook her mother and toddled toward him with upraised arms, and Maggie turned from her cooking to smile at the sight. Bill was fairly popular at home.

But for once Bill himself failed to play his part. He narrowly missed stepping on the unnoticed baby, he shook off Margaret's clutch, and he admonished the "young pirates" swarming up his trouser legs to desist under penalty of dire catastrophe. Freed, he rushed to Maggie.

"Look here," he shouted. "How about that?"

It was a check for $1,250.03.

"That's my salary from Millard for the rest of the year. John Stone got it out of them. I don't know how. And Estea, we own thirty per cent of the stock in a company to use my patent, and everybody's in it, and John Stone says it 'll mean twenty-five thousand dollars a year easy."

The potatoes burned, and the coffee boiled over, and the baby wailed while he explained and explained and explained. And the end of the whole matter found Maggie's head on Bill's shoulder while she wept and laughed and finally said:

"I knew you could do it, Billy boy. I always knew you'd do something big and wonderful some day, and now you've done it."

And since it is always best to accept a woman's decisions without comment, I have called this the story of a research chemist and left out the vengeance-seeking attorney at law.

WHEN THE SHIPS COME IN

NOW from the gray and snarling seas
Do the buffeted ships sail in
They have known the taste of the briny lees,
And the wolfish tempest's din.

In the harbor, anchored, they drift and swing,
And their sails are rent and soiled;
And the velvety runes of breezes sing
Of the terrors faced and foiled.

Though the hulls are scarred with wounds of storm,
The holds are laden deep
With gold that is heavy and tawny warm,
The treasure that victors reap.

And the sailors, home from the restless tide,
Bronzed brown by the winds that blew,
Tread land—while their wistful eyes turn wide
To the wastes where petrels flew.

Olin Lyman.

Luck

by John Frederick

Author of "The Hammer," "The Higher Strain," etc.

CHAPTER XXV.

JACQUELINE WAITS.

JACQUELINE ran between and caught the hand of her father, crying:

"Are you going to finish the work of McGurk before he has a chance to start it? He hunted the rest down one by one. Dad, if you put out Pierre what is left? Can you face that devil alone?"

And the old man groaned: "But it's his luck that's ruined me. It's his damned luck which has broken up the finest fellowship that ever mocked at law on the ranges. Oh, Jack, the heart in me's broken. I wish to God that I lay where Gandil lies. What's the use of fighting any longer? No man can stand up against McGurk!"

And the cold which had come in the blood of Pierre agreed with him. He was a slayer of men, but McGurk was a devil incarnate. His father had died at the hand of this lone rider; it was fitting, it was fate that he himself should die in the same way. The girl looked from face to face, and sensed their despondency. It seemed that their fear gave her the greater courage. Her face flushed as she stood glaring her scorn.

"The yellow streak took a long time in showin', but it's in you, all right, Pierre le Rouge."

"You've hated me ever since the dance, Jack. Why?"

"Because I knew you were yellow—like this!"

He shrugged his shoulders like one who gives up the fight against a woman, and seeing it, she changed suddenly and made a gesture with both hands toward him, a sudden gesture filled with grace and a queer tenderness.

She said: "Pierre, have you forgotten that when you were only a boy you stood up to McGurk and drew blood from him? Are you afraid of him now?"

"I'll take my chance with any man—but McGurk—"

"He has no cross to bring him luck."

"Aye, and he has no friends for that luck to ruin. Look at Gandil, Jack, and then speak to me of the cross."

"Pierre, that first time you met you almost beat him to the draw. Oh, if I were a man, I'd— Pierre, it was to get McGurk that you rode out to the range. You've been here six years, and McGurk is still alive, and now you're ready to run from his shadow."

"Run?" he said hotly. "I swear to God that as I stand here I've no fear of death and no hope for the life ahead."

She sneered: "You're white while you say it. Your will may be brave, but your blood's a coward, Pierre. It deserts you."

"Jack, you devil incarnate—"

"Aye, you can threaten me safely. But if McGurk were here—"

"Let him come."

"Pierre!"

"I mean it."

"Then give me one promise."

"A thousand of 'em."

"Let me hunt him with you."

He stared at her with a mute wonder. She had never been so beautiful.

"Jack, what a heart you have! If you were a man we could rule the mountains, you and I."

"Even as I am, what prevents us, Pierre?"

And looking at her he forgot the sorrow which had been his ever since he looked up

This story began in The Argosy for August 9.

to the face framed with red-gold hair and the dark tree behind and the cold stars steady above it. It would come to him again, but now it was gone, and he murmured, smiling: "I wonder?"

They made their plans that night, sitting all three together. It was better to go out and hunt the hunter than to wait there and be tracked down. Jack, for she insisted on it, would ride out with Pierre the next morning and hunt through the hills for the hiding-place of McGurk.

Some covert he must have, so as to be near his victims. Nothing else could explain the ease with which he kept on their traces. They would take the trail, and Jim Boone, no longer agile enough to be effective on the trail, would guard the house and the body of Gandil in it.

There was little danger that even McGurk would try to rush a hostile house, but they took no chances. The guns of Jim Boone were given a thorough overhauling, and he wore as usual at his belt the heavy-handled hunting knife, a deadly weapon in a hand-to-hand fight. Thus equipped, they left him and took the trail.

They had not ridden a hundred yards when a whistle followed them, the familiar whistle of the gang. They reined short and saw big Dick Wilbur riding his bay after them, but at some distance he halted and shouted: "Pierre!"

"He's come back to us!" cried Jack.

"No. It's only some message."

"Do you know?"

"Yes. Stay here. This is for me alone."

And he rode back to Wilbur, who swung his horse close alongside. However hard he had followed in the pursuit of happiness and the golden hair of Mary Brown, his face was drawn with lines of age and his eyes circled with shadows.

He said: "I've kept close on her trail, Pierre, and the nearest she has come to kindness has been to send me with a message back to you."

He laughed without mirth, and the sound stopped abruptly.

"This is the message in her own words: 'I love him, Dick, and there's nothing in the world for me without him. Bring him back to me. I don't care how; but bring him back.' So tell Jack to ride the trail alone to-day and go back with me. I give her up, not freely, but because I know there's no hope for me."

But Pierre answered: "Wherever I've gone there's been luck for me and hell for every one around me. I lived with a priest, Dick, and left him when I was nearly old enough to begin repaying his care. I came South and found a father and lost him the same day. I gambled for money with which to bury him, and a man died that night and another was hurt. I escaped from the town by riding a horse to death. I was nearly killed in a landslide, and now the men who saved me from that are done for.

"It's all one story, the same over and over. Can I carry a fortune like that back to her? Dick, it would haunt me by day and by night. She would be the next. I know it as I know that I'm sitting in the saddle here. That's my answer. Carry it back to her."

"I won't lie and tell you I'm sorry, because I'm a fool and still have a ghost of a hope, but this will be hard news to tell her, and I'd rather give five years of life than face the look that will come in her eyes."

"I know it, Dick."

"But this is final?"

"It is."

"Then good-by again, and—God bless you, Pierre."

"And you, old fellow."

They swerved their horses in opposite directions and galloped apart.

"It was nothing," said Pierre to Jack, when he came up with her and drew his horse down to a trot. But he knew that she had read his mind, and for an hour they could not look each other in the face.

But all day through the mazes of cañon and hill and rolling ground they searched patiently. There was no cranny in the rocks too small for them to reconnoiter with caution. There was no group of trees they did not examine.

Yet it was not strange that they failed. In the space of every square mile there were a hundred hiding-places which might have served McGurk. It would have taken a

month to comb the country. They had only a day, and left the result to chance, but chance failed them. When the shadows commenced to swing across the gullies they turned back and rode with downward heads, silent.

One hill lay between them and the old ranch-house which had been the headquarters for their gang so many days, when they saw a faint drift of smoke across the sky—not a thin column of smoke such as rises from a chimney, but a broad stream of pale mist, as if a dozen chimneys were spouting wood-smoke at once.

They exchanged glances and spurred their horses up the last slope. As always in a short spurt, the long-legged black of Jacqueline outdistanced the cream-colored mare, and it was she who first topped the rise of land. The girl whirled in her saddle with raised arm, screamed back at Pierre, and rode on at a still more furious pace.

What he saw when he reached a corresponding position was the ranch-house wreathed in smoke, and through all the lower window was the red dance of flames. Before him fled Jacqueline with all the speed of the black. He loosened the reins, spoke to the mare, and she responded with a mighty rush. Even that tearing pace could not quite take him up to the girl, but he flung himself from the saddle and was at her side when she ran across the smoking veranda and wrenched at the front door.

The whole frame gave back at her, and as Pierre snatched her to one side the doorway fell crashing on the porch, while a mighty volume of smoke burst out at them like a puff from the pit.

They stood sputtering, coughing, and choking, and when they could look again they saw a solid wall of red flame, thick, impenetrable, shuddering with the breath of the wind.

While they stared a stronger breath of that wind tore the wall of flames apart, driving it back in a raging tide to either side. The fire had circled the walls of the entire room, but it had scarcely encroached on the center, and there, seated at the table, was Boone.

He had scarcely changed from the position in which they last saw him, save that he was fallen somewhat deeper in the chair, his head resting against the top of the back. He greeted them, through that infernal furnace, with laughter, and wide, steady eyes. At least it seemed laughter, for the mouth was agape and the lips grinned back, but there was no sound from the lips and no light in the fixed eyes.

Laughter indeed it was, but it was the laughter of death, as if the soul of the man, in dying, recognized its natural wild element and had burst into convulsive mirth. So he sat there, untouched as yet by the wide river of fire, chuckling at his destiny. The wall of fire closed across the doorway again and the work of red ruin went on with a crashing of timbers from the upper part of the building.

As that living wall shut solidly, Jacqueline leaped forward, shouting, like a man, words of hope and rescue; Pierre caught her barely in time—a precarious grasp on the wrist from which she nearly wrenched herself free and gained the entrance to the fire. But the jerk threw her off balance for the least fraction of an instant, and the next moment she was safe in his arms.

Safe? He might as well have held a wildcat, or captured with his bare hands a wild eagle, strong of talon and beak. She tore and raged in a wild fury.

"Pierre, coward, devil!"

"Steady, Jack!"

"Are you going to let him die?"

"Don't you see? He's already dead."

"You lie. You only fear the fire!"

"I tell you, McGurk has been here before us."

Her arm was freed by a twisting effort and she beat him furiously across the face. One blow cut his lip and a steady trickle of hot blood left a taste of salt in his mouth.

"You young fiend!" he cried, and grasped both her wrists with a crushing force.

She leaned and gnashed at his hands, but he whirled her about and held her from behind, impotent, raging still.

"A hundred McGurks could never have killed him!"

There was a sharp explosion from the midst of the fire.

"See! He's fighting against his death!"

"No! No! It's only the falling of a timber!"

Yet with a panic at his heart he knew that it was the sharp crack of a firearm.

"Liar again! Pierre, for God's sake, do something for him. Father! He's fighting for his life!"

Another and another explosion from the midst of the fire. He understood then.

"The flames have reached his guns. That's all, Jack. Don't you see? We'd be throwing ourselves away to run into those flames."

Realization came to her at last. A heavy weight slumped down suddenly over his arms. He held her easily, lightly. Her head had tilted back, and the red flare of the fire beat across her face and throat. The roar of the flames shut out all other thought of the world and cast a wide inferno of light around them.

Higher and higher rose the fires, and the wind cut off great fragments and hurried them off into the night, blowing them, it seemed, straight up against the piled thunder of the clouds. Then the roof sagged, swayed, and fell crashing, while a vast cloud of sparks and livid fires shot up a hundred feet into the air. It was as if the soul of old Boone had departed in that final flare.

It started the girl into sudden life, surprising Pierre, so that she managed to wrench herself free and ran from him. He sprang after her with a shout, fearing that in her hysteria she might fling herself into the fire, but that was not her purpose. Straight to the black horse she ran, swung into the saddle with the ease of a man, and rode furiously off through the falling of the night.

He watched her with a curious closing of loneliness like a hand about his heart. He had failed, and because of that failure even Jacqueline was leaving him. It was strange, for since the loss of the girl of the yellow hair and those deep blue eyes, he had never dreamed that another thing in life could pain him.

So at length he mounted the mare again and rode slowly down the hill and out toward the distant ranges, trotting mile after mile with downward head, not caring even if McGurk should cross him, for surely this was the final end of the world to Pierre le Rouge.

About midnight he halted at last, for the uneasy sway of the mare showed that she was nearly dead on her feet with weariness. He found a convenient place for a camp, built his fire, and wrapped his blanket about him without thinking of food.

He never knew how long he sat there, for his thoughts circled the world and back again and found all a prospect of desert before him and behind, until a sound, a vague sound out of the night startled him into alertness. He slipped from beside the fire and into the shadow of a steep rock, watching with eyes that almost pierced the dark on all sides.

And there he saw her creeping up on the outskirts of the firelight, prone on her hands and knees, dragging herself up like a young wildcat hunting prey; it was the glimmer of her eyes that he caught first through the gloom. A cold thought came to him that she had returned with her gun ready.

Inch by inch she came closer, and now he was aware of her restless glances probing on all sides of the camp-fire. Silence—only the crackling of a pitchy stick. And then he heard a muffled sound, soft, soft as the beating of a heart in the night, and regularly pulsing. It hurt him infinitely, and he called gently: "Jack, why are you weeping?"

She started up with her fingers twisted at the butt of her gun.

"It's a lie," called a tremulous voice. "Why should I weep?"

And then she ran to him.

"Oh, Pierre, I thought you were gone!"

That silence which came between them was thick with understanding greater than speech. He said at last:

"I've made my plan. I am going straight for the higher mountains and try to shake McGurk off my trail. There's one chance in ten I may succeed, and if I do then I'll wait for my chance and come down on him, for sooner or later we have to fight this out to the end."

"I know a place he could never find," said Jacqueline. "The old cabin in the gulley between the Twin Bears. We'll start for it to-night."

"Not we," he answered. "Jack, here's the end of our riding together."

She frowned with puzzled wonder.

He explained: "One man is stronger than a dozen. That's the strength of McGurk—that he rides alone. He's finished your father's men. There's only Wilbur left, and Wilbur will go next—then me!"

She stretched her hands to him. She seemed to be pleading for her very life.

"But if he finds us and has to fight us both—I shoot as straight as a man, Pierre!"

"Straighter than most. And you're a better pal than any I've ever ridden with. But I must go alone. It's only a lone wolf that will ever bring down McGurk. Think how he's rounded us up like a herd of cattle and brought us down one by one."

"By getting each man alone and killing him from behind."

"From the front, Jack. No, he's fought square with each one. The wounds of Black Gandil were all in front, and when McGurk and I meet it's going to be face to face."

Her tone changed, softened: "And what of me, Pierre?"

"You have to leave this life. Go down to the city, Jack. Live like a woman; marry some lucky fellow; be happy."

"Can you leave me so easily?"

"No, it's hard, devilish hard to part with a pal like you, Jack; but all the rest of my life I've got hard things to face, partner."

"Partner!" she repeated with an indescribable emphasis. "Pierre, I can't leave you."

"Why?"

"I'm afraid to go. Let me stay!"

He said gloomily: "No good will come of it."

"I'll never trouble you—never!"

"No, the bad luck comes on the people who are with me, but never on me. It's struck them all down, one by one; your turn is next, Jack. If I could leave the cross behind—"

He covered his face, and groaned: "But I don't dare; I don't dare! I have to face McGurk. Jack, I hate myself for it, but I can't help it. I'm afraid of McGurk, afraid of that damned white face, that lowered, fluttering eyelid, that sneering mouth. Without the cross to bring me luck, how could I meet him? But while I keep the cross there's ruin and hell without end for every one with me."

She was white and shaking. She said: "I'm not afraid. I've one friend left; there's nothing else to care for."

"So it's to be this way, Jack?"

"This way, and no other."

"Partner, I'm glad. My God, Jack, what a man you would have made!"

Their hands met and clung together, and her head had drooped, perhaps in acquiescence.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A GAME OF SUPPOSE.

DICK WILBUR, telling Mary how Pierre had cut himself adrift, did not even pretend to sorrow, and she listened to him with her eyes fixed steadily on his own. As a matter of fact, she had shown neither hope nor excitement from the moment he came back to her and started to tell his message. But if she showed neither hope nor excitement for herself, surely she gave Dick still fewer grounds for any optimistic foresights.

So he finished gloomily: "And as far as I can make out, Pierre is right. There's some rotten bad luck that follows him. It may not be the cross—I don't suppose you believe in superstition like that, Miss Brown?"

She said: "It saved my life."

"The cross?"

"Yes."

"Then Pierre—you mean—you met before the dance—you mean—"

He was stammering so that he couldn't finish his thoughts, and she broke in: "If he will not come to me, then I must go to him."

"Follow Pierre le Rouge?" queried Wilbur. "Miss Brown, you're an optimist. But that's because you've never seen him ride. I consider it a good day's work to start out with him and keep within sight till night, but as for following him and overtaking—ha, ha, ha, ha!"

He laughed heartily at the thought.

And she smiled a little sadly, answering: "But I have the most boundless patience in the world. He may gallop all the way, but I will walk, and keep on walking, and reach him in the end. I am not very strong, but—"

Her hands moved out as though testing their power, gripping at the air.

"Where will you go to hunt for him?"

"I don't know. But every evening, when I look out at the sunset hills, with the purple along the valleys, I think that he must be out there somewhere, going toward the highest ranges. If I were up in that country I know that I could find him."

"Never in a thousand years."

"Why?"

"Because he's on the trail—"

"On the trail?"

"Of McGurk."

She started.

"What is this man McGurk? I hear of him on all sides. If one of the men rides a bucking horse successfully, some one is sure to say: 'Who taught you what you know, Bud—McGurk?' And then the rest laugh. The other day a man was pointed out to me as an expert shot. 'Not as fast as McGurk,' it was said, 'but he shoots just as straight.' Finally I asked some one about McGurk. The only answer I received was: 'I hope you never find out what he is.' Tell me, what is McGurk?"

Wilbur considered the question gravely.

He said at last: "McGurk is—hell!"

He expanded his statement: "Think of a man who can ride anything that walks on four feet, who never misses with either a rifle or a revolver, who doesn't know the meaning of fear, and then imagine that man living by himself and fighting the rest of the world like a lone wolf. That's McGurk. He's never had a companion; he's never trusted any man. Perhaps that's why they say about him the same thing that they say about me."

"What's that?"

"You will smile when you hear. They say that McGurk will lose out in the end on account of some woman."

"And they say that of you?"

"They say right of me. I know it myself. Look at me now? What right have I here? If I'm found I'm the meat of the first man who sights me, but here I stay, and wait and watch for your smiles—like a love-sick boy. By Jove, you must despise me, Mary!"

"I don't try to understand you Westerners," she answered, "and that's why I have never questioned you before. Tell me, why is it that you come so stealthily to see me and run away as soon as any one else appears?"

He said with wonder: "Haven't you guessed?"

"I don't dare guess."

"But you have, and your guess was right. There's a price on my head. By right, I should be out there on the ranges with Pierre le Rouge and McGurk. There's the only safe place; but I saw you and I came down out of the wilds and can't go back. I'll stay, I suppose, till I run my head into a halter."

She was too much moved to speak for a moment, and then: "You come to me in spite of that? Dick, whatever you have done, I know that it's only chance which made you go wrong, just as it made Pierre. I wish—"

The dimness of her eyes encouraged him with a great hope. He stole closer to her.

He repeated: "You wish—"

"That you could be satisfied with a mere friendship. I could give you that, Dick, with all my heart."

He stepped back and smiled somewhat grimly on her.

She went on: "And this McGurk—what do you mean when you say that Pierre is on his trail?"

"Hunting him with a gun."

She grew paler and trembled, but her voice remained steady. It was always that way; at the very moment when he expected her to quail, some inner strength bore her up and baffled him.

"But in all those miles of mountains they may never meet?"

"They can't stay apart any more than iron can stay away from a magnet. Listen: half a dozen years ago McGurk had the reputation of bearing a charmed life. He had been in a hundred fights and he was never touched with either a knife or a

bullet. Then he crossed Pierre le Rouge when Pierre was only a youngster just come into the range. He put two bullets through Pierre, but the boy shot him from the floor and wounded him for the first time. The charm of McGurk was broken.

"For half a dozen years McGurk was gone; there was never a whisper about him. Then he came back and went on the trail of Pierre. He has killed the friends of Pierre one by one; Pierre himself is the next in order—Pierre or myself. And when those two meet there will be the greatest fight that was ever staged in the mountain-desert."

She stood straight, staring past Wilbur with hungry eyes.

"I knew he needed me. I have to save him, Dick. You see that? I have to bring him down from the mountains and keep him safe from McGurk. McGurk! somehow the sound means what 'devil' used to mean to me."

"You've never traveled alone, and yet you'd go up there and brave everything that comes for the sake of Pierre? What has he done to deserve it, Mary?"

"What have I done, Dick, to deserve the care you have for me?"

He stared gloomily on her.

"When do you start?"

"To-night."

"Your friends won't let you go."

"I'll steal away and leave a note behind me."

"And you'll go alone?"

She caught at a hope.

"Unless you'll go with me, Dick?"

"I? Take you to Pierre?"

She did not speak to urge him, but in the silence her beauty pleaded for her.

He said: "Mary, how lovely you are. If I go I will have you for a few days—for a week at most, all to myself."

She shook her head. From the window behind her the sunset light flared in her hair, flooding it with red-gold against which her skin was marvelously delicate and white, and the eyes of the deepest blue.

"All the time that we are gone, you will never say things like this, Dick?"

"I suppose not. I should be near you, but terribly far away from your thoughts all the while. Still, you will be near. You will be very beautiful, Mary, riding up the trail through the pines, with all the scents of the evergreens blowing about you, and I—well, I must go back to a second childhood and play a game of suppose—"

"A game of what?"

"Of supposing that you are really mine, Mary, and riding out into the wilderness for my sake."

She stepped a little closer, peering into his face.

"No matter what you suppose, I'm sure you'll leave that part of it merely a game, Dick!"

He laughed suddenly, though the sound broke off as short and sharp as it began.

"Haven't I played a game all my life with the fair ladies? And have I anything to show for it except laughter? I'll go with you, Mary, if you'll let me."

"Dick, you're a heart of gold! What shall I take?"

"I'll make the pack up, and I'll be back here an hour after dark and whistle. Like this—"

And he gave the call of Boone's gang.

"I understand. I'll be ready. Hurry, Dick, for we've very little time."

He hesitated, then: "All the time we're on the trail you must be far from me, and at the end of it will be Pierre le Rouge—and happiness for you. Before we start, Mary, I'd like to—"

It seemed that she read his mind, for she slipped suddenly inside his arms, kissed him, and was gone from the room. He stood a moment with a hand raised to his face.

"After all," he muttered, "that's enough to die for, and—" He threw up his long arms in a gesture of infinite resignation.

"The will of God be done!" said Wilbur, and laughed again.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE TRAIL.

SHE was ready, crouched close to the window of her room, when the signal came, but first she was not sure, because the sound was as faint as a memory. Moreover, it might have been a freakish

whistling in the wind, which rose stronger and stronger. It had piled the thunder-clouds high and higher, and now and again a heavy drop of rain tapped at her window like a thrown pebble.

So she waited, and at last heard the whistle a second time, unmistakably clear. In a moment she was hurrying down to the stable,, climbed into the saddle, and rode at a cautious trot out among the sand-hills.

For a time she saw no one, and commenced to fear that the whole thing had been a gruesomely real, practical jest. So she stopped her horse and imitated the signal whistle as well as she could. It was repeated immediately behind her—almost in her ear, and she turned to make out the dark form of a tall horseman.

"A bad night for the start," called Wilbur. "Do you want to wait till to-morrow?"

She could not answer for a moment, the wind whipping against her face, while a big drop stung her lips.

She said at length: "Would a night like this stop Pierre—or McGurk?"

For answer she heard his laughter.

"Then I'll start. I must never stop for weather."

He rode up beside her.

"This is the start of the finish."

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing. But somewhere on this ride, I've an idea a question will be answered for me."

"What question?"

Instead of replying he said: "You've got a slicker on?"

"Yes."

"Then follow me. We'll gallop into the wind a while and get the horses warmed up. Afterward we'll take the valley of the Old Crow and follow it up to the crest of the range."

His horse lunged out ahead of hers, and she followed, leaning far forward against a wind that kept her almost breathless. For several minutes they cantered steadily, and before the end of the gallop she was sitting straight up, her heart beating fast, a faint smile on her lips, and the blood running hot in her veins. For the battle was begun, she knew, by that first sharp gallop, and here at the start she felt confident of her strength. When she met Pierre she could force him to turn back with her.

Wilbur checked his horse to a trot; they climbed a hill, and just as the rain broke on them with a rattling gust they swung into the valley of the Old Crow. Above them in the sky the thunder rode; the rain whipped against the rocks like the rattle of a thousand flying hoofs; and now and again the lightning whipped across the sky.

Through that vast accompaniment they moved on in the night straight toward the heart of the mountains which sprang into sight with every flash of the lightning and seemed toppling almost right above them, yet they were weary miles away, as she knew.

By those same flashes she caught glimpses of the face of Wilbur. She hardly knew him. She had seen him always big, gentle, handsome, good-natured; now he was grown harder, with a stern set of the jaw, and a certain square outline of the face. It had seemed impossible. Now she began to guess how the law could have placed a price upon his head. For he belonged out here with the night and the crash of the storm, with free, strong, lawless things about him.

An awe grew up in her, and she was filled half with dread and half with curiosity at the thought of facing him, as she must many a time, across the camp-fire. In a way, he was the ladder by which she climbed to an understanding of Pierre le Rouge, Red Pierre. For that Pierre, she knew, was to big Wilbur what Dick himself was to the great mass of law-abiding men. Accident had cut Wilbur adrift, but it was more than accident which started Pierre on the road to outlawry: it was the sheer love of dangerous chance, the glory in fighting other men. This was Pierre.

What was the man for whom Pierre hunted? What was McGurk? Not even the description of Wilbur had proved very enlightening. Her thought of him was vague, nebulous, and taking many forms. Sometimes he was tall and dark and stern. Again he was short and heavy and somewhat deformed of body. But always he was everywhere in the night about her.

She guessed at his voice rumbling through an echo of the thunder; she heard the sound of his pursuing horse in the rattle of the following rain. Her work was to keep this relentless lone rider away from Pierre; it was as if she strove to keep the ocean tide away from the shore. They seemed doomed to meet and shock.

All this she pondered as they began the ride up the valley, but as the long journey continued, and the hours and the miles rolled past them, a racking weariness possessed her and numbed her mind. She began to wish desperately for morning, but even morning might not bring an end to the ride. That would be at the will of the outlaw beside her. Finally, only one picture remained to her. It stabbed across the darkness of her mind—the red hair and the keen eyes of Pierre.

The storm decreased as they went up the valley. Finally the wind fell off to a pleasant breeze, and the clouds of the rain broke in the center of the heavens and toppled west in great tumbling masses. In half an hour's time the sky was clear, and a cold moon looked down on the blue-black evergreens, shining faintly with the wet, and on the dead black of the mountains.

For the first time in all that ride her companion spoke: "In an hour the gray will begin in the east. Suppose we camp here, eat, get a bit of sleep, and then start again?"

As if she had waited for permission, fighting against her weariness, she now let down the bars of her will, and a tingling stupor swept over her body and broke in hot, numbing waves on her brain.

"Whatever you say. I'm afraid I couldn't ride much further to-night."

"Look up at me."

She raised her head.

"No; you're all in. But you've made a game ride. I never dreamed there was so much iron in you. We'll make our fire just inside the trees and carry water up from the river, eh?"

For a scanty growth of the evergreens walked over the hills and skirted along the valley, leaving a broad, sandy waste in the center where the river at times swelled with melted snow or sudden rains and rushed over the lower valley in a broad, muddy flood.

At the edge of the forest he picketed the horses in a little open space carpeted with wet, dead grass. It took him some time to find dry wood. So he wrapped her in blankets and left her sitting on a saddle. As the chill left her body she began to grow delightfully drowsy, and vaguely she heard the crack of his hatchet. For he had found a rotten stump and was tearing off the wet outer bark to get at the dry wood within.

After that it was only a moment before a fire sputtered feebly and smoked at her feet. She watched it, only half conscious, in her utter weariness, and seeing dimly the hollow-eyed face of the man who stooped above the blaze. Now it grew quickly, and increased to a sharp-pointed pyramid of red flame. The bright sparks showered up, crackling and snapping, and when she followed their flight she saw the darkly nodding tops of the evergreens above her.

With the fire well under way, he took the coffee-pot to get water from the river, and left her to fry the bacon. The fumes of the frying meat wakened her at once, and brushed even the thought of her exhaustion from her mind. She was hungry —ravenously hungry.

So she tended the bacon slices with care until they grew brown and crisped and curled at the edges. After that she removed the pan from the fire, and it was not until then that she began to wonder why Wilbur was so long in returning with the water. The bacon grew cold; she heated it again and was mightily tempted to taste one piece of it, but restrained herself to wait for Dick.

Still he did not come. She stood up and called, her high voice rising sharp and small through the trees. It seemed that some sound answered, so she smiled and sat down. Ten minutes passed and he was still gone. A cold alarm swept over her at that. She dropped the pan and ran out from the trees.

Everywhere was the bright moonlight—over the wet rocks, and sand, and glimmering on the slow tide of the river, but nowhere could she see Wilbur, or a form that looked like a man. Then the moonlight

glinted on something at the edge of the river. She ran to it and found the coffee-can half in the water and partially filled with sand.

A wild temptation to scream came over her, but the tight muscles of her throat let out no sound. But if Wilbur were not here, where had he gone? He could not have vanished into thin air. The ripple of the water washing on the sand replied. Yes, that current might have rolled his body away.

To shut out the grim sight of the river she turned. Stretched across the ground at her feet she saw clearly the impression of a body in the moist sand.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A HINT OF WHITE.

THE heels had left two deeply defined gouges in the ground; there was a sharp hollow where the head had lain, and a broad depression for the shoulders. It was the impression of the body of a man—a large man like Wilbur. Any hope, any doubt she might have had, slipped from her mind, and despair rolled into it with an even, sullen current, like the motion of the river.

It is strange what we do with our big moments of fear and sorrow and even of joy. Now Mary stooped and carefully washed out the coffee-pot, and filled it again with water higher up the bank; and turned back toward the edge of the trees.

It was all subconscious, this completing of the task which Wilbur had begun, and subconscious still was her careful rebuilding of the fire till it flamed high, as though she were setting a signal to recall the wanderer. But the flame, throwing warmth and red light across her eyes, recalled her sharply to reality, and she looked up and saw the dull dawn brightening beyond the dark evergreens.

Guilt, too, swept over her, for she remembered what big, handsome Dick Wilbur had said: He would meet his end through a woman. Now it had come to him, and through her.

She cringed at the thought, for what was she that a man should die in her service? She raised her hands with a moan to the nodding tops of the trees, to the vast, black sky above them, and the full knowledge of Wilbur's strength came to her, for had he not ridden calmly, defiantly, into the heart of this wilderness, confident in his power to care both for himself and for her? But she! What could she do wandering by herself? The image of Pierre le Rouge grew dim indeed and sad and distant.

She looked about her at the pack, which had been distributed expertly, and disposed on the ground by Wilbur. She could not even lash it in place behind the saddle. So she drew the blanket once more around her shoulders and sat down to think.

She might return to the house—doubtless she could find her way back. And leave Pierre in the heart of the mountains, surely lost to her forever. She made a determination, sullen, like a child, to ride on and on into the wilderness, and let fate take care of her. The pack she could bundle together as best she might; she would live as she might; and for a guide there would be the hunger for Pierre.

So she ended her thoughts with a hope; her head nodded lower, and she slept the deep, deep sleep of the exhausted mind and the lifeless body. She woke hours later with a start, instantly alert, quivering with fear and life and energy, for she felt like one who has gone to sleep with voices in his ear.

While she slept some one had been near her; she could have sworn it before her startled eyes glanced around.

And though she kept whispering, with white lips, "No, no; it is impossible!" yet there was evidence which proved it. The fire should have burned out, but instead it flamed more brightly than ever, and there was a little heap of fuel laid conveniently close. Moreover, both horses were saddled, and the pack lashed on the saddle of her own mount.

Whatever man or demon had done this work evidently intended that she should ride Wilbur's beautiful bay. Yes, for when she went closer, drawn by her wonder, she found that the stirrups had been much shortened.

Nothing was forgotten by this invisible caretaker; he had even left out the cooking-tins, and she found a little batter of flap-jack flour mixed.

The riddle was too great for solving. Perhaps Wilbur had disappeared merely to play a practical jest on her; but that supposition was too childish to be retained an instant. Perhaps—perhaps Pierre himself had discovered her, but having vowed never to see her again, he cared for her like the invisible hands in the old Greek fable.

This, again, an instinctive knowledge made her dismiss. If he were so close, loving her, he could not stay away; she read in her own heart, and knew. Then it must be something else; evil, because it feared to be seen; not wholly evil, because it surrounded her with care.

At least this new emotion obscured somewhat the terror and the sorrow of Wilbur's disappearance. She cooked her breakfast as if obeying the order of the unseen, climbed into the saddle of Wilbur's horse, and started off up the valley, leading her own mount.

Every moment or so she turned in the saddle suddenly in the hope of getting a glimpse of the follower, but even when she surveyed the entire stretch of country from the crest of a low hill, she saw nothing—not the least sign of life.

She rode slowly, this day, for she was stiff and sore from the violent journey of the night before, but though she went slowly, she kept steadily at the trail. It was a broad and pleasant one, being the beaten sand of the river-bottom; and the horse she rode was the finest that ever pranced beneath her.

His trot was as smooth and springy as the gallop of most horses, and when she let him run over a few level stretches, it was as if she had suddenly been taken up from the earth on wings. There was something about the animal, too, which reminded her of its vanished owner; for it had strength and pride and gentleness at once. Unquestionably it took kindly to its new rider; for once when she dismounted the big horse walked up behind and nuzzled her shoulder.

The mountains were much plainer before the end of the day. They rose sheer up in wave upon frozen wave like water piled ragged by some terrific gale, with the tops of the waters torn and tossed and then frozen forever in that position, like a fantastic and gargantuan mask of dreaming terror. It overawed the heart of Mary Brown to look up to them, but there was growing in her a new impulse of friendly understanding with all this scalped, bald region of rocks, as if in entering the valley she had passed through the gate which closes out the gentler world, and now she was admitted as a denizen of the mountain desert, that scarred and ugly asylum for crime and fear and grandeur.

Feeling this new emotion, the old horizons of her mind gave way and widened; her gentle nature, which had known nothing but smiles, admitted the meaning of a frown. Did she not ride under the very shadow of that frown with her two horses? Was she not armed? She touched the holster at her hip, and smiled. To be sure, she could never hit a mark with that ponderous weapon, but at least the pistol gave the seeming of a dangerous lone rider, familiar with the wilds.

It was about dark, and she was on the verge of looking about for a suitable camping-place, when the bay halted sharply, tossed up his head, and whinnied. From the far distance she thought she heard the beginning of a whinny in reply. She could not be sure, but the possibility made her pulse quicken. In this region, she knew, no stranger could be a friend.

So she started the bay at a gallop and put a couple of swift miles between her and the point at which she had heard the sound; no living creature, she was sure, could have followed the pace the bay held during that distance. So, secure in her loneliness, she trotted the horse around a bend of the rocks and came on the sudden light of a camp-fire.

It was too late to wheel and gallop away; so she remained with her hand fumbling at the butt of the revolver, and her wide blue eyes fixed on the flicker of the fire. Not a voice accosted her. As far as she could peer among the lithe trunks of the saplings, not a sign of living thing was near.

Yet whoever built that fire must be near

for it was obviously newly laid. Perhaps some fleeing outlaw had pitched his camp here and had been startled by her coming. In that case he lurked somewhere in the woods at that moment, his keen eyes fixed on her, and his gun gripped hard in his hand. Perhaps—and the thought thrilled he—this little camp had been prepared by the same power, human or unearthly, which had watched over her early that morning.

All reason and sane caution warned her to ride on and leave that camp unmolested, but an overwhelming, tingling curiosity besieged her. The thin column of smoke rose past the dark trees like a ghost, and reaching the unsheltered space above the trees, was smitten by a light wind and jerked away at a sharp angle.

She looked closer and saw a bed made of a great heap of the tips of limbs of spruce, a bed softer than down and more fragrant than any manufactured perfume, however costly.

Possibly it was the sight of this bed which tempted her down from the saddle, at last. With the reins over her arm, she stood close to the fire and warmed her hands, peering all the while on every side, like some wild and beautiful creature tempted by the bait of the trap, but shrinking from the scent of man.

As she stood there a broad, yellow moon edged its way above the hills and rolled up through the black trees and then floated through the sky. Beneath such a moon no harm could come to her. It was while she stared at it, letting her tensed alertness relax little by little, that she saw, or thought she saw, a hint of moving white pass over the top of the rise of ground and disappear among the trees.

She could not be sure, but her first impulse was to gather the reins with a jerk and place her foot in the stirrup; but then she looked back and saw the fire, burning low now and asking like a human voice to be replenished from the heap of small, broken fuel near by; and she saw also the softly piled bed of evergreens.

She removed her foot from the stirrup. What mattered that imaginary figure of moving white? She felt a strong power of protection lying all about her, breathing out to her with the keen scent of the pines, fanning her face with the chill of the night breeze. She was alone, but she was secure in the wilderness.

CHAPTER XXIX.

JACK.

FOR many a minute she waited by that camp-fire, but there was never a sign of the builder of it, though she centered all her will in making her eyes and ears sharper to pierce through the darkness and to gather from the thousand obscure whispers of the forest any sounds of human origin. So she grew bold at length to take off the pack and the saddles; the camp was hers, built for her coming by the invisible power which surrounded her, which read her mind, it seemed, and chose beforehand the certain route which she must follow.

She resigned herself to that force without question, and the worry of her search disappeared. It seemed certain that this omnipotence, whatever it might be, was reading her wishes and acting with all its power to fulfil them, so that in the end it was merely a question of time before she should accomplish her mission — before she should meet Pierre le Rouge face to face.

That night her sleep was deep, indeed, and she only wakened when the slant light of the sun struck across her eyes. It was a bright day, crisp and chill, and through the clear air the mountains seemed leaning directly above her, and chief of all two peaks, almost exactly similar, black monsters which ruled the range. Toward the gorge between them the valley of the Old Crow aimed its course, and straight up that diminishing cañon she rode all day.

The broad, sandy bottom changed and contracted until the channel was scarcely wide enough for the meager stream of water, and beside it she picked her way along a narrow bridle-path with banks on either side, which became with every mile more like cliffs, walling her in and dooming her to a single destination.

It was evening before she came to the headwaters of the Old Crow, and rode out

into the gorge between the two mountains. The trail failed her here. There was no semblance of a ravine to follow, except the mighty gorge between the two peaks, and into the dark throat of this pass she ventured, like some maiden of medieval romance riding through a solemn gate with the guarding towers tall and black on either side.

The moment she was well started in it and the steep shadow of the evening fell across her almost like night from the west, her heart grew cold as the air of that lofty region. A sense of coming danger filled her, like a little child when it passes from a lighted room into one dark and still. Yet she kept on, holding a tight rain, throwing many a fearful glance at the vast rocks which might have concealed an entire army in every mile of their extent.

When she found the cabin she mistook it at first for merely another rock of singular shape. It was at this shape that she stared, and checked her horse, and not till then did she note the faint flicker of a light no brighter or more distinct than the phosphorescent glow of the eyes of a hunted beast.

All her impulse was to drive her spurs home and pass that place at a racing gallop, but she checked the impulse sharply and began to reason. In the first place, it was doubtless only the cabin of some prospector, such as she had often heard of. In the second place, night was almost upon her, and she saw no desirable camping-place, or at least any with the necessary water at hand.

What harm could come to her? Among Western men, she well knew a woman is safer than all the law and the police of the settled East can make her, so she nerved her courage and advanced toward the faint, changing light.

The cabin was hidden very cunningly. Crouched among the mighty boulders which earthquakes and storms of some wilder, earlier epoch had torn away from the side of the crags above, the house was like another stone, leaning its back to the mountain for support.

When she drew very close she knew that the light which glimmered at the window must come from an open fire, and the thought of a fire warmed her very heart. She hallooed, and receiving no answer, fastened the horses and entered the house. The door swung to behind her, as if of its own volition it wished to make her close prisoner.

The place consisted of one room, and not a spacious one at that, but arranged as a shelter, not a home. The cooking, apparently, was done over the open hearth, for there was no sign of any stove, and, moreover, on the wall near the fireplace hung several soot-blackened pans and the inevitable coffee-pot.

There were two bunks built on opposite sides of the room, and in the middle a table was made of a long section split from the heart of a log by wedges, apparently, and still rude and undressed, except for the preliminary smoothing off which had been done with a broad-ax.

The great plank was supported at either end by a roughly constructed saw-buck. It was very low, and for this reason two fairly square boulders of comfortable proportions were sufficiently high to serve as chairs.

For the rest, the furniture was almost too meager to suggest human habitation, but from nails on the wall there depended a few shirts and a pair of chaps, as well as a much-battered quirt. But a bucket of water in a corner suggested cleanliness, and a small, round, highly polished steel plate, hanging on the wall in lieu of a mirror, further fortified her decision that the owner of this place must be a man somewhat particular as to his appearance.

Here she interrupted her observations to build up the fire, which was flickering down and apparently on the verge of going out. She worked busily for a few minutes, and a roaring blaze rewarded her; she took off her slicker to enjoy the warmth, and in doing so, turned, and saw the owner of the place standing with folded arms just inside the door.

"Making yourself to home?" asked the host, in a low, strangely pleasant voice.

"Do you mind?" asked Mary Brown. "I couldn't find a place that would do for camping."

And she summoned her most winning smile. It was wasted, she knew at once, for

the stranger hardened perceptibly, and his lip curled slightly in scorn or anger. In all her life Mary had never met a man so obdurate, and, moreover, she felt that he could not be wooed into a good humor.

"If you'd gone farther up the gorge," said the other, "you'd of found the best sort of a campin' place—water and everything."

"Then I'll go," said Mary, shrinking at the thought of the strange, cold outdoors compared with this cheery fire. But she put on the slicker and started for the door.

At the last moment the host was touched with compunction. He called: "Wait a minute. There ain't no call to hurry. If you can get along here just stick around."

For a moment Mary hesitated, knowing that only the unwritten law of Western hospitality compelled that speech; it was the crackle and flare of the bright fire which overcame her pride.

She laid off the slicker again, saying, with another smile: "For just a few minutes, if you don't mind."

"Sure," said the other gracelessiy, and tossed his own slicker onto a bunk.

Covertly, but very earnestly, Mary was studying him. He was hardly more than a boy—handsome, slender.

Now that handsome face was under a cloud of gloom, a frown on the forehead and a sneer on the lips, but it was something more than the expression which repelled Mary. For she felt that no matter how she wooed him, she could never win the sympathy of this darkly handsome, cruel youth; he was aloof from her, and the distance between them could never be crossed. She knew at once that the mysterious bridges which link men with women broke down in this case, and she was strongly tempted to leave the cabin to the sole possession of her surly host.

It was the warmth of the fire which once more decided against her reason, so she laid hands on one of the blocks of stone to roll it nearer to the hearth. She could not budge it. Then she caught the sneering laughter of the man, and strove again in a fury. It was of no use; for the stone merely rocked a little and settled back in its place with a bump.

"Here," said the boy, "I'll move it for you."

It was a hard lift for him, but he set his teeth, raised the stone in his slender hands, and set it down again at a comfortable distance from the fire.

"Thank you," smiled Mary, but the boy stood panting against the wall, and for answer merely bestowed on her a rather malicious glance of triumph, as though he gloried in his superior strength and despised her weakness.

Some conversation was absolutely necessary, for the silence began to weigh on her. She said: "My name is Mary Brown."

"Is it?" said the boy, quite without interest. "You can call me Jack."

He sat down on the other stone, his dark face swept by the shadows of the flames, and rolled a cigarette, not deftly, but like one who is learning the mastery of the art. It surprised Mary, watching his fumbling fingers. She decided that Jack must be even younger than he looked.

She noticed also that the boy cast, from time to time, a sharp, rather worried glance of expectation toward the door, as if he feared it would open and disclose some important arrival. Furthermore, those old worn shirts hanging on the wall were much too large for the throat and shoulders of Jack.

Apparently, he lived there with some companion, and a companion of such a nature that he did not wish him to be seen by visitors. This explained the lad's coldness in receiving a guest; it also stimulated Mary to linger out a few more minutes.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE WHISPER OF THE KNIFE.

NOT that she stayed there without a growing fear, but she still felt about her, like the protection of some invisible cloak, the presence of the strange guide who had followed her up the valley of the Old Crow.

It seemed as if the boy were reading her mind.

"See you got two hosses. Come up alone?"

"Most of the way," said Mary, and tingled with a rather feline pleasure to see that her curtness merely sharpened the interest of Jack.

The boy puffed on his cigarette, not with long, slow breaths of inhalation like a practised smoker, but with a puckered face as though he feared that the fumes might drift into his eyes.

"Why," thought Mary, "he's only a child!"

Her heart warmed a little as she adopted this view-point of her surly host. Being warmed, and having much to say, words came of themselves. Surely it would do no harm to tell the story to this queer urchin, who might be able to throw some light on the nature of the invisible protector.

"I started with a man for guide." She fixed a searching gaze on the boy. "His name was Dick Wilbur."

She could not tell whether it was a tremble of the boy's hand or a short motion to knock off the cigarette ash.

"Did you say 'was' Dick Wilbur?"

"Yes. Did you know him?"

"Heard of him, I think. Kind of a hard one, wasn't he?"

"No, no! A fine, brave, gentle fellow—poor Dick!"

She stopped, her eyes filling with tears at many a memory.

"H-m!" coughed the boy. "I thought he was one of old Boone's gang? If he's dead, that made the last of 'em—except Red Pierre."

It was like the sound of a trumpet call at her ear. Mary sat up with a start.

"What do you know of Red Pierre?"

The boy flushed a little, and could not quite meet her eye.

"Nothin'."

"At least you know that he's still alive?"

"Sure. Any one does. When he dies the whole range will know about it—damn quick. I know *that* much about Red Pierre; but who doesn't?"

"I, for one."

"You!"

Strangely enough, there was more of accusation than of surprise in the word.

"Certainly," repeated Mary. "I've only been in this part of the country for a short time. I really know almost nothing about the—the legends."

"Legends?" said the boy, and laughed with a voice of such rich, light music that it took the breath from Mary. "Legend? Say, lady, if Red Pierre is just a legend the Civil War ain't no more 'n a fable. Legend? You go anywhere on the range an' get 'em talking about that legend, and they'll make you think it's an honest-to-goodness fact, and no mistake."

Mary queried earnestly: "Tell me about Red Pierre. It's almost as hard to learn anything of him as it is to find out anything about McGurk."

"What you doing?" asked the boy, keen with suspicion. "Making a study of them two for a book?"

He wiped a damp forehead.

"Take it from me, lady, it ain't healthy to join up them two even in talk!"

"Is there any harm in words?"

The boy was so upset for some unknown reason that he rose and paced up and down the room in a nervous tremor.

"Lots of harm in fool words."

He sat down again, and seemed a little anxious to explain his unusual conduct.

"Ma'am, suppose you had a well plumb full of nitroglycerin in your back yard; suppose there was a forest fire comin' your way from all sides; would you like to have people talk about the nitroglycerin and that forest fire meeting? Even the talk would give you chills. That's the way it is with Pierre and McGurk. When they meet there's going to be a fight that 'll stop the hearts of the people that have to look on."

Mary smiled to cover her excitement.

"But are they coming your way?"

The question seemed to infuriate young Jack, who cried: "Ain't that a fool way of talkin'? Lady, they're coming every one's way. You never know where they'll start from or where they'll land. If there's a thunder-cloud all over the sky, do you know where the lightning's going to strike?"

"Excuse me," said Mary, but she was still eager with curiosity, "but I should think that a youngster like you wouldn't have anything to fear from even those desperadoes."

"Youngster, eh?" snarled the boy, whose

wrath seemed implacable. "I can make my draw and start my gun as fast as any man—except them two, maybe"—he lowered his voice somewhat even to name them—"Pierre—McGurk!"

"It seems hopeless to find out anything about McGurk," said Mary, "but at least you can tell me safely about Red Pierre."

"Interested in him, eh?" said the boy dryly.

"Well, he's a rather romantic figure, don't you think?"

"Romantic? Lady, about a month ago I was talking with a lady that was a widower because of Red Pierre. She didn't think him none too romantic."

"Red Pierre had killed the woman's husband?" repeated Mary, with pale lips.

"Yep. He was one of the gang that took a chance with Pierre and got bumped off. Had three bullets in him and dropped without getting his gun out of the leather. Pierre sure does a nice, artistic job. He serves you a murder with all the trimmings. If I wanted to die nice and polite without making a mess, I don't know who I rather go to than Red Pierre."

"A murderer!" mused Mary, with bowed head.

The boy opened his lips to speak, but changed his mind and sat regarding the girl with a somewhat sinister smile.

"But might it not be," said Mary, "that he killed one man in self-defense and then his destiny drove him, and bad luck forced him into one bad position after another? There have been histories as strange as that, you know."

Jack laughed again, but most of the music was gone from the sound, and it was simply a low, ominous purr.

"Sure," he said. "You can take a bear-cub and keep him tame till he gets the taste of blood, but after that you got to keep him muzzled, you know. Pierre needs a muzzle, but there ain't enough gun-fighters on the range to put one on him."

Something like pride crept into the boy's voice while he spoke, and he ended with a ringing tone. Then, feeling the curious, judicial eyes of Mary upon him, he abruptly changed the subject.

"You say Dick Wilbur is dead?"

"I don't know. I think he is."

"But he started out with you. You ought to know."

"It was like this: We had camped on the edge of the trees coming up the Old Crow Valley, and Dick went off with the can to get water at the river. He was gone a long time, and when I went out to look for him I found the can at the margin of the river half filled with sand, and beside it there was the impression of the body of a big man. That was all I found, and Dick never came back."

They were both silent for a moment.

"Could he have fallen into the river?"

"Sure. He was probably helped in. Did you look for the footprints?"

"I didn't think of that."

Jack was speechless with scorn.

"Sat down and cried, eh?"

"I was dazed; I couldn't think. But he couldn't have been killed by some other man. There was no shot fired; I should have heard it."

Jack moistened his lips.

"Lady, a knife don't make much sound either going or coming out—not much more sound than a whisper, but that whisper means a lot. I got an idea that Dick heard it. Then the river covered him up."

He stopped short and stared at Mary with squinted eyes.

"D'you mean to tell me that you had the nerve to come all the way up the Old Crow by yourself?"

"Every inch of the way."

Jack leaned forward, sneering, savage.

"Then I suppose you put the hitch that's on that pack outside?"

"No."

Jack was dumfounded.

"Then you admit—"

"That first night when I went to sleep I felt as if there were something near me. When I woke up there was a bright fire burning in front of me and the pack had been lashed and placed on one of the horses. At first I thought that it was Dick, who had come back. But Dick didn't appear all day. The next night—"

"Wait!" said Jack. "This is gettin' sort of creepy. If you was the drinking kind I'd say you'd been hitting up the red-eye."

"The next evening," continued Mary steadily, "I came about dark on a camp-fire with a bed of twigs near it. I stayed by the fire, but no one appeared. Once I thought I heard a horse whinny far away, and once I thought that I saw a streak of white disappear over the top of a hill."

The boy sprang up, shuddering with panic.

"You saw what?"

"Nothing. I thought for a minute that it was a bit of something white, but it was gone all at once."

"White—vanished at once—went into the dark as fast as a hoss can gallop?"

"Something like that. Do you think it was some one?"

For answer the boy whipped out his revolver, examined it, and spun the cylinder with shaking hands. Then he said through set teeth: "So you come up here trailin' *him* after you, eh?"

"Trailing whom?"

And Mary rose in turn and shrank back toward the wall, for there was murder in the lighted black eyes which stared after her.

"You fool—you fool! Damn your pretty pink-and-white face—you've done for us all! Get out!"

Mary moved readily enough toward the door, her teeth chattering with terror in the face of this fury.

Jack continued wildly: "Done for us all; got us all as good as under the sod. I wish you was in— Get out quick, or I'll forget—you're a woman!"

He broke into a shrill, hysterical laughter, which stopped short and finished in a heart-broken whisper: "Pierre!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

LAUGHTER.

AT that Mary, who stood with her hand on the latch, whirled and stood wide-eyed, her astonishment greater than her fear, for that whisper told her a thousand things.

Through her mind all the time that she stayed in the cabin there had passed a curious surmise that this very place might be the covert of Pierre le Rouge—he of the dark red hair and the keen blue eyes. There was a fatality about it, for the invisible Power which had led her up the valley of the Old Crow surely would not make mistakes.

In her search for Pierre, Providence brought her to this place, and Providence could not be wrong. This, a vague emotion stirring in her somewhere between reason and the heart, grew to an almost certain knowledge as she heard the whisper, the faint, heartbroken whisper: "Pierre!"

And when she turned to the boy again, noting the shirts and the chaps hanging at the wall, she knew they belonged to Pierre as surely as if she had seen him hang them there.

The fingers of Jack were twisted around the butt of his revolver, white with the intensity of the pressure.

Now he cried: "Get out! You've done your work; get out!"

But Mary stepped straight toward the murderous, pale face.

"I'll stay," she said, "and wait for Pierre."

The boy blanched.

"Stay?" he echoed.

The heart of Mary went out to this trusty companion who feared for his friend.

She said gently: "Listen; I've come all this way looking for Pierre, but not to harm him, or to betray him. I'm his friend. Can't you trust me, Jack?"

"Trust you? No more than I'll trust what came with you!"

And the fierce black eyes lingered on Mary and then fled past her toward the door, as if the boy debated hotly and silently whether or not it would be better to put an end to this intruder, but stayed his hand, fearing that Power which had followed her up the valley of the Old Crow.

It was that same invisible guardian who made Mary strong now; it was like the hand of a friend on her shoulder, like the voice of a friend whispering reassuring words at her ear. She faced those blazing, black eyes steadily. It would be better to be frank, wholly frank.

"The is the house of Pierre. I know it as surely as if I saw him sitting here now. You can't deceive me. And I'll stay. I'll

even tell you why. Once he said that he loved me, Jack, but he left me because of a strange superstition; and so I've followed him, you see, to tell him that I want to be with him, no matter what fate hangs over him."

And the boy, whiter still, and whiter, looked at her with clearing, narrowing, eyes.

"So you're one of them," said the boy softly; "you're one of the fools who listen to Red Pierre. Well, I know you; I've known you from the minute I seen you crouched there at the fire. You're the one Pierre met at the dance at the Crittenden schoolhouse. Tell me!"

"Yes," said Mary, marveling greatly.

"And he told you he loved you?"

"Yes."

It was a fainter voice now, and the color was going up her cheeks.

The lad fixed her with his cold scorn and then turned on his heel and slipped into an easy position on the bunk.

"Then wait for him to come. He'll be here before morning."

But Mary followed across the room and touched the shoulder of Jack. It was as if she touched a wild wolf, for the lad whirled and struck her hand away in an outburst of silent fury.

"Why shouldn't I stay? He hasn't—he hasn't changed—Jack?"

The insolent black eyes looked up and scanned her slowly from head to foot. Then he laughed in the same deliberate manner. It was to Mary as if her clothes had been torn from her body and she were exposed to the bold eyes of a crowd, like a slave put up for sale.

"No, I guess he thinks as much of you now as he ever did."

"You are lying to me," said the girl faintly, but the terror in her eyes said another thing.

"He thinks as much of you as he ever did. He thinks as much of you as he does of the rest of the soft-handed, pretty-faced fools who listen to him and believe him. I suppose—"

He broke off to laugh heartily again, with a jarring, forced note which escaped Mary.

"I suppose that he made love to you one minute and the next told you that bad luck—something about a cross—kept him away from you?"

Each slow word, like a blow of a fist, drove the girl quivering back. She closed her eyes to shut out the scorn of that handsome, boyish face; closed her eyes to summon out from the dark of her mind the picture of Pierre le Rouge as he had knelt before her and told her of his love; of Pierre le Rouge as he had lain beside her with the small, shining cross held high above his head, and waited for death to come over them both. She saw all this, and then she heard the voice of Pierre renouncing her.

She opened her eyes again. She cried: "It is all a lie! If he is not true, there's no truth in the world."

"If you come down to that," said the boy coldly, "there ain't much wasted this side of the Rockies. It's about as scarce as rain."

He continued in an almost kindly tone: "What would you do with a wild man like Red Pierre? Run along; git out of here; grab your hoss, and beat it back to civilization; there ain't no place for you up here in the wilderness."

"What would I do with him?" cried the girl. "Love him!"

It seemed as though her words, like whips, lashed the boy back to his murderous anger. He lay with blazing eyes, watching her for a moment, too moved to speak. At last he propped himself on one elbow, shook a small, white-knuckled fist under the nose of Mary, and cried: "Then what would he do with you?"

He went on: "Would he wear you around his neck like a watch-charm?"

"I'd bring him back with me—back into the East, and he would be lost among the crowds and never suspected of his past."

"*You'd* bring Pierre anywhere? Say, lady, that's like hearing the sheep talk about leading the wolf around by the nose. If all the men in the ranges can't catch him, or make him budge an inch out of the way he's picked, do you think you could stir him?"

Jeering laughter shook him; it seemed that he would never be done with his

laughter, yet there was a hint of the hysterically mirthless in it. It came to a jarring stop.

He said: "D'you think he's just bein' driven around by chance? Lady, d'you think he even *wants* to get out of this life of his? No, he loves it! He loves the danger. D'you think a man that's used to breathing in a whirlwind can get used to living in calm air? It can't be done!"

And the girl answered steadily: "For every man there is one woman, and for that woman the man will do strange things."

"You poor, white-faced, whimpering fool," snarled the boy, gripping at his gun again, "d'you dream that *you're* the one that's picked out for Pierre? No, there's another!"

"Another? A woman who—"

"Who loves Pierre—a woman that's fit for him. She can ride like a man; she can shoot almost as straight and as fast as Pierre; she can handle a knife; and she's been through hell for Pierre, and she'll go through it again. She can ride the trail all day with him and finish it less fagged than he is. She can chop down a tree as well as he can, and build a fire better. She can hold up a train with him or rob a bank and slip through a town in the middle of night and laugh with him about it afterward around a camp-fire. I ask you, is that the sort of a woman that's meant for Pierre?"

And the girl answered, with bowed head: "She is."

She cried instantly afterward, cutting short the look of wild triumph on the face of the boy: "But there's no such woman; there's no one who could do these things! I know it!"

The boy sprang to his feet, flushing as red as the girl was white.

"You fool, if you're blind and got to have your eyes open to see, look at the girl!"

And he tore the wide-brimmed sombrero from his head. Down past the shoulders flooded a mass of blue-black hair. The firelight flickered and danced across the silken shimmer of it. It swept wildly past the waist, a glorious, night-dark tide in which the heart of a strong man could be tangled and lost. With quivering lips Jacqueline cried: "Look at me! Am I worthy of him?"

Short step by step Mary went back, staring with fascinated eyes as one who sees some devilish, midnight revelry, and shrinks away from it lest the sight should blast her. She covered her eyes with her hands, but instantly strong grips fell on her wrists and her hands were jerked down from her face. She looked up into the eyes of a beautiful tigress.

"Answer me—your yellow hair against mine—your child fingers against my grip—are you equal with me?"

But the strength of Jacqueline faded and grew small; her arms fell to her sides; she stepped back, with a rising pallor taking the place of the red. For Mary, brushing her hands, one gloved and one bare, before her eyes, returned the stare of the mountain girl with a calm and equal scorn. Her heart was breaking, but a mighty loathing filled up her veins in place of strength.

"Tell me," she said, "was — was this man living with you when he came to me and—and made speeches—about love?"

"Bah! He was living with me. I tell you, he came back and laughed with me about it, and told me about your baby-blue eyes when they filled with tears; laughed and laughed and laughed, I tell you, as I could laugh now."

The other twisted her hands together, moaning: "And I have followed him, even to the place where he keeps his—woman? Ah, how I hate myself; how I despise myself. I'm unclean—unclean in my own eyes!"

"Wait!" called Jacqueline. "You are leaving too soon. The night is cold."

"I am going. There is no need to gibe at me."

"But wait—he will want to see you! I will tell him that you have been here—that you came clear up the valley of the Old Crow to see him and beg him on your knees to love you—he'll be angry to have missed the scene!"

But the door closed on Mary as she fled with her hands pressed against her ears.

(To be concluded NEXT WEEK.)

The Pirate of South Street

by Raber Mundorf

I.

WHERE South Street opens wide—like an unclean mouth—to swallow Roosevelt and Water Streets that debouch into it, stands a row of dilapidated structures across the façade of which might be scrawled appropriately the single word: "*Waste.*"

Warehouses for paper waste, for cotton and woollen rags, and—set in the middle—a Spanish sailors' and longshoremen's hotel, *La Casa Blanca.* Dirt and grime have rendered this term, "The White House," somewhat of a misnomer. And considering the heavily boarded window—suggestive of a barricade against assaults from without, and the detective agency's placard requesting information regarding any violation of the law within—the "white" would seem unduly stressed as a symbol of *purity.*

As though scorning to associate with this mean-looking row, a Brooklyn ferry and a line of railroad sheds and docks have established themselves on the far opposite side of the wide reach of cobbled thoroughfare, where they appear to devote themselves exclusively to the East River. A dividing line between the unsociable neighbors is marked by an abject street fountain—which struggles up from the mud-bemired cobbles, and has at its base a stone drinking-trough resembling a rough-box, in which urchins delight to play "dead"—to the disgust of thirsty truck-horses and vehement drivers.

Not everywhere is the row scorned, however. Directly to its right, near James Slip, the window of the Gospel Mission proclaims that "Jesus Saves"—hinting of a salvage that may be had from human as well as material waste.

Miss Betty Clark believed in getting about this work early. A kindergarten class at the mission was her especial pride and often her joy. She had recruited it courageously and indiscriminately from the Sicilian, Spanish, Greek, Jewish, and Irish colonies in the neighboring slums.

It may be assumed, therefore, that Betty possessed something over and above her wealth of hair that gleamed golden, a saucily uptilted little nose, and eyes as blue as delft. Indeed, her fun of patience seemed inexhaustible, and she owned a winning smile to match. She had need of them this morning.

Miss Genia Thealossios, out of the wisdom of her five years and a fresh-air-fund vacation, was positive that cows chewed gum. Solly Meyer, equally sage at six, and the best "trader" in the class, couldn't see how that could be. The high cost of chewing-gum would take all the profit out of the cows!

When Miss Betty had stilled—if not al-

together settled—the cow controversy, she closed the picture-book and the disturbing lesson in natural history. Consigning the youngest children to the care of the elder ones, she administered her usual cautions and injunctions and dismissed the class.

She was writing out a report at her desk in the reading room, when Nick Riahl came in.

As he rather diffidently strode forward, it could be seen that it was his six feet several inches that made the man appear so lean. His perpetual, dry smile seemed—on his tanned, brine-cured countenance—as though it were carved in old ivory. Betty was amused, as always, to see his shock of hair—bleached by winds and salt spray to the color of hemp—standing up rebelliously at the crown, like a small boy's mop that defied the comb.

"Jes' stepped in, Miss Clark, to see if mebbe you got in that State commissioner's report and survey o' the oyster grounds, you kindly sent for"—his working clothes of khaki jumpers, high boots, and disreputable slouch hat bearing out the assertion.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Riahl," Betty cordially welcomed, as they shook hands. "I've received the pamphlets—also some special government reports on oyster planting and culture."

She took from a pigeonhole a little bundle of printed matter, hesitated, then hinted with kindly tact: "If there's anything not quite clear—government reports are so confusing, you know—perhaps I could help you read them over."

"It 'd help me lots!" eagerly averred Mr. Riahl, who—barring the use of abstruse scientific terms—could have written an authoritative treatise on the oyster and its habits; out of his own head plotted a survey of all the present oyster beds, and likely new locations, in Long Island Sound; and given points to fish commissioners, besides.

He, therefore, was able to disregard Miss Clark's interpretation of the pamphlets, and to concentrate upon pleasing speculations as to how the sunbeams had become enmeshed in Miss Betty's hair and why the pearliest luster he ever had beheld inside an oyster shell could not compare with the delicate pink of the young lady's adjacent ear.

This uplifting occupation was rudely interrupted.

Nick Riahl still smiled as he glanced toward the intruder, however. His drawl remained courteous and soft.

"I guess I better look over these reports at my shack, an' come in another time when you ain't so busy."

"Oh, do stay! I've nothing urgent."

Notwithstanding Miss Betty's insistence, Nick Riahl breathed thanks and a cheerful apology, and departed. Whereupon, Mr. Bob Brampton took the floor.

"Gospel-girl, if I were you I wouldn't get quite so chummy with that chap. He's as safe as dynamite." Underlying Bob's grinning banter was a note of seriousness.

"Man-at-the-pumps"—Betty's eyes twinkled the laughter her lips repressed—"why is it you object to so many of my visitors, especially the—"

"The males," he finished for her. "Sure, I'm jealous!"—coolly taking up her challenge. Bob made no secret of his reason for sticking to the humdrum job of assistant superintendent at the South Street pumping station—where the high pressure system supplies velocity streams of water at the fire fighters' call. If it weren't for Betty he'd probably be doing engineering now at some remote outpost of the world.

"And I've no more sportsmanship than to slam my rival. You know, I suppose, that all South Street calls him the 'Pirate.'"

"The *Pirate?*" she exclaimed.

"I will say, in justice, that nobody has been able to get anything on him," Bob continued.

"He leases an oyster bed in the deep-water grounds, offshore, 'way out somewhere in the Sound. They say he sows seed oysters and also breeds direct from 'mother' oysters. But he never works his bed—to clear off the choking debris; never dredges out the destructive starfish and drills; never transplants his oysters to less salty harbor waters to prime 'em up. Yet he always comes in with a full crop of the finest—sells 'em to best hotels at top prices."

Betty voiced her indignation. "Just rumors! And you pass them along like a wicked old gossip. I'm surprised, Mr. Robert Brampton!"

"There's a surprising variation in the appearance, character and flavor of his oysters," Bob observed, unmoved. "During that bad year in the Sound, he even showed up with mammoth oysters such as are grown in Jamaica Bay, all the way around to the south of the island. Just as though he were a poacher and 'culled' the choicest oysters off beds here and there! Funny; isn't it?"

"I don't think it's funny at all!" the young lady retorted. "If he's an oyster pirate, why can't they convict him—with all this evidence you seem to have?"

"An eel is mucilage alongside this slippery pirate," Bob countered. "He goes it on his own—doesn't belong to the association. Has a fast boat, with a daredevil crew of half-breeds from Shinnecock Neck. The oyster fleet can't keep close tabs on him, although they spot him anywhere from Orient Point to Glen Cove. Nevertheless, Nick Riahl gets weird results from his 'planting'—results that no honest man could obtain."

"I don't believe a word of it. He looks too honest. Why—he's always smiling!"

Bob replied more earnestly:

"You might believe me if you'd heard some of the stories—from responsible sources, too—of the drinking bouts held in his shack on the oyster pier. It's said the planking that runs from his shack to the steamship pier is a regular 'pirate's plank'; naturally, the bodies found floating beneath it weren't able to tell exactly how they had walked off.

"And say, don't you fool yourself about that smile! It's as much a part of him as the expression on a wooden Indian's face—and means as much. His reputation as a bad customer is built largely on the horror the 'longshoremen, dock rats, and toughs have of that very grin. He'll break a man—kill a man—and calmly smile during the process."

Betty shook her head stubbornly. "All hearsay! Positively malicious!" she maintained—yet involuntarly shuddering.

The maligner seemed about to say something impatient. A lively sense of humor came to his rescue, and he laughed good-naturedly.

"Personally, I've nothing against the fellow," he disowned. "Every odd fish interests me. I'd like to cultivate his acquaintance. Still, in my travels I've met honest-smiling chaps like that before. Look out for them!"

Miss Betty smiled confidently, after Bob had gone. Even if this interesting Nick Riahl had a bad character, she had met the most villianous-looking men during the very cold weather—when the cosy reading-room suddenly became attractive to shivering roustabouts and derelicts — and she never yet had been afraid.

But could the amiable Mr. Riahl really be a pirate, she wondered, as she climbed the precipitous stairway that went up sidewise outside the brick mission—and which led to the second-floor living quarters of the mission superintendent and his wife and the class-room of the girl students in "domestic science."

Why, also—she asked herself—should the delightfully impudent Mr. Brampton be so concerned about Riahl's politeness to her?

When, after luncheon, she had gone to her attic room under the steeply pitched roof with the rounded red tile, she poohhooed the whole matter and observed that in some things men were like little boys—boys who never would grow up.

She had helped Mr. Riahl in small ways; that was her duty there on South Street. In gratitude, he had presented her with an occasional "mess" of delicious oysters, in season—oysters which he boasted were never "plumped" in fresh water to an artificial bigness which meant loss in flavor and nutriment.

And that was all!

Betty absently pinched off the dead leaves from her geraniums, pausing to gaze out the dormer window at the coal barges, lighters, scows, ferry-boats, tugs with pile-drivers in tow—moving to and fro on the East River. While she watched, a swift-moving yacht went careening and clipping among the stodgy craft; and, on the mo-

ment, her imagination transformed it into a rakish sloop, with the Jolly Roger at the masthead, and Nick, the Oyster Pirate, standing with cutlas and dirk and smoking pistol, at the bow.

"Nick, the Oyster Pirate!" she murmured, and actually giggled.

Her merriment might have been less spontaneous could she have followed Nick Riahl from the time he had left the mission.

The oysterman stopped irresolutely next door to the mission, and looked in for a moment at Jim's billiard parlor, where the "boys" were shooting pool at two and one-half cents the cue—"payable strictly in advance."

Not receiving there the information he sought—nor from the truckman, who did business beneath the "apartments—with a bathtub" that were to let, he smilingly strolled north to Slaughter House Point, a favorite haunt of the Cherry Hillers gang.

"T'ink yuh'll fin' Rickie Dunn at de Swamp Stables," a tough, loafing about the tumble-down junk-shop, informed him.

Riahl found Dunn, the gang's leader, and they returned together to the rooms of the Oakview Social Club, "one flight up," over the corner saloon.

"Rickie, I want a job done," drawled the oysterman. "Can't mix in it m'self, for pers'nal reasons.

"Yuh know that guy Brampton from th' pumping station, who hangs around the mission a lot. He drops in to beef with Miss Clark every evenin'. Well, when he comes out to-night, trail 'im and do him up so he'll be a hospital case for some weeks. I've got to have him outa my way to work out my plans.

"No croakin', yuh understand—and no permanent cripplin'. Jes' rumple 'im up with yer knucks and billy, an' mebbe run yer carving-knife across 'is face to spoil 'is manly beauty a trifle."

"Wot's in it?" Rickie cautiously inquired.

"A hundred and fifty, cash."

The gangster shook his head. "I know that guy Brampton, all right, and I'll need help—consider'ble. It's a masked job, too. Mean taffy wot de boys ain't strong for. I'd hafta sweeten 'em up."

"Two hundred beans, then—fifty down; though it's a cinch. And yuh gotta put it through right, or not another cent." Without waiting for reply, Riahl counted out the fifty, and they sealed the pact with a "ball."

Rickie did quite a little thinking—and drinking—after the other had gone on his smiling way. The scheme he finally evolved would have surprised Nick Riahl, who, while admitting the gang's respect for Rickie, had cause to believe in his own prestige among the Cherry Hillers.

II.

PALE lights barely had begun to wink along the river front, when streams of sweaty, gasping humanity flowed down the East Side byways toward South Street.

From as far north as Madison they came; from Monroe, from Oak, from Dickens; little Batavia Street; stolidly plodding men and women, almost too exhausted by the heat to chatter, shrug, gesticulate; crying babes in arms; shrill-tongued children darting among the groups—

Down Roosevelt Street, past the Greek confectioner's and the Italian *panetteria*, the Spanish barber's and the Spanish book-and-tobacco shop, and the several Roosevelt cafés; down James Street, by the "Della Amici," and the spaghetti house, and the vivid blue-and-yellow Greek restaurant; from as far east as Pike Street—

All bound expectantly for the breeze that was to be found on the recreation pier near the foot of Market Slip.

There, while the band played melodies that soothed away cares and painted memory-pictures of far-off shores, the men would doze over pipes; their wives exchange intimate family gossip; youths and maidens boldly spoon; children dance and play tirelessly about. But, best of all, a cooling wind would steal up from the bay; over the slaty, grayish-green river waters slowly deepening to the black of obsidian; and fan away the clinging, smothering heat and humidity.

Betty Clark came often to the pier chiefly because she could meet there the parents of many of her kindergarten charges, and, by artful hints, urge sadly

needed improvements in hygiene, sanitation, and diet.

To-night she seemed extraordinarily forgetful of her self-imposed duty. For the most part, she gazed idly at the scows laden with freight-cars being pushed up-river toward Mott Haven, or the varicolored lights —yellow, red, green, blue, lilac—now twinkling from boats and shining from docks and pier heads.

She sat the concert through; then helped herd some of the sleepy children across South Street on their way home, before she turned in at the reading room of the mission to enter records and make a few notes—a task she invariably reserved for her last duty of the day.

It may have been merely a coincidence that Mr. Bob Brampton always managed to snatch a little time off, at about this hour, and drop in for a casual chat.

"Acts on me like a jolly night-cap, inducing pleasant slumber and sweet dreams," he had confided solemnly.

"But you say you don't go to bed for hours yet," Betty had reminded him. And when Bob had asserted that the potent effect of her conversation lasted more than hours with him, she had rejoined indignantly that it was no compliment to say she talked people to sleep! Still, Bob appeared never to have worn out his welcome.

Neither of them alluded to the Pirate, in their chat this evening; yet Bob had plenty to talk about, his theme inspiring him to a lofty eloquence that brought seeming confusion to Betty.

She looked almost relieved when a taxicab drew up before the mission, and the driver entered, inquiring for Mr. Brampton.

Bob's experienced eye took in the lowered visor of the chauffeur's cap and the flapping collar of his duster, which partly concealed his face. The young engineer did not like the fellow's appearance. "Who wants me?" he demanded suspiciously.

"Yer boss is up in th' fire chief's office at the Municipal Buildin', and 'e sends me to get yuh. Wants tuh chin wit' yuh, I guess."

"May I use your phone, Miss Clark?" asked Bob. "Stay there," he sharply ordered the chauffeur.

The fellow coughed loudly behind his hand. Instantly, three masked toughs sprang from the outside darkness, darted into the room, and, with the chauffeur, threw themselves upon Brampton.

Betty tried to dodge the struggling mass and run for assistance, but—the engineer now having been neatly sandbagged—one of the toughs forced her backward toward the desk, where he switched off the one light burning.

"Keep yer trap shut an' yuh won't git hoit," he warned. "We're gentlemen, an' know how tuh treat a lady."

The girl was familiar with this type of "gentleman," who called himself a "speculator," and "won" your money at the point of a revolver. She opened her mouth to scream; thereupon the tough adroitly shoved a handkerchief between her jaws and secured the gag. Hastily roping her to a chair, they left, bearing the unconscious Brampton in the center of the group.

As the cab rattled off, Betty tried desperately to free herself. Every moment lost in failing to raise the alarm greatly lessened the chances of rescuing Bob. It was not unusual for a taxicab to stop at the mission. Every so often, Aunt Helen would despatch her private motor or a cab, with a message commanding her eccentric but favorite niece, Betty, to return to "civilization"—referring, of course, to Aunt Helen's sumptuous home on West End Avenue—if only for a day's visit.

Indeed, the arrival and departure of the cab probably occasioned not a single comment. And if anybody remarked its passage east on South Street now, it very likely was to observe carelessly that some one was in a hurry to reach the district dockmaster's office, or one of the railroad shipping piers, or warehouse or factory.

The first inkling Bob Brampton had of his destination came when he found himself being hauled roughly up a flight of narrow stairs. Later, when he was seated on the floor, with his back propped against a wall, he succeeded in diverting his attention from his buzzing, aching head long enough to satisfy himself that at least a part of the building was untenanted.

When his nausea had left him, he sized

up his guard, a young tough—still masked—who crouched close by, holding a flash-light.

From the adjoining room came the murmur of voices. By straining his ears, Bob caught snatches of the conversation.

"Are yous gonna welsh now?" he heard some one say angrily, in a voice that sounded vaguely familiar.

An instant later, the name, "Rickie," came to him—and he identified the first speaker as the leader of the Cherry Hillers.

The "guys" addressed seemed to be muttering excuses. Presently Rickie said:

"I tell yuh, dere's no chanst tuh flivver! Ain't we got dis bird safe cooped up, where no one'd ever t'ink o' lookin'? And if Nick Riahl was willin' to pay a pikin' hundred to have Brampton outa de way f'r a mont', I guess we can squeeze a coupla more centuries outa him now."

"Nick Riahl! Why should Riahl want to get rid of me?" Bob puzzled. There flashed the thought of Riahl's attentions to Betty Clark. A muffled growl of rage escaped him; he tugged fiercely at the cords binding his wrists.

"Cut it out!" whispered the guard, who seemed divided between a disinclination to bring himself to Rickie's notice at present and a fear lest the prisoner learn too much from the talk in the next room. His foot gave Bob a savage prod.

The gangsters' argument grew hot; Rickie was fast losing what little patience he owned.

"The Pirate ain't so much! He's jus' got yer number—got yous guys scared pink!" he accused. "I'd brace 'im m'self, only dat t'ree of us makes it more sure.

"All we gotta do is, put de dope to 'im straight—shake 'im down f'r de coin. If 'e gets funny, we got 'im covered. He don't pack no gun in 'is clothes."

Finally, after further argument, there were sullen mutterings of assent, and Rickie and two companions trooped down the stairs. A remaining pair of gangsters came in to join Bob's guard.

"Rather dem th'n me!" said one of the trio, while the others gave a short laugh of approval. "De Pirate did up six guys one night. He woiks like lightnin'!"

Some one produced a flask, another a pack of cards, and they settled down philosophically for a quiet little game.

In the mean time, Betty Clark—by dint of persistent, ingenious twisting and fumbling—had released her hands. She tore the offensive gag from her mouth and snatched up the telephone, but saw that the cord had been cut.

She flew to the door. As she had surmised, there was no cab in sight. Then, never thinking of the telephone up-stairs, she ran along the street.

The pumping station, in the next block, was her goal. About to enter the door, it occurred to her that these people—or even the police whom they would summon—did not know all of the holes in which the gangsters hid, and to one of which they probably had carried Bob Brampton, provided he were still alive. But who *did* know?

"Nick Riahl!" she exclaimed. "*He* might!" If she could find Riahl!

Turning from the door, she ran swiftly westward. As she flew by George's, with its separate wedges of pie and its sirup jugs lined up in the windows, Murtha's, and other water-front dives, and the big yellow warehouse, the thought did not enter Betty's mind that perhaps Mr. Riahl could not be trusted.

Soon she had left behind her, in succession, the poultry market, the ship stores building, the ice-loading dock, and the wagon-builder's, and now arrived breathlessly at Pike Slip.

Her eyes anxiously sought the oystermen's pier. One light was visible there—and that shone from the Pirate's shack.

III.

MANHATTAN BRIDGE passes obliquely above Pike Slip, which is littered with heaps of crushed stone, bricks, gravel, sand, bags of cement, and other useful but inartistic impediments treasured by the department of public works and sometimes employed handily by the warring neighborhood toughs.

Before swinging its nearly two miles of length gracefully and elastically over the East River to its Brooklyn anchorage of

granite and concrete, the bridge cuts across the little pier utilized exclusively by oyster planters and shippers.

This pier is isolated from the South Street dock by several oars' lengths of water. To its west are moored the boats of the oyster fleet; to its east lies a narrow slip bridged by plank inclines extending from the oyster shacks to the pier of the seaboard and gulf steamship line, and the line of freighters plying locally between New York and Keyport.

The wooden, two-story shacks are built closely side by side, along the pier, virtually covering it. From the rear, each presents the quaint appearance of a Noah's ark. But their front—opposite the steamship pier—has all the aspect of an " operation " of run-down suburban dwellings tenanted by, say, unskilled factory workmen and their families. Many of the shacks are furnished with a pretentious " porch," and a French window opening above the porch roof.

A raised skylight embellished the Pirate's shack, which, having sloughed off most of its paint, appeared a muddy gray. Solid, cumbersome little shutters, rounded on the top, protected the rear windows.

It was through one of these, with its shutter swung back, that streamed the ray of light greeted with joy by Betty Clark.

She recalled now that Nick Riahl once had said he was the only oysterman who used his shack for a home as well as for a place of business.

Betty scurried across to the steamship pier and then through the shed, without being accosted. Finally she reached the incline that led to the Pirate's shack.

Nick Riahl opened the door at Miss Betty's knock.

" Come in!" he said smilingly, and then looked doubtfully about him. " This is where I cull my oysters durin' the season, get 'em ready to ship, and have my little office," he explained. " My livin'-place is up-stairs; I like to be handy to my work."

" This is all right," said Betty, glancing hurriedly about the room which, while not altogether pleasing to sensitive nostrils, seemed clean as beeswax.

" Mr. Riahl, I need your help."

She went on, with scarcely a pause, to tell what had happened at the mission.

When Betty spoke of the taxicab, the Pirate fully understood that these elaborate preparations by Rickie and his helpers pointed to an attempt to double-cross him in some way. Yet his smile was fixed, his expression unaltered.

But when she described how the toughs had handled her, something menacing crept into his soft drawl as he commented:

" So they laid hands on *you;* did they?"

" I'm not thinking about that, Mr. Riahl. What worries me is that they may do something terrible to Mr. Brampton."

" I'll see that nothin' serious happens to Mr. Brampton," said the Pirate carelessly. " Don't let that bother you."

Impulsively the girl clasped his hand in both of hers as she looked up into his face and cried gladly: " I *knew* I could depend upon you! You were the first one I thought of!" Then her hands quickly loosened and her eyelids dropped before the man's steadfast gaze.

The Pirate was speaking in a tone so low as to be hardly audible. " Th' mos' natural thing in the world you should bring your troubles to me."

The girl found herself crushed in his arms; his passionate kisses raining upon her mouth, her cheeks, her hair.

" I love you, little girl! An' you love me. What's th' use of us hidin' it!"

With a frantic effort she broke from his embrace and put the table between them. Trembling with anger and disgust, she panted:

" And I thought you were a gentleman!"

The man stood as immobile as the wooden Indian to which Brampton had compared him. His dry, quizzical smile seemed graven curiously upon a face that was white under its tan.

" No; I don't claim to be no gentleman," breathed the soft voice. Still more deliberately: " But roughneck as I am, I never pertended to care f'r a person and lead that person on an' on, jes' to amuse m'self. If I did, I'd expect to pay."

He swung with startling swiftness round the table—and stopped, arrested by what he saw in the girl's face.

"Oh, I'm so sorry," came softly to his ears. "I didn't understand." Betty's voice was tender with pity, almost tearful with self-accusation.

"I didn't really mean to—" She now was pleading haltingly. "I liked you—just as I like old Tom McGrue, the sailmaker, and kindly Mr. Winch, the shipsmith. And I wanted to show my friendship. Won't you forgive me? Can't we be friends, Nick Riahl?"

Riahl had dropped to a chair. Elbow on knee, his chin rested in his cupped hand. He raised his head.

"It's for *you* to forgive"—dully—"an' you wouldn't, if you knew everything." He paused, then asked abruptly:

"Brampton wants to marry you; don't he? An' you love him."

The girl's countenance, and her silence, told him what he desired to know.

Rising quickly, the Pirate took a revolver and cartridge clips from the table drawer. He slipped them into his pockets.

"I'm goin' to find Brampton for you."

Hand on the door-knob, he paused.

"You'd better stay here till I get back—or for a while, anyway. It's apt to be dangerous outside, any minute now."

The Pirate gently closed the door behind him, stepped out upon the incline—or "gangplank," as he termed it—and in a few moments was passing from the steamship pier-shed to the opposite side of South Street.

On the chance of picking up a clue, he dropped into Ross's popular saloon. For a drink, the hangers-on were willing to admit they *had* seen a taxicab—or a dozen cabs, if that would better please "de guy wot set 'em up." But Bill McGee, the bartender, was genuinely observing; that being part of his job.

"'Bout an hour ago, th' doors was swingin' open, as usooal, and I seen one taxi rip east along South—hell bent for election," he volunteered.

"Thanks, Billy," said the Pirate, taking his leave.

The tip sounded good. He would work east—as far as the Hook, if necessary—and try to discover where a taxicab had stopped. Once that information were obtained, he could strike for the nearest haunt of the gangsters and give it the "once-over."

He had gone but a rod or so, when he was certain that he saw a form slink into the coal-yard—or it may have been the junk-yard—near Rutgers Slip. Treading warily, the Pirate shortly entered the coal-yard and went carefully through the wagon-sheds.

His search was fruitless. As he was about to leave, however, he noted something suspicious about the vacant store and dwelling on the corner of Rutgers Slip and South Street. Light had flashed for an instant through chinks in a shutter on an upper-story window. This would bear investigation.

If the Cherry Hillers were in the building, the Pirate knew he could not hope to get in by the front door without giving the alarm. Therefore, he passed through the coal-yard; thence, by a twisting runway, reached the yard that—surrounded by a fence—lay between Gample's bakery and the vacant building. Crossing the yard, he came to where the fence and the building met.

The Pirate examined his revolver. Then, swinging to the top of the fence, he jumped lightly to the high stoop at the side entrance. Here he was in shadow, and barely visible to any gangster who might be on watch in Rutgers Park.

Without pause, he applied his shoulder steadily to the door; finally, the rusted latch yielded with scarcely a sound.

The store on the ground floor might be his proper destination, but a back stairway that led upward looked promising. He decided to try this first.

Keeping close to the wall, where his weight would impose the least strain on the decrepit stairs, he moved so stealthily, so deliberately, as not to make a creak, at last gaining the landing above.

His suspicions were verified. Soon he was gazing with smiling satisfaction into the room occupied by the three gangsters and their prisoner. The Pirate's fist slowly clenched.

A moment he crouched; then launched himself into the room. One startled glance

—and the gangsters, forgetting cards, flasks, prisoner, seemed moved by a single, fixed idea; which was to escape the Pirate's vengeance. As swiftly as he came, they dived desperately along the floor. Their flashlight was kicked into a corner, throwing most of the room into darkness.

The Pirate's only desire at present was to free Brampton. The rest he could attend to, any time later. But one of the gangsters, confused by the suddenly dimmed light, ran into Riahl; and, finding himself cornered, whipped out a knife. The grinning Pirate's hammerlike fist swung out—drove down—and the gangster dropped where he stood. His comrades long since had passed out of the door.

While the Pirate bent over to release Brampton, however, there came the scuffle of feet on the stairs. Reinforced, no doubt, the toughs were coming back—probably with a little gun-play in mind.

Although the Pirate might have relished a little "scrap," he had no desire to rouse the police. Pressing his revolver into Brampton's hand, he threw himself against the rotten shutters of the window nearest him and burst them open.

"Out with you!" he whispered, swinging Brampton out of the window and upon the iron awning; himself closely following.

He flung a leg over the awning edge; groped for and found a post. Then, with the Pirate helping Brampton—who was still weak and faltering—they slid down to the pavement.

Hugging the walls of buildings, they now hurried west along South Street. The Pirate's alert eyes detected several other Cherry Hillers skulking about in the neighborhood, but the toughs also had recognized the Pirate and showed no inclination toward following.

"Rickie must have his whole gang out," he drawled. "Queer I don't spot Rickie himself. I'm special anxious to meet 'im."

Bob Brampton darted a quizzical look at this smiling individual who played the strange double rôle of enemy and rescuer.

"I think you'll find Rickie and several of his pals trying to spot *you*. They went over to your place to soak you for more money," said Bob boldly.

The Pirate stared piercingly at Bob—then broke into a run.

As Brampton pelted after him, the Pirate half turned and said over his shoulder:

"Faster! I left Miss Clark at my shack—waitin' for you."

"The devil you say!" gasped the dismayed Bob Brampton.

IV.

WHILE Nick Riahl sought his clue in Ross's saloon, Rickie Dunn and two supporters were quietly entering the steamship pier-shed, on their way to the Pirate's shack.

Shortly, Rickie was knocking at the door.

His jaw dropped when, after repeated pounding, the door opened a crack and Betty Clark's face timidly appeared.

"Is Nick Riahl in?" at last he inquired.

"Mr. Riahl has gone out," was the short reply.

Rickie poked his head in and satisfied himself that the Pirate was not on the bottom floor at least.

"We're frien's o' his—gotta see 'im" and, to Betty's indignation, the tough coolly pushed open the door, motioned to his pals, and the three walked in.

The gang leader ran softly to the ladder; sprang up it like a cat. After a swift examination of the room above, he returned, to stare wonderingly at the girl.

The Pirate must have snooped around the mission, found her, and brought her here, was his first thought. Yet she appeared a willing captive—the door had not even been locked.

"I came to see Mr. Riahl upon urgent business," Betty said stiffly; flushing under his scrutiny. She knew Rickie Dunn by sight, and had heard he instigated most of the deviltry in the neighborhood. It wouldn't surprise her to learn that Bob had been assaulted by Rickie's gang. The impression persisted that she had heard this tough's voice earlier in the evening. In imagination she covered his face with a mask, and studied him again.

The gang leader himself now was more deeply mystified than ever. There was something "phony" about the "mission

lady," although heretofore he wouldn't have credited the suggestion. Yet the one answer he could find to the riddle was that she was Nick Riahl's "friend," and a party to the Pirate's scheme. Sure! It was as plain as day. Brampton had something "on" them—or they were afraid he would have—so they wanted him safe out of the way. The Pirate was rich, as most of South Street knew—and Miss Clark was "wiser" than she looked.

Rickie leered insolently at the girl, then winked significantly at his pals, who laughed in huge enjoyment at this amusing situation.

So this haughty "mission worker" wasn't the little tin angel she was cracked up to be! No better, in fact, than *their* girls! Great sport it would be, to take her down a peg.

Still, they couldn't afford to antagonize the Pirate further. Lucky for them that part of his "plan" had worked out to perfection! He would be more amenable to their demands for a more satisfactory bargain.

Betty had seated herself, and seemingly was oblivious to their presence. Actually, she was rallying all her courage. She felt that she must cry out—shriek—rush from the place—do anything but sit passive.

The toughs lounged about, nonchalantly rummaging in this corner and that. Finally—when Betty felt that she could not maintain her apparent composure a moment longer—Rickie beckoned to his followers and the trio went outside. He also was growing nervous, although for a different reason.

"T'ink we'd better wait on de other pier," he whispered. "He'll git sore if she tells 'im we been hangin' round all night."

"Besides," fidgeted a pal, fumbling in his pocket for a bottle, "if anyt'ing *should* happen, an' we gotta dig, nix on dis oyster pier, wot's a rat-trap—'less we dived inter de swim, quick enough."

"Keep yer noive—wot *can* happen, anyhow?" scoffed Rickie. He accepted a draught from the flask, nevertheless, and seemed as greatly pleased as his comrades when they all were stowed comfortably behind the bales and boxes on the steamship pier. Rickie could fight—as his record attested—but a scrap with the Pirate was something to think twice about.

Their wait was short. As Rickie craned his neck from behind a packing-case, the rays from an arc-light near the end of the pier fell upon the faces of two men who were approaching at a run.

"De Pirate has found Brampton an' dey've made it up!" he exclaimed with an oath. "Now dey'll be hell to pay!

"See here, pals," he whispered, a note of determination coming into his shaking voice. "We gotta croak dese guys *now*—or de Pirate 'll never let up till he gets *us*.

"Shoot just as dey're about to step on de plank. We can't miss! An' I bet dey ain't got a gat between 'em. "It 'll be soft!"

The chances favored his scheme. For, while the Pirate and Bob naturally were watching for Rickie's look-outs, this was no time for hesitation—when Betty Clark's safety was perhaps at stake.

But the Pirate's wary glance caught the visor tip of Rickie's cap protruding. He softly sprinted ahead of the engineer, and hurled himself around the corner of the packing-box.

Springing after him, Bob heard a sharp report and saw the Pirate tumble over the crouching Rickie. The suddenness of the attack, however, had disconcerted the gangsters. Their shots went wild, and seized with terror at sight of the Pirate lunging among them, two of the toughs turned and ran. Rickie got away last, before the Pirate could regain his feet or come to grips with him.

Bob sent several bullets after the gangsters, but without effect, as they scuttled behind a pile of casks.

Handing the engineer a remaining clip of cartridges, the Pirate said: "I'm goin' to the shack for a gun. Stay here an' try to cover me while I make a run for it. Then wait, unless I call."

On the instant he was gone. A shower of bullets followed his withdrawal from shelter, despite Bob's efforts to draw a bead on the gangsters. Still suffering from the knock-out blow he had received, and exhausted by his run to the pier, the en-

gineer's hand was unsteady and his aim uncertain.

Midway in the crossing, the Pirate stumbled for a moment—but soon covered the remaining distance and entered the shack.

He gave a gasp of relief when he saw Betty standing near a window.

"All right?" he asked.

"Yes; but—"

"Mr. Brampton's safe," he said briefly. "He'll be here soon."

Smiling encouragingly, he found an automatic and cartridges, then cautiously let himself out the door.

"Now I c'n take a hand in the game m'self," he drawled, a few seconds later, as he rejoined the anxiously waiting Brampton.

"No harm's come to Miss Clark," he added.

"They caught you!" exclaimed Bob, noticing the Pirate's limply swinging arm.

"Jes' a little nip I got goin' over," the other responded lightly.

"Now I'm goin' out to settle my score. If yuh see a head showin', pot it—while I sneak up on 'em. That 'll be surer than both of us makin' a rush together," he explained, when Bob demurred.

No sooner did the Pirate emerge, than a gangster's face appeared. Bob's revolver spoke, and the tough jerked back under cover. But he had seen the oncoming Pirate, and the courage oozed from him. With a wild yell he dashed from the casks and, followed by his pal, dodged from one pile of freight to another, until he came to the edge of the pier. From it, the two plunged into the river.

That left only Rickie.

The Pirate now threw aside all pretense of stalking the gang leader. He charged boldly on Rickie's hiding-place.

The gangster's head popped from cover; he cowered for an instant, panic-stricken, and then—losing discretion—bolted along the pier.

Bob withheld his fire, while the fugitive—running like a scared jack-rabbit—and his pursuer, rushed toward the crowd that had gathered at the end of the pier and which now hastily scattered.

Maddened by fear, the gangster whirled and fired. The Pirate was hurled back against an iron pillar; regained his balance; and went on smilingly as though nothing had touched him.

Rickie gaped in hideous fascination. His gun dropped from his nerveless fingers. He turned, screaming frantically, and stumbled forward.

The grinning Pirate drew nearer, still nearer, in his inexorable man-hunt. Seemingly having no use for his revolver, he tossed it aside.

He leaped—bearing down the shrieking gangster as a wolf drags down its quarry.

"How any man with a bullet in his shoulder and a shattered arm could put a tough out of business—*with one hand*—is beyond me!" ejaculated the surgeon who had arrived with the ambulance from the Bellevue Accident Ward at Gouverneur's Slip.

He glanced toward the leader of the "Slaughter House" gang of Cherry Hillers; who, covered with burlap, lay awaiting the dead wagon.

Kneeling lower beside the muttering Pirate, the surgeon asked: "What's that he's saying?"

"Sounds like Miss Clark's name to me," responded the orderly; "an' he says—'Here's Mr. Brampton.' Then somethin' about his keepin' his word even though he ain't no gentleman."

It sounds good; it "reads good"; it is good!

"PRINCESS OF PLUNDER"

By C. ELEANOR and RAYMOND S. SPEARS

BEGINNING SEPTEMBER 20

Avalon

by Francis Stevens

Author of "Citadel of Fear," etc.

CHAPTER XXIII.

RANDOLPH READS.

INTO what arcanum of incendiarism and battle he might be flinging himself, Griggs knew not, but he charged valiantly on. The unseen revolver spoke again, and a neat chip of glass flew from the lamp he carried. Then he was through the smoke.

Dashing a hand across watering eyes, he saw that he had come out into a large, brick-paved room, luridly illuminated by flames that sprang, apparently, from the very bricks themselves. One whole portion of the floor seemed ablaze, sending up thick, black clouds that were beaten back by the strong draft from an open window.

On the very edge of the flaming space, two men lay locked in a struggle which threatened every moment to end in the fire.

Pausing only to set his lamp on the floor, Griggs flung himself upon the combatants, but more with the humane idea of dragging them away from the flames than attacking either one of them. Then Brant and his employer came charging out of the smoke. Seeing the commodore apparently embroiled, they promptly added themselves to the excited heap on the floor.

A moment after that again, the whole five of them heaved upward, practically as one mass. Brant had got hold of somebody's collar and stood up. Then he sat down again with considerable force. Out of the thick of it, one short, broad figure had writhed with astonishing ease, tripping Brant *en route,* dashed across the room and leaped to the sill of the open window.

Again the group, now reduced to four, heaved and writhed frantically. Brant, however, had his feet beneath him again, and his arms had closed around the second of the original combatants, who seemed bent on following the first.

"Let go of me, you fools!" choked a voice hoarse with wrath and smoke. "That's Delgado! He'll get clean away!"

Griggs detached himself and flung around toward the window.

"Stop there or I fire!" he bellowed, but already the window was empty.

Rushing to the opening, he leaned far out and loosed two ineffectual shots after a dimly seen and rapidly receding black bulk, running sure-footedly along the wall-top. A red-orange flash leaped back toward him. Griggs ducked as a bullet zipped past, and when he leaned forth again there wasn't even a dim black bulk to shoot at.

"Missed him!" snapped the commodore disgustedly, and turned back.

Behind him the struggle had resolved into single combat between Brant and Delgado's former antagonist, with Randolph dancing excitedly around the outside edge. Another crash and the pair were down across an overturned chair. Brant was above, and his weight knocked the other man's wind out pretty effectually, but the latter seemed inclined to fight on, till there came a sudden pressure of steel against his temple.

"Quiet!" ordered Griggs. "Don't force us to kill you, Avalon. Lie quiet!"

"For Heaven's sake, Danny, leave him to Brant and help me put out this fire!"

Wondering how Randolph could expect even their united efforts to avail against the fierce conflagration raging in that kitchen, Griggs nevertheless thrust his pistol into the secretary's ready hand and

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rose, choking and coughing as his head came into the upper smoke-strata. The lurid effect of flames, however, seemed strangely diminished.

"Over here!" shouted Randolph, who was beating with his coat at the wall. A scattered blaze was licking the woodwork there, but had not really taken hold. Griggs heard shouts, running feet, and then a great splash of water conquered the last of the flames in a hissing steam-cloud.

To Griggs the kitchen seemed suddenly alive with thronging forms.

He had a confused idea that the house had been rushed at last, till clearing smoke revealed familiar faces, and he realized that the battle of the kitchen had drawn none save those members of his own party.

There stood Bobby, the steward, an empty bucket in his hand, staring at a wide swath, blacker than his own frightened countenance, which marked where the oil of a broken lamp had spread blazing. It had been the crashing fall of that lamp, knocked from table to floor by the original combatants, which brought Griggs and his friends down-stairs. The oil, finding no additional fuel in the brick floor, had burned out of itself, and thanks to Randolph's efforts, and Bobby's water-pail, no damage had resulted save a bit of scorched woodwork.

The smoke and racket, however, had brought every soul in the house, saving Ralph, to investigate. Mrs. Griggs had been the only one with courage really to go to bed in the old-fashioned way. Consequently, she was also the only one to appear artistically draped in a flowered silk quilt over a nightgown. But aside from the generally complete costumes present, the scene for several minutes resembled any other where a midnight fire has roused the household. Question, answer, and excited explanation ran riot, till Brant's voice cut through the medley with a loud: "No, you don't!"

Then for an agitated two minutes battle raged once more in their midst. The united force of yachtsmen, however, formed an overwhelming peace league, and the disturber ended as he had begun, flat on the floor, with Brant's knees grinding into his chest.

"I played fool and started to let him up," panted the secretary. "Thought he was all in, but it was just another of his tricks. He knocked the pistol out of my hand and tried to bolt for the window."

"Sit on him all the time, Brant. Then he can't trick you," advised Randolph satirically.

"Who is it you have there?"

Doris had pushed her way into the group, driven by a very keen anxiety. The captured one was inevitably either Don Felipe or her brother, and she hardly knew which would be worse for her. They both knew too much for her security, and under this kind of treatment she was not sure of the silence of either.

"Harry!" The exclamation held a tinge of relief. Of the two, perhaps her brother was safer.

"You might—might ask your friends to get off me, Doris," he panted. "They're too many for me. I'm through!"

Conciliation seeming wise, Doris accepted the suggestion and Avalon was allowed to rise. With three men holding him, and the treasured automatic in Griggs's hands again, there seemed small danger of his attempting another dash for liberty.

He looked past his sister, and there was Navarre Ainge, silent and pale in the background. Her eyes met his, straight and full.

"You don't need to be so—so rough with him," pleaded Doris, rather feebly. "He—perhaps there's been a mistake. I'm not sure—Don Felipe may be the only guilty one—"

Her voice trailed into silence, as three amazed faces were turned upon her.

"Not sure!" Then Griggs grasped the situation alertly. Of course, the fellow was her brother, whatever he'd done, and this belated attempt at his defense was natural enough. "We won't be any rougher with him than needs be," he assured. "I'd suggest, Miss Avalon, that you withdraw. This must be very painful for you. And the rest of us had better adjourn to the front of the house for a consultation. Per-

haps Mr. Avalon will be willing to explain why Delgado was here, and exactly what we are to expect. Brant, just make sure, will you, that our friend hasn't acquired any weapons since he left us?"

Doris threw her brother one desperate glance. Would he take Griggs at his word and explain? But he was looking past her—and then she saw that Brant, carrying out Griggs's request, had drawn from the captive's pocket, not a weapon, but—

Now she knew why Flurry's mouth was set in that rigid line of endurance. The end was coming. Delgado's letter, the one reckless indiscretion of a scoundrel who prided himself on subtle caution—the letter which damned her and him together in a single blot of vileness—that letter was in Fielding's hands, and he was turning it over to his keen-minded employer with a casual: "Want to read this, Mr. Randolph? Might tell us something. It was in the fellow's pocket."

And Flurry's mouth was a stern line of endurance—only, why did that queer, sudden relief come into his eyes; a kind of inward brightening, as he still looked away and past her?

He was glad! That was it. In his heart he was glad that it was all ended, and since disgrace must be known, that it fell on her, clearing him!

Breathless, chalk-white, hating him, Doris waited for the blow. And now Randolph had whistled softly, and turned the letter over to Griggs.

"From Delgado. Read it aloud, Danny. No harm in all of us knowing what we're up against."

Doris felt a wild impulse to turn and run. But they would catch her—hold her roughly, perhaps, as the three who didn't yet know still held her brother. Though in one way she had recently dared a great deal, physically Doris was an arrant coward.

Now Griggs had begun to read, stupidly halting over difficulties in the script. Why couldn't he read it off and be done?

There was no salutation. Don Felipe had spared putting her name to it, but the matter was sufficient. As legal evidence, of course, the letter was not valid against its recipient. The explanation it offered was another matter. That, for any clear-headed person, must unravel all the tangled mystery she had built up, exposing to the bone the cheap, vicious greed that lay back of it.

Griggs's voice went on:

"Are you mad to stay imprison in that house, when the all depend on your action? These, your stupid *patanes*, they will neither obey me nor act for themselves. They turn without aim from one plan to another. They are like the cattle when they go to make *estampido*, threatening everywhere with the lowered horns. Even me they threaten. Shall you see your Felipe gored and tramped, because you have not boldness to speak with your own mouth the command these cattle obey?

"I will remind you. You have desire that your brother shall be no more. I plan the way that he shall be no more, and that yet no man say, your brother's blood on your head. Yes, I do that. I plan, and somewhat I do. Although to now the attempt fail and yet he lives, there will be against me at least the conspiracy charge. But who win great gain by destruction, I or you? How you think to draw back? That your Felipe, perhaps, take punishment, and let you walk free? No. In the courts he would show how he gain nothing—not one pesito—by the destruction of your brother, unless your hand give it to him. Then you think Felipe alone be punish? No.

"The light-keepers, the Barclays, they go to make the trouble for us. *Dios!* They are no more. The misfortune come that therefore a vessel wreck itself, and six perish without need. You think your Felipe take all on himself? He can show in the courts how you fear to be betray by these Barclays. Is it not in your service that they become no more?

"Perhaps you say: 'Felipe kill the sailor in my house. For that, because it is known to many, he may run far away, and I may say that all was done by my Felipe, who is a great maker of troubles.' No. Felipe will not run far away. He stay to make more trouble for you, should you try to make the great fool of him.

"But we speak no more of this now for two reason. First, you will not draw back. Second, we may yet gain all, and be not punish the least.

"For why are you now afraid? Because the stupid people who are wreck they behold too much? But to play the innocent longer with them will bring you no gain. I tell you, Felipe will not be your scapegoat. Choose, instead, the bold, brave way. Come out and

speak with your own mouth the words to command, and these many guns that are in hands fearing to use them, they will be use.

"Now they shoot, shoot, shoot. All foolishness. They are not aim to kill, but only frighten. In the first it seems to me we do not need you. I think you stay at the house, and I, your Felipe, will do all for you, and then you thank me. But then it was not that many should die, but only your brother. Now it is that not one single of the wreck people must live to go away from here. It is your Felipe's life that he loves, not theirs.

"And be sure! If your Felipe win only destruction by all ne do for you, then he will not destroy alone. He is not foolish. No.

"If I have quite judge wrong, and your thought have not been of betrayal, then forgive these words. And if there be some strong reason why you do not come out now—immediate then let me know at what hour, and where, I may safely meet and talk with you. New plans must be made. Perhaps you signal me when all is safe that I come? Send me word by the boy who brings this. *Tuya-tuya para—*"

"'*Tuya para siempre jamás*,'" finished Randolph. "That is, 'yours forever and always.' Our Spanish friend seems to be a sarcastic devil. Well, what do you think of it, Danny?"

"I—I'm afraid I don't quite understand," muttered Griggs, rather pale beneath his coat of sea-tan. "The fellow certainly seems to be urging a—a general massacre."

"Of course, but there's more in it than that." Randolph cast a glance of pure contempt toward the master of the isles. "Can't you see it? This cur Avalon had found out somehow that we knew too much for his health. In his first terror he *ordered* a general massacre—a repetition on a smaller scale, in fact, of that ghastly Catania business. But whoever planned that, the nerve for it was evidently supplied by the Sanjil's captain. Trying to repeat on his own, our gentle host acquired cold feet, and has attempted to get out of it by throwing all the responsibility on his little Spanish chum!"

Randolph's period was marked by a simultaneous gasp from the two Avalons present.

Till Randolph spoke, the interpretation the yachtsmen might put on Delgado's enlightening missive had not occurred even to Doris as possible. Yet, to them, the "brother" whose attempted removal had failed was inevitably Ralph, and the man on whom the letter had been found, its intended recipient.

Randolph hurried on:

"He must have received this sometime during the day. It speaks of 'the boy who brings this.' Fine watch we've kept! He was probably in communication right along, till we locked him up. Then he already had this appointment with Delgado for to-night, and waited meek as a lamb till he was ready to keep it. Then he sandbagged Brant and quarreled in earnest with Delgado, who was growing unruly.

"We broke in on their little tête-à-tête, and I, for one, believe we made a better win in recapturing our feudal lord here than if we'd got three of Delgado. Whether they like him or not, it's clear that the men outside do take his orders. Their shooting at him was pure bluff. They haven't been shooting at him or any one else. They've been peppering the sky, while he has stuck in here with us trying to make up his mind what he really wants them to do, and poor plaintive little Felipe has grown increasingly disgusted with a pirate's life outside. He's put his own neck in the noose for a cur too cowardly to back him up. My sympathy goes to Felipe." Randolph laughed angrily.

Avalon had been listening with a kind of dazed amazement. The dreaded exposé of Doris had backfired with a vengeance, but here was a thing he could certainly not take on himself. It was too monstrous and futile. Sooner or later, the facts were bound to be known now. And there was Navarre.

"Mr. Randolph," he began, "for me to attempt deceiving you would be madness. That letter—"

"It is the final straw!" Doris's voice was high and shrill, like that of a woman driven to the verge of hysteria. "Oh, Flurry, how could you—how could you—be—so—wicked!"

And turning away, she buried her face in her hands and fled sobbing from his presence.

A moment later Navarre Ainge turned and followed her from the room.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WHEN TRUTH FAILS.

AND now Mr. Flurry Avalon should doubtless have persisted in his effort to right himself in the yachtsmen's esteem. By the mighty power of truth alone, he should have rent to shreds the netted meshes of falsehood, and stood forth the innocent and really much abused gentleman he had been throughout. He should have done it.

Only, as he looked from face to face, all desire to attempt that herculean feat passed from him.

They wouldn't believe him. He knew it with a sickening certainty that had begun when he saw the girl who for him had been the bright emblem of trusting faith, turn and leave him—unheard.

A minute followed in which the too-human soul of him plumbed depths below any pain it had ever found before.

He met the hard anger and contempt in the faces of those about him.

And then suddenly the pain merged into numbness, and there returned that satirical, desperate amusement which had gripped him after first reading Delgado's letter.

He had been cast for the star rôle in a tragedy, but the tragedy had degenerated into farce. A grim drama, with the scarlet thread of death woven through it, but farce comedy, none the less. The deadly seriousness of its actors was the funniest thing about it.

What use to go down on his knees and once more abase and humble himself and entreat them to take his word, and transfer their high-minded condemnation to sister Doris and little brother Ralph, because he himself was really a quite harmless sort of fool, whose largest fault was that he had been too blindly easy-going? They wouldn't believe him. As pirate and would-be fratricide, he was real to them. In his actual character he wasn't even a fantom, so far as they were concerned. He simply didn't exist.

"What are you laughing at?" demanded Griggs.

"Only myself. If I am a criminal, you must admit that I haven't made a very good thing out of it."

Randolph smiled contemptuously.

"As a criminal, you are the most complicated and amazing bungler I have ever heard of or encountered."

"Oh, not quite that, surely. You've met Felipe. But what do you intend doing?"

"Leave these damn—beg pardon, Betty, didn't know you were still in the room—these devilish islands of yours before another sunrise," retorted Griggs. "Betty, you go and get something on besides that silk quilt, and tell Miss Doris we're leaving. She and Ralph must come with us, of course. The boy's practically well from his poisoning, and we certainly can't leave either of them here. Avalon, you understand your part in this midnight flitting?"

"You—you think I will give you safe escort on board some vessel in which you may leave?"

"I don't just think it. You will. Jerry, the quicker we clear out the better, eh?"

"Before something new breaks? You're probably right, Danny. We might have cleared earlier, if we'd guessed what a really valuable little hostage was in our midst."

Avalon smiled pleasantly.

"Glad to be of value to somebody in some way. But wouldn't it be nicer still if we could start for the harbor with Delgado as hostage number two? A sort of relief hostage, in case I should be—well, damaged on the way? I'll help catch him, if you like."

"You will? How?"

"Oh, easily." Truth having proved a stony road, perhaps a few lies of his own would pass muster. "I can signal him to return here," he continued. "There is a small door in the wall by the stables where his messenger passed in and out this morning, and where Delgado himself entered tonight. One can reach it from the kitchen, passing all the way under cover of outbuildings. That's why your watch in the courtyard failed to prevent our communicating. Take me there now, light one of the stable lanterns, and I'll signal."

Griggs eyed their prisoner suspiciously. Why was it that no matter what this man said, one felt that he was acting a part? First, he had acted innocence, and now—but no, this could not be acting. This was the real Avalon, the treacherous creature who, being trapped himself, could not endure that his unlucky accomplice should escape. The black-silk scarf with which he had replaced Flanders's bandage aided the sinister impression of pantherish eyes and sardonically smiling lips below it.

"Then," continued the sinister one, "my men out there will hunt up Felipe, wherever he is, and tell him he's wanted. He will come to that door."

"He will not!" contradicted Randolph incredulously. "What! After your row with him to-night?"

"Oh, certainly. A little disagreement like the one you broke in on is nothing. Why, one time down in Rio, Felipe did his level best to knife me, and I laid him out so that he was in the hospital for three weeks afterward. And yet you can see what pals we've been ever since. If I signal, he'll believe that I've come to reason and wish to tell him so."

Practise, Avalon decided, was not requisite in this new art. You took a few slim little splinters of truth, and simply used them as spreaders for the gauzy net of fancy. It was much easier than telling the truth particularly to some people and also considerably more amusing.

He paused, sighed effectively, and added:

"My willingness to lure Felipe into your hands is less base than it may appear. Felipe Delgado has been the curse of my career. He first led me into crime by inducing me to compound a felony—or try to. Now he would—"

"That will do," snapped Griggs. "If you can save your skin at his expense in the courts, I have no doubt you'll do it; but don't attempt anything more of the kind with us. And now, sir, perhaps you'll explain why we should bother at all with Delgado?"

"Well, if you don't I can't guarantee safe passage to the harbor. The—" For a moment the prisoner hesitated. Then he brightened. "Felipe may whine that he can't handle my loyal pirate band, but believe me, there are a lot of them who will turn on me like wolves, if he so much as hints that I am betraying them. And helping you to leave is betrayal, you know.

"Even here in the isles, we can't carry on a really successful business in the piracy and wrecking line, once Governor Haines has been forced to notice us. I have always been on good terms with the Governors of both the Carolinas, but I fear Haines won't like the newspaper publicity you may be tempted to give us, and for that reason, too, the Federal government officials will be driven to give us an annoying investigation—"

With a furious and regrettable oath, Griggs interrupted him.

"Silence, you— Can you imagine for one instant, sir, that we will believe your operations have been countenanced by—by *any* State administration, or Federal officials, corrupt or not? Or, if what you are saying is merely the cursed flippancy it sounds like, can you think that flippancy in your situation will—will *help* you?"

The other looked mildly surprised at Griggs's almost apoplectic vehemence.

"But if I didn't have State protection, or Federal protection, or some kind of protection, how do you think I could have—er got away with it? Piracy in these days, you know, is not the happy, graft-free profession it once was. There are, as I believe it is called, the police to be squared. However, I hadn't meant to drag in politics. I was merely pointing out that valuable though I am as a hostage, capturing Felipe would make our trip harborward safer."

For a full minute he met brazenly the hard, suspicious query in their eyes.

"Besides," he added, "why become so painfully excited for the honor of the Carolinas? You are men of the world. You easily believe evil of other men. Governor Haines is, I do assure you, a personal friend of mine, as he was of my father's, and like myself he is, I presume, known to you only by reputation. If I could plan and carry out the Catania affair, why shouldn't a Carolina Governor condone the act for a

share in the loot? You credit the one, so I can't for the life of me see why you doubt the other." Again there was silence.

Randolph drew a quick, deep breath. "I give you up, Avalon! I don't know what you're driving at, and you've lied too much. You've brought us to a point where everything you say seems a lie, just because you say it. That Catania horror was fact, but you make it seem like a myth just by referring to it. Now, for Heaven's sake, shut up a while! We're not interested in the Governors of North and South Carolina. How they ever came to be dragged into this discussion—you—shut—up! Let us figure things out for ourselves. Danny, what do you think? Shall we let him signal?"

What Griggs thought, and what Brant Fielding thought, and what Randolph thought occupied a half-hour of heated discussion, throughout which the prisoner sat in the silence desired, and with an increasingly bored expression. Lying was all very well, but hearing the pros and cons of innumerable lies—his and other people's—seriously discussed by that trio, might, he thought, have cured even Doris of prevarication, had she been present. At the end, however, his patience was rewarded. They had agreed to the signal.

"A signal was mentioned in Delgado's letter," argued Griggs, "and if we do catch the Spaniard, we'll have both leaders, and our danger will be practically over. But you, Avalon—remember! Attempt to trick us, and you're a dead man!"

"Good old pirate yourself!" muttered Avalon. "What? Oh, I didn't say anything. You told me not to. Are you ready? Then we may as well go straight across the yard to the stables. The route Delgado entered by is rather winding."

"Nevertheless, that is the route we'll take."

The prisoner eyed Griggs reproachfully. "You are the most suspicious people I ever knew. I merely meant to spare you needless walking."

Escorted by the yachtsman's full force, he proceeded to prove at least one of his statements true. It was really possible, by devious paths, to pass from the kitchen through and behind various outbuildings, and so reach the stables without much chance of being observed by any one posted in the main courtyard. As a secret passage, this compared unfavorably with the old cellar tunnel, but as the yachtsmen knew nothing of that, comparison was not for them.

The stables were located in the extreme northwestern angle of the wall, and entering at the side, Avalon led on past the box-stalls and into the harness-room. There was certainly a door, set well back in the stable's brick casing, and which might well open through the outer wall itself.

"And now," said Avalon, when the stipulated lantern had been duly found and lighted, "you will be obliged to let me make the signal in person, unless you wish to spoil everything. My men are posted along there to see that none of you climb the wall and escape under cover of darkness. Using a lantern in this way, the signaler is bound to be recognizable. If they recognize him as one of you, they'll shoot."

Griggs snorted angrily.

"Do you take us for children? Why the devil should you have arranged a signal at all, when you have merely to call one of your men and speak to him?"

"It was Felipe's idea," explained the captive imperturbably. "He's so subtle that he never likes to do anything in the plain, straightforward way. That is one reason why I am so tired of Felipe."

"If you brought us here with any idea that we're going to let you walk out that door alone—"

"Mr. Griggs," broke in the prisoner with sudden impatience, "I brought you here because if we don't check Delgado in some way, we may all be dead before morning! That's the stark truth, if you must know it. I tried to kill him to-night. He'll spread word of it broadcast. Those men of mine are swinging in the wind as it is. Let Delgado swing them a bit further, and I won't survive the night any more than you. He may answer this signal or he may not. I don't know. But for God's sake, give me a chance to try it!"

There was a sincerity in Avalon's last remarks, which had seemed lacking in the tone of his previous statements.

"Let him try, Danny," advised Randolph. "He doesn't need to go outside. Hold your pistol on him and keep him well within the doorway."

"With your men out of sight on either side of it, please," stipulated the prisoner. "If Delgado comes, I'll make an effort to draw him clear inside, and if he won't be drawn—well, you can choose between his life and your own. Now free my hands and give me that lantern."

Rather reluctantly, Griggs signed one of his seamen to remove the ropes by which the prisoner's arms had been secured. Then he laid a heavy hand on Avalon's shoulder, and pressing the automatic's ready muzzle against the middle of his spine, said grimly:

"Attempt to pass outside and I'll kill you without a moment's hesitation. Be sure of that!"

Lantern in hand, Avalon pushed at the door. It stuck, then opened outward with a startling little shriek of unoiled hinges.

Standing within the doorway, his own taller figure obscuring the commodore from any one who might approach, he raised the lantern and moved it thrice across his chest, then once vertically.

Minutes passed and nothing happened. Outside there was no light anywhere, save a distant, blinking ball of fire that was the Venice beacon. The captive spoke again.

"I fear that standing inside this way the signal can't be seen, Mr. Griggs. If we might move just a step or so forward—"

"Absolutely not! Call one of your men here. This signal business is all fool nonsense, anyway!"

"You think so?"

"I'm sure of it!"

The jerk with which Avalon whirled had the suddenness of a silent explosion. Griggs's grip on his shoulder gave way to it. That pistol at his back was not fired till too late—was never fired.

In the same instant that Avalon flung himself recklessly backward into the open, a rifle cracked from fifty feet away, and by pure luck the bullet tore through between half-raised arm and body, and struck the automatic from Griggs's hand.

Avalon dropped the lantern, rolled sidewise, gathered himself with muscles like spring-steel, and dived headlong into the gloom beyond the radius of its light.

CHAPTER XXV.

ANOTHER VALUABLE HOSTAGE.

LARGE-MINDED nobility is in the best of us a fluctuating quality, and an innocent Ishmael, against whom the hand of every man is raised in misunderstanding, may lose his perspective and share the view-point of any guilt-dyed fugitive.

As a long, staccato rattle of rifle-fire followed that first lucky shot, Avalon found a moment of purely vindictive delight. He had flung himself down again, flat to the ground and tight against the wall. Some of those bullets were probably meant for himself. He didn't care. By the direction of the flashes, most of them were flying toward the stable-door, and primitive instinct rejoiced in the danger of his enemies there.

Through the uproar of guns, however, shouts and a quivering bang announced that the yachtsmen had found "outside" too hot for them. They had retreated, closing the door very hastily behind them.

Then he recalled that the yachtsmen were his enemies by error only.

"I hope," he thought dutifully, "that none of them were hurt—the darn fools! When those hinges creaked, I was afraid for sure they'd suspect that door hadn't been opened in weeks. Suspect? They never suspect anything, as long as it's a lie. At least, they know now what my value as a hostage amounted to. Or do they? No, they'll probably figure out some reason why a pirate chief should be greeted with bullets by his loyal gang. That Randolph has the most ingenious mind—" *Bing!* "There's one fellow has his sights down. Believe I'll move on!"

A steel-jacketed bullet had struck the wall just above, spraying him with tiny splinters of stone. He had flung himself prostrate more with an idea of evading the

yachtsmen's fire than the islanders'. The latter's practise of high-shooting, however, seemed to have been discontinued to-night. He more earnestly hoped that no casualties had been sustained by his guests before their retreat, and getting to his feet, made a quick run of it down the length of wall and dodged around the corner.

Behind him, the rifle-fire suddenly fell in volume, then ceased altogether. Some other sort of commotion seemed to have broken out in the islanders' invisible rank. Shouts, a confused noise of rough, excited voices all talking together and raised in anger, or so Avalon thought at the time. He could have sworn, too, that his brother's name was being tossed back and forth among them. Why they should choose this moment to invoke "Maister Ralph," he neither knew nor paused to find out. Every moment he expected some of them to be in pursuit of himself.

Yet he halted suddenly in his noiseless forward dash. This southward lawn caught a faint ghost of illumination from Avalon lighthouse, half a mile away. Though the latter's focal plane was well above Cliff House roofs, and the diffusion of its beam very slight, man-size objects a dozen feet distant across that lawn were barely discernible. The fugitive had perceived that several such objects were in motion there, and coming toward him on the run.

Turning quickly, he flattened himself with his face against the wall. The black scarf hid his fair hair, and he prayed that with that and his dark clothing he might be sufficiently unobtrusive to pass as part of the wall itself. Apparently his scheme of protective coloring was efficient.

At least several pairs of heavily booted feet thudded past without stopping across the turf behind him. The owners of the feet hadn't seen him, or—

Oh, no. They had. One pair of feet, at least, was coming back. Not on the run, but slowly—doubtfully. The soft crunch of boots on turf seemed to express question and doubt in every stride.

Avalon waited. If only the fellow would come near enough before he should be entirely sure—

The feet stood still, and something hard and heavy prodded queryingly at Avalon's shoulder. Desperate, he wheeled to spring.

"Howd hard, thar!" muttered a deep voice. "This gun be main light on trigger-pull. Who be ye?"

With a rifle muzzle nosing in over his belt, Avalon decided that to spring would be inexpedient.

"I surrender," he sighed. "But you once bragged to me, Lowecroft, that you were a fist-man, not a gun-shooter!"

"Maister!"

"Of course. Who else did you think would be hiding and slinking about the isles, afraid to show his face for fear of a bullet? Why don't you shoot, Lowecroft? I'm quite harmless and unarmed—as usual."

But instead of using his rifle, the smith abruptly lowered it and stepped in closer.

"Maister," he whispered hurriedly, "I be main glad to find ye outa thet house, and gladder 'twas me thet found ye. When I thowt I'd killed ye my ownsel', I larned what a dread, girt burden t' blood-sin be. Traitor or no, I'd not hev t' sin o' yer blood on t' isles—ner yet on poor young Maister Ralph, Gawd 'elp un!"

As the smith paused a fresh burst of shouting roared up-wind from beyond the western wall. Lowecroft's mates had reached whatever cause of excitement reigned there. They had added their voice to the tumult, and now Avalon was very sure that it was his brother's name which was being tossed to the gale, and not in anger, but savage exultation.

"Poor Maister Ralph!" repeated the smith sadly. "Ye must leave the isles this night, maister. I'll git ye down secret t' harbor, and git ye a boat someways. I wull not hev it thet t' brand o' Cain be set on thet poor young lad!"

A sudden and fearful comprehension seized Ralph's brother.

"Lowecroft," he gasped, "is the boy out there now? Has he come out to lead them? Is that what they're yelling over?"

"It be," assented the smith grimly. As rapidly as possible, he explained the situation as he knew it. Delgado, it seemed, had returned from his unlucky appoint-

ment with Doris in a raging temper. After a brief, futile effort to rouse the still sluggish riflemen to action, he had gone on down to the village.

Rather prematurely, the Spaniard had asked Jim Selden to call a general meeting in Exmoor market square that night, and assured him that Miss Doris herself would be present. Not half the isles' actual manpower was needed for holding the deadline around Cliff House. The meeting, therefore, was well attended and a pronounced success—till Delgado appeared alone. Then the latter had his work cut out to explain why he had pledged Miss Doris's presence and then not produced the lady.

"I were thar," said the smith. "T' Spanisher and our Jim wuz both talkin' to wunst, and t' other chaps all thet mad they'd hear t' neither on 'em. Rector Hepburn, he says to me: 'Bob, let's you an' me gwan oop t' Cliff House. Usn wull tell t' chaps on guard thar how t' Spanisher hev lied about Miss Doris. Maybe usn can turn 'em. Now's our chanst to defeat t' Satan thet's clamorin' in usn's midst, Bob.' So Rector and me coom on oop—"

"Isn't Hepburn in favor of gunning, then?"

"Fer sure not," retorted the smith indignantly. "Him an' me be down on ye, maister. Don't ye think fer one minute we're not. But usn never thowt t' isles wud run mad like they done. T' gunnin' be Spanisher's work and Jim Selden's. Last coople days, Rector and me has to give oonder to they chaps."

Bent on their peace mission, therefore, the two had climbed the winding cliff road. On reaching the firing line, they were met with the astonishing news that a few minutes earlier Miss Doris had unbarred the front gate, called across that she was sending Ralph out to them, and herself retired again.

Several of the besiegers ran forward, and found Avalon's popular young brother actually standing there, alive and in the flesh. As they had believed him dead, their joy was immeasurable, but ere much could be said a racket of firing exploded on the western line. Ralph and one of the men with him started over to investigate. The others had returned to their posts. Hepburn promptly suggested that they all follow, and be told by Master Ralph's own lips if he and his sister were really backing Delgado in his would-be bloody campaign.

"But," added Lowecroft simply, "I be main afeard for poor Maister Ralph. He do love t' isles, thet boy. I pray God may punish ye, maister, if this night's work ends in killin'."

Avalon might have retorted that being the killing's victim would seem almost punishment enough for an innocent man. To stand arguing with Lowecroft, however, was too unprofitable. The smith was already on his side in practise if not belief.

"You go and tell Ralph," said he sternly, "that I, his brother, and because I am his brother, have gone down to settle with Delgado for his attempt on Ralph's life yesterday. Never mind what that means. Ralph will understand. Tell him that either alive or dead, he'll find me in Exmoor, if he cares to follow. What? Lowecroft, you must let me take my own way in this— Oh, you would, would you?"

The smith, his stubborn mind set on the master's leaving the isles, by force, if needs be, had attempted to fling his great arms about Avalon.

In his next conscious moment, Lowecroft sat up and rubbed the point of his chin dazedly. He was alone by the wall.

"Knocked oonder," he muttered ruefully. "Clean knocked oonder! Bob Lowecroft, t' man thet cud put ye to sleep thatta way be some man. Traitor or not—I dunno, but I reckon ye'd best take uns message fer un, Bob. Some—man!"

And staggering up, the smith made off across the lawn in search of Ralph.

Meantime, Avalon had proceeded on his own stealthy and slinking way. He was still unarmed. Lowecroft's rifle he had discovered with deep disgust to be without a shell in its magazine. Though the smith bore a gun, perhaps for the fashionable effect, he had been more consistent in fact than appearance, and had carried an empty one.

However, there was a hopeful probability that the road to Exmoor was now en-

tirely unguarded. By Lowecroft's account, the men posted along the front had gone over practically as a body to join the welcoming jubilee over the fervid young patriot, Ralph. Such a force as theirs, undisciplined and untrained, could not be expected to sit tight on sentry duty. The instant a stronger interest called, they had forgotten all about their resolve that no one should come out of Cliff House unchallenged—

"Howd hard, thar!" Like Lowecroft's, the challenge was nonmilitary but effective. Again Avalon halted in his tracks, cursing his own carelessness. Disciplined or not, the islanders had by no means left their dead-line entirely unguarded. Several of them now were hailing each other back and forth, though in such a roughly joking spirit that Avalon soon realized the original challenge had not been addressed to himself. One man had crowded or stumbled over another, and now they were all laughing over the trivial incident like the grown-up children they were. Only, they were such grim grown children!

Glad to retreat undiscovered, Avalon retired as far as the wall of Cliff House. Though the road was blocked, there remained one other route open. Perilous and possibly impracticable, it had nevertheless been the way he planned following when the Venice radio-station had been his objective, and he first escaped Brant Fielding's jailership.

Delgado, leaping from kitchen window to wall, had run along the latter's yard-wide top, dropped off at the end, and found himself on the level front sward, with friends, not enemies, to pass on his way to Exmoor.

That had been Avalon's own intended road, so far as the wall's angle. There it joined with a solid six-foot high wooden barrier, erected all along the sheer, curving drop to Peace Harbor, and broken at one point only, where the harbor stairs came up. Those stairs were some distance from the house. If he could reach them, following the *outside* of the wooden barrier and concealed by it, he might then return to safer footing, for he would be well beyond the besiegers' sentry-line.

Without hesitation, and moving quickly lest he be glimpsed against the sky, he swung himself to the barrier's top, astride of it and over.

On the harbor side, as he remembered it, the fence lacked several inches of being flush with the cliff. Hanging by his hands, with the black emptiness of space behind, his stockinged toes felt for the foothold that should be there. Memory, it seemed, was mistaken. Not only was the expected rock-ledge missing, but the cliff seemed to positively recede a trifle under the barrier. Moreover, the fence itself began to bend outward under his weight, with an ominous creaking.

Then he knew what had happened. The rock here had crumbled away somewhat, leaving this portion of the fence supported only by its next post some half dozen feet distant.

Avalon hastily edged along, hand over hand, expecting every instant that the fence would go. He did find foothold at last, however, and as his toes gripped the narrow ledge he was glad to pause a moment and breathe.

"Crazy wooden fence!" he reflected angrily. "Why—oh, why, just because there's always been a wooden fence along here, do I have to put up with one? By Heaven, if I live through this night the isles are going to part with some of their sacredest traditions, and this fence is one of 'em. Ugly, ramshackle old thing!"

Scowling, he edged on along the despised barrier, which at least hid him from his foes. Of course, should one of the guard be leaning fairly against it, he was lost. Silent though his movements were, the quiver imparted to the fence would give him away.

Not many minutes later, however, he had sidled past the most dangerous point—he could hear them still laughing and talking there—and after edging on down a hundred yards of steep slope, decided that there was no need of continuing this mode of progress clear to the harbor stairs. Quietly, he raised himself to the fence-top again.

From there, far away and down between the trees, he glimpsed a red glowing of

fire, and though the wind was blowing thither, a vague noise of shouting reached his ears. Evidently the meeting was still in tempestuous progress.

He smiled. Miss Doris had failed them, but another and uninvited member of the Avalon family was about to attend that meeting.

Just before swinging from the barrier's top on the landward side, he glanced straight downward. Then he stiffened breathlessly.

There was—there certainly was a deeper shadow crouching in the blackness by the fence. A man? Avalon listened. It seemed to him that he caught a faint hiss of breathing. Farther up-hill, another burst of laughter rang out. They were well engaged up there, and if this were a solitary guard—

With the soft, deadly certainty of a panther, descending on its prey from the forest bough, Avalon dropped.

The shadow was indeed a man, though it squeaked like a rabbit. But that was the result of a startled human yell being stifled in its throat by steely fingers.

"Be still!" muttered Avalon fiercely. "I'm going to let you breathe. If you breathe above a whisper, I'll choke you in earnest. Who are you?"

"Who are *you?* Get off me!" The gaspingly valiant retort was accompanied by a struggle. Swiftly the steely fingers shifted from the throathold and pounced on another hand.

"Ah! Revolver, eh!" The exclamation was of distinct pleasure, as the revolver in question changed possessors abruptly. "*Now* who are you? But I've already guessed. By your fatness, your impudence, and your voice, you are Jerome T. Randolph—aren't you? Answer me!"

The revolver muzzle and the throathold together were too much.

"Y-yes!" gasped the shipbuilder.

"Well, I don't know how you came to be skulking along the fence of my private harbor in the dark, Mr. Randolph, but personally I think you're a very suspicious character. And bearing concealed weapons! Disgraceful! Come on. Stand up!"

"I know who you are, too," muttered the shipbuilder between his teeth. "Why not shoot and be done with it?"

Avalon shook his prey very gently to and fro, still keeping the throathold.

"Because I don't choose," he said softly. "That's reason enough for you. I'm not giving any explanations. Mr. Randolph, before you were stranded here, I had heard of you as a very brilliant man. Now I wish to tell you something about yourself. You're not brilliant. Nor clever. You're stupid. I could have forgiven Griggs and the others, but not you. You were supposed to have brains. Now, Mr. Randolph, you are sure that I'm a very dangerous criminal—aren't you?"

"I think—begin to think you're a lunatic!"

"Splendid! Another brand-new charge, when I thought all the possible ones had been used up. All right. If I'm a lunatic, you believe I'm a dangerous lunatic—don't you? Yes? Then don't forget it. And when you see the commodore again, if you ever do, tell him that he should grasp a man's wrist like this—and twist it behind him—like this—and hold it—so—unless he is willing that the man should wrench away easily. Even you can understand—can't you—that I could never have tumbled backward out of that stable doorway if the commodore had held me as I am holding you."

"Damn you, yes! But he'd have killed you, only a rifle-bullet knocked the pistol out of his hand!"

"Was that the reason? I wondered. Too bad I had that one little bit of luck, wasn't it? Now, Mr. Randolph, I don't know whether you're the only member of your—er—gang who is straying about loose or not. You and I, however, are going down this road together to Exmoor, and if we do meet any more prowling yachtsmen, just remember what a valuable little hostage you are, Mr. Randolph, and that my regard for human life is notoriously deficient. In other words, don't try to ring in any help for yourself. If we meet any of my own gang—"

He paused. "Well?" queried the other rather anxiously.

"In that case you won't need to remem-

ber anything. What? Oh, you'll find out why not. Don't be too curious about what may not happen. And when we reach Exmoor you shall see me commit one of my well-advertised crimes—if I can get away with it. Isn't that a pleasing prospect? Forward, Mr. Randolph—and not a word nor whisper of sound more, if you value your life!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

OUT OF PARIS QUARRY.

CONSIDERING Exmoor's previous reputation for somnolent quiet, and also that the hour was nearer morning than midnight, the market square of that island village presented an extraordinary aspect. In the center a large bonfire of driftwood flaunted many colored flames, roaring to the draft of the strong east wind. It lighted the rough, harsh faces of those who thronged the square; men all, for wives and daughters preferred to remain behind shut doors this night. Drunkenness was afoot, rough hate, and loud dissension.

And yet, for several minutes past, disagreement among themselves had been hushed as they listened to the words of an orator who spoke from the elevation of a platform at the market's inland side.

Jim Selden had given up the meeting in disgust and retired up-hill, seeking the riflemen who, at least, half-acknowledged his leadership. Felipe Delgado, however, more persistent or more desperate, had stuck to his task, and it seemed had really won their attention at last. He was making the most of it. All his cold calm banished, the Spaniard grew impassioned, vehement.

"It is the hour!" he shouted. "The hour to strike! Your *señorita* is not here—no! But for why? For because your traitor master he will not permit. For because he have learn how she is true to you. For because he make her the prisoner! What you think? That she would not come out if she might? But that is madness. I—yes, even I, Felipe Delgado, who am the big fool enough to try be *liberator* for such cowards—I am not the fool to doubt your *señorita*. So beautiful—so generous—so true to these islands she love! *Ingratas* all! She have suffer the traitor's anger for you—and you hang back!"

Just here the meeting he addressed was invaded from two directions, and in two manners, though both were as yet unperceived by the Spaniard.

On the harbor side an old man entered the square—an old, feeble man, weak with suffering. And on the inland side a much younger man leaped to the platform itself from the rear and walked deliberately across till he was within a yard or so of Delgado's unconscious back.

"Ah, *ingratas!*" repeated the orator passionately. "The coward shame to you all! Are you women, crying for the woman to lead you? *Dios*, let it not be say so! Play, men! He who is your enemy strike him down! He who betrays you, his blood be upon his head!"

"That is first-rate advice, Delgado," drawled a voice behind him. "I'll take it!"

Speech died on the Spaniard's lips. With a shuddering start he whirled.

There stood the figure of a man in black, with a strained, somber face and eyes that gleamed dangerous as any untamed jungle-cat's. How he had got here, Delgado did not pause to inquire. Neither did he ask the man's purpose in coming, nor call upon the islanders to assume responsibility for his removal.

What gleamed in the master's eyes had one meaning with the thing that glittered in his hand, and Delgado was not quite stupid enough to attempt a subtle reply to that.

His own hand darted back and came up with true snake-swiftness.

Avalon had waited that fraction of a second. Two reports blended ringingly.

Avalon staggered, then stood still and erect.

The Spaniard's smoking pistol wavered—dropped. His large, pale face tilted back, mouth open to a queerly squarish shape, like the mouth of one of those old Greek masks of tragedy. He did not so much fall as crumple slowly till he squatted in a clumsy heap on the platform, still with face tipped back, mouth open. Then his limbs flung out in a grotesquerie of shuddering protest. So he sprawled there—and died.

The entire incident had occupied less than a quarter of a minute's time.

Unable to grasp so abrupt a tragedy the crowd swayed and yelled, baying as hounds bay, when the harried stag turns at last.

And Avalon stood immobile, staring down at the ugly thing he had killed. He felt suddenly sick and faint, as if something had broken in him. Now was a bad moment for inertia. He knew it—and yet it was as if the very mainspring of action had broken in him. What was it he had meant to say to these people, when Delgado's perilous lies should be silenced?

Another moment and the platform would be rushed. Already a surging forward movement had begun, but luckily for Avalon the meeting's second invader was as surprising to it as he had been himself.

Lean, wiry, gaunt, that old man came stumbling on the scene, held up partly by the arms of two young cattle-herders from Paris Island, but more actually supported by the spirit of vengeance which, for near four days, had kept life in his rheumatic old body. His eyes, sunken and red, peered out of deep hollows. His straggling gray hair and beard were tangled with bits of grass and weed. He resembled the specter of some old fisherman drowned long ago.

Yet all Exmoor knew him well, and as he came, half stumbling, half carried into the circle of firelight, his name replaced mere inarticulate yelling on the lips of those among whom he passed.

"Jem Barclay!"

"Owd Jem, an' lookin' like a sperrit, by Gawd!"

"Whar ye been, Jem? Whar ye been hidin'?"

"I ain't been hidin'!" His voice creaked with hoarseness like a rust-caked hinge. "I been down Paris quarry, thet's whar I been, and I coom back to git the dawg thet put me thar and killed my boy!"

His red eyes, wandering here and there, rose to the platform and blazed with a spectral and awful delight.

"Thar ye be!" he croaked. "Owd Jem be main glad to set eyes on ye, maister. Now usn wull hev jestice on t' dawg thet murdered my lad!"

By an effort Avalon wrenched his gaze from the sprawling thing at his feet and looked out across the market-square. A strange, shadowy unreality was seizing all his surroundings. Flames and shadows leaped alike with a roaring tumult. But he had caught the import of Jem Barclay's words, and to question that the "dawg" meant was himself seemed absurd. All crimes done or thought of in the isles were referred back to him as a matter of course. It seemed not worth arguing about.

"More of maister's work, eh?"

A dozen voices took up the cry till the old lightkeeper silenced them again with furious gesticulations and croakings.

"Maister had nowt to do with it!" He could be heard at last. "Ye let me tell 't, and then ye'll know why I thank Gawd t' see maister standin' alive thar. He bes a true maister and a good, and owd Jem luks to un right trustful fer jestice!"

This seemed a pleasant variation on the usual theme. Quite deliberately Avalon walked to the platform's extreme edge, let himself down on it with the same odd, careful deliberation, and sat there, dangling the pistol between his knees. The men nearest stared and edged off. Guns were still a novelty in the isles, and that particular one had not been used for mere threatening. It had just killed a man.

"Ye all knows," continued Jem Barclay's creaking voice, "thet my boy and young Tim Coleman, they was like twin-butties. Whut one was inter, t'other was onter. One day, whiles back, Tim, he goes oop t' see maister at Cliff House. Bein' jest a lad and hopeful-like, he thinks mebbe by pleadin' with un maister wud change and let usn buy t' lands fer our ownsel's.

"Maister bes out, they tell 't un, but they give Tim leave to wait. So he waited in t' big hall, a thinkin' of maister's wickedness. And, whiles waitin' thar, he overhears strange talk atween thet murderin' dawg, Miss Doris's Spanisher, and—"

"Don't say it, Barclay!"

The maister had cut in sharply on the old man's speech. A low mutter ran through the crowd, but old Jem nodded.

"So be it. In thet thing 'tis fer you ter jedge yer own. But Tim heerd t' furriner a plottin' and plannin' how to git rid of ye,

maister, and to do it in sech ways as t' Owd Nick alone cud of showed un. And at the end of all he and this other shud hev no blood on their heads, but usn of t' isles shud do t' work and glorify them as by lies and falsehoods druv us to't.

"Ye all know how word had been spread thet maister war no good Five Isler. I thowt 'twas true my ownsel', but Tim, he tells my Jem whut he's heerd, and Jem tells me, and the three on us thowt t' make known to ye all how ye was bein' druv to murder by—by a stinkin' furriner, fer I'll not name t'other till maister choose.

"Luckless fer us, Tim, he let uns hot head betray un. He tell 't the furriner a thing or two, meetin' un by chanst and alone. And ye know poor Tim, he gits heme thet night with uns head stove in. I never larned thet tweil an hour sence, but I be main sure t' rock thet drapped on Tim Coleman, off Avalon Cliff, drapped to the push of thet furrin' Spanisher's hand.

"Wull, same day, I oop and goes fer to talk with maister, which Tim hed failed to do: and as I goes out my own door I meets Maister Ralph coomin' in. Tim had said nowt to make me wary o' Maister Ralph. I thowt t' lad hed been deceived like usn.

"He war lookin' kind o' tired and strange like. 'Coom along o' me, Jem,' says he. 'I got summut to show ye ower t' Paris. I'll be gettin' ye back in time fer lightin' yer lamps,' says he. 'Twas then nigh three, and my lamps not trimmed ner tended, and so I tell 't un. But he jest said agin them words he'd said afore, and he looks so queer and troubled like thet I thinks to humor un. So we goes along, and he takes me down t' long harbor stairs, and thar was my young Jem awaitin' in the bit engine boat. Maister Ralph, he says nowt but: 'Cast off, Jem,' and Jem starts the bit engine with Maister Ralph t' the wheel.

"'Maister Ralph,' says I, 'a main, wicked deed bes brewin' oop t' Cliff House.' And I relates whut Tim hed overheerd. And Maister Ralph, he says: 'Aye. A black cloud lies ower t' isles. A black, wicked cloud. But I have summut to show ye, and I'll git ye back in time to 'tend yer lamps.'

"Usn cooms run' Lunnon to Paris, and into the bit cove ahint the herders' sheds. Maister Ralph, he leads along, and not one soul do we meet. Usn be headin' oop fer t' owd quarry. 'Maister Ralph,' says I, 'bes takin' usn to the quarry?' 'I have summut t' show ye,' he says. 'I'll git ye back in time to 'tend yer lamps.'

"So we coom t' the edge of the quarry, and a man steps out from behind t' bulk of a big block thet lays thar. And the man was thet furrin Spanisher whut Miss Doris brung t' the isles fer usn's sorrow.

"'Whut be this?' says I, but Spanisher says nowt. He oop 'n shot my boy—my own lad, standin' thar innercent beside me. My Jem, he put oop uns hands at the flash and toppled over, easy like and I heerd uns body crunch way down in the dark of t' quarry. And me—he's liftin' uns gun at me, but I never waits fer thet.

"I leaped atter my boy, but I did not reach bottom on thet lep. 'Way down t' wall I hits on one of t' owd ladders, all rotted wi' rain, and thet bruk beneath my weight. Below it I coom down in a girt bramble-bush thet growed to a rock-shelf, and thar I lays twell black night fell, and agin twell break o' day, and Gawd, He gi's me strength to clamber down, 'way down, and find my boy. He's thar yit, frien's. I covered un best I cud with bits o' rock and t' like.

"They tells me thet ye coom t' s'arch t' quarry whiles I laid thar. But thet's a lie—or, if it's not, then none of ye never coom nigh the bottom on 't. And mebbe ye coom whiles I was sleepin', and I did not hear ye call. I'm an owd, owd man, lads. It's mebbe so thet not all the whiles I laid thar did I hev sense nor hearin'. It's mebbe so."

"Sim and me," volunteered one of the young men beside him, "thowt poor ol' Pop Barclay war dead fer sure. Usn clambered down t' quarry wi' ropes, lukin' fer Sim's black heifer. Usn thowt black heifer hed mebbe strayed through a break in t' fence and ower t' edge. 'Sted of heifer, usn found Pop Barclay. Thet war nigh sundown. Sim and me worked main hard gettin' Pop Barclay out t' quarry and bringin' of un to. He war like a man dead, fer truth, but uns life coom back amazin' wi' food

and liquor, so Sim and me, usn browt un to Exmoor."

The young man spoke with quiet pride in their achievement. It was many hours since sundown, but the leisureliness of the herders' proceedings did not surprise the master. He was aware that one idea at a time was about all many of his simple-hearted islers could accommodate.

"You say," he began slowly, "you dare say, Jem Barclay, that you went to the quarry with *my brother?*"

"I say 't, Gawd help un! And when my Jem died, Maister Ralph stud by, sayin' nowt, and--"

"That is a lie!"

"It isn't a lie—it is true, Flurry. I saw young Jem die and old Jem leap after him down into the old Paris quarry!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

CONFESSION.

IF the crowd had thought itself past amazement, that new voice proved its mistake.

In the first place, they had believed Ralph dead. The house-servants had seen him—stiff, cold, unquestionably lifeless. That Miss Doris, who was well-known to be a worker of unlawful magic, chose with the aid of the "furrin-born" old doctor to cherish his body and try to bring life back to it, was merely a horrid mystery, spoken of in whispers, and not encouraged by allowing Flanders to enter Cliff House again.

Ralph was dead. Yet here Ralph stood, very pale and confirming a story against himself to which they had listened between horror and disbelief. Such rumors were told of the dead. How they returned, pale and spectral, to confess the sins of their lifetime.

To Avalon, however, the matter appealed differently. Ralph was no ghost, and the tangle was at last unraveling itself, but in the very unraveling it became every moment more wearying and hopeless. If Ralph wished to confess, why couldn't he have done it earlier, when there would have been at least some grace of courage attached to the act?

Now—Barclay had already given everything away. His own protest that the story was a lie had been made without heart and almost mechanically. The worst was known, and Ralph, who had probably followed him down here with anything but friendly intent, was about to take the coward's natural path. He would throw himself on the mercy of his victims—confess!

Not moving from his indifferent attitude on the platform edge, Avalon glanced over his shoulder.

Ralph, it seemed, had not come onto the platform alone.

Lowecroft was there; Rector Hepburn, his harsh, fanatical features twisted with grief; Jerome T. Randolph, inexplicably reaching over to shake hands with him, Avalon; Jim Selden, sullen and mean-faced, a prisoner between two of his own awkward riflemen; Dr. Flanders, anxious-eyed and with an arm about Ralph; all very real, and at the same time dreamily unreal people.

Getting rid of Randolph's hand somehow, Avalon scowled and turned back to the market, where shadows leaped black and red.

Across it Ralph was speaking again in a high, clear voice, that must carry to even those farthest away in the crowd.

"I am going to tell you," he began, "everything that has happened, just as I remember it. For a long time I have been feeling—it is hard to describe how—almost as though I were another person, not myself."

"I can understand that, at least," thought Avalon. "Like a shadow with shadows around him."

"And in some days there have been long, blank spaces. Hours that I couldn't remember at all. I believed I was going mad. There were terrible headaches, and an awful, sickening unhappiness. As if one should recall committing a crime in one's sleep, and not be sure if the thing were a dream or the truth. Then my brother came home. I meant to tell him how I felt, but seeing him it seemed as though he had changed. I couldn't bear to be near him. The touch of his hand made me cold all over. I—I loathed him.

"And then one morning—it was after

the Ulysses was wrecked and all those people were at Cliff House—Doris told me to go out in the launch with—Don Felipe. And while we were out he—he told me—things I had done. And as he talked I remembered—everything.—just as he said it. Wild speeches I had made to you, my poor friends, mad lies about my brother. And then—Tim Coleman—and the Barclays.

"No, it wasn't my hand did those killings, though he said it was I who lighted the lamps that night after the Barclays were gone. He said that he and Doris sent me over to Avalon Light to do it, so that there wouldn't be any wrecks, and that it was my fault about the Ulysses because I lighted them without filling the reservoir.

"So the death of those six drowned men was on me, just the same as if I had purposely killed them. And since I was a murderer already, why should I stand by any longer and leave the real work to others? With Flurry out of the way—dead, he meant—Five Isles and a great deal more would be mine.

"And then he gave me—it was a little arrow that was poisoned. Flurry brought it home from Brazil. He must have taken it from Flurry's room some time when he was out. He said: 'Use it!' Just that. 'Use it.' He stared at me with awful, cold eyes, and I couldn't say anything at all. 'Use it.' I knew what he meant. I was afraid I would do it. We went back to Peace Harbor, and there was Flurry on the pier. He—he sent me up to the house with Dr. Flanders. I had to leave my brother there with that devil of the cold, awful eyes. I couldn't say anything.

"The—dart was in the breast-pocket of my coat. I went in the house, and they were all at luncheon. While I was eating—pretending to eat—I leaned forward and felt a sharp pain in my arm. I know now that the little arrow struck through my coat and went into my arm. I felt tired and shut my eyes, and when I opened them I was in bed. I had been unconscious for nearly twenty-four hours.

"Doris told me what had happened, only she thought Don Felipe had thrust the dart in my arm, because he was sure now that the people would kill Flurry, and he wanted me out of the way, too, so that she and he could have everything themselves.

"She said that she would be even with Don Felipe for what he had done to me, but that Flurry was worse than he and hated us all. That he hated me, too, and would kill me if he could and if she did not protect me from him.

"I had a queer feeling that I had heard all that before—that I had believed it once. But my head was clear now. I knew it wasn't true. I daren't tell her that Don Felipe had not tried to hurt me, because I was afraid she would turn back to him. I asked her to let me see Flurry, but she wouldn't call him. I was too weak to move at first. I've always liked Doris—she has been good to me. But now I was afraid of her. I was so afraid that I daren't tell her I knew she was lying. All those people were in the house. They came in sometimes, and I wanted to ask their help—but she was there. I kept growing stronger, and then night came.

"Doris went out of the room and was away so long that I saw a chance. I got up and dressed. As I was putting on my shoes she came hurrying in. Instead of being angry she seemed pleased. She made me go with her down-stairs. We went in her blue room, where the light makes your head ache so, and she told me to look in the crystal ball she keeps there, and tell her what I saw. I remembered then having looked in it before, and every time there was one of those queer, blank spaces afterward.

"I said no, but that angered her. So I—I pretended to look. My eyes were shut, but she seemed too excited to notice. After a minute she asked if I were asleep yet. I said yes, but I wasn't asleep. Then she told me a lot of things to do. Things I was to come down here and say to you people. I won't tell you what they were. They were bad—wrong. Then she took me out of the house.

"We walked through the empty courtyard to the gate. She opened it and called, and three men came running out of the dark. They had rifles, and seemed frightened to find me there. They said afterward they thought I had died. Doris went back

in the house. Then there was a lot of shooting around at the side. The fellows I was talking with ran around there, and I went with them.

"After a while—when they had stopped cheering and shouting over me—I told them they were doing a terrible thing in shooting at the poor people who had been wrecked. They only laughed, and said I'd talked differently before I was sick. That was true. All these frightful mistakes have been mostly my doing.

"But Mr. Hepburn came up, and then Bob Lowecroft, and they made the men listen to me. I told them the truth. They were very angry. But I said they mustn't punish me till I had confessed before every one—and Lowecroft said my brother had come down here and might be in terrible danger.

"So some of the fellows went to explain about Doris and me to the Ulysses people at Cliff House, and the rest of us came on down. Part way we met Jim Selden. The fellows are angry with Jim, too, but it isn't really fair to blame any one but Doris and Don Felipe and me.

"That is everything I can remember. I did those things. I lied and stirred up hatred and looked on silent at murders in cold blood. Do what you like with me for it. I sha'n't mind. It is—over!"

They had loved Ralph always, these islanders, but the glances cast upward to him now were anything but adoring. What he claimed of having no knowledge of his deeds at the time made little impression. In their simple code he had sinned, repented, and now confessed.

Dr. Flanders caught the mutterings of fresh storm, and raised his hand hastily for silence.

"Men," he cried, "suppose you give me a chance to speak now! I've tried to make you listen to me before, and you wouldn't, and now you see what has come of it. You hear me now, or all the rest of your lives—I warn you—you'll go in mourning and regrets.

"This boy who has just told you of his 'crimes' is absolutely innocent. Alongside of you, my friends, who have all along had as much sense as the Lord ever gave you—little enough—he shines out white, snow white!

"Do you know the meaning of hypnotic influence? I see by your intelligent faces that you don't. All right—to the deuce with science. But you know what black art is, don't you? Of course. And you surely know who in these islands has practised it.

"Do you remember last winter, when little Guy Parsons looked in the big, bright, magic ball Miss Doris keeps in her room of the blue lamp? And he saw a picture, small and bright, of the schooner Lucy Bell driving through storm under bare poles—and he was the last to ever see the Lucy Bell? But afterward Guy's eyes hurt him for days, and he acted so strangely that you would let no more of your children go up to Cliff House and be used in Miss Doris's magic.

"Well, your young Master Ralph here has looked in that globe many times. Too many. I don't know what pictures he saw, but after he had looked, there was a spell upon him, and whatever the globe's mistress commanded, that thing he had to do. Till the spell wore out he was like a man walking in a dream.

"But on that sort of magic a strange limitation has been set—by God, perhaps, Who won't give too great a power to any soul over another. What they told him of his brother, he believed. The words that they bade him speak, he uttered. The acts they commanded, he performed—to a certain point. That point was the actual commission of crime.

"Though Ralph brought his victims to him, Felipe Delgado must do his own killings. And when, in the launch, he gave Ralph the poisoned dart, told him what he had already done and called it 'crime,' even that powerful suggestion did not suffice to raise Ralph's hand in murder against his brother. Instead, the very shock of it somewhat roused him.

"When question rises in a dream, the dreamer wakens. I don't know if he would have entirely roused. By accident, however the dart pierced his own arm, and in the period of unconsciousness following, the hypnotic—er—the magic influence passed,

and he was clever enough to prevent her bewitching him again."

The doctor drew a long breath and mopped his perspiring brow.

"Heavens," he murmured, "that it should come to this! But how can I explain the laws of hypnotic phenomena to these—idiots?"

"You've done wonders," encouraged Randolph. "Keep it up."

"Nothing much more to say, or I wonder if I dare? By Jove, I will, though! My friends"—he raised his voice again—"while I am talking, I shall say some other things I've kept bottled up for years to please a man who's too blamed generous for his own good, or yours. Whose money was it that has been letting you loafers loaf, and you drunkards drink, and given every man jack of you the luxuries most of you are too lazy to work for? Do you know? You don't! You think—"

"That will do, Flanders. Hush!"

The somber figure on the platform edge turned with a motion half menacing, as if to rise and suppress the doctor by force. Then he sank back again, and was still, indifferent, dangling the pistol with which he had killed a man. The red and black shadows leaped.

But Flanders was done with silence, and, physician though he was, the peculiarity of his friend's behavior did not impress him. He was far too excited.

"No, I won't hush! I've hushed for years, and I'm sick of it. You"—he turned on his audience again, white eyebrows abristle, his very glasses flashing red defiance—"you good-for-nothing, lazy, obstinate louts, you've been living for years on this man's generosity and giving all the credit to— He wishes me to stop. Shall I stop or shall I go on?"

"Go on! Go on!" The shout was taken up by scores of voices. The crowd was well-meaning enough now, and ashamed with a shame that took the form of a curious kind of high spirits. They laughed, thumped one another on the back, as if some enormous joke had been perpetrated, and encouraged the doctor by wild applause for every point made, though most of them were aimed at and hit themselves.

"Shadows," thought Avalon. "Shouting shadows. Funny. Never was in a place quite like this before."

And at the same time, in some high, faraway part of his brain, he heard and vaguely disapproved of Dr. Flanders.

"You want to hear," cried the doctor, "and you shall! You deserve worse than that! (Laughter.) You've all been asleep a long while, but you're to wake up now. You have abused this wicked, indifferent master of yours. You've called him traitor; said he was no true Five Isler. I'm no Five Isler myself, and I thank God for it! (Laughter, and shouts of: "Give it to us!" "Lay it on, man. Usn be down!")

"But what has that unpatriotic master of yours been doing all these years he has been away? I'll tell you. He has been working hard to make money for a certain other person to throw away, partly on herself, but a great deal on you.

"He went from here first as a mere boy, and you resented that. But he went because, on reaching his majority, he learned that nearly every cent of his own money, and his brother's money, and that other person's money, had been squandered, gambled away in New York, London, Monte Carlo—how do I know where?—by that wonderful person we won't name. So not because he wished, but because he must, he left his inherited, so-called duty of running the isles to suit your majesties. Passed through some hard times of his own, too, till he got hold of the New York end of a practically defunct coffee-importing concern.

"To-day he owns— I beg your pardon, he's your humble property, eh? *You* own, then, most of the shares in one of the finest coffee plantations in Minas. Besides being president of the company, he's a very active general manager. Oh, yes, I know you're aware of that in a general way; but I wish you to understand that down in Minas he has twice as many men under him as there are souls, all told, in these islands; and the funny part of it is, they like him!

"He only pays them wages, you see, and gives them a fair, square deal. He doesn't support 'em for nothing. And a lot of 'em are blacks or half-blacks, anyway. They

don't know any better than to think that this worthless Avalon of yours, this disgrace to the old name, is one of the whitest, finest men the Lord ever made and was proud of.

"How do I know? Because I went down there myself, that time I dared take a vacation, and you made life so miserable for the substitute I got from Baltimore that I never dared take another one. If I had time, I could tell you some stories I heard about him down there that might make even you a bit less ashamed of him.

"And after he had made his, or, rather, your fortune, why didn't he come home and stay? Why, because your patriotic Miss Doris refused to remain here if the master did, and he considered the isles a safer place for one of her temperament than Paris or Monte Carlo."

"Frightfully bad taste," thought that high, far-away consciousness in Avalon's brain. "The fellow whose sister that man is talking about ought to get up and punch his head."

"She love the isles?" cried Flanders. "Believe me, your revered Miss Doris has hardly that respect for tradition which would have led your master to sell his soul, I honestly believe, before he would let these lands pass into the ownership of strangers. But I tell you this"—and here the doctor's voice rose triumphant again—"if you belonged to me—if I were the master here—I wouldn't wait to sell out or give you away—I'd pay somebody to take you off my hands!"

And Dr. Flanders stood back with a sigh of one whose mind is blissfully relieved after years of repression.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

NAVARRE JUDGES.

LATER on, in many divers discussions of the affair, it was disclosed that not an individual present in Exmoor Market but had observed the singular lassitude and indifference of Avalon's manner, particularly toward the last. All had noted the strangeness of his remaining as if fixed where he sat on the platform edge, and had been impressed by the white, strained solemnity of his countenance. Everybody, it also appeared, had suspected that somewhat more than grief or weariness ailed the master in that hour.

And yet the cold fact remained that Flanders, having put the last touch of rehabilitation on his friend's character, left his friend's material being to take care of itself while he hurried Ralph off to a bed in his own house, with solicitous attention, and had old man Barclay also brought there to be cared for after his terrible experience.

That at least half the population of Exmoor crowded in to shake Avalon's hand, ask his forgiveness, and make it understood that his summary disposal of Delgado was cordially approved.

That toward the end of this amiable siege, Jerry Randolph not only perched on the platform beside him, but started and carried on a considerable conversation with him.

And that nobody, in all that while, was sufficiently concerned over him as a person to inquire of his physical well-being, or suggest that he really did look like a man slowly dying as he sat.

Perhaps it was just that he had been the focus of thought and action until they saw him less as a person than a kind of human pivot about which had revolved events of absorbing excitement. And his remaining quiet in one spot gave them all a chance to circle around and be excited over him some more in a brand-new way, and enjoy the pleasant thrill of knowing that he was a true master, after all, and would see to it that none of them suffer more than need be for their share in the recent violence.

But meanwhile their center of interest sat on the edge of a black abyss, where that upper, far-away part of his brain insisted that he remain and shake hands gravely with a long array of shadows, who came and went, shouting, fantastic, apparently endless in number. It took cognizance of remarks, too, replied briefly but suitably, and filled him with admiration for its handling of a situation passed hopelessly beyond his own command.

Presently it was listening to a fantomlike

being called Randolph, who, it learned, had once crawled out of a kitchen window, crawled along a wall, and sneaked along a fence.

"I didn't dare let Danny or the others know," chuckled Randolph. "They'd have stopped me. I wanted to get you, Avalon—you can't have any idea how much I wanted it. And instead of that, you got me!"

"Did I?" inquired the upper self politely.

"Oh, very much so. But I deserved it and plenty more. If you can't forgive us, remember that we won't ever quite forgive ourselves, either."

"Forgiveness is—is—"

The upper self was beginning to waver a bit. There was such a lot of different words to chose from. I saw them written in little, cold, bright letters—*easy, needless, magnanimous, joyous.* Finally, it picked out *immaterial,* and finished the sentence rather doubtfully with that.

"Immaterial, eh?" echoed Randolph. "Well, maybe. Look here, man; you've been hard hit. I know it. You're not worrying over us, or what we feel or think about you, and yet—Isn't there one of us—" Randolph seemed to be floundering desperately among his own words, but suddenly he checked himself and said grimly: "I'm exactly the clumsy, stupid fool you said I was, and maybe I'm about to put my foot in it worse than ever. But can you guess the really burning motive that led me out of that kitchen window to camp on your trail?"

"To kill me—you said."

"Exactly. Can't blame you for looking bored. So many people seem to have shared the ambition. Still, I lay claim to a certain originality, because I meant to do it for the sake of a man in his grave five years ago. That strikes you as strange?"

"Perhaps."

"He was my friend—and Navarre Ainge's father. Now do you understand?"

"I am—trying to."

Navarre. Navarre Ainge. Surely there had once been a bright, beautiful being of that name, who had trusted—believed—been a miracle of faith. Then changed and was lost; snatched away on the black wings of nightmare.

But Randolph was still talking, relating an involved affair in which the girl, Navarre, had "seen through" a certain letter from the first minute it was read.

"She followed your sister out of that kitchen, meaning to make her confess whom Delgado had really been writing to. All that day Navarre had been arguing and all but quarreling with the lot of us over you. We wouldn't let her go near you, and, of course, she had no evidence. Nothing but faith! Lord, and her faith so much saner than our so-called intellects! But she unluckily lost Miss Doris in some of those mazy passages of your ancestral home, and finally located her again just as she must have been coming back, after letting Ralph out of the gate.

"When we intelligent males returned from assisting your own escape, Navarre greeted us pointblank with what we were too muddle-headed to recognize as the truth. I will say, Avalon, that sister of yours is a wonder. She put it all over us again. Insinuated that Navarre was a silly girl, prejudiced by romantic interest. In other words, that you had been making love to her. And by the way—hit me if you like—but that's true, too, isn't it?"

"Yes," said the upper self after some painful thought.

"None of my business, eh? But, you see, I love her myself—oh, in a fatherly kind of way, but enough to send me out on the idiotic, do-or-die errand I've mentioned.

"Navarre didn't admit it in words—suppose she, too, thought it was none of our business—but her manner showed. And then she came back at us all for what we were—fools—fools—fools! Wicked fools, she said, who had driven an innocent man to his death. Well, you'd put it over us so nicely with your perfectly transparent lantern-trick that we knew we were fools, all right. Only that hadn't increased our regard for you.

"And when we realized where we stood with Navarre, we were wild—plain wild. Navarre proposed to go out by herself and save you, and the rest of us all wanted to

go out and murder you. Well, we suppressed the only sane member of our party. And while the other fellows were confabulating on vengeance, I sneaked out the back way alone.

"That's all, except that, bad family troubles aside, isn't it almost worth the hell you've walked through to know that a girl like Navarre Ainge is—is— But say, Avalon, have I made a fool of myself all over again? Don't you care? By George, if you weren't serious in your love-making —with Navarre—"

The shipbuilder, as angry suddenly as he had been too loquacious, glared indignantly at the somber, indifferent figure beside him. Randolph possessed one romantic spot in his heart. Fat, middle-aged little man that he was, to him the favor of Navarre Ainge would have repaid being plagued with a hundred wicked sisters or condemned by a universe of his fellow men. Could it be that he had once more misjudged this—stranger, and had been practically hurling Navarre at an indifferent head?

As Avalon remained stolidly silent, Randolph rose from the platform edge with a jerk. Whatever furious reproach had come to his lips, however, was left unuttered.

"Look there!" he gasped instead. "There comes Danny across the square, and he's brought the girl down with him. Why 'd he do that? Why didn't he—Avalon, at least you can drop that darn pistol and help me steer Navarre away from this platform. Don't you realize that she mustn't see Delgado—and you with that pistol? Don't you realize it won't do? She'd dream of it—never forget it. Come on! Damn you, don't you even care enough for *that?*"

And then at last, with Randolph tugging at his arm, Avalon rose from the platform edge. He did it, however, very carefully and deliberately, and once up made no further effort to meet the girl who was hurrying toward him.

Not though the shadows cleared with her coming, and for one minute the world and himself were real again.

Gray dawn had broken. He saw the familiar old market square, where the fire had died to embers filmed with ash-lace, and only a few of the repentant Exmoorites remained to mutter interested comments as the "furriners" passed among them.

He saw her face—bright—beautiful—with the clear courageous eyes of a trusting young saint.

And then in one wide flash of comprehension, the whole situation was remembered—was before him—and he surrendered hope of Navarre Ainge ever becoming his wife.

Her bright clearness must not be sullied by union with a man like him. His sister, the known accomplice of a murderer. His brother to stand trial beside her, and be cleared or not, as that story of hypnotic influence might pass muster in the courts. His people riotous, lawless, and brutal. Himself a man of impulses proved degraded as the worst. He had killed, and enjoyed doing it. Would have enjoyed killing several other people. Had felt an impulse to kill his own sister. Fine fellow. Fine family. Failed to save any one else from disgrace—could save Navarre, anyway.

He could say to her— Say, this was one of those great moments when a man must be careful what he says.

She was very near now. Avalon extended his hand.

"Miss Ainge!" he murmured, with a somewhat strained but politely formal smile. "Charmed to meet you! Sorry, Have to excuse me—"

And then even her face was erased by the shadows returning.

"I can't help it!" Randolph was protesting wildly a few minutes later. It was this darn black sweater of his, Navarre. The bullet-hole hardly showed. I don't believe he knew himself he was hit—and bleeding inwardly. My God, isn't that doctor here *yet?*"

"You have killed him between you." Navarre's voice was very cold and even, which seemed strange to her. It should, she thought, have been either a shriek or a whisper. "There were too many of you, and one man can't fight so many. You wouldn't let me come to him in time. You are very wicked people. You—let—him—die!"

Which was not quite just, perhaps; but if Navarre had been just in that moment, surely she would not have been worth loving.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A MATTER OF FORGIVENESS.

FOR a long while he had known that all was not well with him.

There were periods of chaotic dreams, wherein he must bear a fiery weight of pain clasped tight to his body through adventures of incredible weariness; times when monstrous night yawned to engulf him; times when he lay on a bed of torture in a room where strangers moved, soft-footed, stealthy, and inimical.

The worst, though, was that a certain claim he had was too often denied. She belonged to him. Back somewhere in the lost reaches of chaos through which he had come, she had been given to him for his own. Her hand could ease him gently down into those empty chasms of night, robbing their negation of its terror. In the agony of titanic dream-struggle, her voice would reach him, ending the need of struggle with the dream. When the room filled with a visible haze of pain, and he panted for breath, and the air had no life in it, then might he fix his eyes on her face—courage passed to him from her. She was life and the will to endure.

And yet she was at times denied to him!

It was a cruel wrong, and to be rebelled against with steadfast persistence. At all times, when she was withheld from him, he demanded her.

Two fiendish female presences, clothed in white, who worked over and tormented and annoyed him in every conceivable way, were the chief perpetrators of this wrong, though a waveringly familiar person with glasses, white eyebrows, and a bristling mustache seemed secondarily responsible.

Frequently, did he accuse any of these three with sufficient bitterness, she would be produced and returned to him. At other times malicious smiles would distort their mouths, and he would be told that she was "asleep" or "out for a breath of air" or "at dinner." Lies, of course. They had hidden her to torment him.

She, at least, never disputed his ownership. From her he could always be sure of a fair, just response to his complaints.

"Yes, I do belong to you, dear. Yes, I'll be right here when you wake up. Try to fall asleep, darling. Yes, I belong to you—nobody can take me away. I shall stay here, close beside you. Nobody has any right to take me away. Go to sleep, darling, Poor dear, is the pain so bad? Nurse, isn't he to have that hypodermic soon? Not till three? Don't mind, beloved. Give me both your hands. There. Now try to sleep. Yes, I shall be here when you wake up—"

And so on; for as long as he cared to demand her allegiance, which was, as a rule, till one of the white-costumed fiends thrust a needle in his arm and the chasms of night opened under him.

And yet, too often, when he rose from them she had been stolen again!

They were friends, those two in the white, prim dresses.

Till one day he came up from the chasms into his own seaward-facing bedroom at Cliff House, and he was Flurry Avalon, a very sick man, too weak to lift a hand in his own behalf, and with a couple of pleasant-faced, capable, trained nurses in attendance.

Also with Navarre Ainge.

That was all wrong, of course; but many more days followed in which he was both too selfish and too weak to send her away from him. The utmost sacrifice he could accomplish was meek acceptance of her occasional absence from his side. Recollection of the enslavement to which his delirious craving for her presence had subjected the girl, filled him with shame; and yet on the rare occasions when she was out of the room in his waking hours, he was continually on the verge of demanding her again. Fortunately he slept a great deal. After weeks of hovering on the fantastic borderland between two worlds, a man comes back slowly, and is given to much sleep.

He hardly talked to any one. This silence of his seemed to be accepted as natural and commendable at first. Flan-

ders, in fact, approved verbally, standing over him with beneficence beaming through the thick-lensed spectacles.

"Quietly is right, lad. Quietly. Mustn't call those surgeons back from New York, you know. Too expensive." He chuckled. "My stars, that pair of birds should live like kings on one job a year, with the rate we paid 'em. But worth it! Eh, Navarre? Worth a few thousand, you think, to keep this fellow with us? No need to call 'em back, though, so—quiet."

But from day to day, quiet of the kind he kept grew more difficult. Not hard with the two professional nurses, of course. They had their orders. Steeled to repel questions, they might covertly regard the patient who asked none as a *rara avis;* but their opinion scarcely mattered.

Navarre was different. Even Flanders was different, after a time. The silence that had pleased both in the beginning was troubling them now. He could see the question in their eyes, because none came from his lips. After that, pretense of sleep helped for a while longer. To know that Navarre was seated there, or to hear her voice in murmured converse with one of the nurses, was almost the same as seeing her.

But though Navarre was easy to deceive in this way, Flanders couldn't be fooled forever. A morning came when the brusk old doctor turned from taking his pulse, and curtly requested the day nurse to leave them. Avalon heard the faint swish of her skirts receding. And Navarre hadn't come in with the doctor, as she always did. A bad sign. No use to feign sleep. Flanders knew he was bluffing. Here was an end to the respite he had clung to, and he might as well meet the fact squarely. With a reluctant sigh he opened his eyes and met the doctor's kindly, quizzical gaze.

"A quiet sick-room," observed the latter judicially, "is an ideal sick-room; but the ghastly silence of this one is beginning to get on my nerves. You're such a golden example that nobody dares speak in here. Won't do, Avalon. Are you aware that you're actually slipping back down the long hill we've dragged you up, and that the slipping could be cured by the sound of your own voice—and of one or two others?"

Avalon scowled sullenly.

"All right," he muttered. "I'm a coward. Tell me, if you must, and be done with it. Where's Ralph?"

"I thought so." Flanders leaned back with an air of relief. "Frankly, you had me worried, lad. Only struck me to-day that maybe your mind needs a clean-cut, major operation as badly as your body did two months ago."

"Two months," repeated the patient. "That's the first slash done. A lot could happen in two months—while I've lain here useless. Go on with it, Flanders. Don't fiddle about, now you've started. What have they done with Doris? *Where's Ralph?*"

"Outside the door, waiting to be allowed in here," assured Flanders hastily. "You lie back and calm down, or not another word will you get out of any one to-day. That's better. Haven't lost your trick of flaring off like gunpowder when least expected, have you? There, lad. Nothing's half so bad as you think. Listen, and perhaps we can banish some of the bogies that have been scaring you."

Half an hour later, however, Flanders emerged from the sick-room to bestow a slightly puzzled frown on the anxious pair waiting outside.

"Go in, Ralph," he permitted; "but don't stay over three minutes. I've tired him enough for one day. Better take Navarre with you. Try if the pair of you can cheer him up a bit."

"Queer fellow," he added to himself, as he walked on alone down the passage. "Known him from the minute he was born, and still keeps me guessing. Here it all has been cleaned up and finished for him while he lay there. The only decent thing Doris ever accomplished was the ending of her own life, and leaving the written confession that cleared Ralph. The boy wasn't even indicted. All the investigations and general messing around by the State authorities over. Newspapers have forgotten again that Five Isles exist. He has that girl—that gleaming jewel of a girl, who's pretty nearly worn out her own life to keep the life in him. He has her—and love—or has he?

"By Jove, have we all made a last ter-

rible mistake, and didn't he care? Is that his trouble? He was always such a polite young misanthrope about women, because of Doris, I suppose. Was caring for this one just a sick man's whim? But, under the circumstances, that would be a tragedy beside which a few mere murders That would be a tragedy—"

Frowning and tight-lipped, Flanders passed on out of the house, leaving as he must—the "gleaming jewel of a girl" to cope as best she might with whatever mysterious burden remained on their patient's mind.

Fortunately, having once faced the inevitable, Avalon himself solved the problem. From Navarre's view-point, that was a strange, almost laughably pathetic confession to which she listened when, Ralph's three minutes ended and the nurse not returned, they were alone together. But to the man who made it, every word was of terrible import. He was sending Navarre away.

"All cleared up, Flanders says. Maybe. Or maybe disgrace like that can't be cleared. Seems so to me; but anyway, it isn't only the disgrace. It's I—myself. I'm not worthy—not of you. I always knew—there was that side to me. Savage—merciless. Wild beast, ready to claw and tear and hate. Fought it under—always—till that night. It wasn't so much what I did. Flanders says I was exonerated for that, and I suppose they were right. Delgado was dangerous. It was—the way I felt. Showed me—not worthy—of you—"

He turned his head, and tried weakly to draw his hand from hers, but she would not release it. She didn't appear to understand that he was sending her away.

After a minute she said quietly:

"Now, Flurry, I'm not going to tell you that you're sick and exaggerate things that don't matter. In fact, I haven't the least bit of doubt that in that bad time you found the worst of yourself. I understand better than any one else would, probably, because I found my own worst, too—afterward!"

His eyes flashed open indignantly.

"Yours! You have none!"

"Oh, yes. And a very bad worst, I assure you. I can be cold, hard, unforgiving—cruel, to put it plainly. You don't know all the story of these past weeks."

"It is you who are exaggerating some trifle—"

"I've been *mean!*" she announced with gloomy triumph. "I wouldn't forgive anybody. Not my uncle, nor Mr. Randolph, nor Brant, nor anybody. Not your people. I've told them in the village that you, too, will never forgive them. That whatever you said that night, when they all shook hands with you, didn't count, because you were not more than half conscious at the time. I've made them do everything I could think of that they didn't like—"

"You've made them—what?"

"Do the things that you wanted and they didn't. Like the fence around Peace Harbor. Ralph told me you hated that. It's pulled down now, and a nice, decorative, low, granite parapet is being raised there. Then I made them cut the sumach and junipers that spoil the view from Cliff House."

"But there have always been sumach and junipers on that slope—"

"They are doing these things so that you will forgive them; but I don't offer them much hope. I'm hard—mean. Ralph helps me by telling me things you wished changed. He's a dear, and of course he didn't need any forgiving, poor boy; so I can be friends with him. But he and Dr. Flanders are the only ones. The rest are learning that forgiveness is something that must be earned, and earned hard.

"I've made them draw up a petition, asking for a power-house in Exmoor, so that there can be electric lights on all the islands, and a lot of work done by machinery instead of by hand. They are laying the foundations for a larger schoolhouse, too, and will ask you to bring in some dreadful, educated, furrin teachers for their children. I've made them—"

"Navarre, you are a miracle—though I wouldn't have believed even a miracle could persuade our islers to some of these things. They are all splendid—improvements I've longed for years to put in. But what in the world did you mean about the worst of yourself?"

"You'll understand presently. It wasn't only your people I wouldn't forgive. There were my own. Uncle Dan, and Aunt Betty, and Mr. Randolph, and Brant. They felt —oh, I can realize now that I was very unkind, and hurt them cruelly by sending them away as I did—"

"Sending – them—away!"

"Yes. I made them all go away, as soon as the investigations were over. Aunt Betty felt the least bad, probably, because she said when I was over it to wireless or write, and she enjoyed coming back for a visit through the spring months. But Uncle Dan and Mr. Randolph and Brant had no such hopes. They knew I was in earnest when I said I never wished to see them again."

"Navarre—please! Can you actually mean that your relatives went away and left you—alone here—with—with me"

He checked himself, and a hurt, bewildered look crept into his eyes. For her to make game of him, and in such a manner, was indeed outside his knowledge of Navarre.

She would not look at him, however, and he noticed suddenly how the color was heightening in the exquisite, smooth cheek nearest him.

"Flurry Avalon," she said solemnly, "I believe that you don't—remember!"

Several minutes of silence followed.

"Wasn't that a dream?" he whispered then. "Was Mr. Hepburn really in here, and Ralph, and Flanders, and your aunt, and—were you and I—*married*—here in this room?"

Her color heightened much further, and when she answered, it was in a small, cold, faraway voice:

"It is rather embarrassing – to find that one has married a—a person—who—didn't know what he was doing—and—and is sorry he did it!"

"Navarre!"

There was that in the cry which did make her look at him very suddenly, and then she was down on her knees by the bed, and a lovely, flushed cheek was pressed close to his on the pillow.

"My poor, poor darling!" she murmured over and over again, and: "I did think you remembered. I did! Up until the last few days you've seemed to take so much help from knowing I belonged to you; but that doesn't matter. All I care for is that you shall be happy. And if you don't want me, I'll go away; or, if you do want me, I'll stay. Anything! Anything at all, do you understand, just so it shall be the thing that will make you happy."

"Me! When a man has been trying to tear out his very heart to save a wonderful girl from throwing herself away on him, and then finds—"

"That the wonderful girl has gone and married him without his knowledge or consent! Well!"

The head on the pillow turned slightly. Enough so that blue-green eyes looked into clear, dark ones, bright with laughter and tears.

"I'm not—worthy!"

"Much nicer than I am," assured Navarre cheerfully.

"I didn't wish you to share the disgrace."

"Were you disgraced? Nobody mentioned it to me."

"Frightful temper."

"I know. Cold, haughty, and unforgiving is mine."

"You mean it doesn't matter—any of it?"

"Dear heart, no!"

"And I—am to have you—always?"

"Forever and for always, dear heart."

"Then—I believe I can just forget the rest."

The swift, easy sleep of the very weak was taking him. Before quite drifting off on its tide his eyes opened again.

"You'll be here when I wake up?"

"Here, close beside you."

"And I am to have you always. You belong to me, Navarre!"

"Darling, what is it?"

"Nothing, only I didn't ever imagine that happiness—that even happiness could be so—beautiful!"

She cried over him a little as he slept there, that gleaming jewel of a girl who belonged to him.

(The End.)

It Takes a Thief

by

Artemus Calloway

PETE paused in his work of brushing off the rickety table that stood in the center of the Railroad Saloon, principal rendezvous of the black population of Tela, Honduras. The day was warm, and beads of perspiration stood on the old negro's forehead, but the expression of deep concern on his face was not due to climatic conditions.

For a moment he gazed at the slender, well-dressed young negro, leaning idly against the long bar, a cigarette in the corner of his mouth, his Panama hat tilted rakishly to one side.

Pete's trouble was real. His lower lip trembled. A remark of the dandified one had dealt a cruel blow. His voice denoted something of his feelings when he spoke.

"But Mistah Goodtimes, Mistah Espute done said dat I's de bestest man he evah is had to he'p 'roun' dis salume, an' you knows dat jes' befo' he stahted foh San Pedro wid Mistah Duncan whut usta own dis place, he tol' you dat I'd been 'ployed steady, an'—"

With a sharp gesture, Goodtimes Harris indicated that he desired silence. He got it.

"I's heerd 'nough o' dat. Mistah Espute wouldn't o' sont way to Mobile to hire me to come down heah an' run dis place foh him, 'ceptin' he had cornfidence in mah 'bility. He wouldn't gone to San Pedro an' lef' me in charge widout he know'd I'd 'tend to bus'ness. He ain' nevah gone off an' lef' you in charge, is he? Answer me dat? No, he ain'. I knows befo' you opens yo' trap."

Goodtimes took a match from his pocket and relighted his cigarette. Then he pointed a finger straight at Pete.

"I finds dat you's been triflin' 'roun' heah, an' so you's fiahed. Dat's all dey is to it."

He walked around behind the bar.

Pete looked over at a corner table where a card-game was in progress. All of the negroes seemed interested solely in their own affairs, so he turned his attention back to Goodtimes.

"But, Mistah Goodtimes, I's got a little money comin' to me. Two dollahs is jue me."

Goodtimes hesitated for just a moment. Then he looked over at the card players. One of the negroes had put down his cards and was looking straight at the saloon man. The man was Kid Scoot, prize-fighter and friend to Pete. Goodtimes stopped hesitating.

"Heah's yo' two dollahs. Take yo'se'f out'n heah."

"Yassuh, suh, thanky, suh."

Goodtimes watched the old man depart. Then he chuckled to himself.

"Got rid o' dat ol' niggah, all right, an' I'll run dis place to suit mahse'f, an' dey won't be nobody to run to Espute wid tales when he gits back heah."

Pete had gone only a short distance from the saloon when he was overtaken by Kid Scoot.

"Dat's too bad foh you to be treated lak'n to dat, Pete; I's mighty sorry," his friend consoled.

"Thanky, Kid. Dat's one o' dese new kind o' niggahs lak'n I ain' got no use foh *at all.* No suh, not me. Jes' 'cause he's been 'ployed as head bartender by Mistah Espute, and Mistah Espute is gone away, he thinks he's a big man. Huh!"

Kid Scoot was practical.

"But he wuz big 'nough to git you out'n yo' job."

"Dat he wuz."

Pete was lost in thought for a few seconds.

"An' dat's de bestest job I evah is had. Could git a little bit o' gin 'casionally; tawk to de lodge membahs when dey come in, an' s'licit new membahs. I lak'd dat job. Sho' did."

"Mebbe so you kin git it again when Mistah Espute gits back."

"No." Pete's tone was doleful. "Dat niggah 'll tell him some big lie, an' he'll be so mad dat he won't lemme go 'roun' dah no mo'."

"How's de s'licitin' o' new membahs foh de Knights an' Ladies o' de Guidin' Light comin' on?"

"Putty good. You see, one thing dat hu'ts us is dat we ain' got so many 'Merican niggahs heah; jes' a few dat wuks foh de United Fruit Company, but dey's a good many West Indian niggahs wukin' foh de company, too, an' dey laks lodge business same as 'Merican niggahs. Can't 'pen' much on de natives. Dem whut we would have we can't git, an' dem whut we could git we wouldn't have. Dat is, in mos' cases."

"Some good natives heah, Pete."

"Not native niggahs. Dese native niggahs is bad fo'ks. Some good sho' 'nough Spanish fo'ks heah, but you knows dem ain' de kind we's consider'n'. We jes' takes in consideration sho' 'nough, honest-to-goodness niggahs, which leaves de 'Merican niggahs an' dem whut calls deyse'ves British objects."

Pete scratched his head, which, with the exception of a little patch of gray, kinky hair at the back and on the sides, was entirely bald.

"I's in de toughts, Kid."

"You sho' is playin' in hard luck."

"You's done spit out a mou'ful, Kid. I ain't only playin' in hard luck, I's hard luck he'se'f."

"Well, so-long. I gotta be gwine."

Pete stood for a short while where Kid Scoot left him; then turned his steps homeward. He walked slowly down the narrow, dusty street until he reached the bridge which spanned Tela River. The river was the dividing line between new and old Tela. New Tela contained the offices and homes of the United Fruit Company employees. Old Tela, with a few exceptions, housed the natives and others not employed by the Fruit Company.

At the bridge the old negro stopped for a few minutes, gazing at a crocodile that lay half out of the muddy water below, apparently as lifeless as a water-soaked log resting against the bridge's supporting timbers a few feet away.

It would have been impossible to guess Pete's thoughts as he leaned against the bridge railing, his eyes fastened on the ugly creature below, an expression of utmost despair in his face. Not for many a day had anything occurred so to disturb Pete's peace of mind as the losing of his job at the Railroad Saloon.

There was a reason.

Goldfly Churn, the young American negress who cooked for the United Fruit Company manager's family, looked mighty good to Pete, and of late he had almost arrived at the conclusion that the young negress had more than a passing interest in him.

Goldfly, according to Pete's definition, was *some yallah gal.* That he was in the neighborhood of three times the girl's age did not worry him in the slightest degree. She looked just as good to Pete as she would have when he was only twenty. And age ripens the judgment, it is claimed.

One of the things that had made Pete strong with the object of his desire was his position with the Railroad Saloon. An abundance of ready cash to spend hurts no man's standing in a community. And there

had been many and divers ways of picking up small change in the place of liquid refreshments, and Pete, never a thrifty soul, had been a good spender. Now, this was all over. No job meant no money; no money no spending, and no spending—perhaps no girl. The future certainly *could* have looked brighter.

And then he looked up and saw Goldfly.

The old negro had his hat off in a flash and was bowing like a cavalier of old. His forehead almost touched the ground, and his back suffered, but of this Pete for the moment was not aware, or being aware, did not care. Love laughs at trifles. For the time being this was not Pete the jobless, Pete the downcast, but Pete the fortunate, Pete the optimistic—and above all, Pete the lover.

"An' how you is, Miss Goldfly? How you been?"

Goldfly tossed her head.

"Huh! Heah you's been los' yo' job."

Cruel world! Cruel woman, whose tongue can soothe like a mother's touch, or pierce the heart like a poisoned dagger!

"How dat?" The pain that Pete felt showed in his voice, which was scarcely above a whisper.

"You done heerd me! Dat Mistah Goodtimes Harris 'low dat he don' stan' foh no foolishness 'roun' no salume whuh he's de boss at, an' foh such reasons he's done tuk an' fahed you. Dat's whut."

Utmost despair was now the lot of Pete.

"How come you knows so much 'bout all dis?"

"Jes' met Miss Tambourine Finch, and she done tol' me."

"Huh! Dat's jes' lak dat Tambourine gal. Rattlin' 'roun' lak a sho' 'nough tambourine. Dat's all she good foh, to tote niggah news."

"'Tain't no niggah news. I done knowed all 'bout how dis gwine happen."

"'Count o' how?"

Goldfly smiled, showing two rows of perfect teeth that Pete in the past had likened unto pearls. At this moment he was reminded of the fangs of a rattlesnake that has just struck its victim.

"Mistah Goodtimes tol' me 'bout it las' night."

"Las' night? You done tol' me dat you didn't feel good las' night wuz de reason you wouldn't lemme take you to de ice-cream festerville."

"Liable to tell *you* anything. Mistah Goodtimes is de kin' o' man whut makes appealations to mah fancy."

"Say he do?"

"He do dat. He tol' me las' night he gwine fiah you. Well, I gotta be gwine on. *Addio owe us*, as de Spanish gals say."

Goldfly flounced away, her green dress glistening in the morning sunlight in a manner almost blinding to the eye, a baby-pink ribbon adorned the black, crinkly hair, while the not overly long skirt allowed a liberal portion of some well-filled, cream-colored, near-silk hosiery to be visible.

Pete muttered something that would have startled some of the members of the Knights and Ladies of the Guiding Light, had they heard it, and again continued his homeward journey.

When Pete reached his home, which was a little hut that stood in a clearing just at the outer edge of Tela, he paused for a moment and looked about him. A few banana plants, avocado, mango, and other fruit trees were scattered about the place. A dozen or more chickens were industriously scratching up the earth, and a dog of uncertain pedigree gave a bark of welcome as Pete took off his hat, took from his pocket a handkerchief that showed signs of much usage, and removed some of the perspiration from his wrinkled brow.

Ordinarily Pete would have found much to interest him in his surroundings, or this failing to appeal to him, the welcome given by Bones, as he continued barking and wagging his tail, would have elicited some response, but the old man's spirits were at low ebb. Satan must have chortled with glee could he but have read his thoughts.

With steps that were slow and uncertain, he entered the house, and seating himself in a rickety chair that threatened to deposit him on the floor, sat there, his head bowed, hands resting on his knees, old hat pulled down on his forehead, his eyes half closed. Bones came to the door and looked in, but sensing that something was amiss beyond his understanding.

Noontime came and passed. Pete stirred not. Bones, however, had no weighty affairs on his mind. The time had not arrived when he could forget food, so finally he approached the door again. This time he stood there for several minutes as motionless as the figure in the chair. Then he whined. This brought no response. A moment later he stepped noiselessly to the old negro's side and lightly touched his hand with his nose.

For the first time since entering the house, Pete showed signs of consciousness. He raised his hand and rubbed the dog on the head as tenderly and caressingly as a mother would have fondled her baby. Bones nestled his head close to his master's knee. Then the old man remembered something.

" 'Clah to goodness, Bones, I done fohgot, ain' I? I ain' give you no dinnah yit, is I, boy? De ol' man is gittin' on'sponsible, ain' he? Sho' is, foh a fac'. Jes' you wait one minute, ol' fellah, an' we'll fix dat up all right."

The dog whined as if he understood. Half a minute later he was lying under the edge of the house, gnawing a bone which contained a generous covering of meat, all the time keeping half an eye on some of the more venturesome chickens that displayed more than a passing interest in the feast.

Pete now took his stand in the door, seemingly trying to make up his mind on some subject. This was a hard job. He removed his hat and scratched his head. Apparently this had the desired effect.

" Dah now! I'd plum' 'mos' fohgot. De Suriname will be gwine in a little while, and Mistah Ed Mason is gwine to de States on it. I sho' do hate to see dat white man leave fum heah. I's got to go out an' tell him good-by. He sho' is he'p'd me out a heap in figger'n my lodge bus'ness foh me."

Muttering to himself, Pete left the house and made his way to the dock. The ship just about ready to sail when he shuffled alongside.

He heard some one on deck shout to him, and looking up, saw Mason.

" Come down this way, Pete, I want to talk to you."

" Pete," said Mason, a moment later as he handed a small roll of bills over the ship's railing, " give that money to Mr. Farley for me. It's some money that I owe him, and he's out on one of the plantations. I intended leaving it at the office for him, but in the rush, forgot it. There's forty dollars there. Be careful you don't lose it."

" I ain' gwine lose *dis* money, Mistah Mason. I's skeerd o' Mistah Farley. He don' stan' *no* foolishness fum nobody."

" All right, Pete. Mr. Rozier will help you out in looking after your lodge affairs the same as I have been doing. Good-by."

" Sho' hates to see you go, Mistah Mason. Good-by."

Mr. Farley was still out of town next morning, for which reason Pete could not deliver the money.

Late that afternoon the old negro strolled over to town and down by the Railroad Saloon. Goodtimes Harris was standing out in front, talking to some of his friends.

Goodtimes made a wonderful picture as he stood before the dingy looking little shack. He was arrayed in a suit of spotless white ducks, bright tan shoes, Panama hat, red tie, in which sparkled a wonderful *near*-diamond, while on the little finger of his right hand sparkled another, which, if real, would have been worth at the least a thousand dollars.

Pete attempted to slip by without attracting any undue attention, but Goodtimes intercepted him.

" Huh! Ol' niggah, who tol' you to come loafin' 'roun' disheah salume?"

" I ain' doin' no loafin', Mistah Goodtimes. I's jes' passin'."

" Dat's whut you 'blongs to do. Jes' pass. Don' want no wuthless, triflin' niggahs 'roun' heah."

" I ain' no triflin', wuthless niggah. I's a man o' 'pawtance. I's president an' treasurer o' de Knights an' Ladies o' de Guidin' Light—I's—"

" Yeh! I knows all 'bout dat. Dese niggahs sho' must 'a' been crazy when dey 'lected you to dem positions—I—"

" Huh!"

Pete's voice was rising. Moreover, his opinion of himself was again on the increase.

" Widout me, dey wouldn't o' been dem

positions—I's a man 'mongst men in dis-heah town. I's—"

Goodtimes snorted his contempt.

"You's a ol' fool. Dat's whut you is. If'n you comes 'roun' heah any moah, I'll tie yo' yeahs back, grease yo' head, and swaller you whole. I's a bad niggah, an' don' stan' no foolishments. You don' know how 'pawtant I is in Mobile. I's a man o' standin' dah. You tawks 'bout yo' 'pawtance! Huh! Don' nobody pay no 'tention to you. 'Pawtant! Whut does you do dat's so 'pawtant?"

This was somewhat of a poser. Pete, however, could on occasion turn his head to other uses than that of a hat-rack. Sometimes he would find an idea jammed back there somewhere. Sometimes these ideas were dangerous things to fool with. He dug up an idea now.

"Pshaw! You don' know nothin'. How 'pawtant is I? Why, niggah, when I *wants* to, I kin have a ban' playin' an' a 'scort o' soldiers ev'y time I goes down de street, an' dat's a fac'."

Goodtimes was not the only one that laughed at this remark. The others joined in. But Pete, once started, could not be stopped in this manner.

"Yeh. If'n I want to I kin have a ban' playin' music, an' soldiers marchin'—I means a sho' 'nough brass ban', de military ban' heah. I kin have a real procession—I kin have—"

Goodtimes interrupted.

"Aw shet up, you lyin' ol'—"

"'Tain't no lyin'. I—"

"Well, I gwine see."

Goodtimes ran his hand in his pocket and brought forth three, bright, crisp ten-dollar bills. He held these above his head. His voice grew louder so that all in the block might hear.

"Heah's thutty dollahs dat I bets you can't have no ban' playin' music when you comes down de street, neither no soldiers marchin' 'long behime. Put up yo' money wid Doctah Percy Shade, heah."

Pete realized that he had been doing some rather unnecessary talking.

"I—I—"

He was interrupted by the loud laughter of the other negroes.

Dr. Percy Shade, the suggested stake-holder, was a heavy-set, yellow negro from Kingston, Jamaica. He had only recently hung out his shingle in Tela. He had quite a practise among the negroes there, many of whom would not call the United Fruit Company's physician or go to the hospital unless forced to do so.

Pete had never liked Dr. Percy Shade. He liked him less at this moment as his coarse laughter threatened to drown even that of Goodtimes Harris.

Pete ran his hand in a trouser-pocket. His fingers closed on a roll of bills—Farley's money. He hesitated—with the usual result. He brought forth the money.

"Heah you is. Heah's thutty dollahs. 'Cose I ain' skeered to bet. Put up yo' money wid de doctah, Goodtimes, an' de onderstandin' is dat if'n I don' come marchin' down de street wid de ban' o' music playin', and de soldiers marchin' on behime, you gits all de money. If I does have de ban' an' de soldiers, den I gits de money, an' I's got three days to do it in."

"Three days? Huh! I thought you could do it jes' any time. Reckon I wants to bet lak dat?"

"Pshaw, Goodtimes, give him all the time he wants," suggested Dr. Shade. "He couldn't win the bet in a year, so what difference does it make?"

Goodtimes was reassured.

"All right. I's a spoht, I is. But three days is onnecessary. I makes it fawty-eight hours fum now. It's five o'clock now, an' time is up at five o'clock day aftah tomorrow evenin' at dis time."

"Does that suit you, Pete?" Dr. Shade wanted to know.

It had to. There was no way out of it. Dr. Shade pocketed the money and walked into the saloon.

Half an hour later Pete met Kid Scoot. Kid had heard of the bet. He was indignant.

"You sho' is played de wild," he declared to the older negro. "I knows whut you's done. You's made a bet dat you *knows* you's boun' to lose. Whu 'd you git dat money to bet, nohow? I know you didn't had no money day o' so ago."

Pete told him.

"Dah now! You *is* played de wild. Mistah Farley is one bad man when he gits displeased, and dah ain' *nothin'* displeases him lak losin' money."

"I knows it, kid, but dat niggah jes' runned me crazy."

"Mistah Farley gwine *run you to death*. Dat's whut he gwine do. Mistah Mason gwine be sho' to write him dat he lef' de money wid you."

Kid was not a cheerful companion, so Pete left him.

He slept but little that night. Next morning he went down to see Phil Rozier, a clerk in the United Fruit Company's offices.

"Mistah Rozier, since you's he'p'n me out in mah bus'ness, sich as keepin' de lodge bus'ness straight foh me an' sich lak as dat, place'n Mistah Mason, I thought mebbe so you could he'p me out'n a little tight place I's in."

"All right, Pete, tell me about it. Perhaps I can help you."

Pete explained fully, freely, and at length.

Rozier whistled.

"Certainly did get yourself in a jam, Pete, no mistake about that. I don't see how I can help you out."

Just then his eyes rested on a picture tacked on the wall just above his desk.

"By George!" he exclaimed. "Pete, you see that? You know—"

Pete interrupted him.

"Dat's a fac', Mistah Rozier. Why can't us—"

"We can. Wait a minute, Pete- let me think."

Goodtimes Harris stood in the door of the Railroad Saloon. The hour was three-thirty o'clock. At five o'clock he would be thirty dollars richer.

From up the street came the sound of a band. Soon it came in sight. A bunch of ragged, barefooted natives, most of them boys not over fifteen years old. This was the Tela military band. They were playing as if their lives depended on it. Just behind them marched Pete, a bright, red sash around his waist. And behind Pete marched thirty barefooted soldiers.

Goodtimes's mouth flew open, and he stared, pop-eyed. Dr. Shade yelled at him from the next corner.

"You lost your bet, Goodtimes. I'll have to pay the money to Pete."

Goodtimes said something. He said many things—he said some wild things.

Pete did not know it. Dr. Shade did not know it, but Goodtimes had bet the saloon's money! He was overdrawn in his account—and Espute was due back that night!

Three-quarters of an hour later Pete appeared before Phil Rozier again.

A broad grin overspread his face.

"Mistah Rozier, heah's fawty dollahs I wants you to give Mistah Farley. Dat's de 'zac' amount Mistah Mason gimme foh him, an' I's tired o' de 'sponsibility. De ten I had lef' aftah bettin' an' dat I bet is all dah. An' I's got thutty dollahs foh spendin' pupposes."

"All right, Pete. We certainly fixed Goodtimes, didn't we?"

"Yassuh, an' I sho' wants to thank you foh gittin' down to p'leece headquatahs so quick an' withdrawin' dat chawge ag'inst me foh stealin' yo' sash befo' any o' dese niggahs got on to de fac' dat ole Pete wuz 'rested."

"That's all right."

Rozier laughed.

"Goodtimes didn't know that the law here is that when any one steals anything he is to be marched around town with the band and soldiers, and then brought back to commence serving his sentence. I wouldn't have thought of that if I hadn't had that kodak picture above my desk that I took, the day I arrived here, of just such an occurrence."

He laughed again. Lighting a cigarette, he continued:

"My hitting on the plan for you to steal that sash and then have you arrested was good. Goodtimes thought the sash was some kind of an honorable decoration."

Pete chuckled.

"In which case it's you dat deserves de decoration, boss, same as me, 'cause dis wuz one time whuh brains wuz needed—lak us is got; an' used, lak us did."

Billy Dawson's Bust

by Norman Springer

I.

FOR three years Billy Dawson had played in hard luck. Month in and month out, he prospected over the burning floor of the desert, or high up on the sterile flanks of the Funeral range, but the ledge of pure gold he felt in his bones he would some day happen upon ever lay just beyond.

Usually he gathered enough of the elusive metal to pay Ryan, Sweetwater's general storekeeper, for his grubstakes. Occasionally he even had enough over to permit himself a mildly exciting evening at Sweetwater's Palace Saloon and Dance-Hall. But enough he never had to allow him to leave Sweetwater's bitter dust behind.

Three years of Sweetwater and its wide environs is an arid eternity to a cheer-loving soul. Billy's desert-reddened eyes ached for the soothing sight of green, growing things, a meadow, a blooming rose-bush, or any of the verdured scenes of a kindlier country.

In the heat of the day his throat lusted for a long glass in which ice tinkled; in the cold of night he thought regretfully of the hot toddies he had so carelessly sipped in long, past days of affluence. When he tossed his flapjacks, or clamped his teeth into a soggy biscuit, he would think of a gleaming table set with roast chicken, or behold upon the sand a mirage of ham and eggs.

Gradually a longing grew in his heart; as keen a longing as the sailor's, who dreams of the day he will step ashore on the home dock. Billy's longing was to get on the stage at Sweetwater, his pocket filled with money, and journey out of the desert for a fine, soul-satisfying, spending jag in a civilized community. He yearned for a "bust."

But never for a moment did Billy consider leaving the desert without a stake. He was a true son of chance. Hope ever beckoned. Each trip from Sweetwater into the desert would be the last.

"We'll find her sure this time, m'son," he would always say to Pancake, his burro. "And, Lord, Lord, what a bust we'll have!"

One morning, in the hills, four days' hike from Sweetwater, he turned into a little cañon, and followed it up because of a perverse humor, for his experienced eyes judged it barren territory. At the cañon's head he found a water-soak, and in the surrounding ground he found "color."

Billy was not a demonstrative man. Had he unexpectedly stumbled upon El Dorado, he would not have given way to those peculiar transports which are supposed to possess the miner in his lucky moments. In this case he neither wept nor sang. No. He took his fry-pan and experimented with the ground about the soak. Then he cooked himself a meal, and afterward

smoked a reflective pipe. Finally he addressed the browsing Pancake:

"Well, old scout, I guess we'll stick around a while. Pretty soft for you."

At the end of his first day's work he further unbosomed himself to his companion.

"Well, you doggoned belly on legs, we got it! She ain't no bonanza, for sure, but she will give us our bust all right!"

Four weeks later Billy and Pancake came back down the cañon. Billy was somewhat gaunt from a bout with half rations, but neither the well-cinched belt nor the knowledge of the four days of heart-breaking hiking ahead, had power to oppress his spirits. There was an unwonted sparkle in his pale, sun-washed eyes, and his lips puckered around a gay whistle.

For at last he had his stake! In the billy-can that made part of Pancake's load, was a small flour-sack, and in the bottom of this sack was a lump composed of heavy, golden grains. There was, Billy judged, between fifteen and sixteen pounds of gold in that flour-sack. Good reason to whistle.

As he marched across the desert that day his mood hourly grew more exultant. "Giddap, you onery, four-legged flea heaven!" he chanted at Pancake. "We're on our way, you sabe? We're on our way to God's country!"

He spent hours at a fascinating mental arithmetic, computing his dust into dollars. His stake would amount to five thousand dollars or more. Oh, what a bust!

Not a penny of his roll would the Sweetwater tin-horns get. He would go direct get the best of them. He would go direct to Ryan, and Ryan, in his capacity as express agent, would exchange his dust for a draft payable in God's country. He would hold out just enough cash to pay stage and railroad fare.

He would go to San Bardue for his time. Now, there was a fine town, a regular town, with pavements, and real ice!

He brightened the long afternoon by anticipating the delights of San Bardue. He took them one by one, held them up before his mind's eye, and gloated upon them. He put them in his mouth, rolled them on his tongue, and smacked his lips. When, at nightfall, he pitched camp, and dined off his last can of beans, he explained to Pancake the many charms of San Bardue.

"There'll be real trees growin', m'son. And real, honest-to-God grass in front of the houses, and real flowers to look at. And there's a saloon with a marble floor, and they *give* the ice away. And you can get a drink of real stuff, Pancake, no Sweetwater rotgut, but the real goods, two bits a shot—not too much for us this trip.

"And there's real beds to sleep in. And a bathtub, with all the water you want. And you can get a real feed, with a napkin. Oh, Lord, a real feed! The kind a *woman* cooks!"

Pancake listened with becoming solemnity. He had forsaken the sage for the label of the bean-can, and upon this delectable morsel he ruminated, one eye closed, one long ear cocked forward, to his master's words.

"I'd sure like to take you with me, old scout," Billy continued. "But, Lord, you ain't got no soul! You wouldn't enjoy heaven. If you seen a rose-bush you'd want to scoff it, you doggoned cannibal! You don't care if you never get between two clean sheets. No, I'll have to leave you with Ryan. I'll tell him to give you all the oats you'll eat, and you won't have to work. That 'll be heaven for you, hey? That 'll be your bust."

Pancake appeared satisfied.

But Billy could not remain satisfied. When, next morning, he continued the march, his stirred imagination had overleaped San Bardue.

Why tarry at San Bardue? He had five thousand dollars to spend. Los Angeles lay beyond San Bardue. Now, there was a town! San Bardue—a mere overgrown Sweetwater. But Los Angeles! Why, in Los he would be at the ocean side. He would be in a real city.

That morning the heat waves, dancing over the desert floor, formed themselves into wonderful pictures for Billy. He saw the cool, green sea racing into the beach, and heard the roar of the surf. He saw wide, crowded streets, pretty women, sleek city men in white collars. He saw a great café, spacious, cool, bright with service, and

filled with people who sucked cold drinks through straws. Los Angeles!

But by noon his vaulting mind had left even the City of Angels behind. During his noonday rest he definitely decided where he was going for his bust. San Francisco! Sure. Didn't he have five thousand dollars or more in the flour-sack?

Frisco! Now that was the town where a guy could get action for his money. Los Angeles—a country burg in comparison. Frisco was the place for him. In Frisco a guy could get anything, do anything, see everything. Frisco was the place to spend a roll.

II.

DURING the afternoon Billy stopped his march for a moment to kill an insolent rattler. Pancake, disliking the company, scampered on ahead. When Billy caught up with the burro, he found Pancake stopped, pensively eying a man's body, which was lying, face downward, on the sand.

"Thirst!" said Billy. But when he reached Pancake's side, his desert-wise eyes told him otherwise.

For one thing, the body was fully clad, and Billy knew the thirst-crazed man always discards his covering. And then, a moment's investigation showed that water was in the canteen that lay beside the body.

Billy turned the body over. It was the corpse of a young man, tall, and incredibly thin. The face was emaciated, skin drawn tight over the bones, the eyes deep-sunken. On the sand, where the face had pressed, was a telltale discoloration. Dried blood and caked sand was upon the lips.

"Lunger," said Billy. "Poor guy. Something busted inside and knocked him over."

The body was cold, but Billy judged the man had not been dead more than a day. He climbed an adjacent sand-hill and looked about for the felow's burro, without success. "Must have beat it," decided Billy. "Well, I got to plant the poor stiff."

He proceeded methodically. This was not the first time Billy had happened upon a dead man in the desert, and buried him. Some day, perhaps, somebody would stumble upon his dead body lying face downward on the sand. That day, Billy hoped, the finder would tarry long enough to dig a hole. Until that day he would decently inter his own findings.

Since day was far gone, he first pitched camp in the lee of the sand-hill. Then he dug a shallow grave beside the body, and carried stones to the hole, to make a cairn.

The grave ready, he turned to the body, and searched it, in an effort to establish identity. The pockets yielded nothing of moment, nor did they contain a cent of money. There was no jewelry on the man. But against the concave chest, suspended from the neck by a piece of ribbon, Billy found a pouch made from a silk handkerchief, and in it were papers. Billy laid the pouch aside, and proceeded with the burial.

After supper he inspected the contents of the handkerchief: A small photograph and a letter.

He looked at the photograph first. It was the likeness of an old woman, a white-haired, sweet-faced old lady, with lips half parted in a smile. The age-seamed features seemed careworn and sorrowful.

There was something about that sweet old face that went straight to Billy's heart. He held the picture close to the fire, the better to see, and the flame shadows seemed to invest the likeness with life. Almost, Billy thought, she might speak to him. The patient eyes and tender mouth seemed to have a message for him. On the face of the photograph was an inscription, scrawled in an uncertain hand:

With my love to Arthur. MOTHER.

"Poor guy," said Billy. Then, after thought: "Poor old lady."

He put the picture aside, and gave his attention to the letter. There was no envelope, and the letter itself bore no date or place heading. Billy knew from the handwriting it was from the old woman of the picture:

MY DEAR, DEAR BOY:

I received your letter that said you were going to the desert, to the place with the

pretty name. Dr. Pettie was pleased. He said the desert air would help you. But, oh, my boy, be careful of yourself! You are so far away from me. Now, Arthur, remember your health. You know over-exertion might cause one of those terrible hemorrhages. If I could only send you money, my boy, so you could rest completely, and get well and strong! But you know I cannot. Now, my dear, you must not worry about me. I promise you I shall not deceive you about my affairs. But do not worry, Arthur. I am an old woman; my life is lived, and I need nothing. Do not think of me, dear boy. You must put your mind upon your body and get well. Oh, that my prayers may help you! You must get well and come back to me. Oh, my son, come back to me!

MOTHER.

Billy's eyes were watery, and his throat tight by the time he finished reading. He coughed, and kicked the fire, and cursed it for smoking. Then he picked up the photograph, and fell to studying the old mother's face.

"Poor old lady," he said. "Poor mother. And here I've planted him under the stars, and he won't never come back to you."

At dawn, Billy resumed his march toward Sweetwater. As before, he endeavored to lighten the way with a mental motion-picture of the joys so soon to be his. But though his bust was a day nearer, though the fleshpots of Frisco were as enticing as ever, the zest was somehow gone from the game.

The picture and the letter carefully bestowed in the breast-pocket of his shirt, pressed upon his spirits. As he walked along, he gradually surrendered to an unaccustomed, critical mood. He began to think about life.

This game of life didn't seem quite on the square to Billy. That poor stiff he had planted—now, he had been a game guy, and his need had been bitter. With death's finger already upon him, he had gone into the desert to play the strong man's game. He had tried, and against what odds? He had come out to what he must have known would be his death. And the poor old lady!

And here was he, Billy Dawson, going out of the desert with slathers of gold. He had no kind-faced old lady to write to him, and pray for him, and accept his help. All he could do with his stake was blow it in. He was going out on a bust, and somewhere that poor old lady was waiting for them to come and turn her out of her home. And she would patiently wait, with growing anguish and despair, for the son who would not return.

If he could only give her the poor consolation of a letter saying her boy had gone out. But there was no address, no name save "Arthur," in the letter he carried in his shirt-pocket. Poor old lady. Somehow, it did not seem fair to Billy.

III.

THE next afternoon Billy plodded into Sweetwater. As he had promised himself, he went direct to Ryan's, not even glancing into the yawning, inviting mouth of the Palace Saloon.

"Well, I struck it pretty good this trip," he said to Ryan after the latter's hearty greeting. "Going out to God's country for a bust this time."

"Sure, I'm glad to hear it," responded the storekeeper. "If any one deserves a bit o' luck 'tis you, Billy."

"Will you weigh me in?" added Billy, handing the flour-sack to the other.

Ryan balanced the sack in his hand, and ventured to admonish the younger man.

"'Tis a tidy lump, Billy. Will you take a bit o' advice? Leave this in my safe till stage time to-morrow. For if ever them sharks across the way in the Palace get their hooks on it, 'tis devil a cent you'll take outside."

"Them Palace tin-horns don't get none of this," stated Billy. "When you've weighed it, just put on your express agent's cap, and make me out a draft on old Frisco town. Leave out a couple of hundred to get me there."

Ryan weighed the gold, and laboriously figured upon the top of a cracker-barrel. "Fifty-two hundred dollars," he told Billy.

"Hooray—now give me that draft," responded Billy.

Ryan put the dust in the safe, and led the way to the corner of the store reserved for his labors as postmaster and express agent. He sat down at a small, littered desk, and prepared to draw the draft Billy

requested. As he drew the blank forms out of a pigeonhole, an envelope was dislodged, and fell upon the blotter before him.

"Huh—what's this?" he murmured absently, picking up the envelope, and reading the inscription. "Oh, yes—that sick felly." He looked up at Billy and casually inquired:

"Say, Billy, you didn't meet up with a young lunger out there, did you? A felly without any meat on him?"

"Yes. Bumped into him on the trail two days ago, and planted him," replied Billy. "Poor guy—something had busted inside of him, and he was stiff. I planted him good; won't no coyote bother him."

He drew out the photograph and letter, and handed them to Ryan.

"All the poor guy had on him."

Ryan read the letter and studied the picture for a long moment. When he lifted his face, there was real distress in it, and in his voice.

"Ain't that the devil of a go?" he said. "The poor felly. And this is the old mother he was talking about."

"Did you know him?" asked Billy.

"He came in on the stage a couple of weeks ago," said Ryan. "He walked into the store here and, sure, the minute that I seen the felly I knew I was looking at a dead man. 'Twas in his face. Bad sick, he was, and like a drunken man on his feet. And devil a cent in his pockets nor baggage in his hand. And he talked of going prospecting."

"He went," said Billy.

"Aye, he went," echoed Ryan. "And I misdoubt not the poor lad's death is at my door. He was bad, as I said, and I put him to bed in the back room there. Glory be, 'twas a bean-pole he was when I got the clothes off him. And there he lay for a few days, too weak entirely to stand, and talked all the time about going out prospecting.

"'Prospecting!' says I. 'Young felly. 'tis the hospital, not the desert, you should be thinking about.'

"There came a letter for him—I misdoubt not this very one—and there was no holding him. On his bare nerve he got out of bed. 'Would you have me old mother in the poorhouse?' says he to me.

"And so, thinks I, he might as well die outdoors as in, and I grubstaked him. I give him my Jinny burro, and off he goes, a week ago. Yesterday, Jinny came home alone. Ah, well, the lad's gone. I misdoubt not he was a fine lad in his day, Billy."

"Yes—he had guts to hit the desert when he was sick," agreed Billy. "And that letter there—for him?"

"Yes. Came yesterday," answered Ryan. He handed Billy the envelope that had first brought the subject to mind.

It was an official-looking envelope, with a typewritten address to "Mr. Arthur Rolfe."

"I'd better open this, Ryan," said Billy. "Maybe it 'll give his home address. Somebody ought to drop that poor old lady a line."

"Aw, now, 'tis against the law—" hesitated Ryan.

"Curse the law," responded Billy, and tore the envelope open. He unfolded the sheet of paper it contained, and read aloud the message it bore:

"Fairmont, Iowa,
"September 15, 1917.

"MR. ARTHUR ROLFE.

"DEAR SIR: The home of your mother, Mary Rolfe, will be forfeited by mortgage foreclosure upon October 1, we are informed. We understand Mary Rolfe is destitute, and will, upon this date, become a public charge unless funds are provided for her support. We have investigated the case, and while it is true we have found Mary Rolfe worthy of admittance to the County Almshouse, yet we trust you will endeavor to prevent this additional burden being placed upon the taxpayers of the county.

"Yours sincerely,
"JONAS STUBBS,
"Director of Public Charities for
"Brown County."

Billy tossed the brutal note upon the desk and swore soulfully. "A fine thing to send to sick guy!" he exclaimed. "The poor old lady—in the poorhouse!"

"Aye, 'tis a hard world," agreed Ryan. "I'll write her a bit about her boy—though 'tis a job I don't like. And this draft, now, Billy—make it out to plain William Dawson?"

Billy coughed, and drew a deep breath. "Make it out to Mary Rolfe," he said distinctly.

"What?" exclaimed Ryan.

"Sure," confirmed Billy. He hesitated and reddened, and began stammeringly: "I—I got a confession to make, Ryan. I- I—well, I picked that dust off that poor stiff. It ain't mine. I didn't know who he was, and -well, you know how I been playing in hard luck for a long time. I thought I'd take it and say I struck it lucky this trip, and go on a bust. But now—well, you see- this old lady—"

"Huh!" snorted Ryan, turning back to the draft. "Mary Rolfe, you say. And for how much, Billy?"

"All of it," promptly responded Billy. "I ain't a piker. And, besides, it ain't mine, I tell you. I lifted the dust off that stiff--"

Ryan looked up. His usually bright eyes were misty, and his voice was uncommonly gruff.

"Billy Dawson, you're a damn poor liar," said he. "But, by me soul, you can have anything you want in my store, any time you want it!"

The Woman Who Stopped the War

by Courtenay Savage

"IT was purely an economic condition that caused the cessation of hostilities," Burnham, the banker, said sagely. "The Allied money-bags were a reenforcement against which no bullet could compete —so—" He shrugged his shoulders, carefully straightening the points of his checked waistcoat.

"Economic, yes," Kingsley agreed quickly; "but it was the people awakening that brought about the internal situation." The two men at the table stirred uneasily. Kingsley was professor of history at the local college, and his views were bordering on the revolutionary.

"You may both be right," the third man said quickly, and then, after a pause: "It was a woman who stopped the war."

"A woman?" they seemed to echo his assertion, and Kingsley laughed. "What is it?" he asked. "A joke?" for the third man, Gilder, was a comedian. He had been writing, producing, and acting plays since his days at Harvard, and the burlesque stage was his medium. As he sat there he was as strange a contradiction as ever lived, for Gilder might have been either the college professor or the banker—yet he was billed as "King of the Comedians."

"Yes--a woman stopped the war," he said sagely, "or, at least, you can't make any member of the 'Gay Whirl for 1918' believe differently."

Laura Smith gave up her position one Saturday evening and announced to her

mother that she had decided to become an actress.

"Actress? Get them notions out of your head—and quick. Playing the piano at the Ten-Cent Store is near enough the stage for you."

"I'm never going to the Ten-Cent Store again," she said in a quiet, determined tone. "I can do society-dancing, and I can sing, and I've got the looks, and I might as well make use of it all."

"Society-dancing?" Mrs. Smith straightened up. "All this tango and one-step and hesitation-waltz business has gone to your head. You're crazy."

"Well—anyway—I'm going to try—" the girl persisted. "Me and Joe can dance, and we can sing. We've both got talent."

"Oh—you and Joe," Mrs. Smith grunted. "Well, Joe Levy had better hang on to his job." Then, after a minute of serious thought: "Joe Levy's a good boy, but he's got crazy ideas. Acting!" and she laughed.

Laura said nothing. She was city-bred and used to doing as she pleased. The following Monday morning she dressed carefully and left the house at the usual time, relieved that her mother had made no remarks over the fact that she was wearing her best dress.

At half past four that afternoon she startled her mother by arriving home and demanding food.

"We rehearsed right through lunch-hour, but I was so sort of scared and happy that I never noticed the difference."

"What?" asked Mrs. Smith. "What are you talking about? Are you sick or fired?" these being the only two reasons that any one would return home from work at four thirty.

"Neither—didn't I tell you I was going to be an actress? Well, we fell into real luck. Joe got us an engagement right off, and ma—my end of the salary is sixty-two fifty a week."

Mrs. Smith's head rang with the sum. When one has always lived in a small flat in a congested section of the city, sixty-two dollars and fifty cents a week is the key to more than ordinary happiness.

"Say—you're being honest, aren't you?"

"Sure."

"And they pay money like that to actresses?"

"Yep—and 'The Gay Whirl' is one of the classiest shows on the burlesque circuit."

"Burlesque?" Mrs. Smith shrieked. "Say—you don't mean to say that you—" and then she thought of the sixty-two fifty a week and stopped.

Such was the beginning of the dance-team of "The Le Vays," that being the stage pseudonym coined by the ingenuous Joe Levy.

Joe Levy was a typical second-generation Jew. His parents had been refugees from some depressing town in Russia, but he had gone to grammar school, sold papers after the hours of education, graduated, and started his work of helping to support the family. Joe had never been a business success, although he was not lacking in ambition. He found it impossible to be interested in work; it meant for him only money for his mother and the theater. Joe went to the theater for more than recreation—it was a study.

Mrs. Smith had called Joe a "good boy." He was certainly that. Tall, with a shock of dark hair, his kindly eyes were his best feature. Both Jew and Gentile of his neighborhood had a kind word for Joe Levy.

Then came the dancing craze that swept the country. For the first time Joe had stepped from a humble position among his friends to one of envy. He was a perfect dancer, and he eventually found Laura Smith his best partner. She and Joe Levy would dance with a grace that made others stop dancing to watch them. One day Joe summoned the courage to ask the girl if she would be willing to go on the stage. She was more than willing—she was anxious. Joe started to work at once.

That season every musical production had its team of "society dancers," and Joe Levy, with true racial assurance, had marched the round of the theatrical producers asking for a chance to demonstrate their ability. At one office, that of Austin Gilder, he applied at a critical moment, and, being the first on the scene, had the luck to win a hearing. After they had danced once the contract was offered them. It was not large, but it was enviable for beginners.

The dancing Le Vays were a success. When their first season ended they each had more money than they had ever believed possible for them to acquire—and Joe Levy had a contract for the following season. "The Gay Whirl" was an annual institution.

There was no idleness for either of them that summer. Joe was a hard taskmaster—and he had decided that they must really learn to sing and to dance. The society dancing was losing its novelty—so they hired a "professor" and started to learn acrobatic steps.

From that time on the Le Vays were probably the most popular song-and-dance people on the burlesque circuit. Many managers cast longing eyes in their direction and made tempting offers, but Joe was wise beyond his years of experience. "The Gay Whirl" was the best burlesque show in the business. Austin Gilder, the comedian, was a college man; he wrote the productions, he could always bring his laughs, he made money, and invested it each year in costly productions that made him more money. Joe Levy knew that the future of the Le Vays was safe with "The Gay Whirl."

"There ain't nothing better than a sure thing," was the way Joe expressed it to one manager, and, finding that he was satisfied with the phrase, continued to use it.

And in everything Laura Le Vay—she had almost forgotten the Smith of other days—echoed the words of her partner. It was always a wonder to those who worked with them that Laura and Joe had never married. Joe was frankly adoring—and his love seemed sincere.

There was a cleanness about their affection for one another that was delightful. No breath of scandal ever came near the girl. She had no male friends save Joe, unless one counted Austin Gilder, who was a friend to every one, and Joe seemed as a guard before her—as if to shut out any taint that might find its way into the garden of her life.

That she cared for him seemed evident. That she valued his word higher than the word of any other man on earth was positive. She had called him her partner. He was more; he was the being who seemed to control her every action—her thought, her words, what she wore, her failure, success, the innermost detail of her life.

And yet they never married. No one knew why.

The seasons went swiftly on—with the Le Vays growing in fame and fatness of pocketbook—and then one day as they went to the theater Joe read that the President of the United States had declared war on Germany.

"Good thing," he had commented. "I hate them Heinies."

"It's a good thing," Laura told the women of the company. For she was Joe's echo.

Only a few weeks later, however, she was to listen dry-eyed, but with fluttering heart, to the plans for the first draft, and Joe was only twenty-nine. Even then they did not marry, a fact which won them the deep respect of their fellow workers. Slacker was becoming a common word.

Joe Levy was one of the first men called in the selective draft of September, 1917. The current edition of "The Gay Whirl" had opened its season in Philadelphia, but Joe was not there. Instead, he had marched with a flag on his shoulder to the Pennsylvania Railroad Terminal—and so to Camp Upton. The next Sunday, Laura went to see him—and after that the show went West. She was singing and dancing alone—and was frankly lonesome.

The winter passed with leaden feet. Laura Le Vay played her part, traveled, wrote her daily letter to Joe—sent him candy, cigarettes, and learned to knit. She was living through hours of dull, ever-present heartache.

The strange part to Laura was that she lived at all. Life was an empty thing—yet she went on, and people laughed at her songs and applauded her dancing. She lived the daily life that Joe had taught her—and yet he was not there to make it complete. There had been a friendly, devoted, affection between them before—now into the girl's heart crept longing—love—both awakened by the miles of shining steel track that lay between her and Private Joe Levy.

Then, suddenly, Joe's letters stopped.

Laura knew the answer. Even as she danced and sang, she could picture the file of khaki-clad men as they boarded the transport, which would go sneaking out through the mists of the lower bay—and so, huddled in the arms of a convoy, to France.

Two weeks later she got his card—"Arrived safely," and nearly a month after that his first long letter.

By that time the season was finished, and Laura was "resting." She had a contract for the next year, she could well afford to rest, but after a few days the emptiness of the city hurt. Some one told her about the soldiers' and sailors' canteens — and she found her services much appreciated. Occasionally she sang for the boys in the camps near New York—or in the hospitals. Her whole life, however, lay in Joe's welcome letters.

They were strange epistles. Joe had been such a material fellow before the war; now he talked about his soul, and right and wrong. He developed the gift of letter-writing, of being able to suggest with quick, ungrammatical sentences the scenes about him. French villages leaped into life and color—and the men and women he met beside the road.

"Gee, you ought to had been with me Sunday," he wrote in one passage that she would never forget. "I was kind of blue, and thinking of how the season would be opening in New York—and me not there. I walked out in the country, and come to a small house with the roof knocked off of one corner. There was a bunch of bushes all in flower before the place, and a woman standing there by the door. She sort of smiled at me—not the kind of a smile that the dames round Times Square give you—but a kind of 'Thank you, boy!' smile. You know—like an old lady gives you when you let her have your seat. I stopped short and give her a few words of my French. She laughed and answered me in English. She used to be a nursemaid in New York and knew our language before she got married. And then, right away, he went to war.

"Her fellow's been in for four years and only wounded once, she tells me, and soon it will all be over. God is good, and He ain't going to let wrong triumph much longer. That's why He sent the Americans.

"Ain't that some idea? And she's dead right, too."

Laura guessed that Joe must be right, but she could not help but wonder. God had never meant anything in her life—but if Joe thought He was good—Joe was always right.

Another letter from Joe added to her bewildered state of mind. He had been hurt by the premature explosion of a hand-grenade that one of the other boys was throwing. His wound was not serious, yet he was in a hospital in a camp back of the firing-line.

"It's a great place here," he wrote, "and what makes it great is the old Salvation Army. Say—remember how we had a chorus dressed like Salvation Army lassies two seasons ago, and how they used to all guy one another when they was dressed that way about how good they was getting. Funny, ain't it, how it takes a war or something to wake a fellow up. Now the old S. A. ain't never meant nothing to me but a crowd of nuts standing on a corner and giving a bum imitation of playing a band. We used to laugh at them, and if some kid got fresh and tried to bust up the meeting, we thought it a regular joke.

"Never no more, Laura—they can have my cash any time. You ought to see them S. A. girls round here, singing and playing for the fellows — working like men — with never a complaint. I seen one of the girls writing on the back of some pictures she was going to put in a letter. I asked her if they was her pictures that she was sending to her fellow. Nothing doing—but whenever she has an afternoon off that dame walks two miles to where there was a battle not so very long ago, and she spends her time taking pictures of the graves of the American boys what was killed.

"I seen them graves, sort of sad-looking places, but for the pictures she'd covered them over with all kinds of flowers, and she was sending them pictures home to the mothers of the fellows. Can you beat that for being a regular woman? 'It 'll make

her feel better to know that some one cares for her boy's grave,' she tells me.

"And the way they treat all the fellows alike. Me—a Jew—and it don't make no more difference. They said that they was going to have a meeting last Sunday afternoon, and everybody was welcome that cared to come. I never thought they meant me—but one of the girls says: 'Some one told me you used to be on the stage. Were you a singer, we'd like to have you sit up front and help with the singing, if you'd care to.' And me a Jew. Ain't that some regular way to treat a guy?"

Laura thought it was.

The 1919 edition of "The Gay Whirl" started its season by a week of one-night stands and then swung onto the regular circuit. The route for the year led up through New England and then West. New England was rather a depressing place to play, for the 76th Division, composed of fellows from the six States, had been in heavy action, and everywhere gold stars rivaled the blue of the service stars.

Laura Le Vay found it hard to be cheerful, even when she was on the stage.

"Say I'll be glad to swing West," she confided to Austin Gilder as they left the theater after a Saturday matinée. "Did you notice how none of your jokes in the first act got over?"

"New England boys have seen hard service," Gilder said sagely, "and when one loses something that is very dear—it's hard to laugh. You ought to know that."

"Me? Yes—I'm wise to how it feels. You know, Joe always wanted to marry me—but I didn't really love him before. We was good business partners, and I thought a lot of Joe—but I was afraid that marriage would break us up."

"Oh—that's why you never married, is it?"

"Yep—and now—it wouldn't be half so bad if we were married. At least I'd know that he was all mine, dead or alive, he was all mine."

"Dead or alive—all mine," the man repeated her words. "That must be what makes the women one sees so truly brave. That thought—and hope and prayer."

The girl looked at him quickly.

"Do you believe there is anything in that prayer business?" she asked quickly—and then before he could answer: "Joe writes me that he's stuck on the way the Salvation Army has treated him. He says they're regular people—and they believe in prayer. What do you think?"

Gilder did not answer at once.

"I used not to believe—but I think I do now," he said simply.

When Laura had finished her dinner that evening she saw that there was over a half-hour before she need report to the theater. She put on her hat and coat and started for a short walk. She had not gone more than half a dozen blocks when she heard singing and the boom of a drum.

"They say that the Salvation Army is doing good work in France," a man said as he passed her—and, remembering Joe's letter, she elbowed her way through the little crowd until she was near enough to hear and see the little band of devoted worshipers.

The singing stopped, and a burly man offered an extemporaneous prayer. Laura did not understand it, and she was about to move on when the prayer ended and a girl with a high-pitched voice started to sing. Then a man stepped forward with an open book and began to read.

There was something haunting in the man's voice that carried her rapt attention. She did not know it, but he was reading the fourteenth chapter of St. John—and when he had finished he closed the book and started to speak. His words were simple, and one of his small audience stood in bewildered enrapturement as he told them that if they would only ask, and believe that their prayers would be answered, that their petitions would be granted. As he was speaking, a girl, the one with the soprano voice, came around with a tambourine soliciting funds.

"Say—listen," she stopped the girl as she put a bill on the tambourine. "What he said just now—about asking for things, and if you believed they'd come true?"

"Yes, that's God's word!" the girl smiled.

"And—and I could get anything I

wanted? I could—I could even stop the war and get Joe back?"

"God tells us that by faith we can move a mountain. You can do anything if you will believe in God."

The man was finishing his address by inviting all those who wished to come into the near-by hall for the regular meeting. The girl with the tambourine moved to go.

"Anything?" Laura started to ask, but stopped. Suddenly she remembered that she was an actress and had a night-performance to play. When the girl with the tambourine went back to invite her to the regular meeting she was gone.

There was something born in the dancing girl's brain that night that was not to go lightly out of her life—something that grew with each moment of thought—a beautiful something that a poet might call the birth of a soul. For several days she thought of it all. Her keen memory brought back the words of the man and the girl—and as if to substantiate them there was Joe's letter. He had said that these Salvation Army people were the real thing—and yet they told her that if she would only pray and believe that she could stop the war. It seemed like what Joe had always termed "bunk"—and yet!

Finally she spoke to Austin Gilder on the subject.

"I think it's true," he told her heartily. "I think that if one would only truly believe—anything might happen."

That night when he returned to the theater he carried a Bible, and he had marked the chapter that Laura had heard. While the orchestra jazzed the overture they read it together, and he gave the Bible to the girl to keep.

"Thanks," she said simply. "And you know—Mr. Gilder, I've just made up my mind. I'm going to stop this war."

"I hope so," Gilder said earnestly.

"I've got to stop it. Do you think I can go on without my Joe? He's mine—I'm going to marry him. And the rest of the women—I got to stop it for them." She walked to the door. "How long do you think it ought to take? Do you suppose that I could do it in a month or six weeks?"

Gilder did not answer. From the stage they could hear the singing of the opening chorus.

That was in September. In the north of France men were fighting and dying as they pushed the Hun line steadily back. The optimistic said that the war might be over before Christmas, if Germany collapsed. Others thought that spring would surely bring victory.

Laura Le Vay, however, thought differently, and there were many about her who found it in their hearts to feel as she. The girl's faith was as a radiating light.

Laura Le Vay seemed to change physically and mentally during those September days: there was a softness about her eyes and mouth — a gentleness about her manner.

When the influenza closed all of the theaters, no one in the company was surprised to know that she was spending her days in the Red Cross emergency workroom.

"Queer—ain't it?" one of the women of the company remarked the night of the reopening. "But Laura Le Vay seems a different woman."

The man she addressed nodded thoughtfully.

"Yes," he agreed finally—"and the odd part of it is that she's got me feeling differently. Why, you know I got to thinking about Laura and her praying to end the war—and one day I went to church."

"You never—" the woman said quickly.

"I did, too; and since then, every once in a while, I kind of feel myself believing that this thing is going to end soon."

The woman laughed.

The man shrugged his shoulders. It was not a matter for argument.

No matter what they thought, however, the whole company stood by and waited anxiously. Would the war end soon? Was there such a thing as really believing in prayer? Was Laura just a little crazy? Though they argued among themselves and among the members of other troupes that they met in their travels, none of them ridiculed, or argued, with Laura Le Vay.

Each day, crashing out of the air, came the wireless news of victory. The Belgian

coast was free. Allenby was victorious in Palestine, the Italians were defeating the Austrians on the Piave. The world gasped when Bulgaria was counted out of the battle, and Austria followed. "In the spring will come the end," they said, but in less than a week the world went wild with the false news of peace. Four days later the world went hilariously, happily, mad again—only this time it was true.

The members of "The Gay Whirl" company celebrated with the rest—but in their hearts was awe.

"Do you think that Laura stopped the war?" one of the women asked Gilder.

He shrugged his shoulders, but he did not answer.

The woman saw that a soft, kindly light had come into his eyes.

"Well, what does Laura think?" she persisted. "I tried to talk with her, but she was so darn happy I couldn't tell if she was stuck on herself or not."

"Laura will never be stuck on herself," Gilder said quickly. "And all that she thinks is that Joe will be back soon and that they will get married. Also, she thinks that Joe was right about the Salvation Army. As for what else she thinks—why, I don't know."

When Gilder stopped the three men sat in silence. A smile played around the lips of Kingsley, the professor of history; but Burnham, the banker, was lost in stolid thought.

"It's a nice little story," Kingsley said suddenly. "Just shows how things work out. I'm only surprised that the girl does not think that she is a great faith-healer, or the founder of a new religion."

"No—she only wants Joe Levy."

"Say—look here," Burnham said suddenly. "Do you believe that that girl stopped the war by her praying?"

"I don't know," Gilder said quietly. "I only know that the war is over, that it stopped as abruptly as it began—and I've read my Bible. Who dares to say that her faith did not stop the war—who *knows* that it didn't stop the war?"

Burnham shook his head. Even Kingsley was suddenly sobered. After all—who could say?

MY DESERT GARDEN

NOBODY knows of my desert garden—
This is one spot that is all my own;
Never a hoof-print the sand shall harden,
Crush one blossom, disturb one stone.

Long ere the sun o'er the desert's rim rose,
Here I found it, one rose-red morn;
Kissed the dew on the desert primrose,
Pricked my cheek on a guarding thorn.

Flame of cactus, and yuccas creamy,
Golden cup of the prickly pear,
Agave blossoms in clusters dreamy,
Wove their witchery round me there.

Yea, I have walked by your lilied waters;
Yea, I have marveled your daisied sod;
But these are the desert's dearest daughters,
Twilight-flung from the hands of God!

Rimmed round with rocks that the ages harden;
Girdled, guarded, by thorn and stone;
Nobody knows of my desert garden—
Here I may revel in dreams alone.

Lydia M. D. O'Neil.

The Log-Book

By the Editor

IT now appears that England held the secret of a device for annihilation that the Anglo-Saxon mind decided was too terrible even for war, hence it was not employed in the great conflict recently ended. The scheme involved the concentration of the sun's rays on enormous burning-glasses which, directed on the enemy at more than a mile distant, would shrivel up everything in their path.

These burning glasses, it seems, were the elaboration of a contrivance employed in ancient times by Archimedes; and had the Germans stumbled on the idea, one may readily imagine the swiftness with which they would have utilized it. But, after all, the havoc wrought would have been considerably minimized by the infrequency with which the thing could have been hitched up to old Sol. Recalling what the doughboys told us, it rained practically every day in France during the war.

It was but a step, little more than a handbreadth, spanning the sheer, sickening plunge into unthinkable depths, and yet, suddenly, strangely, he shrank from it in a swift, unreasoning panic—he, the strong man—the apotheosis of daring, the hard-bitten and tremendously vital god of the girders, seized suddenly, made weak and impotent by—what?

"CROSSES OF STEEL"

BY REX PARSON

Author of "Easy Garvin," "Southwest of the Law," etc.

begins as a five-part serial in THE ARGOSY for September 13, and this is but one of the situations, tense and gripping, which are a part of this splendid drama of steel and iron —and, yes—of softness and beauty. And beginning with the picture of the "abysmal brute," crucified upon the dizzy eminence of the girder, even as he had been transfixed by a love unworthy, the story moves to a conclusion which for sheer, gripping drama has seldom been surpassed.

You would scarcely imagine that consulting a reference volume in the New York Public Library on Fifth Avenue would precipitate a series of adventures not inaccurately described by the term blood curdling. Yet that is precisely what happened to *Bruce Tarton*, of whom you will read in

"THE YELLOW EMERALD"

BY FRANCIS JAMES

Author of "Prey," "Cold Sunburn," etc.

This is our complete novelette for next week, a splendid specimen of the type that, starting off in quiet waters, speedily flings its hero into a splurging torrent of

events that threatens his very life. And none of it would have happened had not a vagrant breeze blowing in at the library window chanced to snatch up the slip of paper containing the name of the book *Tarton* was meaning to consult, and wafted it straight into the hands of a pretty girl he had already noticed more than once, and longed to get acquainted with. Imagine, however, what *Tarton* thought when, after glancing at the name on the slip, she warned him gravely that he must not think of ordering that book.

Next week will give you the final story in that remarkable series, "A ROMANCE IN REDEMPTION," by William Dudley Pelley. "THE MAN FROM CHAOS" it is called, and takes one right into the heart of the operations of the Bolsheviki in their native Siberia. *Jim Herring* is indeed in dire straits, and what befalls him and the faithful *Joe* will not only prove absorbing while you are reading it, but will likely stay by you in memory for days afterward. In "PETE'S POLITE—PERHAPS," Charles Wesley Sanders's tale of road-building in Ohio not only provides rather a novel background for fiction, but sets forth a combination of love-making and fisticuffs which seldom meet under the same head-line. "BLACKSTONE SHINGLES," by Edward Walton, is another feature of the next ARGOSY you can't afford to miss, telling you what happened to the young law student who took for a motto, "Lean until you can stand."

REACHING A POSITIVE DECISION

Dawson, Pennsylvania.

Enclosed is my subscription. I have positively decided that THE ARGOSY is a need to me. I certainly seem lost without it. My subscription is late, but better late than never. THE ARGOSY certainly has some A1 stories. Loring Brent, Captain Dingle, Seltzer, and so many too numerous to mention, put out some mighty fine stories. Of course, the novelettes are liked best, and some stories are liked better than others. Anyway, your magazine puts out such fine material, and such a variety, that I have no kick coming. So I close with a boost for the good old ARGOSY.

FRANK MCGILL.

NOT KEEN FOR SEA STORIES

Panhandle, Texas.

I write you this to tell you how well I like the weekly ARGOSY. I especially like Western or ranch stories, such as "Forbidden Trails," "The Duke of Chimney Butte," and "Beau Rand." I also like Samuel G. Camp's stories. Please don't cut them out. I don't care if there is a "now" every other word. I did not like "Green Spiders" extra well, but read it. I do not care for any stories of the sea very much. "Alone in Boston" is good; also "Playing the System" starts fine. I hope to be able always to read THE ARGOSY. I did not care for "Texas Fever" very much, or "Bully Bess" or "Sword and Anvil" or "Fathoms Deep." Hoping to see this in the Log-Book,

MRS. MAE PENDERGRASS.

TRIED AND FOUND WANTING

Niles, Ohio.

I have just finished reading the June 14 ARGOSY from cover to cover, skipping only one serial, and as I came to the Log-Book and saw no letters from eastern Ohio, I thought I'd let you know that eastern Buckeyes like good reading as well as any one. I have been a steady reader of THE ARGOSY for the last five years. I have tried several other magazines, but none can give me such pleasure as dear old ARGOSY. I believe, of all the authors, I think Charles Alden Seltzer is my favorite; of course, I like the others, too; but I think it seems as though Mr. Seltzer is my idea of what an author ought to be. And I also agree with Edwin I. Miller, of Jamestown, New York, that more space ought to be given to poems. Please put in good, clean love stories, too.

OLIVE WHITSTONE.

PREFERS THE PRAIRIE TO THE STAGE

New York City.

I am only a recent convert to your splendid magazine, but I feel as though I must tell you how much I like it. And please don't stop those serial stories, especially such ones as "Riddle Gawne" and "Beau Rand." I love them. I spend quite a bit of my life on a homestead in Colorado, and down among the copper mines in Arizona. At present I'm just a mere chorus-girl in New York, but no one knows how lonesome I am for God's country and the good old prairie. I'd like to read a real true-to-life chorus-girl story. Is it impossible? If I don't find a real one soon, I'll be tempted to write one myself. And, oh, boy! I've sure collected enough material. I'd like to see this printed, so go ahead.

ANTOINETTE RAYMONDE.

TWICE A WEEK NOT TOO OFTEN

Vienna, Maryland.

Enclosed find ten cents, for which please send me THE ARGOSY for June 14. I am anxious to finish "Blue Flames." It's some story, believe me. My favorite authors are: Loring Brent, Ethel and James Dorrance, George W. Ogden,

Katharine Eggleston, and Charles Alden Seltzer. "The Duke of Chimney Butte" was a good one; "Bully Bess" promises to be a good one also; "Sword and Anvil" was a good one. Also the short stories are dandy—"Wild Sage Honey," "The Blizzard Wolf," "Watch the Yankee," "The Higher Strain," and "Prey." Western stories are my favorites. THE ARGOSY is the best yet. W. L. Pond will have to take a semimonthly magazine, so then he will be able to read slow enough, maybe; they cannot come fast enough for me. If they came twice a week, I'd be satisfied; but as they come now I am satisfied. Here's long life to THE ARGOSY and the members of its staff.

J. D'ARCY BASSETT.

BRENT WAS A WIRELESS OPERATOR ON THE PACIFIC

Maupin, Oregon.

I think THE ARGOSY the best magazine on the market, and, to my notion, the best available. I was a reader of the *Railroad Man's Magazine*, and I was reading the serial "Who Dares?" and when it changed in combination with THE ARGOSY I bought three of the first ARGOSYS to finish the story. Then I kept buying them right along. The best story I ever read in anything was "Clash of Identities," by Keeler. It ought to have been twice as long, though. Say, was Loring Brent ever a sailor? He seems to know a lot about an ocean steamer. The story, "The Ship that Crumbled," by him, makes me think that he was a sailor. Well, wishing THE ARGOSY the best of luck,

J. ROY COE.

P. S.—I don't see what anybody wants to conceal his name for. If you publish this, use my full name if you like.

FRED JACKSON NOW WRITING PLAYS ONLY

Ironton, Ohio.

I have been a reader of THE ARGOSY for a great while, though not a subscriber, and have always enjoyed your magazine. I have a standing order for it at the local book-store, so I never miss it.

But it is only recently that I began to read the serials. For several years I made it a rule never to read a serial in any magazine. I tried the method of saving up the magazines to get the whole story, but I lost the first two instalments of "Square Deal Sanderson," so I ditched the idea, and laid off serials entirely until I just happened to read the first part of "Beau Rand" by mistake, thinking it was a short story. After that I had to read on, and then thought I would try "The Mating of the Blades." Now I have the serial habit for sure. How about Fred Jackson? I know he isn't dead, so why not give us a story from him?

JACK SELINER.

FRANK OPINIONS WELCOME

New York City.

I wonder if you'll mind, Mr. Editor, if I write this letter in pencil, and perhaps some of your Log-Book devotees may be able to find a psychological reason for my being more at home with paper and pencil than pen and ink. But it's a fact that, when using a pen, my words become stilted, and my written opinions, somehow, don't correspond with my thoughts. But what really made me sit down and write to-day was what I considered the altogether undeserved criticism that seemed to be heaped upon Mr. Harris, of Pasadena, California.

According to Mrs. Gus McColloch, if a person happens to have more or less (and in this case more) of a fastidious taste in reading matter, and (as in this case again) is perfectly frank in proclaiming his likes and dislikes, then that person should "publish a magazine of his own." Not only is this statement exceedingly bigoted in point of view, but also exceedingly unfair to the said Mr. Harris. I would love to know whether Mrs. McColloch thinks the Log-Book is only for the boosting of authors and stories. I, personally, hope the gentleman from Pasadena continues his criticisms, adverse and otherwise, if only for the sake of hearing an honest-to-goodness opinion.

There's just one more "knocker of knockers" I'd like to draw attention to—namely, "Mobile, alias the Parrot," of Elmira, New York. Whoever gave him his alias must certainly have been a most astute observer of human nature. This gentleman casually observes that "his aim is to avoid registering a knock against authors," and farther on he virtually contradicts himself in saying that the "editor is paid to know what the public wants." Will "Alias the Parrot" kindly explain how he expects the editor to know what the public wants if not through the said public's stated opinions?

Just as a bit of aside—don't you think it sounds rather foolish to address endearing terms to the editor? I don't know how the editor feels about it, but I still have too much of my schoolgirl's awe of the big man to address him as "Here's to the dear ed."

Do you know, Mr. Editor, I was so worked up over to-day's Log-Book that I haven't as yet told you how much I enjoy THE ARGOSY. I've just finished reading "Prey," and I'm still tingling and shuddering. Isn't it queer that one can feel both fascination and horror at the same time? Good Lord! It's about time I finished, isn't it? But just one word more. Don't for a moment think that because I have defended the "knockers" that I'm a kicker, because it's just because I realize that I'm not a very discriminating reader that I like to see other people catalogue their reading matter in either good, bad, or medium piles.

GERTRUDE E. GOTTESFELD.

LOG-BOOK JOTTINGS

I. M. Byron, Sierra Madre, California, requests permission to "butt in again to ask if C. P. Broom and Mrs. E. R. Buck will mentally shake hands with another Southerner, and accept thanks for so ably expressing what he wanted to say, but didn't quite know how." Gladys Grossett, Dilworth, Oklahoma, doesn't like war stories, nor the silly, mushy ones; but enjoys Western tales, and the nice, clean, wholesome ones that are not too sad. Burl Thomas, Prospect, Ohio, can get a copy of the January 18, 1919, ARGOSY by sending ten cents to this office. I should be glad to print the letter from H. N. Welles, Dinsmore, Florida, if I hadn't closed the discussion of the topic, as per notice in Log of August 16. Glad to hear that he likes "Thumbs Down" and "Beau Rand." Scott Denham, Midway, Arkansas, begs that no more magazines be sent to him or his mother.