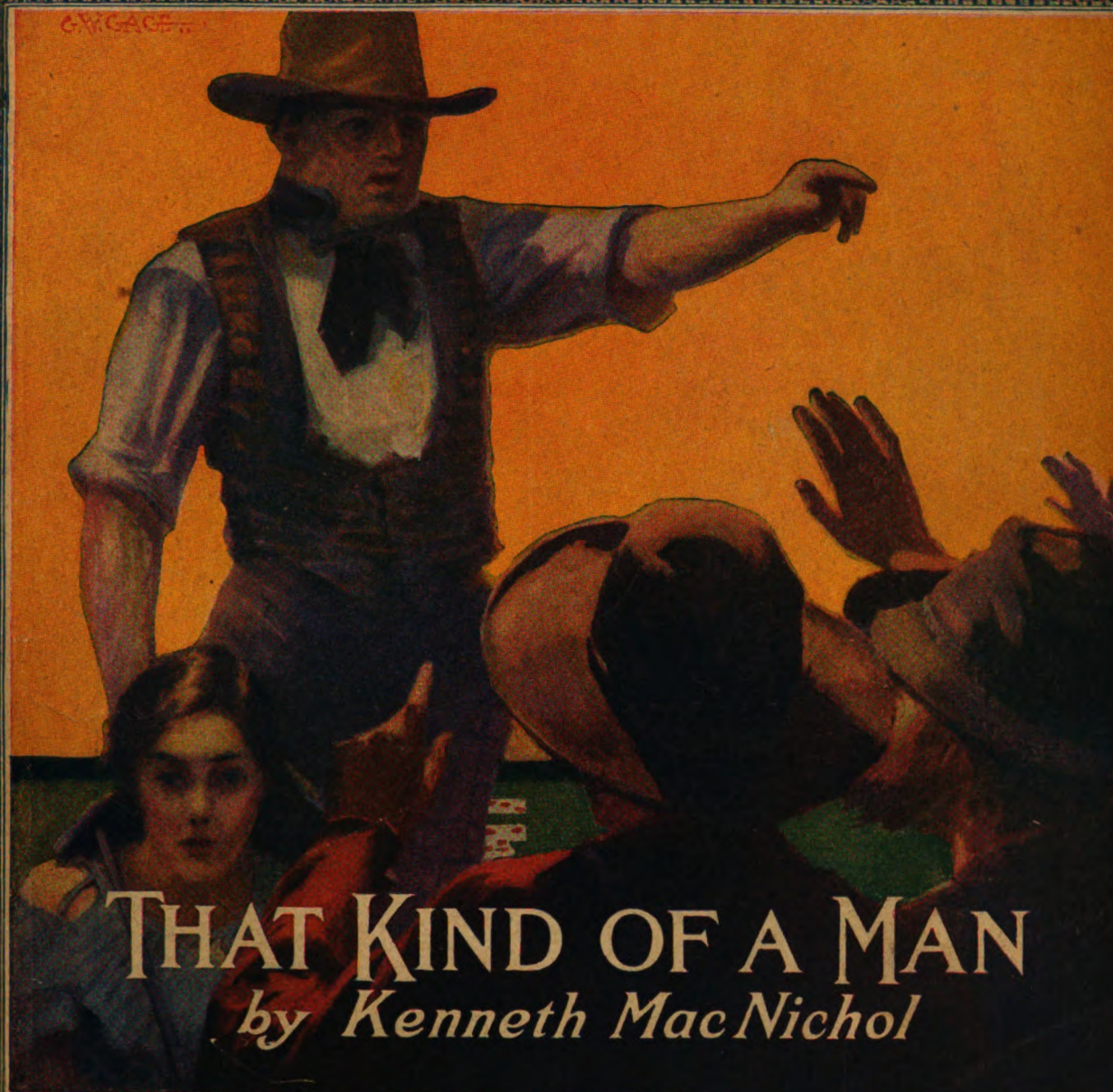


ARGOSY

Issued Weekly



THAT KIND OF A MAN
by Kenneth MacNichol

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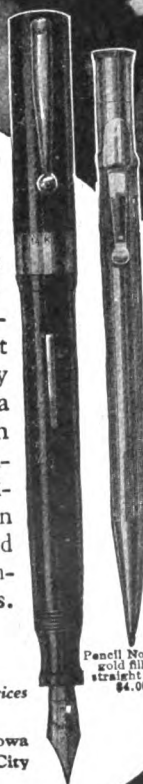
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THE ARGOSY

Vol. CXX

ISSUED WEEKLY

NUMBER 4

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A most timely story with a warning and a punch

“THE HOUSE OF FRAUD”

BY JACK BECHDOLT

NEXT WEEK

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

The Purpose of this Department

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

Classified Advertising

Rates in the Munsey Magazines:

	Line Rate	Combination
Munsey's Magazine	\$1.50	Line Rate
THE ARGOSY COMB'N		\$3.50
The Argosy	2.00	Less 2% cash discount
All-Story Weekly		

June 12th Argosy Combination Forms Close May 19th.

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SALESMEN—City or traveling. Experience unnecessary. Send for list of lines and full particulars. Prepare in spare time to earn the big salaries—\$2,500 to \$10,000 a year. Employment services rendered. Members. National Salesmen's Training Association, Dept. 133-E, Chicago, Ill.

AGENTS: New Reversible Raincoat. Not sold in stores. One side dress coat, other side storm overcoat. Saves \$20. Guaranteed waterproof. Big commission. No capital required. Sample furnished. Parker Mfg. Co., 306 Rue St., Dayton, Ohio.

SELL WORLD'S GREATEST AUTO WONDER. Agents amazed, coining money; Vetter \$75 first day. No more blurred windshields; one operation with new invention keeps glass clear for hours; rain blur vanishes like magic; Chemical Felt works wonders; it's new, powerful; handy steel mounted holder; fits pocket. Exclusive territory worth fortune. Security Mfg. Co., Dept. 285, Toledo, Ohio.

WE START YOU IN BUSINESS, furnishing everything. Men and women. \$30.00 to \$100.00, weekly operating our "New System Specialty Candy Factories" anywhere. Opportunity lifetime; booklet free. Bagdale Co., Drawer 93, East Orange, N.J.

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MIRACLE MOTOR-GAS AMAZES MOTORISTS. 3 cents worth equals gallon gasoline. Eliminates carbon. 300% profit. Isom, Idaho, wires: "Ship 500 packages. Made \$70 yesterday." Investigate. Chas. H. Butler Co., Dept. 197, Toledo, Ohio.

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\$10 WORTH OF FINEST TOILET SOAPS, perfumes, toilet waters, spices, etc. absolutely free to agents on our refund plan. Lacassian Co., Dept. 425, St. Louis, Mo.

SELL What Millions Want. New, wonderful Liberty Portraits. Creates tremendous interest. Absolutely different; unique; enormous demand—30 hours' service. Liberal credit. Outfit and catalogue free. \$100 weekly profit easy. Consolidated Portrait Co., Dept. 22, 1036 W. Adams St., Chicago.

SEND 2c POSTAGE FOR FREE SAMPLE with particulars. No splashing water strainers. Easy seller. Returns big. Experience unnecessary. Seed Filter Co., N 73 Franklin St., New York.

AGENTS FOR "SECRET OF BEAUTY" toilet preparations. Large profits. Quick sales. Fine repeater. Send stamp for samples and terms. Heron Co., Dept. 30A, Cleveland, Ohio.

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PATENTS. If you have an invention write for our Guide Book. "How To Get A Patent." Send model or sketch and description, and we will give our opinion as to its patentable nature. Randolph & Co., 630 F. Washington, D. C.

Classified Advertising continued on page 2, back section.

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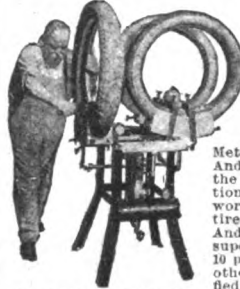
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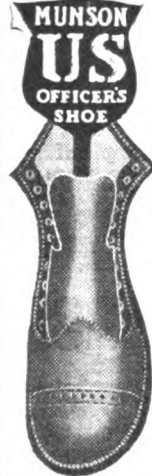
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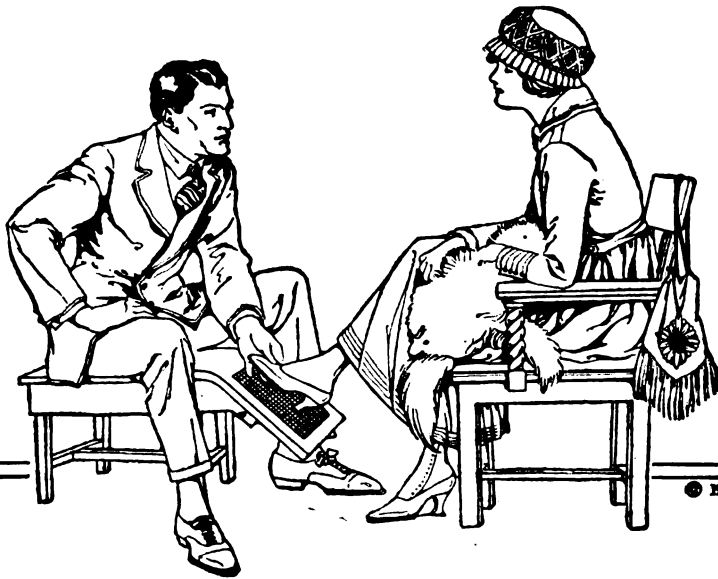
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| ... Colds | ... Insomnia | ... Gastritis |
| ... Catarrh | ... Short Wind | ... Falling Hair |
| ... Hay Fever | ... Flat Feet | ... Weak Eyes |
| ... Asthma | ... Stomach Disorders | ... Heartweakness |
| ... Headache | ... Constipation | ... Poor Circulation |
| ... Thinness | ... Biliousness | ... Skin Disorders |
| ... Rupture | ... Torpid Liver | ... Dependancy |
| ... Lumbago | ... Indigestion | ... Round Shoulders |
| ... Neuritis | ... Nervousness | ... Lung Troubles |
| ... Neuralgia | ... Poor Memory | ... Increased Height |
| ... Flat Chest | ... Rheumatism | ... Stoop Shoulders |
| ... Deformity | ... Bad Habits | ... Muscular |
| (describe) | ... Weaknesses | Development |

NAME.....

AGE..... OCCUPATION.....

STREET.....

CITY..... STATE.....



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THE ARGOSY

Vol. CXX

SATURDAY, MAY 8, 1920

No. 4



That Kind of a Man by Kenneth MacNichol

Author of "Enough Is Plenty," etc.

CHAPTER I.

A VOICE IS STILLED.

THE mantle of early fall lay on the hills. In the clear California sunshine the undergrowth of oak and manzanita burned with a thousand hues of red and scarlet. The slim quaking-asps were like white candles with a head of yellow flame against a dark background of spruce and pine.

An ancient wagon, descending the steep grades of the gullied Sierra road, creaked and groaned in every splinter of its decrepit frame. The unpainted body bore evidence of amateur patching with unfamiliar boards. The wheels printed four wiggling snake-tracks on the road. A drunken stove-pipe leaned from the stained canvas cover in which a multitude of cinder holes had been repaired with gunny sacking until further patching could only add new insult to irreparable injury.

The horses—a rawboned white mare of uncertain age and a thin young sorrel whose dejection had not quite cast out the devil of viciousness from a rolling eye—

were attached to this hopeless wagon by a harness in which ropes and mildewed leather were equally divided.

The driver, thin, stooped, with faded blue eyes, yellow mustache and straggling beard covering his moving jaws, clothed in a flapping hat, soiled flannel-shirt, and gray-jean trousers thrust into shabby boots, drooped loosely forward from the seat beneath the canvas top.

By his side rode a young girl, thin, brown of face, her black hair covered by a ragged sun-bonnet, wearing a brown home-spun waist and short skirt, her slim feet dangling in a pair of worn men's shoes. Her attitude was as dejected as that of the sorrel colt, but there was something of the same sleeping fire in the girl's brown eyes.

The man talked, ceaselessly, relentlessly, as he had been talking from early morning until late afternoon, the complaints of Job expressed in a slow mountain drawl:

"An' 's ef thet wan't enough, yo'r mammy had to up an die on me, after me a waitin' nigh onto six weeks fer her to perk up a mite so's I mought move on. Giddap! An' her on'y a half-sister to me, anyways,

so's yo' ain't even my own flesh an' blood. Thet ain't shif-lessness—'s plain onluck! An' yo' 'a' eatin' yo'r head off all the time.

"Giddap, thare! Naw, thare ain't nobody could ever tell me why Gawd made John Taine to tote the burden o' bein' the onluckiest critter thet He ever made. Giddap! Thare ain't no sense to it, when I mought 'a' stayed to home. Why, ef Californie was a mounting o' gold, I reckon I'd never tech a mite on't. An' 's fer's I'm consarned, Gawd mought ez well let them mountings fall on me!"

There was no resentment in the girl. She was watching a chipmunk that cheeped excitedly by the roadside; listening to the raucous scolding of a jay. There was a swaying in the manzanita bushes that might have meant the presence of a deer.

"I dunno," she replied evenly, "I dunno but what I wish they mought, so's I needn't listen to yo'r clack!"

The manzanita, stirring, revealed a little patch of deeper red. The ears of the sorrel colt pricked forward sharply.

"Thet's all I git fer takin' keer o' ye—whoa, consarn ye—"

The manzanita parted. A Digger squaw, red blanketed, with a huge conical basket half filled with manzanita berries strapped to her back, stepped into the roadway before the startled colt. The colt shyed, jerked forward, broke into an awkward gallop, dragging the unwilling gray mare after him.

"Consarn ye, whoa!" Taine yelled angrily, dragging on the lines. The rotten leather parted at his hand.

The girl straightened and jumped down from the seat, falling on all fours on the rocky road, but was immediately up again. The wagon, swaying on a steep down-grade, pushed the horses into a stumbling run.

The startled squaw hastily left the road, her flapping red blanket dissolved into the flaming chapparal on the lower side.

Running after the wagon, through the round rear opening of the canvas top, the girl glimpsed Taine clinging helplessly to the bouncing seat. His frightened yell added to the horse's fear.

"Whoa! Dog-gone ye! Land o' Goshen—whoa!"

At the foot of the hill, where a trickling stream of water crossed the road, the pitching wagon struck a rock that had rolled down from the mountain-side. It was just at the moment when Taine tried to jump. The wagon leaped, veered suddenly, swayed drunkenly on two wheels.

Taine, in the act of falling, was hurled from the seat. The girl, hurrying forward, saw that he lay motionless where he fell.

Half-way up the opposite slope, the horses, blown by such short exertion, stopped in the road, no further damage done.

John Taine was unconscious when the girl came up to him. His feet lay in the rivulet. His head rested limply against a bank of earth by the roadside. When she raised his head, her fingers were stained with red.

The wound was not deep. It appeared to be no more than an abrasion. But the man remained unconscious even after she had dipped up ice-cold water in his leaky hat, and thoroughly soaked his head and face with it. He breathed—she could be certain of nothing else.

She was frightened, but she knew that there was only one more thing that she could do. Sunbonnet hanging on her back, black hair flying, she went after the horses, now peacefully grazing by the roadside.

When she returned with the wagon, after mending the broken line with a bit of rope, it took her the better part of a half hour to raise the unconscious man, for his body was limp and heavy; she was undernourished and not really strong. But presently he was laid, as comfortably as possible, on a heap of bedding beneath the wagon-top.

After this she rested for a little while; then mounted the seat and continued the interrupted journey. From time to time she glanced back into the wagon. Taine breathed, but he did not move except as the jolting of the wagon rolled him from side to side. The girl drove slowly, avoiding rocks and gullies as much as possible. After a little, conquering her fear, she began to think connectedly again, a frowning, defiant line between her eyes.

"I reckon he thought a mounting fell on him. An' I ought to be sorry. But I'm

not nigh as sorry as I'd ought to be. He'd say that's cause I'm natural full o' sin." Sometimes her thought took a more kindly turn. "'S true that we-all ain't never had no luck. An' mebbe I have been a burden to him, too. Looks like suthin' was bound to happen, seein' this was to be the last day on the road."

She thought of that year-long journey across the continent, prairie, mountain, plain, and desert passing in daily, interminable panorama by the crawling wagon—a panorama of almost daily accident and hope deferred. With it always the doleful voice of the now-helpless man, constant as the creaking of the wheels, complaining, admonishing, grumbling in monotone.

"Leastways," she thought, "for wunst he's bound to be quiet fer a while. 'S the first time in six months that there John Taine ain't had much to say."

Rounding a shoulder of the mountain, the wagon crept along the edge of a cañon wooded thick with spruce and juniper. Further down a grove of giant redwoods reared their towering green columns to the sky. And beyond and below the redwoods, still distant, framed by an opening at the cañon's mouth, a pale smudge of smoke arose from beside a ribbon of silver—Feather River, gleaming in the California sun.

The girl stopped the horses, gazing down.

"I reckon," she thought, "that's where we been 'a' headin' for, 's nigh a year."

CHAPTER II.

A VISITOR TO THE ESMERALDA.

AS a placer-camp, Hogan's Gulch was just about played out. Six months after the discovery in 1849 the first prospectors staked claims where Grizzly Creek emptied into Feather River. For a year thereafter a thousand dollars a day were not uncommon wages for the fortunate. But by 1851 some had moved on to newer and richer fields; those who remained were content with lesser gain.

Occasionally the finding of a rich new pocket revived for some days the crazed excitement which had been chronic the year

before. For the reputation of the Gulch this worked more harm than good; it was at the time when "pocket placer" began to be a term of well-deserved contempt, meaning perhaps a five pound nugget—afterward sweat, and nothing for a year.

However, there was one energetic citizen of Hogan's Gulch who had located a pocket which, day in and day out, never failed to pay rich dividends. This was Chino Pete, owner of the Esmeralda Saloon. His profits did not depend on a single group of claims, for his mine was in the pockets of all the miners in the district to whom he dispensed whisky and amusement at a profit of three hundred per cent on the drinks, and something more than that for the amusement. Also he took gold in payment, with the local price sometimes as low as six dollars the ounce. But Chino Pete gave value received for all he got.

To the miners of Hogan's Gulch the Esmeralda was something more than a combined casino, dance-hall, and saloon. It was their community center and temple of hospitality, a court-room, theater, clubhouse, and above all, their home—the only home they knew beyond the Sierra. For it takes more than a cabin of rock and logs, blankets on a bunk, pail of sour dough fermenting in a corner, to complete a home in any quarter of the world, and the Widow Marcy, whose husband had been carried hence by the premature explosion of a keg of black powder, was the only woman resident of Hogan's Gulch, unless one may except the girls of the Esmeralda, who, as home-makers, were generally unavailable.

The Esmeralda was the largest building in Hogan's Gulch. There was one door at the front, two at the rear—a necessary provision where men sometimes departed more hastily than they came. One saw on entering a long low room profusely hung with hides and heads of deer, puma, and huge cinnamon and grizzly bears. Two glass cases near the door were filled with exhibits of local mineral.

The bar of rough redwood occupied a length of forty feet at one side of the room. Opposite the bar were layouts and tables for roulette, faro, black-jack, craps, and monte, with other smaller tables for those

sociable souls who preferred to risk their money at poker and *conquien*.

At the center of the room there was a huge, pot-bellied stove; at the rear a fenced-off dance floor and a stand of the negro orchestra of two banjos, an accordion, and a guitar. A wing to the left was the domicile of the girls who were the hostesses of the Esmeralda; another wing to the right contained an indifferent restaurant managed by an inconspicuous and cautious Chink.

Chino Pete, immense of girth, smooth-shaven, soft-spoken, dangerous in a fight, and the friend of every man in Hogan's Gulch, moved among his guests with a white apron tied about the place where his waist should have been, keeping the peace with known authority.

His first lieutenant was Spanish Joe, a "breed," dark, silent, efficient, who dealt out "forty-rod" with an expert hand from behind the bar.

Next in authority was "Faro" Carroll, responsible for all the games, who had almost forgotten that his name was Ralph; smiling, young, intelligent, "the only honest tin-horn in twenty-seven states," yet declared by Chino Pete himself to be the best faro dealer between St. Louis and the Coast. For these two qualities and a sense of humor that never slept, Hogan's Gulch forgave the lad for his wide hat braided with silver, white silk neckerchief, cream-corduroy trousers, and boots made for some Spanish grandee—a costume otherwise quite unforgivable.

In addition to these notables, fill the Esmeralda with booted and red-shirted miners bearded to the eyes, dusty prospectors and *peon* Mexicans, with a sprinkling of stolid Digger Indians who waited in the corners for free drinks; light the scene with innumerable tallow dips; fill the air with rank tobacco smoke; pit the clash of string music against the rattle of the gamblers' chips; punctuate a dozen heated arguments with the challenge of the gaming tables: "Sky's the limit, gentlemen; get down your bets. Roll 'em high, there's always more in the ground. Buy the White House, or sleep in the streets—Double O in the green, gentlemen—and all set!"

Spangled skirts whirling to the tune of the "Arkansas Traveler" or the "Irish Washwoman" in swift quadrille; the flash of glasses spinning down the bar; buckskin bags of "dust" flung carelessly on the scales to pay the bill—noise, dust, smoke, smell, raw color, fierce excitement, and deep despondency—the miner's home, created by the soft hands of Chino Pete.

It was this assemblage that, when dusk had fallen over Hogan's Gulch and the evening was gathering headway for the night, was arrested by the apparition of a young girl stepping through the doorway—a girl, thin, brown-faced, curiously beautiful despite the ragged frock and masculine shoes, her brown eyes flashing, half curious, half defiant, from beneath a tangled mass of midnight hair.

For an instant there was silence in the room. The girl's voice, high and sweet, cut into it:

"I wasn't a meanin'," she apologized, "to come in here thisaway, but 'pears like this is the only place in town that is alive. Will somebody tell me who's a runnin' this shebang?"

Chino Pete came forward, his white apron draped across his arm.

"I claim the place, if you'll say what we might do for you?"

The girl looked at Chino Pete sidewise from beneath long lashes, then more directly, seeing that there was one with some authority, and one whom she could trust.

"I'm Jess Haney," she announced unsmilingly. "An' I reckon I've come to this here town to stay. 'Cause I got John Taine that calls hisself my uncle out here in a wagon—an' I'll say fer sartain, he's one hell of a sick man."

And this was the sensational introduction of Jess Haney to the little world of Hogan's Gulch.

CHAPTER III.

THE AUCTION.

CHINO PETE was a man of positive action and few words.

"Anybody here seen Doc Alkyre?" he demanded of the assembly at large.

A red-faced miner standing near the roulette wheel answered him.

"I seen Doc goin' up to his cabin 'bout six o'clock—an' he was travelin' kind o' high an' wild."

"That's the limit," Chino Pete announced. "I stop sellin' to Doc to-morrow morning. An' anybody else gives him a drink will get their own supply cut off right pronto. Doc won't be worth a damn for 'bout three days." He turned politely to Jess. "Do you know what ails your uncle, Miss?"

"He fell out'n the wagon an' bashed his head," Jess answered briefly. "An' less'n suthin' is done for him right soon, I reckon he's fit to pass away."

"Anybody here lend a hand?" Pete invited.

Colonel Horace Carleton, who edited and printed *The Feather River Banner*—his name, by the way, had been Biggers in Vermont—came forward, as ever, pompous and important. Coming forward was the best thing he did.

"I shall be happy," he declared, "to offer my services—"

"Which 'll be as much use as a shote in a parade," the owner of the Esmeralda rudely interrupted. "Anyways, we got to get the feller in. If some o' you boys 'll give us a lift?"

A half-dozen willing hands brought the unconscious Taine into the saloon and placed him carefully on a blanket thrown across the black-jack layout.

And then, unexpectedly, the graybeard, Gumbo Jones, proved his right to venture an opinion. Heretofore he had been known to fame only in conjunction with his companion ancient, Lonnie Beeson, these two old prospectors being inseparable. Yet they quarreled constantly, and once, it was said, they had not spoken to each other for three months.

"I used to know a little 'bout sich things," he quavered timidly. "I studied 'em wunst when I was a young feller in the East. An' I've had quite a little 'sperience, one time when Lonnie was hurt up in the hills, an' with fellers that has been shot up an' sich."

With an assurance almost professional

Gumbo examined the wound in Taine's head, listened attentively to his heavy breathing, took his pulse, and presented a diagnosis of the case.

"All we kin do," he decided, "is to clean him up, an' tie up that head o' his, an' put him where he kin be quiet fer a while. He got a pow'ful bump, an' either he gits over it or he don't—an' no doctor couldn't say no more fer him than that."

"An' that bein' the case," Chino Pete proposed, "which one o' you boys is prepared to take him in?"

The proposal met with no response—not that Hogan's Gulch was lacking in hospitality, but only that each man, mentally reviewing the capacity of his cabin, could not see how it could be arranged. Even for a sick man it might be managed, but there was Jess, silent and big-eyed, to make the question more embarrassing.

"You boys savvy," continued the owner of the Esmeralda, "there ain't no place I can offer to a girl a stayin' here." Some one snickered. Pete turned fiercely in the direction of the sound. "If anybody thinks that's funny, laugh out loud!"

No one cared to answer to the challenge. But Big Barney Graw, Irish, red of beard, and "full o' fun," had a suggestion that seemed appropriate.

"Some o' we will have to double up, so we can give the little girrul a shack. An' I'm fer givin' me vote to Doc Alkyre an' the colonel, or either one or the other, with the Chink."

The suggestion, received with laughter, relieved the tension of embarrassment.

"Good!" declared Chino Pete. "Colonel, you can double in with Doc, an' seein' that his claim is two miles out, the little walk 'll do you a heap o' good."

Colonel Carleton, his assurance somewhat shaken by this threatened calamity, hastened to put himself in opposition.

"If you gentlemen will excuse me—" he began.

"Of course," Pete continued calmly, "if you care to turn in with Charlie Wing, who is plenty clean for a Chink, I'll not charge you any rent, an' mebbe you could get him to wash your shirt."

"But, gentlemen!" protested the heckled

colonel. "You forget my duty to the community! My home is my office, so to speak, and the *Banner* hasn't been printed yet this week!"

"Niver mind that, colonel, me boy," Graw interrupted. "Our motto is pleasure first, an' duty afterward—we'll have to do without your literachoor. We can chuck out your truck, an' clean up the bit of a house, an' all remain contented an' ignorant until the sick feller is up an' movin' about."

"And you actually expect me to tolerate this vicious and high-handed procedure!" the colonel spluttered furiously.

"In the interests of the community," Graw insisted firmly. "Out ye go, whether you like it or not."

Here, eyes blazing, Jess stepped into the ring.

"I reckon," she said dryly, "he ain't a wantin' us much. On High Turkle Run we'd say the ol' devil was close as a bleed-in'-worm—but we-all 'ud see us in hell afore we'd go nigh to his house!"

To Faro Carroll, negligently leaning against his deserted layout in the background, it seemed that close behind her anger there was a tremble of tears. The gambler's voice intruded gently into the silence occasioned by her remark.

"It seems to me, gentlemen," he drawled, "there is one little bet that you have overlooked." He looked at Jess gravely but with a half smile hovering about his lips. Then, deliberately, he winked, consciously and impudently.

Jess felt a flush of anger rising in her face, but there was something besides anger as well, for immediately afterward he smiled, whimsically, and with a world of sympathy. It seemed to her that the room was suddenly filled with a spirit of friendliness. But he did not look at her again. His attention was directed to the crowd. "Yes," he said again, softly, "there is a little bet that we have overlooked."

"All right, boy; we'll hear from Faro," Graw invited. "He's a young divil, an' entirely lackin' in sense, but sometimes he says somethin' when he talks."

"I thank you," said Faro Carroll with exaggerated politeness to Graw. "And with your permission, gentlemen?" to the

crowd. "Because I have a proposal to make to you."

He did not change his position, but once again he looked straightly at Jess, the devil of impudent humor dancing in his eyes.

"Gentlemen, with the assistance of Colonel Carleton, it appears to me that to-night we have disgraced the fair name of Hogan's Gulch," he began oratorically. "And on this night, of all nights, when we are present at the making of history. You fail to recognize that the arrival of this young lady and her uncle is an event. It is the beginning of a new era, the dawn of civilization, the advent of womanhood in Hogan's Gulch."

"And shall it be said," he demanded, his voice rising dramatically, "that we have made any difficulty about showing her a welcome? Why, gentlemen, your attitude fills me with pain and astonishment! The best we have is not half good enough. Why, we should compete for the honor of offering our hospitality, even though the fortunate gentleman who donates his home be forced to repose beneath the whispering pines for ages to come."

"Gentlemen, I propose that we hold an auction, and let the honor fall to that one among us who will appreciate it the most—and pay accordingly. With the further proviso that the proceeds be used in drinking a toast to the dawn of civilization in Hogan's Gulch!" Once again he winked deliberately at the crowd.

"Bully for you!" Graw shouted laughingly, his being the head into which the idea first penetrated. "Sure, it's five ounces I'll bid for the privilege now!"

Faro Carroll moved from drawing speech to swift action, mounting the faro layout as though it were the block of an auctioneer, flinging his weighted sombrero to the look-out behind on his stool.

"Five ounces I'm bid," he rattled sharply, with a strong accent imported from northern Vermont. "Five ounces—and that's a shame—who'll make it ten?"

"Six," bid Chino Pete.

"Without a house?" questioned Faro.

"Buy one," said Chino briefly.

"And six bid by Chino Pete who hasn't a house! Six, and do I hear ten, who'll

make it ten, I want ten, oughter be twenty—do I get the ten?"

"Two more, for me an' Lonnie," yelled Gumbo Jones.

"Eight, and who's next—"

"Ten!" shouted Graw.

"Ten—and who'll add five? Shake out your bags; do I get fifteen—free drinks for the town—do you want them for fifteen—"

"Fifteen," said Chino Pete.

"And twenty—who says twenty—"

At least three voices yelled eighteen.

"Twenty!" roared Barney Graw.

"*Trienta, con mis respetos*"—the offer came from a brilliantly clad young Mexican, the Señor Pablo Moreno, whose father, the Don, owned all of the lower reaches of Feather River in one vast *hacienda*, the son being worthless as his father was rich, and handsome as he was worthless, a constant visitor at Chino Pete's.

"Thirty," barked Faro Carroll; "who'll make it thirty-five and cheap at the price?"

"Thirty-five, and damn his respects," Graw yelled, with a glance of honest contempt at the Mexican.

"*Cuarenta*," drawled Pablo Moreno in reply.

"*Cuarenta y dos*," snapped Graw, speaking in Spanish to add to his air of insult.

"*Cuarenta y cinco*," Moreno bid with no perceptible hesitation.

"We've got forty-five—and what do you say, Chino—make it fifty, and get it all back before morning?" But Chino Pete had picked up a barely perceptible shake of the head from his auctioneer.

"Goin' too steep," he growled, wondering what Faro had meant. Which he was to learn later at a somewhat heavy expense.

"Right," Faro scoffed, "because of your poverty—but there are others with nerve—and I've got to have fifty—how about fifty there, Graw?"

"Fifty from me," said Graw. But the Mexican spoke immediately, raising the ante by ten.

"*Setenta y cinco*," Graw flashed, suddenly jumping to seventy-five. The Mexican wavered, thinking perhaps of a parental reproach. But he ventured another bid:

"*Ochenta!*"

"Eighty, and who'll give me ten more—"

"A hundred even," Graw flared, with a glance in Moreno's direction. "And a hundred more where that came from if needed, an' then after that the richest claim in the Gulch! Now, do your dirt, an' when you're through, I'll commence!"

Moreno opened his mouth, swallowed, said nothing.

"I've got a hundred—going—going—do I get a raise on a hundred?" chanted Faro. "Going—do I get that raise? Going"—he hesitated an instant before concluding—"and passed down to Graw at a hundred ounces of gold, and cheap at the price!"

A great cheer set the smoke fumes to eddying. Faro climbed down from his rostrum. "Worth it!" he whispered to Graw. Jess, her eyes wide and round, was backed against one of the tables. She scarcely understood what it was all about; scarcely knew whether to be grateful or angry. Her sunbonnet had fallen back on her shoulders, and standing there in the candle-light, she was the one note of real beauty in all that room, strange and exotic like a wood elf trapped among the group of rough men. Moreno watched her from the corners of his eyes. She was disappointed that Faro did not look at her again.

The Mexican slid through the crowd to the side of Graw. "*Le felicito a V. cordialmente!*" he said smilingly.

"T'll with yer congratulations," growled Barney Graw. "I'll do without 'em with pleasure."

This exchange both Graw and the Mexican understood perfectly. It was as though Pablo had said to Graw, with his smile wholly evil: "Congratulations on a successful purchase, *señor*." And Graw had replied: "I'd give up me soul to keep any woman out o' the hands of such a black greaser pup, which is meanin' yourself!"

But to Jess, Graw showed a wholly different side of his character. Somewhat awkwardly, but with that assurance that never wholly deserts a Son of the Sod, he approached:

"Sorry I am, miss, I haven't anything better to be offerin' you, but I'll try to make you an' your uncle as much at home as I can. An' if you don't mind, we'd better be after gettin' the man to his bed."

Noise, heat, light, cheers, and laughter—if there were tears, it was only a bright drop that twinkled in the eyes of Jess Haney because of the only kindness she had known for many a day. She wanted to thank Faro Carroll for the part he had played, although she didn't quite understand it all, but Faro had disappeared for the moment. So she thanked Graw instead, putting out a brown hand, awkwardly, like a man.

"At first," she apologized, "I was in a right fair way to be riled, but yo' shore are bein' jest like folks to we-all—" She jerked her sunbonnet back on her tousled head.

At the instance of Chino Pete, the ever efficient, Taine was already being carried out to the wagon. Jess followed Graw. The Esmeralda was emptied.

Not since the last stampede had such a procession appeared on the single street of the mining camp—the wagon in the lead, and all of Hogan's Gulch following after. "Like an alderman's funeral or a bilin' big charivari," said Big Barney Graw.

Some one had the forethought to rouse the Widow Marcy from her retreat. Arrived at Graw's cabin, her diagnosis of Taine's injury was, perhaps, no more accurate than that of Gumbo Jones, but, with plenty of hot water, and John Taine in bed, her treatment was more effective.

Within an hour after the departure of the crowd, Barney Graw with the rest, Taine was breathing more quietly, and his stupor of unconsciousness was gradually changing into a natural sleep. Meantime, with an anxious eye to the bed, Jess gossiped with Widow Marcy over a delayed supper spread upon a rustic table in the cabin. Rather, the widow was gossiping while Jess listened, which was the usual condition when the widow talked at all.

"There'll be a real ruction before morning—sounds like Fourth o' July an' Christmas already now," the widow remarked at one time, with an ear to the growing tumult from the direction of the Esmeralda. "Person'ly I don't hold by likker none at all, though a drop is comfortin' of a cold morning—but that there"—again in reference to a mighty noise—"that there, I-say, it gits me full o' bile!"

It was true that never before had there been such a toast drinking in Hogan's Gulch as that which followed the "advent of civilization"—a toast drinking that lasted over into another day, and was as noisy throughout as a feast of the Norse gods. Chino Pete's emporium was well stocked, and a hundred ounces of gold will buy truly enormous quantities of "budge." Also thirsts become great as liquor cheapens—this, it will be remembered, was all free.

But it was not a celebration at the expense of Barney Graw after all, as Faro carefully explained to Chino Pete some time near morning, when, strictly sober, as business men should be, they were closeted for a counting of spoils.

"I guess Graw is good for that hundred?" Chino Pete suggested without anxiety.

"You needn't worry if he's not," said Faro pointedly. "Because that isn't any concern of yours."

"What's that?" Pete demanded suddenly alert, thinking of the ruck of bottles despoiled.

"Oh, that was only a little stall of mine," Faro admitted carelessly. "I knew the boys would come through easier if they thought it was being spent for drinks. But I coppered that bet when I laid it down. The drinks were on you, and we save the hundred to set the kid up in business. They look as if they need it—and I'd as soon offer to chew string with a bobcat as to ask her to accept a contribution from the boys."

"Say!" Pete objected. "Have you any idea how much that gang used up last night? Why, it 'll take the camp a week to sleep it off!"

"Something over a hundred ounces, I should say," Faro stated calmly. "But wasn't you going to buy the girl a home—or was that before you waked up? You know that I wouldn't let Graw pay the whole hundred, anyway, and reserved the right to chip in a half myself. But, just as you say, Chino—I pay you the hundred and quit, or you stand for the drinks and I stay. I might add that we cleaned up over three hundred ounces running the games."

"Kid, you beat hell!" And this was all that Chino Pete had to say.

It was thus that Jess Haney found friends in Hogan's Gulch, and Big Barney Graw gained his first and only real enemy.

CHAPTER IV.

JESS IS PUZZLED.

FOR three days in each term of three months that citizen of Hogan's Gulch whose name was Wells rejoiced in the title "Judge" before all men. This was just after his quarterly remittance had arrived. For all remaining time he was known colloquially as "Boomer" Wells, and it was said of him that he could do less work, drink more whisky, talk longer and say less, than any other man in California.

But this was not strictly true, for although his appearance was disreputable and despite his besetting sin, at heart he was a man of great kindness and wisdom, and occasionally his remarks displayed both of these too rare qualities. As, for instance, when the Widow Marcy, being somewhat peeved, characterized him as "a dirty, stinkin', low-down, no-count bum," which, being repeated to him and his opinion asked, brought forth the reply that the widow was a woman of the best intentions.

It was true that the widow meant no more than to be neighborly and kind in calling on Jess at Graw's cabin on the morning following the advent of civilization. However, she failed to leave her tongue at home, and an unbridled tongue in the mouth of a woman of the best intentions is infinitely more terrible than a sword with a double edge.

The widow found Jess tired and approachable. Taine, stretched on one of the two bunks which the cabin contained, had passed a fairly easy night, but he had been restless and uncomfortable, and Jess had obtained no great amount of sleep. It was water Taine wanted most, fevered and calling in semiconsciousness, and, when gray daylight pearled the single window of the cabin Jess had decided that it was useless to lie down again.

So, after building up a good fire in the

fireplace, where she set a Dutch oven of sour-dough to bake, she had engaged herself in cleaning the cabin—no small task, but one she had almost finished at eight when the widow arrived.

Widow Marcy cast a sharp glance of approval over the renovation accomplished by Jess, and bestowed a word of grudging praise on her care of Taine.

"Seems to be doing as well as could be expected," she admitted, "an' I dunno as I could do better myself. So's I might as well be going—"

Jess followed the garrulous widow to the door. Just outside the door the widow turned, her natural instincts holding the advantage, now that her obvious duty had been performed.

"I s'pose you heard that unholy row last night?" she demanded. Then, without waiting for an answer: "Disgraceful, I call it, an' me that lenient, too! When you think! There they were coming home at all hours of the morning, some of 'em not home yet, I can well suppose, and all of 'em in a condition that was just that and nothing else—disgraceful!" And this was true, although it would not have occurred to Jess if it had not been brought to her attention.

"One thing I do know," continued the Widow Marcy, going strong and pleased to have an attentive listener. "That there Ralph Carroll who plays faro—all his fault, of course—can't ever come to no good end. What with all his gamblin' and carryin' on generally, I call him worse 'n Chino Pete himself. Apparently a young man of a pretty good fam'ly, but a reg'lar black sheep I s'pose. Never did have no use for that kind of a man myself—don't see why he don't go to work and try to be some respectable.

"The very idea of holding an auction on a young girl, as though she was a horse or some kind o' furniture—oh, I heard about that, too—and spending the proceeds for likker afterward; that's what they did. No one but him could ever have thought of it, and it is a wonder to me you let it go on.

"But, of course, you know more about that than I do—I wasn't there." This hint for further details failing to bring results, after an instant of hesitation: "Well, I cer-

tainly heard about it, and a deaf woman would 'a' heard the racket they made!"

This was something for Jess to think about, and perhaps because she was thinking she made no reply. In a way this was highly satisfactory to the widow, who, having exhausted that topic, went on to the next:

"But what I really wanted to say, child, was that, of course, you can't go on here living in Barney Graw's cabin, no matter what happens or did happen last night. That was only a fool and his money gettin' parted—you know what I mean: Anyway, it ain't respectable, with you a young, unmarried girl an' all—at least, I judge you ain't married?"

The widow regarded Jess sharply, but again Jess furnished no reply to the implied question.

"Anyway, you'd ought to find some other place to stay, though where that'd be I'm certain I couldn't say. Let alone not being respectable, it ain't scarcely decent, and there is always them as is bound to talk. And you can't expect any man to get all his meals at a restaurant—that Chinaman's cookin' would kill a cart horse if I'm any judge—not that Graw could do much more for himself."

"I dunno," said Jess, "but mebbe you mought be right," feeling some remark imperative for the sake of politeness.

"Well," the widow remarked in conclusion, "I've got to go and get me some baking done. You'll not forget to put the cold rags on your uncle's head like I said, and he'd ought to be better now in a day or two. We'll hope at least he ain't goin' to pass away. And you think over what I've been telling you, child, an' as soon as he can be moved, you can decide for yourself what you'd better do."

"All right," agreed Jess. "I'll shorely be doin' that."

With this the Widow Marcy took herself and her cataclysmic best intentions away from the cabin and back to her home again. And Jess did some thinking when she entered the cabin again. A part of the conversation Jess later, and without much thought, repeated to Graw when he arrived, a trifle heavy-eyed and with a little less than

his usual assurance, though smiling as always, and ready enough with his greeting.

"An how goes the battle? Is yo'r uncle better the mornin', miss?"

"He mought be," Jess answered briefly, "an' then agin he mought not." Then, with certain mountain memories stirring within her: "I reckon you'd better set an' let me bile a kittle o' coffee, Mr. Graw."

"It is a pleasant thought," Barney admitted. "True, it is, I'm feelin' the need of it, with my sorrow only equal in size by my head. But, an' ye don't mind, miss, it has always been Barney between me an' my friends."

"Ol' lady Marcy says that we kain't be friends," Jess stated directly, placing the coffee pot on the glowing coals. "An' she says 'tain't right 'bout me livin' here in yo'r house, so I reckon I'd better be huntin' a place to go."

The rude chair which Barney had tilted back against the log wall bumped on the puncheon floor with a sudden crash.

"The divil an' all she does!" he exclaimed, with righteous dismay. "If any one asks, she's a damned, meddlesome, interferin' old woman, with a tongue in her head to scatter ruin like a hound dog scatterin' fleas—beggin' yo'r pardon, miss." Barney grew red. "But, of course, I'll not be after botherin' you. Here ye are, an' here ye'r goin' to stay. I'd just come over to move my litter o' traps to the Esmeralda. You needn't ever be troublin' yo'r head at all."

"That Chinaman's cookin'—" thought Jess, whose mind snapped like a steel-trap when her decision was ripe. "'Taint no place fer a man to be," she announced. "Yo' needn't to think we-all 'ud turn a man out'n his house. There's a tent in our wagon that you kin stick up nigh as yo' like—least I kin do is to cook up yo'r vittles whilst we-all are here." The aroma of steaming coffee poured into a tin cup, and the latter set down with emphasis upon the table, added a note of force to the last remark.

"That's kind as can be," said Barney seriously, "but sure as the world, then, that old lady'll talk."

"Let 'er!" said Jess, succinctly, eyes

snapping now, determined brown hands planted defiantly on her slim hips. "Whenever it gits so I need suthin' to say, I reckon I kin do some talkin' myself!"

Barney smiled at the picture. "I'm thinkin' ye might," he said, chuckling. "We'll try to see that there'll not be any need," he declared more seriously; "an' lookin' at it that way, we'll call it a go."

Neither knew that this might later prove a momentous decision. But now that it had been made there was at once a new status between them, a more friendly attitude on the part of the girl; on Barney's part an appreciation of what her presence might mean in his humble home, already brightened by the touch of a woman's hand.

He noted, wondering, that the rough floor had been scrubbed until most of the mud brought in on his miner's boots was already removed; the hearth was swept, and even the open fire seemed to burn with a more cheerful air; pots and pans were scoured with sand as they had not been before for many a day; blankets were folded neatly across the bunk, and a considerable number of odds and ends formerly stacked promiscuously in the corners had been exiled to the lean-to where Barney stored his winter's supply of wood.

Now and then Taine stirred and groaned as he lay in the bunk on the right hand side of the cabin. Barney noted the active grace of the girl as she leaned over the sick man, giving him drink, a tablespoon at a time, or adjusting the wet cloths that his wandering fingers twitched from his head.

There was something extremely comforting about having her there, Barney found, though to save his life he could not have told what it was. He noticed, too, that while the girl's ragged frock was in a state of irreparable disrepair, something had been done to make it appear more presentable; she was a little less the elfish witch of the woods than she had appeared to be on the night before.

"Prob'ly her hair," Barney thought, "though it 'ud be the divil and all to ever make it stay smooth." He could not know how very hard she had tried. "Now, if she had a wad o' that caliker down to old Skowhookum's store—" But how to offer

it to her without giving offense was a problem too deep for solution by Big Barney Graw. But a little appreciation would hurt nothing at all.

"It's a wonder an' all, it is," he remarked casually, with no attempt to hide the admiration he felt, "how just overnight a woman can be doin' things to a bit of a house—some women," he added, remembering the housekeeping, not altogether womanly, of the Widow Marcy, who should have been born a man.

"There are women," Barney added, making conversation as an Irishman must, "who'll be after bringin' the spring along with 'em the minute they step foot in the door."

"If you'd been livin' in a busted down wagon fer nigh on a year, a house 'ud look like some place to settle down," Jess remarked simply, yet not overlooking the compliment paid by Graw. "I ain't done yit half the things that I think to do in a day or two. An' then," she added, a note of regret in her voice, "I reckon as how we'll be movin' along agin. That there John Taine"—she jerked a thumb contemptuously toward the bunk—"is the movinest cuss you ever see in yo'r life. Yo' couldn't hold him down no more 'n a flea; whilst he's got two feet under him, he'll never be lackin' for some place to go."

For some reason this idea was immensely displeasing to Graw, although it was not a thought that he could express. "There's a lot worse camps nor the Gulch," he asserted, weakly persuasive.

"I've seen some," said Jess. Her tone was comment enough. "Will ye have some more o' the coffee, Mr.—Barney Graw?"

"Aw, I'm thinkin' I've had enough," said Barney, remembering that he had just swallowed the third pint, willing to swallow another gallon or two just to remain, but not quite sure whether the invitation was a hint or merely a courtesy. It might have been a little of both, Mr.—Barney Graw.

"Och, she's a colleen swate as the bog-rose o' Roscommon," thought Graw, whose thoughts even more than his speech followed earlier habits. But he said: "I'd better be leavin' if I'm to do any part o' my work to-day."

Still, untangling his feet from about the legs of the chair, getting onto them, and getting them to carry him out of the cabin required an effort of fully ten minutes more.

"I'll be lookin' fer ye fer supper," Jess called from the door as he moved slowly away.

"It's sure I'll be with ye, then," called Barney over his shoulder. His great heart was "playin' the devil," as he would have said, and it wasn't all the briskness put into his walk. "She'll be lookin' fer me fer supper, she will," he thought, "an' sure ye're a lucky devil an' all, Mr.—Barney Graw."

He was luckier, indeed, for the moment than the visitor who followed in the earliest hour of afternoon. Jess looked up from arranging the blankets on the sick man's bunk, to see him cutting off the light of the sun at the doorway, graceful, negligently leaning against the door, white silk shirt and neckerchief spotless as Charlie Wing could make them appear, cream-colored trousers to rival in splendor the gaily embroidered boots, smiling with just a suspicion of curiosity in his eyes.

"Faro" swept his wide, silver-braided sombrero to the floor with almost too exaggerated politeness.

"Good afternoon," he said easily. "Thought I'd step in and see how you were getting along."

"You see," said Jess, not reasoning why, but knowing that there was something about the grand manner of Faro Carroll that "riled" her as she would have said.

"Yes, I see," returned Carroll, gravely, suddenly ceasing to smile. "I thought there might be something that I could do—"

Jess placed a slim hand on the table, facing the door. She regarded the boy straightly. "It 'pears to me," she stated calmly, "that by an' large mebbe you've done most enough."

And here it was the Widow Marcy who talked through her lips, but Jess really felt that the grievance was wholly her own. It was a feeling of which she had not been aware until Carroll had commenced by "puttin' on airs" at her doorway. But this reason was wholly obscure to Carroll.

"If I have really done anything to offend—" he began.

"Ye hain't," Jess flashed back at him. "Less'n ye mought call it an ornery trick, a stickin' a girl up to sell like'n she was a—a boss, or a passell o' sticks an' stocks. Yo'r a fine lookin' spec'men, callin' yo'se'f a man!"

Jess usually did convince herself she was right, almost as soon as she had begun to talk. It did not matter that the accusation was entirely lacking in justice. But after all, seeing the hurt look creep into his eyes, she felt that the last remark was the only one that was true, and then not at all in the way she meant. But Carroll, like many a man before him, made the grave mistake of standing on dignity.

"Really," he said, stiffly, "I had no intention—and if that is the way you feel—it wasn't a crime!" he burst out, thereby proving his utter youth.

"No, it wa'n't a crime," Jess remarked dryly, "an' it wa'n't a crime, neither, to git the town drunk on what ye got out'n the sale, an' it mought 'a' been as funny as all git out. All I'm a sayin', it wa'n't funny to me."

Here, had Carroll but noticed the opening, was his chance to set the sun to shining again. Unfortunately he failed to seize the advantage.

"Then," he said, "since there is nothing further to say, I think I may as well bid you good afternoon." Again the hat and the overpowering bow. There was something peculiarly irritating about that hat.

"There is suthin' other to say," snapped Jess, who, after her second look at the lad, knew this was true, did not at all want him to go away, and had no intention whatever of saying what was in her mind.

"I mought as well say it now whilst it's in my mind. 'S no more than I'd expected, knowin' you make a livin' the way you do, when any decent man 'ud be doin' some work. You, an' them clothes—a tin-horn—that's all you be—an' I never did have no use fer that kind of a man!"

"No doubt," said Carroll stiffly, "you have every reason for your remarks. Except one, which, of course, is of no real importance."

"Well?" demanded Jess briefly.

"Despite your conclusions, I'm not that kind of a man." And with this parting shot he turned on his polished heel and strode—strode is the only word to express the offended dignity of the lad—down the trail and away from that cabin door.

When he was gone, with the anger dying out of her eyes, the strain evaporating from her small, tense body, Jess felt—but she wasn't sure just what it was that she felt. Once looking after that retreating back, broad, erect, splendid in cream-colored silk, Jess clenched her small fist and raised it toward the door.

But she didn't shake it. Somehow or other the anger had gone out of that fist. Somehow she felt that, gambler or not, Faro Carroll had gotten a shade the best of the argument. And finally she had it all straightened out in her most particularly feminine mind.

Her anger against Carroll, she would have said, was not in the least abated. But, "Darn that ol' lady Marcy!" said Jess to herself. "She's an ol' hellion, an' everything else that Graw said, an' I'd just admire to give 'er a piece o' my mind!"

Carroll passed Lonnie Beeson and Gumbo Jones as he went down the trail, too much occupied in their own affairs to note the most unusual absence of greeting. The two ancients were quarreling, as usual, one or the other in turn bowed beneath the burden that was the cause for dispute—strangely enough, they contended for the honor of carrying the sack.

"Seein' as how it was my *idee* in the fust place," grumbled Lonnie, "looks like 's only fair to let me make the speech."

"That's just like you," croaked Gumbo, scornfully. "Se'fishest man I ever did see. If it wasn't fer me you'd never have nerve enough to go up to the house."

"Got as much *nerve* as anybody," Lonnie retorted, "an' I'd go, anyway. I'd go out o' my way any day to do a *favor* to anybody, let alone a young girl that likely ain't got *anybody* to look out after her—"

"I s'pose while you're lookin' out you'd like to look out a little fer the uncle, too," remarked Gumbo, with serious intent to wound.

"Now you lookee here!" Lonnie expostulated. "Jist cause they let you *look* at the ol' man you ain't so all-fired smart. That don't *prove* nothin'. You didn't *do* nothin' fur's I could see, on'y *talk*. I could do that much, anyways—"

"An' I didn't do nothin' only talk that time when you was hurted in the hills, only nurse you like a baby—that's all I done—"

"I always did claim I'd got well a month sooner if you'd had *sense* enough to let that leg alone—"

"Most unreas'nable cuss I ever did see," panted Gumbo, bowed beneath the pack. "Don't matter nothin' I put in the best part o' my life jist a studyin' to make you well—"

"Might o' been the *best* part," Lonnie admitted. "Ain't none of it been worth *nothin'* since. Gittin' old and childish, that's what *you* be—now, you gimme that there hunk o' meat! You'll not say I didn't *suggest* it, anyway."

"An' who suggested comin', I'd like to know?" Gumbo protested.

"You did," Lonnie acknowledged readily. "An' it was your all-fired *pride*, that's what it was. But you didn't think o' *bringin'* nothin', on'y gab—"

"You must think I talk a lot—you!" Gumbo retorted, dabbing at his forehead.

"You do," taunted Lonnie, "on'y you don't *say* much." He seized the opportunity to become possessed of the burden which Gumbo had laid down, and with this petty triumph was content. "An' if you'd *talk* less, an' *do* more, we'd git along a *sight* faster," he flung back over his shoulder at the disgusted Gumbo, whom he had surprised.

"Now you gimme that there hunk o' meat!" Gumbo quavered, following after his traitorous comrade. "Wasn't I a pack-in' it well enough?"

"Gittin' old," Lonnie reflected serenely. "I don't *want* you to git all tired out—"

Despite Gumbo's angry protests Lonnie continued with his captured burden until they arrived at Graw's cabin door. There, despite all Lonnie's boasts, the threatened speech refused to materialize. The words were there, only they remained sticking in his throat.

"We thought we'd come—" he did say finally, with an appealing glance at Gumbo.

"Seein' as how—" said Gumbo, and there he stuck.

"Yes," remarked Lonnie; "yes—seein' as how—"

"Will ye come in an' set?" Jess asked, with kind intent.

"We might look at your uncle—yes, we will," Gumbo explained with effort.

"He's out'n his head yit," Jess advised. "But I do reckon he's a mite easier this evenin'—sometimes he seems to talk real sensible for a spell."

His professional interest aroused, once inside, some of Gumbo's embarrassment departed. "He did git a pow'ful bump," he ventured conversationally. "'Bout as pow'ful a bump as ever I did see. But I've seen some fellers git right mean bumps an' live; seems like some men ain't nothin' can kill—they jist seem to last through everything. An' then agin sometimes a right little bump 'ill upset 'em terrible."

Having started, Gumbo found it difficult to stop until Lonnie, reaching forward, came down with a rough heel on his foot. "What in time!" he exclaimed, glaring at Lonnie. Lonnie glared in turn. Jess, astonished, looked at the two of them.

"We thought—" interposed Lonnie, glancing at the bundle near the door.

"Yes, we thought—" prompted Gumbo.

"We'd sort o' *drift* around," Lonnie began again.

"Ain't nothin' much," Gumbo asserted, "but then, seein' as how—"

"Seein' that we was comin', anyway," Lonnie assisted.

"To see your uncle," Gumbo added hastily, "like he might need suthin' kind o' stren'th-nin'. Why, seein' as how yisterday we killed a deer—"

"I killed a deer!" Lonnie corrected with equal haste, while Gumbo glared.

"Why, me an' Lonnie, we jist fetched a quarter of it along," Gumbo finished, edging toward open country.

Already when Jess would have thanked them they were gone, hastening down the trail. "You-all mought let me thank you," she called after them, between smiles and tears.

"'S all right," Lonnie called back.

"'Tain't nothin' at all echoed Gumbo.

Standing in the doorway, Jess could hear them for a long time, quavering voices raised at first in mutual self-congratulation; then again in petulant argument. It was a good argument, and they enjoyed it hugely for, after twenty years of constant companionship, even subject matter for argument must grow rare.

One other visitor Jess had on her day "at home"—the Señor Pablo Moreno, unsuccessful bidder of the night before, who came, gaily garbed, on a mission the most formal, bearing a letter, "from my aunt, *señora*, who keeps the house of my father at the *rancho*."

Pablo smiled charmingly, producing the missive, folded and sealed, from the depths of a much-braided *sombrero*. It may here be remarked that the aunt was wholly mythical—although the invitation which she sent was not.

Jess accepted the letter from Pablo's hand, glancing curiously at the slanted script.

"Ah, the *señorita* has not the Spanish?" Pablo smiled. He took the letter and broke the seal as though the contents were not already familiar. It was a beautiful bit of acting.

"My aunt writes thees," he lisped, "theenking eet a so great shame that you must be here alone:

"DEAR MEES:

"We have honor to hear of your arrive, and make demand for you visit to us at *Rancho Hermano del Pais* for our great pleasure until your esteem relative ees cure. The *padre* of our mission is also doctor of the best which will make of the arrangements the most agreeable. It ees from the heart we make thees invite who kiss your feet.

"SEÑORA MARIA ANGELO MORENO DEL VAR."

Pablo paused, looking at Jess expectantly.

"You mean," asked the puzzled Jess, "that yo'r aunt is askin' us to put up with you-all?"

"Eet ees the custom," Pablo replied, gravely and courteously. "We like not to see you stay in the town alone."

"That's right kind," said Jess, trying on her part also to be most polite. "But I

reckon we'll do well enough here where we are."

A flicker of disappointment crossed the Mexican's face, immediately effaced by his most brilliant smile.

"As you must," he agreed. "It is so I must tell to my aunt, but that also I have of the regret for your refuse—*Adios, señorita*"—Pablo extended his hand. Certainly Pablo had a most charming smile. "*No es de balda; es menester romper el cuesco para comer la almendra,*" he quoted, with a voice that carried assurance that this was pure Castilian courtesy. It was just as well that Jess did not know it for pure Mexican impudence—no refusal mattered, and nuts must be broken to get at the meat.

Nevertheless, Pablo, departing, left behind him an impression puzzling to Jess. The very great difference between what she felt about him, and what she felt she should feel after such a kind invitation, presented a problem which she did not try to solve.

Returning for supper, Barney Graw saw the Mexican riding away. Unfortunately he said nothing at all about it to Jess. But, then Jess said nothing at all about Pablo's visit to him, though she did tell him, laughing, about the visit of the inseparables, Lonnie and Gumbo Jones. This was only because Jess never bothered other folks with her own affairs—in this instance a mistake to be laid at the door of Jess.

The mistake was not serious, neither on the part of Barney or Jess—would not appear to be serious for some time to come. For the present it had only the effect of spoiling their supper.

It was not altogether a satisfactory day—this first day Jess spent in the Gulch.

CHAPTER V.

THE FANATIC.

THE red and gold of oak and manzanita had long since ceased to blaze on the lower hills; spruce and redwood took on a more vivid green against their seasonal backgrounds of earthy brown. Day by day the snow-caps of the high Sierras drifted lower on the towering peaks. The yellow sunshine paled in the valleys; there were occa-

sional gray days of misty rain. And Chino Pete laid an extra stock of the stuff that cheers while it inebriates, in contemplation of a heavy Christmas trade.

For the rest, life in Hogan's Gulch proceeded much as usual. Pan, rocker and tom gleaned the yellow metal from the pay dirt of the Gulch; now and then the discovery of an unusual nugget or a new rich streak revived the hope that the Gulch would boom again—an expectation that died with the sober second day.

Roulette wheel and faro bank continued to pay princely dividends. Doc Alkyre, obtaining supplies from some mysterious source, ceased not to indulge in melancholy sprees in competition with the more public potations of Boomer Wells.

The *Banner*, always just about to go to press, did semi-occasionally appear. Its editor, the indomitable colonel, had been whipped once, and shot at twice, not because he was courageous enough to intentionally offend, but merely that he had been indiscreet. Nor was the intent of either shooter serious, but only intended to add a decent sense of responsibility to the editorial equipment of the scared shootee.

The tongue of the Widow Marcy continued to wag—rumor had it that it wagged in the direction of the unfortunate colonel with deadly aim. Sometimes, usually when Graw was absent in the hills, Pablo Moreno, bestriding a gaily decorated horse, rode in the direction of Graw's cabin; his visits were always brief and generally unsatisfactory. It was noted, particularly by black-eyed Ynez, of the Esmeralda, that the Mexican's smile was becoming less pronounced, his flowing Castilian phrases shorter and less polite, the sleeping demon in his eyes more responsive to the stimulation of Chino's "budge."

As for Faro Carroll, he looked out at the world from over his green baize tables, watchful and interested, and no doubt gained instruction and amusement from his survey of the parade. The hopes that had grown up in the heart of Barney Graw only Barney knew—he had never been so content and comfortable in his life; he knew that here was something worth perpetuating, but how to go about it he did not know.

With the addition of new responsibilities, Jess, whose presence in Hogan's Gulch was no longer cause for comment, had taken on some quality of womanhood entirely absent before she had a house of her own to keep. Good food and surcease from anxiety had added something to her weight; her face, no longer pinched and sharp, looked less and less like the face of an impish mountain elf; her lithe young body rounded more and more into the sweet curves of womanhood.

But there were yet times when her anger flashed like a keen-edged sword, and more than one too persistent visitor at Graw's had experience with the fine temper of her tongue.

She was, and always would be, altogether unreasonable, entirely illogical, very much given to sudden change of mind, wilful and lovable as a maid may be, which is only to say that she was very much a woman with a spirit of "wind and water and a heart o' gold," as Barney Graw went whispering to himself.

Toward Taine, convalescent, the attitude of the Gulch had been very kindly, became tolerant, and grew to something nearly approaching impatience. There was gold in the ground, and it was to be had for the digging—no great fortune, perhaps, but a few hours' work each day with pan and pick on almost any unpreempted drift or bar would give a man at least the means to exist.

But Taine's great weakness, more apparent in his disposition than in his body, as surmised by the Gulch, prevented him from making even the casual effort needed for this. To Jess, intimately acquainted with all of his previous habits, this was no great surprise, but she did notice a curious change in the man.

From the day when he had first opened his eyes in conscious survey of the world after his injury he talked much less than had been habitual; he did not complain or grumble at all. He had only one comment to make on the accident:

" 'S a real Gawd's marcy I reckon I wan't killed."

Taine was an ignorant man; it was all he could do to read slowly and with considerable difficulty, following the lines with his

finger across the page. During the long term of convalescence he spent his days following the sun around the walls of the cabin, tilted back against the logs in Graw's favorite chair. When it rained he sat by the fire inside.

He found an all-consuming occupation in the reading of the only two books that the cabin contained, which had been left behind by some previous occupant. They were "The Way of the Transgressor," and a dog-eared volume of "Preacher Bender's Sermons," with some pages missing, where Graw had used them for lighting his pipe. In both these books hell-fire glowed at its whitest and most unendurable heat.

At times there was a certain look in Taine's eyes that high-strung Jess found it very difficult to endure.

"Yo' quit a lookin' at me like that!" she would say.

"I wa'n't a lookin' at nothin'—reckon I was jist a thinkin' o' things," Taine would retort. The subject matter for all his thinking he never explained.

The Widow Marcy had ceased to visit at Graw's. She had fully decided in her own mind that the arrangement there, "whatever else, just don't look respectable," and on her part "she'd not be a party to any sich goin's on."

Her attitude troubled neither Jess nor Graw the least in the world. Nor was Graw troubled by the failure of Taine to display that ambition which Hogan's Gulch expected as the chief and indispensable attribute of a man—not that he admired the man, but because toleration of Taine meant the continued presence in his "bit of a house" of the girl he had grown to love.

But Jess grew more restless and irritable in her relations with Taine for the same reason that made Barney lenient with him.

"Tain't fitten a man," she told Taine on more than one occasion, "to be eatin' other folks' vittles without doin' a lick. I'm git-tin' sick an' tired o' seein' yo' lazin' around. When a man's flat on his back an' kaint help it he's got some excuse, but no spell o' sickness ought to lay a man up for the rest o' his nat'ral life!"

Whereupon Taine would look up at Jess dumbly, without retort, which was also-

gether contrary to custom, or, if he said anything, it was only to mutter: "I'm a moughty sick man with these here spells in my haid—you'd ought to know that I kain't work thisaway, with ev'ything goin' black in front o' my eyes!"

To which Jess would reply with anger: "Yo' seem to see well enough with yo'r nose in them books, an' I never seen yo' yit at the table when they was anything black in front o' yo' eyes!"

But Graw, easy-going and subtle on this occasion, found means to encourage Taine in his weakness: "Never ye trouble—take all the time that ye need. There'll be plenty o' time to be workin' when ye git ye'r strength back into ye'r legs." Which was, in itself, enough to upset all the good intentions of Jess.

Autumn passed into bitter winter high in the hills, but late fall tarried long there on Feather River. Yet the time came when for days the sun was hidden, and there were sudden gusts of chilly rain. The first real storm, both inside the cabin and on the world outside, broke without warning only on Christmas eve.

Early in the afternoon Taine had borrowed Graw's rifle and left for the hills, saying that he "felt the need o' stretchin' my legs" and "mought kill a deer or suthin'" by taking the gun. Jess, thankful to be alone, raised no objection. Taine had been unusually silent for several days, and this strange silence worried Jess more than his habitual garrulousness.

This evening Graw laid off work and came home a little earlier than usual; Jess, between the wood-hut and the door, heard him singing as he came up the trail—Graw always sang when he was particularly pleased:

"Whin sixteen years uv age Oi was me mither's fair-haired bhoy. She kipt a little huckster shop, her name it was Malloy"—and then, nearer, rollicking exultation in every rounded tone, and in brogue "as thick as a Kilkenny foot!"—"An' now Oi'm goin' back again as poor as Oi began, to make a happy lass or more, an' sure Oi think Oi can!"

Jess, smiling, left the door open a crack, awaiting his entrance.

"Good evenin' to ye—an' have ye got a place for a stranger in yo'r bit of a house?" he demanded mirthfully.

His tingling good humor filled the cabin like the warmth of an open hearth. He had brought in a large package under his arm, placing it on the table; Jess put it aside when she set down the tin plates in preparation for supper.

"'Tis a white Christmas we'll be havin', sure as the world," Graw remarked.

"'Pears like we mought," Jess replied, looking out of the window into the gathering dusk.

Presently Graw spoke again as he warmed his hands at the fire, looking around at her slyly, but as though he spoke to himself: "An' what would ye say to a woman that never had any curiosity at all?"

"Talkin' to me?" Jess questioned, busy lighting the candles with a splint from the hearth.

"Naw, just thinkin' a bit to myself," Graw replied. "An' wonderin' if ye was wonderin' what might be in the bit of a bundle there on the bunk?"

"Why? Is it something for me?" Jess asked, all at attention.

"Never can tell," answered Barney, smiling. "But then it might be if ye'd be takin' the trouble to open it up."

It was a Christmas gift that Barney had had in contemplation for over a month—a complete costume of cream-colored buckskin, soft as fine silk, gaily fringed and decorated with stained porcupine quills, jacket, short skirt, leggings, and moccasins, and a tiny furred cap, which Jess immediately poised on her head with a little feminine cry of delight.

She caught up a polished tin plate from the table and peered at the distorted image there mirrored, moving her black head from side to side like a curious bird to get the effect. And then, her barbaric finery caught up and draped over her arm, she raised up both her slim hands to Big Barney's shoulders.

"It's the—the purtiest thing I ever had in my life," she cried breathlessly. And there she stopped, her eyes shining.

"It's nothin' at all," insisted Big Bar-

ney Graw. And then the miner had the surprise of his life, for Jess sat down suddenly, laying her head on the table. Her shoulders were shaking.

"Can it be?" thought Barney. "The divill! It's cryin', she is!" And what could he do? "Och, what's the matter, *acushla*—what is it, now?" he asked helplessly. He laid a sympathetic hand on her shoulder; curiously Jess did not resent it at all. "Sure, ye know, if 'tis anything I could do—"

"I'm a fool," quavered Jess; "I don't keer—I kain't help bein' a fool—nobody ain't never give me no Christmas afore."

"An' that's the divil an' all to be cryin' over," said Graw, intensely relieved. Jess looked up, smiles already forcing a way through the tears.

"Oh, Barney, don't mind."

"Never a bit!" said Barney, smiling in turn.

"And, Barney—"

"Yes?"

"Yo're the best man, Barney, I ever knew."

"I'm glad to be hearin' the same—'tis a grand bit o' news," laughed Barney. "Just for that I'd wish it was Christmas every day in the year."

"An' me lettin' yo' starve!" cried Jess, jumping up, suddenly thinking again of her household tasks.

"I am," Barney assured her solemnly, "near to bein' the hungriest man in the world."

They laughed together, merry as children.

"I haven't said thanks," Jess was reminded.

"There's no need if you'll feed me," Graw declared, while Jess busied herself with her pans.

"Yo' didn't see Taine?" she asked a moment later, and, at the mention of the name, it was as though a shadow crept into the room.

"I did not," Barney replied, "though I'm thinkin' 'tis time he was gettin' back from the hills."

"He'd better be, if he wants any supper," Jess asserted. Nevertheless she went to look out at the cabin door.

The door opened onto blackness, feathery flakes of soft snow drifting into and through the rays from the tallow dips on the table. Jess listened, hearing nothing but the barking of a dog in the town.

"Yo' don't reckon anything mought 'a' happened?" she demanded anxiously, closing the door.

"Nothin' that could," Graw reassured her. "Mebbe he just got to trailin' a deer."

"That man shore gits me pow'ful on-easy," Jess declared. "There's times," she reflected, "I git to thinkin' mebbe he ain't jist right. He never used to be like he is." She paused again, listening, but there was nothing to hear.

"Since ye speak of it, I have noticed something like that myself," Graw agreed dryly.

"He don't do a tap," Jess burst out, standing with a plate in her hand. "An' the way he's a goin' it don't seem like he ever would. He was shif'less before, but nothin' to what he is now."

She had never voiced all her misgivings before. "An' if he don't git to doin' suthin' afore a great spell, I'd like to know what he thinks 'll become o' we-all. An' you"—she turned on Barney accusingly—"why, yo' jist set him on to be shif'less an' all. An' I oughn't to say it, when yo' jist think to be kind."

"Aw, sure he is sick," Barney temporized.

"He'll stay sick," Jess asserted, "jist as long as yo' keep egg'in' him on. An' he's got me plumb troubled, Barney; I'm tellin' yo' that." She paused helplessly.

Then Big Barney Graw grasped his courage in both his great hands. He had turned to the fireplace where he was lighting his pipe, but now he laid the pipe carefully on the hewn log that formed the shelf of the mantel.

"An' why should ye worry, *acushla*?" he asked, taking a step toward the girl, laying a tender hand on her shoulder. "Sure an' ye know"—all of his heart was looking forth from his eyes—"sure an' ye know ye needn't worry at all."

Jess looked up at him, startled.

"I'd like nothin' better, *machree*, than

to keep ye away from bother the rest o' yo'r life."

"Yo' kain't," said Jess finally, "an' there ain't nothin' that can, 's long as I got to be livin' along with that man—an' he hain't nothin' to me, no more'n a toad in a hole—"

"Could I be?" Graw pleaded, a world of tenderness thrilling in the deep bass of his voice. "Tell me, *mavourneen*—ye're knowin' me well enough—an' I'd be the kindest to ye ever I knew?"

Jess, like a wild young deer, stood quivering under his hand, her dark eyes round and bright in the light of the flame. "Yo're as kind as ever was now, Barney," she breathed. "I reckon I don't jist come by what yo're a gittin' at?"

"S this!" said Barney, and drew her tight in his arms. "It's my heart is bleedin' for love o' ye, Jess," he whispered into her ear; "day an' night, an' me never sayin' a word, for I didn't dare. I'm nothin' on earth, but I have the best claim in the Gulch—if ye don't like it, we'll leave as soon as ye're sayin' the word. I'm wantin' to marry ye, Jess—an' wantin' ye mine, an' lovin' ye every minute since first ye stepped yer little foot in the door!"

She lay for a little time there in his arms, crushed against him, still as a captured bird. The pulse of her heart in her throat had stifled her voice.

"Och, say that ye will!" Barney urged. "Take all the time ye'll be wantin', but say that ye will!"

Jess did not resist him or struggle to get away, but her eyes were grave and serious as she looked up at him.

"I kain't," she said; "Barney, I like yo', but honest—honest, I kain't—"

"But ye don't dislike me?"

"I reckon I jist don't feel to get married at all."

There was a sudden drift of cold air in the room. Barney's arms dropped to his side. They turned together, startled. The stooping figure of John Taine stood in the door.

How much Taine had seen neither Barney nor Jess could know. Neither had heard him as he opened the door. But, apparently, Taine had seen nothing at all.

He advanced to the fire, shaking the wet snow from his shoulders, and laid Graw's rifle across the spreading antlers nailed over the hearth—it was habit that he should carefully wipe the gun dry before putting it up.

With no shame, or any thought of misgiving before, now Jess felt her face burning scarlet as she bent over the table. It was Barney who first found a voice:

"What luck?" he asked, not quite successful in an attempt to speak naturally.

"Never seed nothin' to shoot at," Taine answered briefly, and left both Jess and Barney wondering what he had seen.

"We been a waitin' supper," said Jess, pouring the coffee, "an' I reckon the pone is jist about spoiled."

"Twan't wuth it, fer me," observed Taine, regarding his plate.

They despatched the supper silently, the men not looking at each other, or either at Jess. It was a difficult meal. When it was finished, Taine pushed back his chair, after his habit, tilted against the wall. Barney rose, and after a period of embarrassed hesitation, took down his hat from its peg.

"If ye don't mind," he said lamely, "I think I'll be goin' an' look up some o' the boys."

Jess shot him a glance of appeal which he failed to remark.

"'Night—an' a merry Christmas," he said as he went out at the door. His heart was heavy; there was a lump like a chunk of lead in his throat. For a moment Jess had a mad impulse to run after Barney into the night. Instead she gathered up the dishes, rattling the tin plates viciously in the pan.

It took her a long time to wash and dry the few plates, but, delay as she might, the work was finished too soon. Once the dishes were stacked in the box that was nailed to the wall, she turned to the bunk where she had laid the Indian costume—Graw's Christmas gift.

This was her corner, the only chamber she had, separated from the rest of the cabin by a heavy curtain of canvas made from a wagon top. She began folding the costume neatly to put away. Taine sat glowering over the reddening coals.

"What mought ye call that thare?" he asked suddenly, his first words since the departure of Graw.

"'S a frock," Jess answered briefly.

"'S all gew-gawed up," Taine complained, "like the sins o' the heathen Injuns themselves. Mought I ask whare yo' laid hold on the thing?"

"'S none o' yo'r put-in," Jess asserted, "but Barney give it to me for Christmas, since yo' got to know."

Taine looked at the girl darkly from under drooping lids. "I reckon 'tain't all he was givin' yo'—er mebbe yo' reckon I didn't see yo'-all when I come in?"

The anger of Jess burst like a powder flare. "Mebbe yo' think I give a damn what yo' seen!" she stormed, panting with wrath. "He was a offerin' to take keer o' me, like yo' never done. An' I'll thank yo', Taine, to keep yo'r nose out'n affairs that ain't yo'r consarn—an' that settles that, fur's I'm consarned! Yo' hear me, Taine?"

"Mebbe they're some consarn o' mine, an' mebbe they're not," Taine observed coldly, his dull eyes beginning to glow. "If they hain't, I'd better be makin' 'em be—seem' thet some ways they're callin' yo' kin to me."

"Waal, I hain't," declared Jess, "an' I never claimed to be—an' I'd never make no brag on't if it was true!"

Taine ignored that remark. "An' now I know," he asserted solemnly and quietly, although his lean hands were twitching against the homespun in which he was clothed; "now 's made plain to me what I were saved to do!"

He rose to his feet, unbending the gaunt length of his body like a folding rule, his eyes turned to the ceiling, burning blue with a sort of fanatic light.

"I been saved," he cried, "from dyin' in all o' my sins—I been saved, fur I reckon thar's work to do!"

With all his bearded, ungainly ugliness there was something wildly impressive about the man. Like a prophet of old denouncing the sins of his people, he directed an accusing finger at the quivering girl.

"Jess Haney," he yelled, "I been spared fer to save yo'r soul!"

Jess shrank back against the boards of the bunk. "John Taine," she cried, "yo're crazy as all git out! An' I reckon my soul 'll manage to git along like 's always done, 'thout any more o' that sort o' talk out'n you!"

"Yo're a daughter o' sin, same as I always knew," Taine accused, "an' yo' been possessed o' the devil since the day yo' was born. An' now yo're turnin' into the scarlet woman in front o' my eyes! Glory be!" he shouted. "With my feet goin' down like a bran' to the burnin' I been yanked back from the pit—an' I'll save yo', Jess Haney, ef I got to beat yo' 'thin a inch o' yo'r life!"

"Jes' yo' dare to lay a hand on me, Taine."

"I seen what I seen," he roared, "an' shore's hell's a whoopin', I'm gonta wear yo' out fer the good o' yo'r soul!"

Jess screamed as his grasping fingers closed on her homespun waist. Taine snatched at her, dragging her away from the bunk. She screamed only once, then turned like a cat and sank her teeth in his arm. Taine grunted—it may be doubted if he was actually aware of the pain. Little by little he forced the girl nearer a corner where there was the handle of an ax which Graw had broken only a day or two before.

"I'll larn ye," he muttered; "I'll larn ye to mock the Lord!"

Jess fought silently. In his weakened condition Taine was not much more than a match for the young strength of the girl that terror made great. It was something more than mere violence that she feared—even more than the dread of the threatened punishment, she was affrighted by the stark madness that possessed the man.

Swaying together they overturned the table—the collar of the girl's waist was jerked away in Taine's hand. In that sudden loss of balance Jess seized her advantage. She suddenly pushed against him with all her force. Taine entangled one leg with the trap of the heavy table, and fell, sprawling, at full length on the floor.

One hasty glance, and Jess leaped to the door.

"Barney—Barney!" she called, and fled, blind with fright and fury, into the night.

CHAPTER VI.

TAINÉ HEARS THE CALL.

CHRISTMAS lay white on the single street of the Gulch except where the passing of heavy boots had churned the wet snow into inglorious slush. All claims were deserted; pan, tom, and rocker lay idle on drift and bar. The male inhabitants of the Gulch were gathered *en masse* at Chino Pete's Esmeralda.

Two only were absent—the unfortunate Doc Alkyre, outlawed by decree, who celebrated after his own fashion, flat in his bunk with a demijohn by his side; and Taine, whom no one had seen at all since Jess fled the house the evening before.

He had not remained at the cabin, as Jess learned when, after careful reconnoiter, she found the door standing partly open, snow drifted onto the floor, gray ash on the hearth, and Taine's coat still hanging on its peg in the corner.

After fleeing the house, reluctant to ask for Graw at the Esmeralda, she had as a last resort appealed to the Widow Marcy, who had, just as reluctantly, given her shelter for the night. She escaped the widow's tongue as early as possible this following morning.

Neither Graw nor Taine reappeared for breakfast, and Jess built up the fire, swept the floor, and ate a solitary meal of coffee, flap-jacks, and bacon with no great appetite. After breakfast she busied herself with cleaning the cabin; among other things she took some satisfaction in burning both "The Way of the Transgressor" and the collection of sermons that the unknown "Preacher Bender" had left behind as he passed through this vale of tears—not without a privately expressed hope that the authors of both these disturbing works were now resident in a neighborhood as torrid as the flame that consumed their efforts.

But this was only a temporary panacea for her troubles, Jess found—she had been

afraid she would find Taine in the cabin; not to find him there was still more disturbing.

She knew no one to whom she could appeal. Barney continued absent. She had no idea that he would return before four o'clock in the afternoon, the hour they had set for their Christmas dinner—even Barney did not surmise that the time was really chosen by Jess with the idea of keeping him away from the attractions of the Esmeralda.

However, Jess was never given to worry for nothing at all: considering Taine, "He'll prob'ly be back," she thought, "when he begins to git hungry." With that assurance she rested in comparative calm. She did not yet surmise the true extent of his growing madness.

Meantime there was the dinner which she must consider—a leg of young deer to be carefully baked on an improvised spit before the open fire; potatoes and turnips brought in from the Chinese gardens of Sacramento; to add grace to the feast a deep pie of dried wild plums baked in the Dutch oven buried among the coals.

The preparation of the dinner was a pleasure for Jess. As much as possible she tried to put out of her mind the events of the day before—Barney's proposal, the violence of Taine, her flight from the cabin—as though they had been a dream. Surely soon she would look out of the door and hear Barney's greeting: "Good afternoon, an' have ye a bite an' a sup for a stranger in yo'r little house?"

She thought of the kindness and vast consideration of the man. "I reckon meb-be I ought to love Barney," she thought. "But shucks, I reckon meb-be I ought to been bo'n a man." Which was a thing that, knowing Jess, no one but Jess would ever have thought at all.

The sun touched the zenith, passed on his westward race. From below in the town came occasional bursts of cheers from the Esmeralda. Later, by two hours, when Jess had already made more than one trip to the door, wondering why neither Barney nor Taine had arrived, she glimpsed a blue smock that came waddling up the trail. It was not unfamiliar. But to-day of all days

she supposed that the Chink, Charlie Wing, would be busy about his work. Something was wrong—surely, the Chinaman hurried.

Then he stood, bowing and grinning there at her door.

"My come," he spluttered; "byme-bye you come, look see. My dunno—all fella hop dlunk—Missee Taine, he laise hell Esmelalda. You savee? Mo' betta my come—you look see!"

It took Jess only a moment to move the carefully basted roast away from the flame and follow the Chinaman, after closing the door. On the trail he attempted voluble explanation.

"Wha's malla? My no savee, dunno. Missee Taine talkee, talkee, no can stop—he laise plenty hell Esmelalda."

Charlie Wing's vocabulary was limited strictly to the imparting of scant information.

Noise, dust, smoke, smell, raw color, the fierce excitement of gain, the despondency of loss; the flash of glasses sent spinning by Spanish Joe; loud-voiced miners in red and blue shirts, corduroy and homespun, waiting their turn four deep in front of the bar; shrill laughter of women, jealously gathering spoils; crazed beating of banjos; the rattle of gamblers' chips; fat bags of "dust" flung carelessly on the scales to pay the bill—Christmas, the only Christmas possible in the Gulch.

Every table was surrounded by restless crowds. Before the roulette-wheel the colonel piked his Mexican *pesos* on alternate red and black until pushed aside by a disgusted miner anxious to stake his ounces straight up on a variety of numbers selected by the simple expedient of shutting his eyes and dropping the measured sack. When it fell split between two or on four he played in the green, disdaining all smaller losses and smaller winnings.

In an hour he lost twelve thousand at six dollars the ounce; called the house for a drink; borrowed a hundred, and recouped his losses in ten minutes of reckless play. Before night it was fated that he would own neither fortune, cabin, nor claim. This would cause no comment; to-morrow he might have a million—this was the game.

At the faro table Barney Graw, whose vices were only those of his time and place, laughingly faced Faro Carroll, reasonably sober in consideration for Jess, as Faro was sober for strictly business reasons. Carroll's slim fingers played delicately with the box.

"Bust ye or die," laughed Graw, "on the queen o' spades."

"I'll pay for the funeral," said Faro. "Marker—the nine!" He swept Graw's money into the waiting drawer.

Graw played the "cat-hop" on the last turn to pay four for one, calling the order of the three cards that remained to be drawn, ace, seven, king, club, and two hearts—they came in that order over the last card "in hock."

"Ye divil—I reached into ye plenty—an' I'll pay for me own funeral," said Graw as Faro counted his gains.

"Better good luck than good looks," remarked Faro blithely, reshuffling the pack. Graw laughed, a trifle bitterly.

"Easy to win when ye copper to lose," he quoted. "There's nothin' I need, an' so I can have it all." Faro, pulling the "soda"—the first unplayed card on the pack—paid no attention to the uncalled-for remark. "Gentlemen, your bets," he chanted, "to win or to lose—copper or play—no bet is refused—make it a day!"

Graw played again. Neither Faro nor Graw looked up from the lay-out when a Mexican, sitting beside Graw opposite the "case" was suddenly raised in the air, hurled to the floor, and thereafter disappeared on his way to the door—caught by the watchful Chino in the act of lifting a pitiful bet after the play had been called.

This was the business of no one except the case-keeper and Chino Pete, no more than it was the business of any one in the house to mix in the affairs of Moreno and the girl, Ynez, who conducted a bitter private quarrel in a corner.

For all of this it was rather a quiet day. Chino Pete had intended that it remain quiet, and insured tranquillity by the simple expedient of collecting all guns as the price of admission, strictly paid in advance. To those who objected he had only one reply: "T'ell with ye; 's Christmas; if ye

"do any shootin' to-day, you'll do it outside."

Into this colorful assembly, John Taine, a man with a mission, wandered.

His clothes were muddy; he had spent the night in the hills. He wore no hat; his long, light-brown hair framed a thin face covered with tangled beard; in his light-blue eyes glowed a determination altogether strange to the man he had been. But his manner was quiet in his address to Chino Pete.

"If yo' don't mind, I reckon I'd like to talk to the boys," he said.

"Speakin' o' what?" asked Pete.

"Seein' it's Christmas," Taine explained, "I got to thinkin'—an' I reckoned how a dose o' religion couldn't do 'em no harm."

"Preacher?" asked Pete.

"Mought be," Taine answered truthfully. "Leastways I got a call, an' I reckoned I'd try."

"Aw right," agreed Chino briefly. He regarded the room with some little hint of disgust in his own heavy face. "Guess you're right, an' it couldn't do 'em no harm. Seein' it's Christmas—hey, you, listen to me!"

His voice rang out like the roar of the Cretan Bull, gaining instant attention. His preliminary introduction was brief:

"That sick feller that's been up to Graw's—sort of a preacher—got a few words to say. Close down the games, there, Faro—everybody shut up!" Then to Taine: "Aw right, le's have what you got on your chest." Graw was the only man in the room in the least surprised.

"Up on a table!" suggested a voice.

"Sure—up on the table—give the feller a boost!"

"Shut up, there, you, give 'im a chance to spout!"

The games stopped; the dancers came from the floor. Spanish Joe set a dripping bottle back on the shelf. Chino Pete's word was law in the Esmeralda. Slowly a comparative silence crept into the room. After all, it was not a thing so unusual; more than one traveling evangelist had spoken in Chino Pete's. There was a little of reverence; the convention of real respect which reigned even here; a little itch

for a new form of amusement—and Taine, pushed forward, mounted the rostrum of the roulette-wheel overlooking the crowd.

For a moment there was an air of frightened helplessness about the man; he looked about him wildly as though he wondered at finding himself in that place; as though now he desired only escape.

"I dunno—" he began, and paused.

"Louder!" some one called.

"I dunno why I'm here, but I reckoned like I'd had a call to come down." With the sound of his own voice something like a new spirit seemed to creep into the man. "I'm John Taine," he announced, "an' I've seed the light, an' I've had a call for to show yo'-all yo'r sins!"

His head straightened back; his dull eyes began to blaze; there was a power in him that held the room silent before the flame in his eyes.

"Glory be!" he shouted. "I got a bash on the head, an' it let in the light. I was a dyin' in sin, but I was saved for to tote a message to them as walk in darkness with their feet takin' hold on hell, like I was afore. That's why I'm here, brothers—that's the reason I'm here! Ye're sinners, ev'ry last pesky one o' ye, same as I was—drinkin' an' gamblin' an' ginerly carryin' on lost in yo'r sins, an' yo' got to stop it fer fear o' the wrath to come!"

"I'm a goin' to tote yo'r sins out in the open, praise be, and bust 'em wide open, an' show yo'-all they're black as the ink that's settin' 'em down 'till the judgement day. Listen! Hell's burnin'; burnin' beneath yo'r feet. The devil's a rantin' an' a roarin' right here in this house—an' he's got most o' ye by the hand a leadin' yo' down to hell!"

"Oh, brothers, the day 'll come when yo'-all are a goin' to die, an' the whisky ye drink, an' the gamblin' ye do, an' the women ye run after—they'll all be like weights on yo'r feet a draggin' yo' down. No place to hide—nowhere to run away—an' there yo'll be standin' with the everlasting flame a lickin' yo'r chin—an' then yo'-all kain't never say yo' ain't had yo'r warnin' in time. Fer I'm a tellin' yo', brothers, I'm a tellin' yo' now!"

There was not a smile in the room as

Taine paused for breath. The fervor of the man, the rude words sufficiently familiar and fit for the needs of the time, were expressed with an access of power that seemed strangely alien to the type of the man himself.

He held his crowd, held them against their will; made them believe in him, if not in his talk. It is safe to say that in the half-hour he spoke no one in Hogan's Gulch had ever heard himself, his weakness and folly so well denounced, so thoroughly scorned—nor would, from other lips, without immediate recourse to carnal and worldly force.

Nor had Chino Pete any objection to the consumption of time—after all, his profits were only temporarily suspended. It would have been well had Taine chosen to stop with this. But, sweat beading his forehead, the fanatic light in his eyes, he plunged involuntarily over the edge.

"Let 'em alone," he yelled—"them women, the devil's tools, that go a leadin' yo'

down. Ye kain't trust 'em—there ain't nary one o' them that yo' kin trust. Yo' needn't to think I ain't started in on my own—my own sins, and the sins o' my fam'ly goes chucked in with the rest. There's a gal I been a tendin' nigh on two years—"

For the first time since Taine began speaking, a murmur like the sound of a growing wave ran through the house. Jess was well known and liked by the men of the Gulch, even though many had felt the lash of her tongue. Heedless, the self-appointed prophet rushed on to destruction:

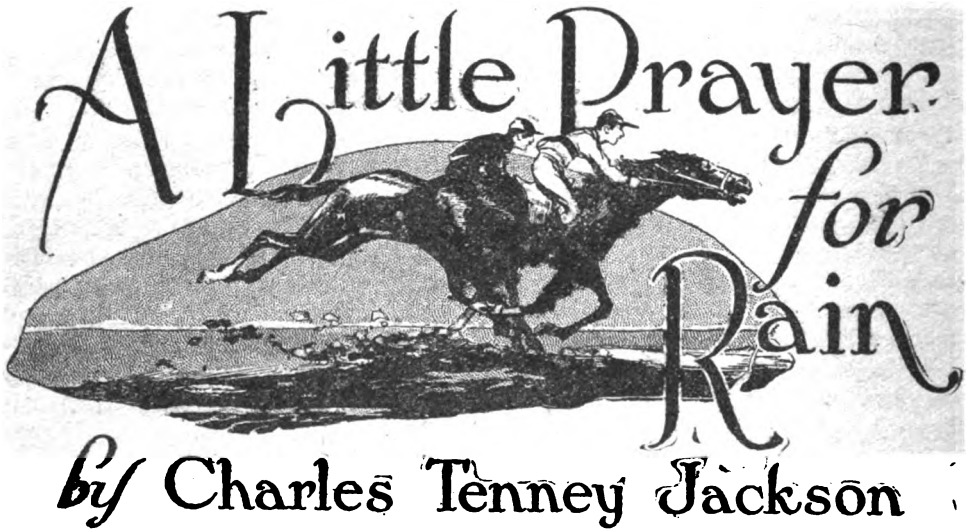
"Like all the rest—a nat'ral daughter o' sin."

"That 'll do!" It was Barney Graw, who elbowed his way through the crowd. Taine, beside himself, pointed an accusing finger at Graw:

"Yo'd stop my mouth—yo' in the midst o' yo'r sin—"

"You lie!" Graw's voice was deadly, "You lie, an' you know you lie!"

(To be concluded NEXT WEEK.)



COLONEL T. SAMBOLA TUNK wondered casually why he had traveled from Mississippi City, Mississippi, to Iketown, Kentucky, merely to stand, of a drizzly afternoon, on Miss Paisley's back porch drinking rain water from the rain bar'l. He hung the tin dipper on the nail among the honeysuckle

vines and looked off across the horse lot to the Baptist parsonage.

Under a persimmon tree were three animals, heads down, tails to the storm, a patient picture of useless protest. Sheriff Steve pointed mutely at one nag, and Colonel Tunk shook his head.

"Even a race hoss, seh, has come down

to eatin' his head off on the dominie's soft grass. Vagabond, seh, that could do his five and a half furlongs in one and five. I recall his first out at Pimlico, seh; and now he is bequeathed to Rev. Dr. Bell, of the First Baptist Church, by the terms of Major Martin's will. Dominie Bell, seh, who abhors a hoss race as a device of the devil. In Kentucky, seh, which was once the abode of fair wimmen, fast hosses, and good whisky."

"And where's the fair wimmen?" mused Sheriff Steve. "There's only the preacher's daughter which is mighty good-lookin' in this town. And you ain't a show—she's only seventeen, and runnin' with this store clerk that sings in choir. Not that he gives a durn, but just so's he can take her home from meetin'."

From the parson's porch some one was even now waving airily to Colonel Tunk. He straightened his black string tie and lifted his damp Panama.

"Fair wimmen, seh, of which there is none fairer than Miss Joy. But at the drug sto' she insisted on me drinkin' a—a loolip. Mint, seh, and sugar and lemon, and a—a—"

"Hey?" said Sheriff Steve interestedly.

"That's all. Me, seh, after travelin' six hundred miles to Kentucky to drink rain water out of a rain bar'l, and look upon a race hoss turned out to grass."

"And old Preacher Bell, so plumb pore he got his church condemned by the county because the roof's slippin' off, heir to that Vagabond hoss to cherish and maintain till death do 'em part. Too pore to keep that hoss, colonel, and forbid by the will of his old friend, Major Martin, to sell him. One little race wouldn't do no harm."

"Holy Writ, seh, is filled with allusions to hosses. And to keep my respect fo' the prophets I hold they must have been fast hosses. Could Elijah, seh, and his chariot made that ascent to heaven in anythin' mo' en 1.38?"

"If you ever start that way, colonel, you'll have to do it in one flat—and it 'll be neck and neck with Satan then."

"I expaict," murmured Colonel Tunk, "when I am called, to make it in fifty—and somethin' from this deluded sphere,

where I am forced to drink rain water out of a rain bar'l. Good day, seh!"

Putting on his rubbers against further contamination and raising his umbrella, Colonel Tunk went up Main Street, and he was exactly opposite the three horses under the persimmon tree when a youth came whistling cheerily out of the parsonage, jumped the fence with a grocery basket, on the short cut to Miss Paisley's kitchen, and stopped as if a ghost had arisen in his path.

Colonel T. Sambola Tunk saw the boy stare, put his grocery basket down, walk around the three animals, and do a most extraordinary thing. "Angel-Face Jimmy," the new choir boy of the First Baptist Church, leaped to Vagabond's side, threw an arm about his neck, and whispered incredulously.

"Old Sloppy Weather!" he then cried. "It's you—it's you!"

Colonel Tunk laid a hand on the fence and coughed discreetly as will a gentleman come unawares on a delicate situation.

"Seh? You—Mr. Driscoll—know that hoss?"

The young man whirled about, and then was relieved that it was Colonel Tunk, of Mississippi, and not one of the First Baptists.

"Know him? I—rode him—" Jimmy Driscoll checked himself.

"Rode him? You, seh—singin' in the Baptist choir—callin' on Miss Joy Bell every evenin', seh—you been a jock?"

"I," the young man muttered—"I cut it all out, colonel. I got overweight, like the boys do, and then—well, I just drifted into this village last summer and took typhoid at that dirty little hotel. These people were mighty good to me. The old preacher took me to his house. She"—he waved a hand back at the early lamp-glow in the preacher's window—"was good to me—a guy like me. It was just peaceful; I didn't want to get well. And then I thought I'd stay. Nobody knows, colonel, that I rode—except you, now."

The colonel withheld judgment, but his silence made the boy turn suddenly.

"Look here! You needn't blow me off! I ain't had a leg up for three years. Last time out at N'Awlyins, and I was done."

"N'Awlyins? Who'd you ride fo, seh?"

Jimmy, the angel-faced, seemed uneasy again. "Well, I won't stall you—you'd find out, anyhow. It was Jeremy & Luce—but I didn't stand for all their stuff. No, colonel, the big frame-ups didn't come on me!"

Colonel Tunk stiffened. Jeremy & Luce—the crookedest combination that ever followed the tracks, the outlaws who had corrupted the sport of kings and kunnels and ruined the game in a dozen States!

"I didn't pull 'em, much," confessed Jimmy wearily. "Honest, the graft got too strong for me. I quit—that's all. Me—that was good for twenty thousand a year—drivin' a damn grocery wagon now—and happy."

"Happy, seh? You—pussonel valet to that Stivers' grocery hoss—you, seh, that have faced the barrier at Churchill Downs?"

"Well, she did it." Again Jimmy pointed to the home glow in the parson's window. "Sixty a month, I'm gettin'—but honest money, colonel—money that don't bark at me nights like the old stuff, till I spent it."

"Your virtue, seh, consists of twenty pounds overweight, I think."

"No, I just cut it out. I even went to church, and the women here found I could sing. And she—don't know my old days, colonel."

There came a pleading note that forbid Colonel Tunk to stand in judgment. And as he stood watching the boy in the dusk Vagabond put out a dainty muzzle and Jimmy's fingers stole back in loving caress.

"Well, seh," mused Colonel Tunk. "You happen to strike a cho'd in my being—this hoss loving you, standing here mizzable in the rain!"

"Old Vagabond—some mudder, colonel, take it from me that rode him! What 'd Major Martin up and die and leave him to the preacher for?"

Colonel Tunk was on his way. At Parson Bell's door he hesitated. "If that boy 'd rode fo' anybody but Jeremy & Luce, I could fo'give him. But that gang 'd steal the paint off a house."

He had gone fair into the parsonage study before his thoughts strayed from Vagabond's sad finish. But there he found an unusual assemblage. Deacon Pelton and Trustee Stivers and Dr. Andrews; and shrunk down in his worn study chair, old Preacher Bell, saintly and silent, his white hair shining under the lamp.

Dr. Andrews seemed to be talking with embarrassed formality to the old man who for fifty years had recorded the weddings, christenings, and burials of West Ike-town Baptist Church. A shabby, lost little church back in the creek elms, an impoverished congregation that had dwindled to those of the few old families who remembered and loved Rev. Joseph Johnston Bell for the days of their youth.

"The board has decided," faltered Dr. Andrews, "that because the county has condemned the building as unsafe, and because of our dwindling attendance, that we should merge with the new Tenth Street congregation. We—we—dear Mr. Bell—must yield to modern—conditions. I know how hard—we all regret—"

Good Dr. Andrews stopped helplessly. Deacon Pelton coughed. The four old men looked at one another miserably. And then, framed in the kitchen door, Joy burst upon them wrathfully.

"Shut up our church? Well, I guess not! What 'd we-all do?"

"My dear—my dear—", began her father, and tried to smile.

"Provision is made for you, Joy. Dear Dr. Bell on the superannuated list, and—"

"But we're not superannuated, and the church won't tumble down!" On her brown hair, on her pink cheek, the rain-drops sparkled. It made Colonel Tunk think of the honeysuckle about Miss Paisley's rain bar'l.

"We—my dear Joy—" murmured Deacon Pelton, "see no alternative."

And suddenly, with a burst of tears, Joy Bell fled back to the kitchen. Colonel Tunk saw Jimmy Driscoll there ere the door slammed. He felt that here was an issue of fine feeling in which he, a stranger, had no share. With the dignified delicacy of a gentleman of Mississippi, Colonel Tunk withdrew.

He was trying to open his umbrella at the gate when some one whispered to him.

"Going my way, colonel? I don't guess I'll stick around to-night. We was going to make taffy, but—" Jimmy waved back to the little house. "I reckon you and me don't figure—the committee is rulin' the old boy off the track—and a pikin' little thousand-dollar bank-roll would save his durned church. Say, I used to lose it by necks and noses!"

"I know, seh. If the parson 'd sell his race hoss—"

"Sell nothin'. The dominie and old Major Martin must have been curious friends, but that hoss is a sacred trust in the Bell family."

"If he was my hoss, seh—I'd see. Bein' as he's off the tracks for years now, I reckon, seh, this old Vagabond 'd go to the post about twenty to one. The handicappers wouldn't give him a show. The bookies wouldn't think that old mudder, seh, filled up on soft grass and rain water fo' four years, would last to the quarter pole."

"No—unless it rained. Oh, Lordy—Colonel!" Jimmy stopped.

"Seh?"

"Old Zeb that used to train for Major Martin is workin' in the express office. Old Zeb, that knows the Martin hosses like they were his babies. Oh, golly, colonel—a long shot and a rainy afternoon at Lexington, and you layin' a big fat bet—for the First Baptist Church!"

"Seh? You astound me!"

"I'd sell my shoes for that old preacher! I'd go do time for him and his little old sore-back church! I'd—steal for him! I—I'd steal his own hoss for him!"

A lone street-lamp shone on the angel-faced one. An honest, fair and humorous face that now tugged at memories in Colonel Tunk's mind.

The grand stands, the beautiful women silken clad of a sunny afternoon, the commissioners bawling the odds among the throngs, the busy bookies down in the ring, the railbirds across under the whitewashed oaks waiting as the satin-skinned thoroughbreds walked from the paddock—all the lazy, eager, thriftless life of it under a

warming sky of the South lured the long-buried youth in the colonel's heart.

"Colonel," gasped Jimmy softly, "a ringer! Suppose you and me hid up that old Vagabond in the hills—and Zeb worked him to condition? Goddlemity—I could take out a license at Lexington for one last big chance!"

"Seh? I—Colonel Tunk—hoss steal-in?"

"You neve' know anything about it, You're just the wise guy."

And he vanished into the rainy dark.

Colonel T. Sambola Tunk, refreshed as was the dew-wet mint-bed which he was inspecting the next morning in Miss Paisley's garden, heard the usual cheery call from across the horse lot. Joy Bell had come out, but her innocent thoughts were upon lettuce, while Colonel Tunk rubbed a bit of mint across his nose reminiscently.

"Mawnin', Miss Joy. You feel tole'able?"

"Sure! But what do you think? Old Zeb, the expressman, brought back Patchie, but he couldn't find Vagabond!"

"Patchie? Vagabond? Oh, yes, ma'am! What happened?"

"They got in a fight and kicked the fence down. Don't you see the rails all scattered? Zeb found Patchie down the creek bottom."

"And the Martin hoss, Miss Joy—he—he—"

"Ain't found him yet. Zeb said he spend the day lookin'. He just loves that miserable race horse that never does nothin' but gaze down Main Street."

"Past Main Street," quoth Colonel Tunk cryptically, "lies Lexington. All fast hosses in West Kentucky, Miss Joy, point east when they get to broodin'. Mawnin', Miss Joy—mawnin'—I must go buy a paper right soon."

Down in the court-house square Colonel Tunk opened his paper, looked at the form chart, looked at the green hills, and sighed. He hungered for life again, high secrets, romance, adventure, and a highball.

"That young limb of Satan stole that hoss sure as fish in a bucket. And Sheriff Steve boasted yesterday that no hoss ever

got stole in Buckberry County since he was elected."

He was on his way home with the Lexington paper when a grocery wagon splashed by, then stopped. The First Baptist Church choir-boy was grinning down at him.

"Howdy, colonel!"

"Mawnin', seh. I trust you slept peaceful, seh?"

"Middlin'." Jimmy was a bit weary-eyed.

Colonel Tunk leaned nearer. "As a matter of professional int'rest, seh—how much are you overweight?"

"Grass fat—just like some race hosses." Jimmy's blue eyes were on the far hills. "About eight miles east of town—up past the Blue Top quarry, where nobody ever goes except blackberry time—there's an old road. The Yanks built it to get some guns somewhere. It's all grass, just grass, and Zeb's good at grass cuttin'. A mile and a furlong around Blue Top Mountain—just made for a long-legged mud hoss that likes rough goin'. Wonder if you ever held a watch on a hoss, eh?"

"Seh? I've held a stop-watch on my own colts—" The colonel stopped, looking straight into Jimmy's innocent eye. "Only time you'll have to train that hoss 'll be nights."

"Well, he's goin' to be a dark hoss, colonel! Gid-dap, you!"

He larruped Deacon Stivers's grocery nag and splashed on. Colonel Tunk went home to coffee and beaten biscuit. And he spent a curious morning.

Up in Miss Paisley's attic, above the room where Major Martin boarded until he died, Colonel Tunk opened an old hair trunk and rummaged about among his dead friend's effects. At last he took out the remainder of the Martin estate and laid it across his knees. A faded blue-and-gold jockey cap and coat, an old pennon that had waved above the quarters of the Martin racing string on many a track.

The colonel shook his head over the worn and stained colors.

"Ashes to ashes, an' dust to dust—but if ever the Baptist brethren find that boy's backslid to racin' they'll fire him clean out

o' grace into sin an' darkness. And Joy loves him, and he loves Vagabond."

A starry evening Colonel Tunk drove Miss Paisley's ewe-necked sorrel, hitched to a mountain buckboard, up the Tuly Creek Road. He remarked that he thought he'd look at the Gilfish tobacco out that way. But when he came to the Blue Top quarry he paused before a jungle.

He hitched his nag to a tree and floundered up the brushy steep. When he reached the open and rocky crest the half-moon showed cut and trampled grass. And on the stillness came a sound. It grew clearer, the muffled rapid beats of a horse's hoofs. Presently a lantern showed, and earnest voices were audible. Colonel Tunk remained until old Zeb came leading a blanketed, sweating animal down the rocky trail to the quarry.

When Jimmy Driscoll followed, Colonel Tunk coughed discreetly.

The boy whirled about on him. "Oh, colonel!"

"A hoss," murmured Colonel Tunk, "trained on that goin' will leg 1.44 in the rough."

"You scared me," muttered Jimmy. "Come on to quarters. Zeb's rubbin' down. We're soakin' the grass out of him. Zeb tried to clock him to-night with an old watch that got the main spring busted at Appomattox, and it said 1.59. If a hoss can run in this stuff he can run hardles an' beat 'em."

"Seh," said Colonel Tunk solemnly—"a present—from the Martin stable."

He laid before Angel-Faced Jimmy the worn, faded colors of lost glories.

The boy fingered the clothes, and raised his eyes.

"Colonel, you're all right. You got to be our money guy. I applied for a ridin' license yesterday. But Vagabond—I don't just know how to enter him for the handicap—what owner's name to give 'em."

"Dis hoss, colonel," put in old Zeb, "jes' gwine to run in de name o' the Lawd."

"Leave it to me," muttered Jimmy determinedly. "They know the Martin colors—major was the squarest horseman ever went broke at the game. Go to it, Zeb—

rub him down! Zeb sleeps with this hoss, he dreams of this hoss—right here under the rocks in the nicest little stall you ever saw! We had a time gettin' feed in, though."

Jimmy went down to the buckboard to ride with Colonel Tunk, leading the Stivers's grocery animal that he had secretly taken from the stable.

It was two o'clock when Jimmy limped down from Colonel Tunk's rig by the court-house square.

"Workin' two shifts," he commented, "kind of stiffens a fellow. Joy can't understand why I'm all beat out and don't linger evenin's any more with her."

"You joined the the church fo' her, I unde'stand?"

"I'd join a suicide club for her. But folks seem suspicious this week. Think I'm backslidin'. I can't have her know!"

"There was once a man in Holy Writ who worked seven years fo' a girl. Sacred history don't say what he was doin' on the side o' nights. Good night, seh!"

Colonel Tunk attended next Sunday's services and sat by Joy Bell's side. There was a sadness in the sweet air under the overarching elms, for there was not a soul who did not know that this was the last month for the little church. But the old preacher spoke the Word bravely, his smile as gentle as of yore. Colonel T. Sambola Tunk looked down to see a tear in Joy's gray eye. And there was a vacancy in the First Baptist choir.

Colonel Tunk fumbled the dog-eared hymn-book when Joy made him arise for the congregational singing. Joy, in fact, saw that Colonel Tunk observed religion; she came to Miss Paisley's house and found his clean tie, and brushed his black mohair coat, and sat him in a pew.

Out in the yard when the good folk were lingering, the colonel heard references to Jimmy. Grave old ladies shook their heads. Strange tales were gossiped. Farmers driving in from Tuly's Creek had told of an apparition in the dusk—of a great black charger with a boy clinging to his back, that clattered far into the hollows of the hills as mysteriously as he appeared. Old Zeb Handy had been seen sitting on a

rail fence taking the works lugubriously out of a brass watch that had been given him by Captain Eph Graham in 1865.

Joy walked home between Colonel Tunk and her father. It was noted that the angel-faced one was missing this Sabbath. Joy evaded the kindly curiosity of her mates.

There were other girls who had strayed back to the First Baptist Church since Jimmy came to town. A merry-eyed, rollicking lad out of the great world beyond the hills, with a mysterious past, was a great stimulus to chicken-pie suppers. Who was there so finely attentive to the old ladies, so quick to help in decorating the hall for ice-cream socials, so humorously sophisticated, so eager at every little thing as one to whom the simple church life was a vision for which his weary young eyes had longed? And to Joy Bell he had come as a wandering knight out of fierce battles against a sinful world triumphantly to love her. The most far-wandering sinner must be forgiven.

Deacon Stivers complained that his grocery clerk had borrowed his delivery horse without his consent, and maybe he'd gone courting some girl up Tuly's Creek Road.

When Colonel Tunk slipped away that week to join the conspirators at the secret rendezvous he found Jimmy Driscoll sitting on a stump watching a little cloud over Blue Top Mountain. Two weeks now of smiling skies and the county roads had waxed as dry as a Constitutional Amendment. Zeb was feeling solicitously of Vagabond's dainty feet after the workout.

"I remember when he was runnin' as a two-year-old," said Jimmy, "he always held up on a hard track. 'Fraid of his feet."

"I see by the papers," observed Colonel Tunk, "that this Martin hoss is entered for the openin' handicap. What the wise birds sayin', seh, about Vagabond?"

"They were kind o' surprised at his come-back. They were kind o' surprised when I took out a license. But the stewards looked up my record and give me the ticket. Kind o' suspicious, though."

"Jeremy & Luce been ruled off now two years, seh, or you'd neve' got yo' license.

It was the Martin hoss, and the major's memory, that got you by. A squarer hoss-man neve' owned a string."

"The bookies don't give Vagabond a chance. The handicappers think he's a joke—they let him in lightweights, and at that he'll be twenty to one—against that Sam Townley hoss and Zulieka."

"If it rains," retorted Colonel Tunk, "I lay a thousand—fo' the First Baptist Church, seh."

"I'm sellin' my stickpin. I'll sell my shoes on Vagabond—if the track's heavy."

From Wednesday evening prayer-meeting Jimmy wandered home with Joy Bell as in other days. But they both felt a constraint. She did not ask him in, but sat on the front porch staring at the moon.

"Jimmy, you know folks are sayin' things about you?"

"Who? Me?"

"Mrs. Hodge saw you in Lexington talkin' to some men that looked like race-horse gamblers. You never told me you went to town."

"I kind o' got a tooth that needed fillin'. Laid me up Sunday, too."

"Jimmy! You were out at Tuly's Creek! Somebody told me!"

"Just couldn't sit still for that tooth. What do you care if some old lady saw me in Lexington?"

"You don't love me, Jimmy," whispered Joy.

"Honest, I do! Sure, I do! I want to save up and get a million dollars and buy a farm and marry you, Joy! And we can put a new roof on the darn old church and new sides and floor and everything. Shucks, we'll have a whale of a time!"

"You don't love me," she sobbed. "You're goin' back. Somebody said all the racin' men knew you. Once you rode race horses!"

"Who? Me?" Jimmy's innocent eyes were wide and hurt.

"It was just that miserable Vagabond standing here that put temptation in your path. I'm glad he went off and got lost or stolen, and I hope he never comes back! He just got you to thinking about sin and you're backslidin' from grace."

"Who? Me? Gosh, that old pelter couldn't tempt a baby! Why, Joy—"

He stopped; his eyes fell on a pink paper which she was unfolding.

"There! I found this in the yard. Maybe Colonel Tunk dropped it. Read that, now!"

And Jimmy dumbly read a fateful item. Jockey Driscoll, one of the old-timers, had taken out a license and was going to ride again.

Old-timer! That hurt, too. Three years off the turf, and an old-timer—at twenty-one! The boy slowly put the paper down. He tried to say something, but the girl leaped up with swift anger.

"You lied to me! You're a regular adventurer to come here and make a girl love you! Oh, I—I'm ashamed to look at folks! I never want to see you again—and I won't!"

"Joy, I—let me explain. Suppose I—just drifted in here, and it was peaceful. Just peaceful, after everything—and then you came, and was kind to me. And the old man—just like a dad to me—"

But she was gone. The door closed. He stared into the flickers of moonlight among the honeysuckles and turned away. Down in his cheap little room in the boarding-house he packed up the battered suit-case and at midnight came out to look down the quiet peace of the village street. Hurt, dumbly hurt, and hungry for something he didn't know what. An hour later he had gone to the silent hills.

But their beauty stung him now. By the lantern's light he stared at the old worn and faded suit of blue-and-gold of the Martin stables. He hungered for a friend; the old sight and smell and sound of the tracks, the careless talk, the idlers about the hotel lobbies, the gossip and the banter of his cronies, the lads he used to know.

"I guess I lose either way," he muttered. "I—can't get down to weight again. I—I'd be a joke—an old-timer. And she won't ever understand!"

He went to the cavern under the quarry face. Old Vagabond turned his clean muzzle to rub Jimmy's cheek.

"Old-timer," whispered Jimmy, "you got to do it! Then I'll fade away. I can

go and write sheet for some bookie in N'Awlyins next winter, mebbe—and just idle round the poker hangouts like I used to do."

And Iketown knew him no more. The Baptist folk talked a little and forgot. Sheriff Steve still cal'lated that some moonshiner had picked up the dominie's horse wandering in the creek bottoms and run him down into Tennessee. Old Dr. Bell seemed rather relieved now at being rid of this one scandal in his saintly life. And Joy was openly glad that the sinful Martin legacy had been removed from the First Baptist community. That was all Joy was glad about these days. Colonel Tunk sorrowfully watched her mute seeking for forgetfulness.

When he saw Jimmy in the hills he found the same dumb hurt in his eyes. If Colonel Tunk could only explain—but he knew that Vagabond, king of the mudders, would never face the wire at Lexington if Joy Bell knew.

"Lovin' a girl, and lovin' a hoss," mused Colonel Tunk, "he cain't ride a mile and an eighth with that on his mind."

The next day in the village his eyes would wander to that far blue line of hills to the east. "Seh," he muttered, "I salute you!"

Three weeks of drought in the blue-grass country. The colonel went out secretly for one last conference.

"This weather, seh, ain't ordered fo' this hoss."

"Too late to hedge. I got two months' pay I was savin', sent down already to a commissioner. All my stuff soaked, too, colonel."

"I have put up, seh, a little matter of some cotton warehouse receipts with the bank this week. How is this hoss conditionin', Zeb?"

"Lawdy, the shape he's in! Des lak this fool rain to rain and rain last month, and now dry out lak a bone! Dat Sam Townley hoss, he laks a fast track, colonel."

"Colonel," muttered Jimmy, "what do they say of me in Iketown?"

"I swore, seh—on my honor as a gentleman—that you had gone to Louisville to attend a monthly missionary conf'rence."

Jimmy's heavy heart would not prompt a smile. He was gathering up his few belongings.

"We're goin' to sneak the old hoss down after midnight. Get him to the track stables, and I guess we're safe. None of the First Baptists will be there openin' day."

"You cain't tell, seh," answered Colonel Tunk.

He lingered until he saw them go. With Jimmy leading down the rough trail, the black satin of Vagabond's flank gleamed in the moonlight. With eager hands and the dumb love of the three he had been groomed and watched and worked and petted. The big seven-year-old was all afire with life and motion.

Colonel T. Sambola Tunk sat on Miss Paisley's stoop the next afternoon reading the daily racing form. He looked at the blue, smiling sky and sighed. The Townley colt was odds-on favorite. Vagabond a twenty-five-to-one shot. The dope was wrong, but the pfice was too juicy to resist. Colonel Tunk had plunged again. A wire had gone to Mississippi City, and the Tunk cotton warehouse receipts were at his bankers no more.

"If that hoss don't figger in place-money," ruminated Colonel Tunk, "I reckon I better look up the Confederate Veterans' Home."

He was looking lugubriously at the weather forecast when some one came behind and placed cool fingers over his eyes. It was like old glad playtimes, and he smiled.

"Miss Joy, ma'am?"

"How you feelin', colonel?"

"Just tole'bly. Must go down to Lexington this week on account of a pesterin' tooth—"

"Tooth?" Joy came to gaze at him. "That's funny! You got toothache, too? And Lexington? We got a good dentist right here!"

"Yes, but—" Colonel Tunk floundered a bit, then he sat up dismayed. Out of his pocket had fallen the racing-form sheet. He swallowed dryly, tried to remove it from her curious eyes.

Joy gasped: "You—betting!" Then she cried out: "Vagabond! Vaga—black gel-

ding, seven years old. *Imperator*, by Lady Lucky. Owner, Miss Joy Bell, Iketown, Kentucky."

She dropped the sheet speechlessly. "'Jockey, J. Driscoll; colors, blue cap, gold facing.'"

There was a vast silence.

Colonel Tunk nervously felt of his Adam's apple.

"My horse—racin'! To-morrow!"

"My dear—"

"He stole my horse—and racin' him! I'm goin' there and stop it!"

"I—my tooth—Miss Joy, dear." Colonel Tunk arose. "I hear that bell fo' prayer-meetin', Miss Joy. We betteh go an' pray fo' mizzable sinners that love race hosses."

"Colonel Tunk—I never thought it of you! Got a toothache, too!" She turned, as she was speeding homeward. "I'm going to stop 'em!"

Colonel Tunk went alone to prayer-meeting. The good folk were slowly gathering. In a back seat in shadows sat the colonel, looking at the old brass lamp shedding a halo down on the saintly hair of Rev. Dr. Bell. The old man had concluded a last exhortation to his flock. There was a snuffle from a woman here and there. The little church was passing as dies one loved, after long weariness, to rest.

"There is to be no repining," said the worn old shepherd. "Next Sunday you will all be welcomed at the big new church on Tenth Street. The Lord's will be done."

Then, after the silence, he went on gently with his prayer.

He had concluded when Colonel Tunk felt a rustle by his side. The preacher's daughter had entered and sat unnoticed him. Joy Bell was staring ahead at the little group of worshipers beyond the empty seats.

"I've a notion to rise up and tell 'em," she breathed. "Stole my horse!"

With a sigh the colonel slipped his hand over hers.

She started, turning to see him.

"I'm prayin'" she said, "that he breaks a leg!"

"Who? The boy?"

"No! The horse."

"I'm prayin'," muttered Colonel Tunk, "that he breaks a leg or betteh!"

He heard her weary sigh. And then, as the old man's voice droned on, out above the leafy stillness of the town came a faint thunder.

"I hope," whispered Joy suddenly, "it rains!"

"Miss Joy," muttered Colonel Tunk eagerly, "let us pray fo' rain! A hard, soakin' rain to make slippery the paths of the unrighteous! Upon that sinful and modern Sodom, thirteen miles and a half east of here by the county pike, let the floodgates open and—"

"Why, colonel!" gasped Joy Bell.

"Amen," said the colonel.

"Why, colonel, you got religion?"

"Doin' my durndest!"

"Oh, let it rain, and keep Jimmy pure!"

Colonel Tunk's lips moved again solemnly. Joy's little fingers closed over his. "Listen to that thundeh," whispered Colonel Tunk reverently.

"Oh, I hope it drowns 'em out! Colonel, I'm goin' to lead you to the mourners' bench next revival!"

"Lead me, Miss Joy. But, I trust, not mournin'. A good, hard, soakin' rain that 'll lift up our hearts in hallelujahs."

"Hear that thunder?"

Colonel T. Sambola Tunk had stolen out. In the village street he looked at a silver-tipped cloud riding past the moon.

"I lift up mine eyes," murmured he, "and behold every dolleh I possess staked on a hoss that neve' could run on a fast track. Oh, Lord, let Zeb and that boy get all the money placed at twenty befo' them wise birds down in Lexington hear that thundeh!"

He could not sleep for hours, but at last it came; and then Colonel Tunk awakened to a lilt of drowsy song about him.

Glup—glup—glup—a louder note came.

Colonel Tunk sat up in a sweet damp peace from his window.

"The rain bar'l," he whispered, "full and runnin' oveh. The old-time religion's good enough fo' me."

Morning came, and he looked out on a green, wet world. Patchie stood under the dripping persimmon tree. A farmer's fliv-

ver splashed down Main Street. Colonel Tunk walked out in a dewy heaven.

"If this here deluge didn't strike Lexington then I'm a backslidin' sinneh!"

He came to his coffee in a great peace that puzzled Miss Paisley. She inquired about his tooth.

Colonel Tunk said he had had a miserable night.

"Land's sake! I never saw you look so well!"

"Tooth, like a canker of sorrow, ma'am, eatin' at human hopes. I'm goin' to Lexington and have it pulled."

An hour later Miss Paisley gasped when she looked out.

"Well, if the colonel isn't drivin' Joy Bell in the preacher's old buggy, and all diked out like a weddin'! Of all the doin's!"

For old Mr. Bell stood in the sunshine waving them adieu. Joy waved back, then settled trustfully by Colonel Tunk's side.

"I never would go with you, if you hadn't got religion so hard—suddenly. But you'll help me confront 'em and stop my horse runnin'."

"If that Vagabond eve' gets his head down at the three-quarters, and the track's a little heavy, Miss Joy, he'll have the fo' hosses of the Apocalypse just spoken of the next mawnin' as also rans."

"What you mean, colonel?"

"A hoss might lead me to fuller grace. A hoss that 'll go so fast that he'll look like a vanishin' point in space, leadin' the First Baptist Church to glory."

"He'll vanish all right. I'll tell the sheriff, but it 'd all get in the papers, and maybe Jimmy get arrested. And, colonel, whatever's got into you? Is your soul just cleaned and ready so soon?"

"It may be," returned Colonel Tunk. "And so's my bank account."

They ambled along through beatific puddles to the colonel's eye.

Joy was silent for a long time; then she looked up at him.

"Colonel, what 'll I say when we get there?"

"If I remembah that hoss correctly, you'll say, 'Hold up, boy—hold him up till the stretch!' Gid-dap, Patchie!"

They were jogging down a hollow of the hills when Patchie swerved at a rabbit in the grass. The buggy slued into the ruts.

"Gid-dap!" counseled Colonel Tunk.

"A washout!" said Joy. "We're in to the hubs on this side!"

Patchie made one vain heave as the colonel plied the whip.

Then he looked at his watch. "Stuck," he muttered, and something else, under his breath. "Miss Joy, I must carry you to the roadside. Then I'll try hard to find some one."

"But we'll miss the races!"

"Miss Joy—you sound sinful!"

"Look at your new linen pants. Mud—mud everywhere!"

"What we prayed fo', Miss Joy. But you wait."

He left her sitting in the rig and set off determinedly. Over the hill was a deserted farmhouse. He hastened his search. A mile distant he found a crossroads store and before it a spattered car.

Colonel Tunk, in perturbation, looked at his watch and hastened in.

"Seh, a lady in the mud!"

"Gosh! Where?" said the storekeeper.

"A conveyance, seh, to Lexington! By two o'clock, seh!"

"Hi, Doc!" yelled the merchant. "A feller stuck in the mud, and he's tryin' to make the races!"

Colonel Tunk spied Doc Huccome going out to his flivver, and hastened after.

"Seh, a lady—I am in Kentucky, am I not, seh—and a lady—"

"Hop in, colonel," yelled Doc. "Do my best, but this old bus—"

"Ove' the second hill—on the creek road, seh!"

He hung to the rear seat while Doc dodged and twisted about the worst holes. Joy rose up staring when the little car splashed to the buggy's side.

"Colonel, are we going to leave Patchie in all this mess?"

"Sutin'y. I know a hoss that loves mud and can use it. Now, Doc, seh—two fifteen at the gate, seh! Twenty dollehs to get us there!"

"You-all must have money on the first

race," volunteered Doc. "That Townley hoss ain't bad in the mud. He's good at the weight, too."

"I know a hoss that's dreamed mud for seven years. Hurry, seh."

The car was pounding crazily when it struck the asphalt road leading to Lexington town.

Colonel Tunk was gasping in Doc's ear.

"The speed limit, seh—I'll pay yo' fine, now, break it!"

"I can't break nothin' with this car but tires," panted Doc. "Ow! What 'd I tell you?"

For a whistling howl had come from beneath. The car swerved to the curb, bump—bump—and stopped. And a mile down the street they saw the main gate of the track bannered like a bedizened home of Satan.

Joy gazed curiously, and then at Doc down behind his car.

"There's a street-car!" yelled Doc, straightening up. "And the hosses must be at the post!"

"Miss Joy," said Colonel Tunk. "Come. I fear they've started!"

"It's too late? Then I won't stir a foot! It's awful—my name in the papers, and everything!"

"Miss Joy—please—the street-car!"

She stood up very determinedly. "You go bring my horse back! Tell 'em I denounce 'em! Tell 'em I'm a church-member in good standin'—"

"Good-by, Joy!" gasped Colonel Tunk, and for the first time in his life he abandoned a lady in distress.

She saw his linen coat-tails sail out from the rear platform.

"Say," commented Doc, "did you ever seen an ol' party run so fast?"

But he looked up at a face that was black as last night's storm with disdain. She wouldn't speak to him. She didn't see him.

Doc retreated in discomfiture to the drug store on the corner and drank a raspberry torture. He came out later, wiping his chin. He wanted to take his flivver to a garage, but he hadn't the courage to say so.

Suddenly, after ten minutes of stern si-

lence, came a bull-throated roar from down Lexington Road. Incredulity, wrath, ecstasy were in that tumult.

"I hope he busted a leg," murmured the passenger tragically.

"Who? The colonel?"

"Oh, you keep still! Let me alone! I got my plans! I'll never speak to anybody again!"

Doc disappeared in desperation. Through the drug store window he peered fearsomely at her, and drank a Lovers' Peril feverishly.

"Wish to thunder she'd go home, or somewheres," he murmured, and drank a mint loolip. He watched his helpless car for fifteen minutes. The small pink-gowned figure never moved.

"By golly," ventured Doc, "hear the yellin'! And say—who's that?"

For down the street was speeding a great green demon of a car. It came roaring up to Doc's tin wagon like a devouring monster.

And standing up now in the rear seat was Colonel T. Sambola Tunk. He took off his hat to the unmoving pink figure in the flivver. He seemed about to make a speech reverently, but no words came.

And before him arose another one. A slight youth who wore a faded silken coat and cap. Jimmy wiped the stinging dirt from his eyes. Mud he was from head to foot; and he tried to smile out of a worn, grim-lined face. Then they were all very still.

"You did it," said Joy distantly. "Where's my horse?"

Jimmy looked at Colonel Tunk. The colonel was still mute.

"Where's my horse?"

"I—couldn't stop him, Joy Bell. He got his head down and ran three furlongs past the tape. I couldn't do a thing with him, and then we took one awful spill, and Vagabond just slid over in the mud—dead!"

"Dead?"

"I got up and ran to him when I got my senses. Ol' Vagabond just raised his head and gimme a once-over. Veterinarian said he had a hemorrhage—it was too much for an old pelter just off the grass."

"Seh," whispered Colonel Tunk to Doc Huccome, "I saw the finish. Conduct me, seh, to a—a loolip."

The girl sat staring mutely at them. Jimmy took off his silken blue-and-gold cap and looked down at it.

"Colonel," he muttered, "how much did we get down altogether?"

"I think, seh, there were two bets at five hundred, at yesterday's price—twenty to one. The Philistines smelled the weath-eh this mawnin', and shaved the price to sixteen. Some three hundred went on at that, and Zeb and me pooled our last fifty at twelve. I collected six thousand of it as we passed out. My tickets, seh, call fo' a matteh of twenty-five thousand five hundred dollahs, I think."

"He won?" cried Joy Bell, with hot resentment flaming to her eyes.

"He'd been goin' round that track yet if he hadn't died."

Colonel Tunk was transferring fistfuls of yellowbacks from one pocket to another.

"Sam Townley hung on our neck to the stretch," said Jimmy tiredly. "Had me scared. Then I remembered what Colonel Tunk wired me this mornin' about you, Joy, and—"

"About me?"

"He said you prayed for rain—and it rained. Then I thought you must love me, after all. And at the finish, I just stuck my face down in Vagabond's mane and prayed, too."

"But rain?" She turned to Colonel Tunk, who was beckoning Doc. "I won't touch a penny of that money!"

"You don't need to, Joy," said Colonel Tunk. "I'll be treasurer."

"It's for the church, Joy," blurted out Jimmy. "Honest—for your little old pikin' church. Didn't you know? Then what'n'll did you want it to rain for?"

Joy Bell sat back, watching him bewilderedly.

"Doc Huccome," gestured Colonel Tunk—"this way—a loolip, seh!"

"Ain't it a sin?" sighed Doc, looking at the colonel's bulging pocket. "I'm goin' to get religion and bet 'em up next week!"

Jimmy saw them disappear into the drug store. Then he ran to Joy Bell's side. She was weeping silently.

"Take me home! Get me out of this somewhere!"

"This big car 'll get you home in half an hour—mud 'n' all. Aw, Joy, honey—don't cry! You ought to seen ol' Vagabond this mornin'. He looked at me and just sighed. He knew it was the last time out for him and me—us old-timers! Dyin' in the mud he looked at me—happy!"

"Take me home!" she wailed. "Oh, Jimmy! What 'd you do it for?"

"For you. And your dad—and the little old church. And honest, we could pay the mortgage and repair the roof and fix the church up inside; and buy a little farm on what's left. Honest, Joy!"

"You better take me home, and quit talkin'."

"Sure! Watch our smoke!"

He started the big green car, and with a roar they fled out of the street just as Colonel T. Sambola Tunk came out of the drug store with three high glasses of green iced stuff.

Colonel Tunk stared up the road. He set the tray down and wiped his mustache.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" he said. "Three mint loolips—and me got to drink 'em all!"

There was a far, high hill on the road home, with one way leading back to Lexington and the other winding to a peaceful valley of green-and-yellow checkered fields and trees.

There Jimmy stopped the car and pointed.

"Aw, honey, look how homey it is off yonder! And wet—honest, Joy, the colonel telegraphed me that you was prayin' for rain last night."

"I did. He told me to!"

"God certainly was pullin' for that little church—with Vagabond and me. He certainly must have heard you, Joy."

"I just prayed for rain," whispered Joy Bell. "But—oh, Jimmy!"

"What is is, honey?"

"At the end I just said a little word—for you. So's you'd come back to me!"

The Cave That Swims on the Water

By **Paul L. Anderson**
Author of "The Lord of the Winged Death," "The Son of the Red God," etc.

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.

CHAPTER I.

FOR SACRIFICE.

"INTO your hands, then, shall she be delivered. Be you at the great rock by the river, two thousand paces downstream, to-morrow at sunset, and you shall see her come; by her yellow hair may you know her for the one you seek, though in truth no sign is needed, for alone will she come."

The speaker was Ta-nu-ko, chief priest of the Ta-an, and the one to whom he spoke was Gur, chieftain of the Little Hairy Men. Fifteen years before, led by T'san-va-men, Lord of the Winged Death, the Ta-an had come to the Land of the Dying Sun and had there made their homes, stretching for miles along a fair valley. During fifteen years had they warred with the Little Hairy Men, and now for the first had one of the Ta-an spoken in peace to one of the olden-time dwellers in that land.

A strange contrast the two made as they faced each other, concealed in a deep thicket that nestled high above the river, clinging to the face of the hill, for the chief priest was tall and straight, long of limb and smooth of face, with a noble head, albeit his countenance was somewhat marked with lines of selfishness and deceit, whereas Gur was short and squatty, with stooping shoulders and long arms, so that

his hands, hanging half-closed, reached nearly to his knees.

His face, with broad, low forehead, flattened nose and outward-pointing nostrils, with retreating chin and prominent cheekbones, marked him as one of a race lower than the Ta-an—a race not too far removed from the great apes, the resemblance being heightened by the thin growth of hair that covered his features.

And even in the garments and weapons of the two men was an equal difference, for Ta-nu-ko, clad in finely worked clothing of leopard's hide, bore well-chipped ax and dagger of flint beside which those of the Little Hairy Men were rude and ill-formed, and carried also a bow and quiver of arrows, Gur's chief weapon being a long and heavy club of oak, air-dried and seasoned in the sun. Also, Gur's sole garment was roughly shaped from the hide of a wild horse, worked and dressed with little skill.

Seeing the two in converse, none could have doubted that they were of different race; his only wonder would have been that the priest of the Ta-an should be speaking in friendship with an enemy.

"At sunset, then, shall A-ta, the Girl of the Mountain Caves, daughter to Ban-tu-v'rai of the Ta-an, come to the Great Rock. Do with her as you will, save only that she must not live." Both spoke in the same tongue—that of the Little Hairy Men.

"May I not keep her as my slave, to do my bidding?"

"As I speak, so shall you do, else A-ta comes not!" flamed the priest, leaning forward with a hard stare, from which Gur shrank back, muttering:

"It shall be done!"

"It is well!" said Ta-nu-ko. "Slay her as you will; young and strong is she, and should make good sport ere her spirit passes into the Long Dark."

"It shall be done," repeated Gur, licking his lips with an evil grin. "I will bind her and flay thongs for my garments from her white skin; soft and tender are the thongs made from the hide of a maiden!"

And he grinned again in anticipation, while Ta-nu-ko looked at him with a shudder of repulsion, disgusted at the thought of such deliberate cruelty.

"But tell me, tall man," went on Gur, "why wish you death for the maiden? Why may I not keep her as a slave, binding her with thongs, watching her, or perchance hewing off her foot, that she may not flee?"

"Because," returned the priest, "none can say that she might not escape you, finding her way back to the Ta-an. Menzonomen, Slayer of Wolves, is vowed to the priesthood of the tribe by his parents, and he loves and is loved by A-ta. Should they marry, should he take her to his cave, then is he lost to the priest clan, for by the law of the Ta-an a priest may have no woman."

"And can you not claim him, in fulfillment of the vow?"

Ta-nu-ko shrugged his shoulders, replying:

"Were she other than A-ta, yes. But T'san-va-men, Great Chieftain of the Ta-an, loves the maiden, to whom he is even as a father. In childhood did he save her from death in a swift stream, and indeed it is in my mind that she is even dearer to him than his own daughter, also that she loves him more than she loves her father. It is his joy to give her pleasure; should she desire Menzonomen she need but speak two words to the chieftain—and who may withstand the Lord of the Winged Death?"

"Straight are your words," answered Gur. "Your will shall be done; sweet will

it be to torture a maiden of the Ta-an, watching her writhings and hardening to her screams!"

Ta-nu-ko shuddered again, but controlled himself, nodded, and turned away, saying:

"At sunset, then." And plunging into the bushes, he disappeared down the slope.

Gur stood looking after him, marking his progress by the waving of the brush, and as the priest drew farther and farther toward the river Gur's evil smile spread wider and wider. At length he chuckled, and muttered to himself:

"Sweet indeed would it be to torture a maiden of the Ta-an, but sweeter still to keep her as a slave! Then should she labor for me, carrying water, preparing my food, dressing, with her greater skill, the hides of beasts which I slay—perchance even teaching me to bring to life the Red God, that he might warm me in cold and dry me in wet! Also, thus could I beat her each day! And who shall tell this traitor priest that Gur has not obeyed him? And could he harm me did he know? In truth, I will keep the maiden alive!"

And grunting and chuckling, shaking his head in glee at the prospect, Gur took his way down the hill in turn, swinging south, then west along the river-bank to a point opposite the great rock, where, after gorging himself on a lump of raw meat, afterward drinking deep from the river, he stretched out in the shadow of an overarching tree to sleep away the long hours between noon and sunset.

The Ta-an had made their homes along a winding stream, dwelling in the caves and grottoes of steep cliffs that overhung the water, these homes stretching for some six or eight hundred paces along the twists and turns of the river-bed, and to one of the largest and finest of the caves the chief priest made his way, climbing to the entrance, some ten or fifteen feet above the ground, by means of a rude ladder—the stout trunk of a tree, with footholds chopped deep into the wood on each side.

Reaching his home he seated himself on the rocky floor at the cavern's mouth, squatting where he could overlook the broad river and the path which led along the bank. Here he sat for an hour or

more, meditating upon the fate of A-ta, for the priest was not by nature cruel.

But he could see naught else that he might have done; jealous of the power of the priesthood, believing firmly that in the priest clan was bound up the welfare of the tribe, it behooved him to secure for that clan the finest and best of the young men.

And such a one was Menzono-men; tall and strong and handsome, well formed, young, filled with high ideals, he would be a ministrant most acceptable to O-Ma-Ken, Great Father of the Ta-an. And the priests of the tribe might not marry! In very truth, A-ta was a stumbling-block in the way of the priesthood!

But was there not some other way? Even yet it was not too late; it were easy to let Gur go bailed of his victim! And for the hundredth time Ta-nu-ko turned over in his mind plan after plan.

To slay the maiden himself, in secret; to betray her into some pitfall; anything to bring her a more merciful death. But no; the trackers of the Ta-an were skilled and crafty; Sar-no-m'rai, The Eyes That Walk in Darkness, friend and boyhood companion of the great chieftain—keener was he than a hunting wolf; no man might hope to elude his wondrous vision, to move without leaving traces that he could see and read.

No, this was the only way; for the hundredth time Ta-nu-ko reached this decision, now final, and, rising, he made his way down the ladder and turned his steps eastward along the shore of the river.

Five hundred paces had he gone when he was aware of a movement, a rustling of the bushes ahead, and he stopped in his tracks, unslinging his powerful bow from his shoulders and fitting an arrow to the string—none might tell when some beast of prey would attack! But he lowered the bow and replaced the arrow as a girl of nineteen rounded a turn of the path and came toward him, smiling, and he smiled in response, feeling a twinge of pain in his bosom as he did so, for it was A-ta.

And once again the priest sensed a regret that so fair a one must die, for indeed A-ta was fair, fit bride for such as Menzono-men. Tall she was, so that her eyes

looked level into Ta-nu-ko's; long of limb, and slim yet round, the muscles playing under the smooth, sleek skin; brown of hair and of eye, as beseeemed a maiden of the People of the Mountain Caves, and so beautiful of feature that in the tribal songs her name was coupled with that of the half-fabled A-ai, the Dawn, bride of Snorr, the great chieftain of olden time.

As she stood in the patches of sunlight that filtered through the trees, clad in a scanty garment of leopard's hide that left bare her arms and right shoulder and breast, and reached but to the middle of her thighs, Ta-nu-ko wondered not that Ro-su, Carver of Statues, had cut from the tusk of a mammoth a figure which he named A-ta; not fairer was its surface than the velvet roundness of the living form!

A-ta drew near, smiling, for she was friend to every man and to every woman of the Ta-an, and the Chief Priest turned sick, closed his eyes, and swayed where he stood as a vision rose before him of that lovely form, bound and writhing in agony as the savage chieftain of the Little Hairy Men stripped thongs of skin from the tortured flesh.

Instantly A-ta was at his side, her arm about his waist, supporting him, as she said, anxiously:

"Ta-nu-ko! You are sick? Has illness overtaken you?"

He recovered himself with an effort, thinking silently:

"It is for the Ta-an!" Aloud he answered: "It is but a passing weakness; not since dawn of yesterday have I tasted food." Then, once more erect and firm:

"A-ta, we are well met; I sought a messenger, and you will serve. It is for the Ta-an!"

"Speak!" answered the girl. "In what way can I serve the Ta-an?"

"To-morrow is the Great Sacrifice of the Hunt; it is for that I fast. Go you to the great rock that overhangs the water, two thousand paces to the south from here, where the Smaller Water joins this our stream. The place is known to you?"

The girl nodded silently, and the priest went on.

"Take with you this sacred basket of

woven reeds, bathe your hands and arms even to the shoulders seven times in the water, bathing also the basket. As the sun sinks to rest in the Great Water, pluck from the rock three handfuls of the moss that grows there, returning swiftly to the Place of Sacrifice, where I will take the moss, needed for the sacrifice to-morrow. Let no sound pass your lips from now till it is in my hands, and see that the moss is touched by naught save only your fingers and the basket in which you bring it. And fail not to pray in silence to the Great Father that you may be worthy to render this service. Go in peace!"

The girl bowed, then hesitated as she turned away, raising her left hand and her eyebrows in inquiry.

"Speak!" said Ta-nu-ko.

"Think not that I seek to avoid serving," spoke A-ta, "but did not the son of Sen-va bring the sacred moss but yesterday?"

"It has been defiled. One of the children of the tribe, meaning no harm, laid a hand upon it as it was carried from the young man's hands to the altar. Go in peace, omitting not to pray to the Great Father."

The girl bowed, and kneeling before the chief priest, said: "Your blessing on my errand, Ta-nu-ko!"

Once more Ta-nu-ko shuddered, but laid his hands on the girl's head, moving his lips silently—words would not come!

Satisfied, A-ta rose and continued along the path, the priest watching her till she was hidden in the bushes, when he covered his face with his hands and bent his head.

"Great Father," he prayed, "accept the sacrifice of my honor! In thy service has a priest of the Ta-an spoken with two tongues and sent to her death the noblest maiden of the tribe. May the sacrifice find favor in thy sight!"

Rousing himself, he passed on to the cave of T'san-va-men, great chieftain of the Ta-an, where the two sat long, planning the Great Hunt, when the tribe would move, men and women and children, ten days' journey to the north and west, to make a camp where they would hunt, storing meat, dried in the smoke of the fires, to keep them through the Long Cold.

The plans made, Ta-nu-ko returned along the river to his own cave, where he wrapped himself in skins of wolf and leopard and lay down to sleep.

He slept ill, being troubled much by dreams, and on awaking, he caught sight of a man hurrying along the path by the water's edge.

Nearer and nearer drew the figure, and soon Ta-nu-ko recognized it for the burly form of L'vu, friend and right-hand man to the great chieftain. Coming near, L'vu looked upward, and, seeing the chief priest above, halted and raised his left hand. Ta-nu-ko nodded and beckoned, clenching his right fist and moving it back and forth across his body, knuckles upward, and L'vu climbed the ladder, bowing deeply before the priest.

"Ta-nu-ko, Chief Priest," he said, "T'san-va-men, Lord of the Winged Death, Great Chieftain of the Ta-an, sends me to pray you come to him swiftly."

Ta-nu-ko leaped to his feet. "Trouble is come upon the Ta-an?" he asked.

"Nay," answered L'vu, "upon the great chieftain. A-ta, whom he loves as a daughter, returned not to her home, and he fears misfortune may have come upon her. Savage beasts are abroad."

"I come!" And quickly the two climbed down the ladder, making their way in haste to the cave of T'san-va-men. Arrived there, the priest bowed before the chieftain, who motioned him to sit, L'vu, Sar-no-m'rai, and others standing respectfully.

"Ta-nu-ko," spoke the chieftain, "A-ta returned not to the cave of her father yesternight. She was seen to speak with you by the river, and by none has she been seen since. Can you perchance tell us aught of what has overtaken her?"

"Nay, naught is known to me, save only that by me was she sent to bring the sacred moss for the Great Sacrifice of the Hunt, going to the Great Rock to gather it."

"Did not the son of Sen-va bring moss?"

"By chance was it defiled."

T'san-va-men turned to Sar-no-m'rai.

"Sar-no-m'rai," he said, "most skilful of all the trackers of the Ta-an are you. Go swiftly to the Great Rock and bring news of what you read there."

The famous hunter bowed in silence, examined his weapons—ax and dagger of flint, bow and arrows—and, turning, left the cave, proceeding on a jog-trot down the river. In silence he went, and in silence he returned.

Straight to the chieftain's cave he came, bowing before T'san-va-men and starting to draw in the dust the three circles of ceremony without which none dared address the great chieftain of the Ta-an. But T'san-va-men waved his hand impatiently, saying:

"That another time! Speak quickly!"

"Oh, great chieftain," said Sar-no-m'rai, "to the Great Rock went A-ta. There knelt she by the stream, bathing hands and arms; her knees had pressed deeply into the grass by the river's edge. Rising, she went to the Great Rock and took from it some moss. While doing so, she was seized from behind by one of the Little Hairy Men, who crept close and sprang upon her; the tracks were clear. Bitterly she fought, but was overpowered and carried away. Also, I found where the Little Hairy Man had lain and slept. Also, I bring the basket of woven reeds given A-ta by Ta-nu-ko, thus proving his words."

And he laid down the basket at the chieftain's feet, drawing back and bowing as he took once more his place in the circle.

The chieftain's face grew red with anger and his brows drew together as he leaped to his feet, clenching his fists. But his eye fell on Ta-nu-ko, who sat with his face buried in his hands, muttering:

"And I sent her to death! It is I who am to blame!"

The great chieftain eyed the priest askance for a moment, for he had no strong love for the priesthood, but Ta-nu-ko's grief and self-reproach were evident, and his face softened. Stepping near, he laid his hand on the shoulder of the chief priest, saying gently:

"Nay, Ta-nu-ko, blame not yourself! One or another must bring the mess, and who so fit as A-ta, purest of the pure? And it is not known that she is dead; it may be that the Little Hairy Men but hold her captive. Blame not yourself, Ta-nu-ko! If she lives, rescue will find her—and if

not, the Little Hairy Men shall journey into the Long Dark!" He turned to L'vu.

"L'vu," he said, "take Kan-to, Sar-no-m'rai, and Sen-va, also others, as you may see fit. Go swiftly up the river and down, also up the Smaller Water; summon the warriors of the Ta-an, bidding them come armed and with food, prepared for war, for by the Great Father above I swear to rescue A-ta whole and unharmed from the hands of the Little Hairy Men, or to carry swift death and destruction to all their tribe, from the Snow-Crowned Mountains on the east to the Great Water on the west; from the Great Blue Water on the south to the farthest north that the foot of man has trod. Go swiftly; summon the tribesmen to war! Go!"

CHAPTER II.

AT THE ROCK OF COUNCIL.

THE following morning as the chieftain, with Nan-ai, his wife, arose, and the two stepped to the mouth of the cave, they stopped, smiling, for their son, a lad of fourteen, squatted in the sunlight polishing and testing his boyish weapons.

"Oh, great chieftain, my father," greeted the youth instantly, "take me, I pray, with you into battle! Beasts have I fought and slain, but never armed foes. Strong am I, and skilled in the use of weapons, even as you yourself have said; let me then go with you, I beg, that I may learn to meet the shock of battle, as be-comes a chieftain's son of the Ta-an!"

T'san-va-men looked with pride at the youth, then turned to his wife, saying:

"Your son is he also; shall his prayer be heard?"

Nan-ai clung to her husband's arm, mingled pride and fear showing on her face as she answered, doubtfully:

"Our only son is he, and I fear for him! Yet—yet—Tsu-ven must learn! Only—I beg—watch over him in battle, my husband!"

The chieftain's eyes glowed proudly, but he controlled himself, saying only:

"L'vu and Sar-no-m'rai shall keep near him. Better teachers could he not have;

craft and skill, skill and strength—he will return to you, bearing the weapons of his foes!” Then turning to his son he nodded, saying: “Your wish is granted; you shall go.”

The youth’s face glowed, and his eyes shone, but he said, quietly and soberly:

“I thank you, my father; and you also, my mother.” Then rising, he took his weapons and left the cave, turning into the forest, while the chieftain turned to his wife, speaking gently, laughing a little:

“Nay, put fear from your heart, Nan-ai; even such a one was I in my youth—yet I still live!”

“L’vu comes,” said Nan-ai, and T’san-va-men turned to greet his messenger, who drew near, hurrying along the river-bank. Reaching the cave, L’vu knelt before the chieftain, drew in the dust with his finger, and said:

“Great chieftain, the men of the eastern caves are at the Place of Council.”

“It is well,” replied T’san-va-men. “And Sar-no-m’rai approaches from the north!”

Even as he spoke Sar-no-m’rai came, reporting as had L’vu, and swift on his heels Kan-to from the west and Sen-va from the south.

“To the Rock of Council,” said T’san-va-men, and stepped within the cave, to gather his weapons when, striding along the path by the river, hurrying, appeared a young man of some twenty years of age, tall and handsome, slim of build, but wiry and muscular.

Approaching the cave, he knelt before the chieftain, drawing in the dust the interlocking circles of ceremony. By his un-mutilated hands, which bore all the fingers intact, the youth might have been an artist, but he carried only the lance and dagger of boyhood, and by the absence of ax and bow it might be recognized that he had not yet been inducted into any of the clans, either priestly, artist, or warrior.

“Speak, Menzono-men!” said the chieftain, and the young man began, doubtfully and hesitatingly:

“Oh, T’san-va-men, great chieftain of the Ta-an,” he said, “it is known to you that from childhood my parents have destined me to the priestly clan?” He looked up

questioningly, and the chieftain nodded, whereat the youth continued:

“I crave a boon—I—I—” and he stopped, seeking words.

“Speak! I can but refuse,” said T’san-va-men.

“I—I—O great chieftain, let me be one of the warriors rather than the priests!” said the Slayer of Wolves. “I—I love A-ta; to give her up—I could not endure to see her another’s! And—and—to slay a bound and helpless victim on the altar—I cannot do it! My heart sickens, my hand weakens at the thought! To slay in battle, in defense of my life and of the tribe, yes, but at the altar I cannot! Let me be of the warrior clan and go with you to seek A-ta!”

T’san-va-men turned on his companions a look which they understood, for though it was not seemly that the chieftain should oppose the priests, yet to his boyhood companions, men who had stood by him in outlawry and had been with him received again into the tribe, it was well known that the great chieftain had no love for the priest clan.

His enmity was perhaps natural; Ja-ko, then chief priest, had endeavored to have him slain, but though Ja-ko had long since gone into the Long Dark, yet still it pleased the chieftain could he draw the best of the young men to the warrior clan.

But he turned a stern face to the kneeling youth.

“Menzono-men,” said the chieftain, “this is a great thing you ask. It does not become a chieftain of the Ta-an to oppose the priests, taking from them one vowed to them from childhood! Nor has your training been that of a warrior; how, then, shall you handle weapons and endure the hardships of war?”

“Oh, great chieftain,” spoke the Slayer of Wolves eagerly, “long have I trained myself in the use of weapons, and to endure the long march and the cold camp! Ever in my mind has been the thought that perchance I might be a warrior. And for the rest—if a priest I must be—my lance will set me free!”

“Speak not thus!” said the chieftain sternly. “It is to serve the Great Father

that you are vowed to the priest clan! He will not receive with favor one who shuns his service! Your body to the beast and your soul to the Place of Evil should you thus avoid your duty! Only by favor of the priest clan, only with their consent, can you be a warrior. But go we now to the Rock of Council; do you follow, and this matter shall be laid before the tribe."

So saying, the chieftain and his men bent their steps to the north, fording the river and taking the shortest way across a neck of land, formed by a loop in the stream, Menzono-men following submissively, head bent.

This short-cut saved perhaps some three thousand paces in distance, but made necessary the fording of the river a second time, and this at a dangerous place, where the water, narrowing below a little island, and made swift by the shallow bottom which alone made possible the ford, foamed and boiled waist deep over a rough, rocky, and uneven bed.

More than one man, daring this passage, had been swept from his uncertain footing and whirled and tumbled down-stream until, battered and bruised by the sharp and jagged stones which thrust up from the rapids below, his lifeless body was spewed ashore from some eddy far down the river.

But the chieftain and his men, confident of their strength and skill—and not unwilling to test Menzono-men—strode along the narrow path toward the river.

Reaching the river-bank, the chieftain plunged unhesitating into the water, and after him L'vu.

Then followed Sen-va, and after him came Sar-no-m'rai, and last Kan-to, Menzono-men—who had never dared the ford—watching, awestruck, at the careless manner in which these men flung themselves to what seemed certain death.

At length the young man's turn was come, T'san-va-men, who had reached the farther bank, swinging about to see the manner of the young man's coming. But at that instant the chieftain's eye was caught by Kan-to, who slipped on the wet rock, staggered, caught at his balance, poised wavering, flung up his arms, fell, and was carried away by the rushing water,

his form now appearing, now lost to view as he was swept down the flood.

Among the Ta-an it was, if not a disgrace, at least unusual, for man or woman to be unable to swim. By force of long tradition, the mothers took their children, while yet infants, to a shallow pool in some near-by stream, there letting them sport and play in the smooth water, so that often indeed a child could swim before he was able to walk.

But it had so chanced that Kan-to when young, had had his right leg broken by a falling rock, and although he had, by long and arduous training, overcome this handicap, and was known as a warrior of especial strength and skill, he had not learned to swim as well as most of his tribe.

But even as the chieftain turned to run, a white form rose from the farther bank, curved downward, plunged, and Menzono-men, like a swooping bird, cleft the water in one magnificent dive, disappearing with scarce a splash, and rising to the surface at once, his arms and legs flashing in the long, sweeping overhand stroke that carries a swimmer with utmost speed.

T'san-va-men, running, eyed the water anxiously; five hundred paces below the rocks broke the surface in those rapids where no man might live. Could Menzono-men bring Kan-to to shore ere the flood carried them there?

Faster and faster the swimmer closed on the drowning man, flashing through the boiling, surging water even as the salmon darts. No spray flew from those gleaming arms; in smooth, even strokes they broke the water, and gently if swiftly they clove it again—only the arms showed above the surface; body and head buried, save only that at times the head was raised for breath or for a quick glance ahead.

Thus Menzono-men bore down on the older man—half-way to the rapids he overtook him—dove—came up behind—passed his right arm through the crook of Kan-to's elbows, drawing Kan-to's arms behind him—turned on his left side, bringing Kan-to's face above the water—and, swimming with legs and left arm alone, made his way slowly toward the shore, where the others waited his coming.

Still the river swept them down, and doubt was in the minds of T'san-va-men and his followers—could he make it? Nearer and nearer drew the rapids—but now Menzono-men was close at hand—into the water plunged T'san-va-men, grasping the hand of Sar-no-m'rai, he holding to Sen-va, the burly L'vu, as anchor, gripping tight an overhanging limb of a tree.

Out into the stream stretched the living chain, and as Menzono-men bore down on them the outthrust hand of the chieftain caught the wrist of the young man, and the two were hauled ashore, where they lay gasping, exhausted by the struggle. Kan-to recovered first—he had but rested while Menzono-men swam with him—and staggering to his feet he spoke:

"Ours must he be; not for such a one the bound and helpless victim on the altar!"

"In very truth!" answered the chieftain, and L'vu and Sen'va echoed his words: "In very truth!" while Sar-no-m'rai, ever silent unless speech were needed, nodded his head in agreement.

Presently Menzono-men, too, rose, and the six—though now more slowly—resumed their march to the Rock of Council, some four hundred paces from the ford, where were gathered the warriors and priests from the neighboring caves both up and down the river, and from the caves and shelters along both sides of the Smaller Water.

The Rock of Council, flat-topped like a table, and some ten paces in diameter, rose two-thirds the height of a man above the level of the plain, and grouped in a semi-circle about it—for the river flowed under one side—were four or five hundred armed men, strong, active, and eager of face, each dressed in a single scanty garment of hide, each bearing ax and dagger and lance, bow and quiver of arrows.

On the rock sat, or rather squatted, five men, Ta-nu-ko, and four lesser priests, for among the Ta-an the priest clan had equal voice with the warrior clan in all deliberations concerning the welfare of the tribe.

Toward this rock the great chieftain strode, followed by his four trusted lieu-

tenants, and Menzono-men, and the crowd opened before them, closing in again behind, each warrior raising his lance erect, full length, above his head, while a mighty shout rose to the sky:

"Comes T'san-va-men! Hail, Lord of the Winged Death, great chieftain of the Ta-an!"

Reaching the Rock of Council, T'san-va-men took two quick steps and, burdened as he was with weapons, leaped full and free to its surface, landing erect. Followed L'vu, Sar-no-m'rai, and Sen-va; last Kan-to, though for him, weakened from the river, the effort was great.

Menzono-men halted at the foot of the rock, kneeling as became one who had a gift to crave, but T'san-va-men, turning, beckoned him, using the clenched fist moved back and forth across the body, breast-high, and the Slayer of Wolves, rising, leaped also upon the rock, while a murmur of astonishment ran through the crowd—an unfledged youth, not yet admitted to either warrior or priest clan, standing on the Rock of Council! But swinging about on the edge of the rock, his men beside him and the priests behind, rising to their feet, the chieftain spoke:

"Warriors of the Ta-an, too bold grow the Little Hairy Men! To all of you is known A-ta—but yesternight was she, going to the Great Rock for the sacred moss, attacked and carried to death or captivity by one of their tribe. Shall this be? Shall one of the noblest of the Ta-an be slave to a savage people, a people who command not the Red God, but, losing him, go cold till they can beg a spark? Or shall she be victim to a people who torture captives, slaying them through long days, and even, it is told, devouring the bodies of those slain in battle or upon their vile altars? Shall not the warriors of the Ta-an move to the rescue, punishing this base people, driving them far from our homes, and—it may be—sending them into the Long Dark? How say you, men of the Ta-an? Speak!"

Then from the crowding warriors rose a great shout:

* Even at the present day there are savage tribes who are familiar with the use of fire, but cannot generate it, depending on keeping alive a spark, or, if this be lost, on fortuitous origins, such as lightning—AUTHOR'S NOTE.

"Lead us, O chieftain! Lead us against the Little Hairy Men, that we may destroy them! Lead us! Lead us!"

The chieftain turned to the priests.

"And you, Ta-nu-ko—how say you? For your word also must we have ere we go to battle!"

Now, Ta-nu-ko would gladly have opposed; hoping for the death of A-ta, and fearing the capture of Gur, willingly would he have negated the proposal to war—yet dared not! No reason could he give that would not betray him, and he bowed, saying:

"Lead, T'san-va-men! The Great Father will send victory!"

Then rose a greater shout than before, and weapons were tossed on high, but the chieftain raised his hand.

"Yet one thing, men of the Ta-an! Here stands before you Menzono-men, Slayer of Wolves, a youth vowed to the priesthood, who yet craves admittance to the warrior clan, that he may go with us to seek A-ta, beloved by him. Also, he craves not the service of the altar, slaying the bound victim, but rather the shock of battle. How say you, warriors and priests; shall his prayer be heard?"

This was a serious matter; diverting from a clan one vowed thereto; and the warriors stood thoughtful, a murmur rippling through the ranks. Aghast stood Ta-nu-ko; should this be granted, his crime had gone for naught! Useless his betrayal of A-ta, useless his lies, useless his sacrifice of honor! He leaped forward, throwing out his hands.

"Warriors and priests of the Ta-an!" he cried, "this may not be! From birth is Menzono-men vowed to the priesthood; not for us now to turn aside that vow! The wrath of the Great Father would lie heavy on us did we thus! This may not be! Further, untrained is the youth to war; no skill has he in the use of weapons; no warrior, he, but a priest, to serve at the altar!"

Again the chieftain spoke:

"Not an hour since did this youth save the life of Kan-to, who stands beside me now, plunging of his own free will into the Ford of Death to bring to shore Kan-to, swept down the flood! Is it for such a one

to serve at the altar or to fight shoulder to shoulder with other warriors in battle?"

Once more a murmur spread through the ranks, this time of astonishment, and all looked with respect on the youth who had dared, swimming, the Ford of Death. Then forward stepped Sar-no-m'rai, raising his hand, and the crowd was still, listening with attention, for Sar-no-m'rai was known as one who, usually silent, spoke, when he spoke at all, with the tongue of wisdom.

"Men of the Ta-an!" he said, "this youth has courage. Also, strength has he, his deed proving well my words. Yet the chief priest says he knows not the use of weapons as a warrior should, nor can he endure hardships as befits a warrior. Let us then put this to the proof.

"Let Menzono-men lie, fasting, for seven days and seven nights on the Rock of Council, unsheltered from the sun and from the storm. Let him then bring to the Rock of Council—still fasting—the skin of Menzono the wolf, the horn of the Beast that Wears a Horn on His Nose, and the Poisoned Slayer—this last living, and borne in the naked hand. So shall he prove his skill with weapons, his craft, his courage, and his endurance. Is the word good?"

"The word is good! The word is good!" shouted the warriors, and Sar-no-m'rai turned to the chief priest, asking directly:

"Is the word good?"

Ta-nu-ko, confident that the youth could not meet the test, and sure also that A-ta, for all her strength and spirit, would be dead long ere the test was ended and the warriors should move—in his heart pleased with the proposal, yet feigning reluctance, answered:

"The word is good!"

"Do you accept the test?" asked the chieftain of Menzono-men, and the youth bowed, replying:

"Gladly, great chieftain!"

"It is said!" spoke T'san-va-men, turning to the group. "Go you now to your homes; prepare for war, taking food, making ready your weapons, each man carrying five tens of arrows, for perchance is this a long war. On the twelfth day be here once more, to greet Menzono-men, and thereafter we march. Go, prepare! It is said!"

He waved his hand and leaped from the rock, and the crowd melted swiftly away, the warriors going to hunt beasts for food, that the flesh might be smoked over the fires, going to make new stores of arrows, to look over their weapons, and to make ready in all things.

There remained the chieftain and his followers, the priests under Ta-nu-ko, and Menzono-men. To the last the chieftain turned, saying: "You have heard! Water will be brought you daily. The Great Father aid you!"

And the ten strode off into the forest, T'san-va-men taking one path, Ta-nu-ko another, and the young man was left alone to his vigil on the Rock of Council.

CHAPTER III.

THE CAVE THAT SWIMS ON THE WATER.

AND now for a time we turn to A-ta, the Girl of the Mountain Caves. Trusting the words of Ta-nu-ko, fearing naught, and rejoicing to be entrusted with so holy a mission, she followed her instructions with care, going duly to the Great Rock, bathing herself and the basket, and repairing to the rock to gather the sacred moss for the sacrifice.

While kneeling before the rock, A-ta caught a slight sound, the rustling of a dry stick, perhaps, and turned swiftly, fearing some beast of prey, but even as she turned, as she had a glimpse of a squat, hairy form, there descended on her head a club, a million lights flashed and whirled before her eyes, and she sank back, dazed.

But deep within her breast a voice seemed to say: "Fight! Fight!" and with all her powers she struggled to rise. Her limbs seemed weighted down, and but slowly and with infinite effort could she stir, yet she stood upright and as Gur advanced, grinning, she closed, grappling him, biting, scratching, striking with fist and knee, so that the chieftain of the Little Hairy Men gave back, amazed.

Closely A-ta followed, for it was the tradition and training of the Ta-an—and A-ta was a warrior's child—ever to carry the fight forward, not standing on defense, but

ever attacking, and closing with Gur once more she sank her teeth deep in his upper arm, so that the blood gushed forth and the man howled with pain. But he wrenched free, leaped back, and as A-ta came forward again his club fell—once more the lights whirled and danced before her eyes—and all was black.

When she regained consciousness she was being carried over Gur's shoulder, belly down, her legs in front tight clasped in his muscular left arm, her face, behind, bumping against the small of his back as he proceeded at a shambling trot through the darkening forest. Her feet were tied together with a thong, her hands were tied behind her back, but as soon as A-ta was fully conscious she began once more to struggle.

Gur stopped, leaned his club against his body, reached around with his right hand, and caught the girl's long hair, which was flowing loose. He twisted it about his forearm, pulling it taut and drawing her head over to one side, picked up his club, and resumed his swinging trot, and A-ta, now helpless and tortured, again lost consciousness.

All during that long night Gur proceeded thus, never once stopping to rest, but keeping on, on, ever on. At times A-ta came out of her swoon and realized what was happening, at times all was black and she knew but vaguely the pain of the regular jerk, jerk, jerk on her imprisoned hair.

Once the slap of cold water on her face roused her to full consciousness as Gur forded a river, and A-ta wondered dully at the marvelous strength and endurance in the ungainly, almost grotesque body of the chieftain who could carry a grown woman thus tirelessly through the midnight dark of the forest, but as the water grew deeper she swooned once more, half strangled by the flood that swept over her face.

A-ta never knew how long Gur carried her (it was, in fact, for several days, with intervals for rest), nor had she any slightest notion of the route he followed. When next her senses came to her it was late afternoon—the sun was just setting—and she lay, still bound, on the floor of a rude cave, the home of her captor.

At first A-ta did not move; indeed, she could not, for every bone and muscle ached fiercely from the terrible ride, and her head throbbed agonizingly—she had been carried head downward for long hours. So she lay still, looking about, examining what came within range of her eyes, for the cave fronted the west, and the last rays of the sun struck brilliantly into it.

The roof of the cave was not ornamented with drawings and paintings of bison and mammoth, as were the caves of the Ta-an, nor had any slightest effort been made to shape the grotto into a better home; the floor was not swept, nor was the daily litter removed; gnawed bones, scraps of fur, weapons, tools, and other objects mingling in heaps about the place, so that A-ta felt a wave of disgust as she saw the filthy way her captor lived.

"Even the beasts thrust offal from their dens!" she thought, and her disgust grew as she watched Gur, squatting before a fire, cook and eat his evening meal, for he tore the meat like a tiger, grunting and growling and snarling over it, nor, to A-ta's amazement, did he allow it to cook through; instead, he roasted the outside over the flames, gnawed off that layer, cooked it a little more, gnawed off the next layer in turn, and so on, cooking and eating alternately.

A-ta gave an exclamation of disgust, and Gur rose, coming to stand by her side, grinning down at her and saying something which was unintelligible to the girl, for he spoke in the tongue of the Little Hairy Men.

Turning, he apparently called some one, and four women of the tribe entered, to stand watching the captive, jabbering excitedly, whereupon the girl, exhausted, overwrought, tortured, and in an agony of fear, swooned again.

Then for many days A-ta, a prisoner, labored for Gur, carrying wood and water, curing hides, preparing food, doing the work of the chieftain's household, beaten if she failed to do it, beaten if she did it, but ever borne up by the hope of escape. So A-ta labored for Gur, seeking ever her chance, watchful always, thinking ever of some way to get back to the Ta-an.

Gradually, day by day, she made her plans for escape, deciding finally that by

water, if at all, could she win back to the home caves of the Ta-an. Could she make the journey, beset as it was by nameless terrors?

So thinking, that very night A-ta made up her mind to the attempt, but it was an attempt foredoomed to failure. Gur following hard on her trail, and recapturing her, despite her desperate resistance. Then followed fresh indignities, until she resolved to plan more fully, to see if it were not possible to devise some means which would enable her to evade pursuit, and the thought came that she might follow the stream *in* rather than *beside* the water, for then she would leave no trail, no scent would lie, and the sweep of the river itself would carry her on her way.

But she could not hope to swim any such distance—would it be possible to float on a log? No, a log would roll under her; she could not sleep on it, nor could she carry food, for any least little wavelet would sweep it away.

Day after day she pondered over the matter, turning it over and over in her mind as she worked for Gur, and at last the solution came. She would travel on a log, beaching it at night—taking the risk of discovery—and would hollow out a place for her food—instantly there flashed across her mind the thought: "Why not hollow out a place for myself, too? Lying down, I could draw leaves and branches over myself, and the Little Hairy Men, passing, would think it but a stranded tree!"

The more she thought it over, the more this idea pleased her, and she set about to accomplish her purpose.

The first thing that occurred to her was that she must work at night, for during the day she was too cleverly watched, so night after night she slipped from the cave to work in the forest, it being, fortunately, full moon, so that there was light enough to see.

Each night, as Gur placed the bonds on her ankles and wrists, A-ta craftily set her muscles—a trick she had learned from Sarno-m'rai—so that when she relaxed the thongs might fall slack and her hands and feet, slim and flexible, be drawn through, nor did Gur, dull of brain and slow of wit, but, trusting the bonds, and sleeping sound-

ly, once notice the deception. But for all her care it was no simple matter to escape nightly from the cave, nor was it easy to force her tired limbs, worn and exhausted by the labor of the day, to struggle with the task she had set herself.

But night after night she persevered, first burning with a slow fire—the coals stolen from Gur's hearth—the wood from the surface of the great tree she had chosen.

It was a long task for a young girl, but at length it was finished; and then the thought occurred to her; how was she to propel her log?

Down-stream the current would carry it, but she must travel against the current after reaching the junction of the rivers.

Long she pondered this matter, and finally cut a pole, trusting that she might be able to push her craft along, striking the pole against the bed of the stream; then, ready to start, she placed in the hollowed-out space her provisions, stolen, little by little, from her captor; dried flesh of deer and wild horse, roots and berries, and a bundle of salt, wrapped in a fragment of skin. As she was doing this her eye fell on her adze, and she thought:

"A dull tool cuts not well; will not a sharpened log cut the water better than a dull?" And down she sat to debate this new question.

All that day this question was in her mind, and when night came she had decided to sharpen one end of the log to a cutting edge—speed might be needed on the journey! This held her back three days—the longest three since she had begun her toil!—but at length the task was finally done and all was ready for the start.

Provisions stowed, adze beside them, pole ready, she prepared to slide the craft to the water—and could not move it!

A-ta was no heroine of romance, she was a poor, tired girl, worn out by her frantic labors, tortured and tried by the cruelty of Gur and his wives, borne up by the hope of escape, the dream of seeing her home and friends once more—she dropped full length on the ground and wept as though her heart would break.

Long she lay there, sobbing, thinking of the bitter contrast between her present fate

and her happiness of a few short weeks before, when, of a sudden there flashed into her mind the humorous quirk of the chieftain's mouth and the gleam of his eyes as once he said, in time of famine:

"If the prey comes not to the hunter, then must the hunter go to the prey!"

Raising her head, A-ta stared intently into the forest, thinking hard; she rose, stepped to the waters' edge, looked long at the river, then:

"Perchance can I bring the river to the log!"

She looked up at the stars and saw that scarce three hours remained till dawn, then seized her adze and frantically began to scoop a canal, barely big enough to pass the log, from the river to the craft. Long and desperately she labored, until, when she was beginning to despair, she broke down the last barrier, in rushed the water—A-ta held her breath, watching—the log was afloat! About to step into the hollowed log, A-ta heard behind her a rustle, a gasp of astonishment, and whirled quickly, to see Boh, oldest and ugliest and most cruel of the wives of Gur.

Boh's mouth was open to yell, to call for help, but in that instant, before the sound came, A-ta's pole, driven by her strong young arms, the hatred engendered by weeks of torture urging, plunged, butt-first, into the woman's stomach.

Eyes goggling, mouth lolling, Boh doubled up and fell slowly forward; as she fell the pole swept up and down, striking full on the back of her neck, and the chief of Gur's wives pitched forward, dead. A-ta watched a moment, pole ready, but Boh did not stir, and the girl, stepping into her craft, sat down and pushed off from the bank, turning the bow down-stream.

Then followed days of comparative ease for A-ta. Once in her slow progress a band of the Little Hairy Men appeared on the southern bank, shouting and gesticulating, but after that no human being did she see, but many animals; Snorr-m'rai-no, the fear that walks the night; Do-m'rai, the hill that walks; Ven-su, the beaver; Va-m'rai, the swift runner, trooping daintily down to the water's edge, his does and fawns following; Kzen, the rat who lives in the water, and

once, chancing to look up, she saw, depending from a spreading branch, the green and glistening form and evil, beady, black eyes of the Poisoned Slayer.

At length the mouth of the great river, as large almost as that on which she was, came in sight, and A-ta, poling her craft ashore, beached it at dusk to sleep one full night and in the morning take up the long struggle against the current that must be hers before she could win once more to the homes of the Ta-an.

CHAPTER IV.

A WARRIOR'S METTLE.

MEANWHILE, Menzono-men fasted on the great Rock of Council, finding the task, indeed, more severe by far than he had expected it to prove. A fast of seven days and seven nights was naught to the young man, glorying in the strength of youth, nor—after the first day—did the wolf in his belly gnaw, but from the fierce sun Menzono-men sheltered himself as much as might be, following the shade while it lasted, and covering his bowed head with his hands; but for all he could do it seemed at times as though the blood seethed and bubbled within him, and more than once he felt, during the hottest hours, as though worms and maggots and grubs crawled and writhed within his skull.

And at night the coolness brought a chill from which he shivered.

Twice daily, at dawn and at sunset, water was brought by Ta-nu-ko and Kan-to, for neither priest nor warrior clan would trust the other to deal fairly, and the two made each trip in company.

So the weary days wore on, and on the fifth came the worst torment of all Menzono-men endured.

On the fifth day the wind had blown all morning, hot and searing, his scanty allowance of water was exhausted long since, and he huddled, bent over, clasping his head in his hands and moaning slightly from time to time.

Once more Menzono-men groaned, and, stripping his scanty garment of hide from his loins, he wrapped it tightly about his

head. Hot and suffering before, he was now half suffocated, yet he knew it was his only salvation, so he endured. Presently, little puffs of yet hotter wind came, bringing with them faint, sifting dust, which touched his skin almost caressingly, then faster and faster they came, till the dust, wind-borne, struck against him continuously, like rain, but no longer caressing; it burned and cut and stung, it dried yet further his already parched skin, it sifted through the covering about his head, it clogged his eyes, it filled his ears, it drove into his nostrils, it scorched his lips, till Menzono-men, tortured, could scarce restrain himself from leaping from the rock and running to the river, that, plunging in, he might find relief from his agony. One thought only held him back, and over and over he repeated to himself:

"A-ta! A-ta!" grinding his teeth and clenching his fists till the nails, cutting into the flesh, brought a new pain which in some measure diverted his mind from the old.

So for three long hours he held on, till the storm had blown itself out, and with the coming of the shade came Kan-to and Ta-nu-ko, bearing the precious water.

Menzono-men, knowing his haggard looks from the shocked expression of the warrior's face, yet contrived a twisted smile of greeting, winning thus a nod and smile of approval from Kan-to, who loved brave men.

"Endure yet two days," said Kan-to. "And it is permitted to say to you that the Ta-an march not till your test is done, the great chieftain, Lord of the Winged Death, having sworn that should you succeed it shall be yours to seek out and slay the one who has taken A-ta captive."

Menzono-men, glancing from Kan-to to Ta-nu-ko, surprised a curious look on the latter's face, but thought little of it, taking it merely for disappointment at the favor shown. Rinsing his mouth, he took a long swallow of the life-bringing water, and after a vain effort spoke in a harsh, rasping croak:

"Bear my thanks to the great chieftain, I pray, and tell him I will endure; the suffering is great, but so likewise, and greater, is the reward!"

Kan-to nodded approvingly, and said:

"Good! Your words shall go to him." Then, turning, the two left Menzono-men to the last stretch of his fasting.

The worst was now past; there came no more dust-storms, and cooler weather made more endurable the days, the chill of night being less hard to bear than the heat of the day. Still, Menzono-men suffered, and was rejoiced when, at sunrise of the eighth day, there came to the Rock of Council T'san-va-men and Ta-nu-ko, none others being with them.

"Descend, Slayer of Wolves!" said the great chieftain, and the priest nodded, whereat the youth, gathering his strength, leaped from the rock and knelt before them.

"Menzono-men," said the chieftain gravely and solemnly, "the first part of the test have you passed. It remains now to pass the second. From this day forth water is yours where you shall find it, but not food. Swear now, by your honor as one of the Ta-an, by your worship as a child of O-Ma-Ken, the Great Father, and by your hope that after this life you may be with the spirits of your fathers in the Place of Good, that no food shall pass your lips till you come once more to the Rock of Council, bearing the horn of the great beast, the hide of the wolf, and the Poisoned Slayer; for none goes with you into the forest."

"As you have said, so do I swear," answered Menzono-men, solemnly and reverently.

"It is well!" said T'san-va-men. "Take now these weapons, a gift from me to you. Bear them into the forest and use them well, that your prayer may be granted! Go!"

And T'san-va-men dropped over the youth's shoulders the thong of a quiver of arrows and the string of a bow, placed in his girdle a beautiful dagger of flint, with handle of oak, and in his hands ax and lance. He touched the young man lightly on the shoulder, repeated: "Go!" and, turning, disappeared into the forest, followed by Ta-nu-ko.

Menzono-men remained kneeling while he uttered a prayer for aid, then, taking his way to the river, luxuriated in a quiet pool, whence, when he had bathed, he set out in search of a trail along which he might place

a trap for the Beast that Wears a Horn on His Nose.

All that morning he tramped, till the sun was high overhead, when he rested for a time, and again took up the search, walking along the bank of the river and examining carefully and with attention the grass and brush which grew close down to the stream. Many game trails he passed, but none which bore the mark of the huge foot he sought, till about the middle of the afternoon he found the desired track. Casting a glance at the sun, the young man decided it was too late to set his trap; so, climbing a tree, he made a rude platform of branches watted across two great limbs, and lay down to watch the trail.

At length, grunting and rolling his little piggish eyes, the prey he sought, the Beast that Wears a Horn on His Nose, came to the river to drink and then went away. This done, Menzono-men climbed cautiously down from the tree and with all possible speed—for it was at best a long task—selected a heavy tree, from which with infinite labor, he made a deadfall.

Presently came the first of the beasts, a troop of wild sheep, but they passed in safety, unalarmed—Menzono-men had cleared away, as well as might be, all signs of his labor, and had strewed the ground with strong-scented leaves plucked near the river. Next came a dozen wild cattle, and at last the chosen prey of the hunter.

Slowly he walked down the trail, grunting and snorting, his huge, ungainly bulk looming large in the dusk of the forest. On and on he came, and Menzono-men's heart beat fast—never had he hunted such mighty game! On and on, and Menzono-men, lips parted, watching closely, gathered tight the end of the vine—nearer and nearer came the beast—Menzono-men's eyes glowed—his muscles drew slowly taut—one step more—a strong jerk—the upright pole snapped—the great log, gathering speed, swept crashing down, striking the prey just behind the shoulders—and Menzono-men, after watching a moment, climbed down his tree and, taking his ax, began to cut away the horn; the deadfall had broken the beast's spine and it had died instantly.

The following day saw Menzono-men re-

turning toward the homes of the Ta-an, for while searching for the Beast that Wears a Horn on His Nose he had marked down a wolf's den, a cave in a pile of tumbled rocks, and here he planned to take the hide of Menzono the Slayer.

Here the young man lay in wait, and late in the afternoon his vigil was rewarded, for there suddenly appeared, without warning, like a magic trick, the head of a great gray wolf, framed in the black mouth of the den.

For some moments the wolf looked about, seeking danger, seeking to know whether or not he could safely leave his home, and the young man silently rose to one knee, lifting his bow, an arrow fitted to the string.

Slowly, silently rose the Slayer of Wolves, drew back the arrow to his ear, and sped the shaft—the wolf dodged back, catching sound of the twang of string, and Menzono-men dashed the bow furiously to the ground, cursing—the arrow had flown wild! Again he cursed, and stood a moment in thought, then looked at the sun, now low down toward the horizon, reflected a moment more, and with a reckless air dropped his weapons on the ground, all but his dagger, fell on all fours, and crawled head first into the wolf's den!

The dagger Menzono-men carried was a large one, the flint blade alone being half the length of the young man's forearm, from elbow to finger-tip.

Menzono-men had no fear, could he but reach the wolf with this, and on he crawled, down a little slope, the smell of the dank earth, mixed with the strong animal reek, in his nostrils as he went.

The entrance to the den pitched slightly downward, and the passage was at first barely wide enough for him to travel, but presently it widened slightly, giving more elbow-room, and became higher, so that he could walk, crouching. His feet struck against a few bones as he progressed, but for the most part the hard-packed earth underneath was bare and clean.

And now there came to his nostrils another scent, that of blood, whereby he knew that some partly devoured prey of the wolf still lay in the den; lifting his head to sniff, his eyes caught the gleam of two greenish eyes ahead—the eyes of Menzono—his

hand tightened on the dagger—in that instant there sounded a ferocious snarl—the eyes moved—the wolf sprang—and Menzono-men struck!

Twice he struck, even as the sharp teeth gashed his left arm, outhrown, from elbow to wrist—again—again!—and all was still, save for his own hard breathing. Cautiously Menzono-men reached out and felt before him a warm, furry body; he was conscious of the hot blood gushing down his wounded arm; seizing the carcass, he backed from the den, dragging it after him, and, reaching the open air once more, flung himself down on the grass, panting, the great beast a huddled heap beside him.

Presently he rose, sought healing leaves, and bound them tightly about his arm, first bruising them between his hands that the soothing juices, entering the wounds, might allay the pain and prevent stiffening, then set to work to strip the hide from the wolf.

This was no slight task, weakened as he was by fasting, wearied by his labors at the deadfall, and further weakened by loss of blood; but he persisted, though the work was not finished till after nightfall, and Menzono-men saw scores of eyes gleaming about him, and heard rustlings in the brush.

At length, the hide taken, the young man thought of rest, and as he cast about for a safe place his eye lit with a sudden glint of humor; he would sleep in the wolf's den! No fear of the wolf's mate returning; this was the season of young, and there were none in the den, so this was a lone beast, unmated, and Menzono-men, pushing the rolled-up skin before him, crept into the den, curled up, faced the opening, and slept.

In the morning he woke, crawled from the den, finding the bones of the wolf picked bare of flesh by hyenas who had feasted during the night, and took up the third and most perilous part of his task, the search for the Poisoned Slayer. For this he struck inland, away from the river, for only seldom and by chance did the reptile come down to the water; he preferred the higher ground, where piled rocks offered many dens and lurking-places, and where, stretched out on their hot surface, he could sun himself through the long, unshaded days.

So Menzono-men turned his face away from the stream, climbing the slope of the gently rising ground to a place he knew, where were many tumbled rock masses, the chosen home of his third prey. All that morning he tramped, the forest gradually thinning out, till toward noon he came to the crest of a low hill and saw before him a little open space, rock-floored, where lay in twisted, intertwined piles the green and shining bodies of thousands of snakes.

Snakes big and little, snakes young and old, lay in the hot sun, their unwinking eyes staring like black jewels in their evil, flattened heads. Menzono-men, drawing near, was conscious of a strong, sickening odor that rose from the deadly reptile, and he hesitated—the snakes, at sight of a man, lifting their heads and weaving them back and forth, darting their forked tongues in and out, while from the mass rose a low, prolonged hissing sound.

Menzono-men was no coward—none save a man, of proved courage could crawl into a wolf's den to slay the beast!—but he was smitten with sick horror at the dreadful sight before him; instinctive fear, racial, from his ancestors, came upon him, and he retreated a few steps, shuddering; he leaned against a tree, shaking from head to foot, his empty stomach retching agonizingly as he strove vainly to vomit.

For some time he stood thus, then, calling up all his forces, he cut from a tree a straight branch some six feet in length, and with this in his hand approached once more the heap of snakes. Thrice he drew near and thrice recoiled, as there rose before him the memory of one he had seen die from the bite of the Poisoned Slayer—as there rang again in his ears the screams of the dying man, and his cries: "I burn! I burn! In pity, slay me!"

Menzono-men feared not death, but torture he feared! At last, with bitten lip and blood therefrom trickling down his chin, he stepped forward and extended the stick toward the nearest snake, which instantly flung itself into a coil and struck, recoiling swift as a flash of light. Still Menzono-men held out the stick, and again and again the snake struck till, exhausted or sullen, it refused to strike again.

Immediately the young man pressed the stick down firmly on the back of the snake's neck, and, despite its writhings, held it down while he gripped it tight with his right hand, claspings three fingers about its neck and pressing hard with thumb and forefinger against the sides of its jaw. He rose erect, the reptile twisting itself about his arm and wrenching in its efforts to reach him with its fangs, but Menzono-men held fast and turned once more toward the river.

Suddenly a thought struck him—how was he to carry the snake?

For a time the young man was puzzled, and was minded to slay this snake and capture another, but there came to him a recollection of what an old man of the Ta-an had told him; that should he press firmly on a certain spot on the snake's neck the reptile would sleep for a time. He tried, using his left hand, and to his amazement the snake ceased its struggles, became utterly rigid, stiff as the haft of an ax, and so remained.

He laid it down, took a thong of rawhide, made in it a slip-knot, fastened the other end to a long stick, slipped the loop over the snake's neck, drawing it snug, lifted his prey, and made his way to where he had left the hide of the wolf and the horn of the Beast that Wears a Horn on His Nose. These he lifted, and with them and his weapons set his face again toward the homes of the Ta-an and the Great Rock of Council.

CHAPTER V.

TO THE DEATH.

DOWN the bank of the river marched T'san-va-men, Great Chieftain of the Ta-an, followed by more than four hundred armed warriors of the tribe, each bearing ax and dagger, lance and bow, and a quiver of arrows.

A magnificent body of men were they, each man stepping proudly in the company to which he belonged.

Menzono-men, a full-fledged warrior, had knelt at the altar while Ta-nu-ko, the chief priest, with the adze and hammer of ceremony, struck off the little finger of his left hand, thus proving his induction into the

clan, and he now strode forth proudly in the Company of the Wolf, following directly behind L'vu, Sar-m'rai-no, Kan-to, and Sen-va, these in turn stepping in the footprints of their chieftain, while beside Menzono-men walked Tsu-ven, son of the chief, claiming fulfilment of his father's promise.

The chieftain had sent out scouts, seeking a passage directly overland to the homes of the Little Hairy Men, but these had returned, confirming his belief that the Farther River was impassable, and he had resolved to march down the river on which he was to the junction of that with the one on which lived the Little Hairy Men, to cross the broad water by swimming, and make his way up the confluent branch along the southern shore.

Now, for seven days had the warriors marched, pressing on through forest and brush, fording or swimming small streams, and sleeping where night overtook them. Five days of rest and feeding had Menzono-men received, then three of fasting and prayer before the ceremony of induction, so it was now the twenty-eighth day since the disappearance of A-ta, and Menzono-men feared greatly, though L'vu oft reassured him, saying:

"Did she not die forthwith, she still lives, a slave." On the evening of the twenty-eighth day, as the warriors were preparing to camp, came one to T'san-va-men, greatly excited, begging speech with the chieftain. This granted, he knelt and drew on the grass the three circles of ceremony, saying:

"Oh, T'san-va-men, Lord of the Winged Death, Great Chieftain of the Ta-an, an omen!"

"Speak!" answered T'san-va-men, and the warrior replied:

"There comes a log toward us, moving against the stream!"

At these words there was a stir among those near the chief, and Tsu-ven broke out:

"Oh, father—great chieftain, rather—is the omen of good?"

T'san-va-men smiled at the boy's eagerness, answering gently:

"Go we forthwith to learn." And, rising from where he sat on a fallen tree, he led

the way the few steps to the bank, where the crowd of warriors, eagerly peering, made way respectfully.

In very truth, far down the stream, there appeared a log, and in very truth was it making its way against the current. T'san-va-men looked for a time, then turned to him who stood at his left, saying:

"Sar-no-m'rai, keenest of all is your sight; look now and tell us if the omen be of good or of evil!"

Long Sar-no-m'rai looked, shading his eyes with his hand against the glare from the sky, then, smiling, he turned to the chieftain, replying:

"Good, in very truth! It is A-ta who comes!"

At these astounding words a buzz of wonder ran through the crowd, and T'san-va-men looked keenly at the most skilful tracker among the Ta-an.

"A-ta!" he cried. "Sar-no-m'rai, is this indeed sooth?"

"I speak not with two tongues," replied Sar-no-m'rai, and the chieftain answered:

"Indeed, that is known to me. It is A-ta!"

Forthwith a great shout broke from the warriors, and crying: "A-ta! A-ta!" they rushed along the bank till opposite the strange craft, which swung inshore to meet them. Amid much buzz of talk it was dragged up on dry land, and A-ta, half led, half carried, was taken to where the chieftain had resumed his seat on the log, over which had been thrown a lion's hide.

As she drew near he rose, and when she knelt he lifted her, pressing her in his arms and seating her near him on a smaller log which was quickly brought. Menzono-men was sent for, and food and drink were brought, and when the girl had rested and eaten she told her tale, showing the scars of the beatings she had received from Gur and his wives, and showing also her limbs, gaunt from starvation.

Frequent and loud were the curses as the tale was told, for A-ta was loved of all the tribe, and many were the demands to be led at once, without delay, against the Little Hairy Men, but T'san-va-men, thoughtful, asked:

"Was it chance, think you, A-ta, that

Gur waited at the Great Rock? Or was it appointed?"

"Nay, great chieftain," replied A-ta, "he boasted that the chief priest of the Ta-an had sent me to him!"

"Gur speaks then the tongue of the Ta-an?"

"Nay, he did but point to me and to himself, saying: 'Ta-nu-ko! Ta-nu-ko!' and laughing."

For a long time the chieftain sat silent, thinking, remembering various trifles which at the time had made no impression, then, rising, he said:

"L'vu, Kan-to, Sen-va, take you the trail to the homes of the Ta-an. Reaching there, tell Ta-nu-ko I require his presence here. Tell him no other word, and in especial speak to none of the return of A-ta. Should he refuse—though it is not in my mind that he will—bring him by force, but unharmed. Go!"

The three bowed and took their departure, and T'san-va-men spoke to Sar-no-m'rai.

"A-ta being once more among us, the Little Hairy Men may wait our pleasure. Here we camp till these return with Ta-nu-ko; see to it!"

So camp was made, and for ten days the warriors of the Ta-an busied themselves with hunting and with drying over fires the flesh of the animals slain, adding thus to their store of food, to the supplies they carried with them to the war. On the eleventh day, at about the middle hour of the morning, appeared the messengers, and with them the chief priest, coming of his own will, though wondering.

Straight to T'san-va-men they went, bowing before him where he sat on his skin-covered log at the edge of a little glade in the forest, L'vu—having drawn the ceremonial sign—saying:

"Oh, great chieftain, the errand is accomplished; before you stands Ta-nu-ko, chief priest of the Ta-an!"

"It is well done," answered T'san-va-men. "Call now the warriors."

Presently, full-panoplied, the warriors of the Ta-an came hurrying, and grouped themselves in a semicircle about where sat the chieftain, none speaking; Ta-nu-ko

standing alone three paces from him, and facing him. When all were placed T'san-va-men, closely watching Ta-nu-ko, said:

"L'vu, go you and bring A-ta," and he saw that Ta-nu-ko, for all his self-control, started and looked about quickly as though seeking escape. Quickly came A-ta, led by the burly lieutenant of the chieftain, and the circle parted to let her pass.

"A-ta," said T'san-va-men, "you have said that this priest betrayed you into the hands of Gur; tell now once more, that all may hear, what happened, that all may judge of the guilt of Ta-nu-ko, sending to death or slavery one of the Ta-an!"

But as A-ta was about to speak, Ta-nu-ko, who had recovered his self-possession, broke in:

"It needs not; the maiden speaks truly. I it was who sent her to the Great Rock, knowing that Gur awaited her coming. And this I did that Menzono-men, losing her whom he loved, might keep the vows made for him, following the path of the priestly clan, to the glory and honor of the Great Father of the Ta-an. The sin is mine, if sin there be; for the welfare of the tribe did I thus, sacrificing my honor to the glory of the Great Father, and mine is the punishment, if punishment there be!"

And he looked about him proudly and bravely—defiantly, even—at the throng of threatening faces, for from the warriors there rose a fierce growl, and a murmur of:

"Death to the traitor! Slay! Slay!"

But the chieftain raised his hand for silence, and in the hush that followed whispered briefly with L'vu and Sar-no-m'rai, both of these nodding. Then, addressing Ta-nu-ko, he spoke:

"Ta-nu-ko, chief priest of the People of the Mountain Caves, it is in my mind that you have done ill; betraying a maiden of the tribe into the hands of savages, to death or worse, false have you been to the Ta-an, nor does it seem that the Great Father approves your act, since before you stand A-ta, escaped from slavery, and Menzono-men, no priest, but a warrior, your plot a failure.

"Yet, since to your twisted mind it seemed a worthy act, since you hoped thus to add to the glory of the Great Father, it is not in my mind to slay you forthwith,

even though by the law of the tribe treachery is so punished.

"Therefore make now your choice; either to die on the Great Altar, at the hands of the priests, in sacrifice, that the Great Father, seeing your death, may accept this in expiation; or taking bow and arrows, to seek Menzono-men in the forest, fighting with him. Should you slay him against whom you have plotted, then may the Ta-an take it as a sign that O-Ma-Ken approves your act, and you shall go free, returning once more to the priestly office. Choose!"

Now it chanced that Ta-nu-kø, unlike the most of the priests, was skilled in the use of the bow; with him it was a diversion, an amusement, and often had he practised it in hours of leisure from his duties at the altar. Therefore, when T'san-va-men offered the alternative, the priest's eyes lit up, and not doubting that he could conquer, he answered:

"I accept the trial; let bows be given, and set us to seek each other deep in the forest!"

"So be it," said the chieftain. "L'vu and Sen-va, let the bows be brought; give each man three arrows; conduct the priest a thousand paces into the forest thither"—and he pointed northwest—"and Menzono-men a thousand paces there"—and he pointed northeast. "Then let them seek each other. It is said; go!"

L'vu and Sen-va, each with a bow and three arrows, stepped forward to lead the duelists to their places, Menzono-men casting a last look at A-ta as he followed the steps of Sen-va. Then the warriors of the Ta-an settled themselves to wait the outcome, squatting about the little glade and speaking in hushed voices.

A-ta, knowing the chief priest's skill with the bow, crouched, shivering with fear for her lover, behind the log where sat the chieftain, impassive as a rock. Presently was heard the long-drawn, quavering call of L'vu, announcing that his man was placed, and that of Sen-va replying, and the warriors knew the hunt was on; that one or both of the duelists would fall—the die was cast. At length Sen-va returned, to take his place in the group about the chieftain, and soon L'vu also stepped from the forest.

All that long afternoon the great chieftain and his men sat in the little glade, and behind him crouched A-ta, clenching and unclenching her hands; and so the slow day dragged on.

And now the chieftain began to cast anxious glances at the sun, which was drawing low down in the western sky; no sign of either of the two had appeared, and sunset was near. But as the sun touched the tops of the western trees and the long shadows crept across the grass a sudden sound broke the hush of afternoon; one long, shuddering scream, the scream of a man in agony, rang through the forest—and once more all was still.

The Winged Death had found one—but which? A-ta's heart swelled till it seemed as though it would burst, then the blood swept away from it, leaving her cold. Which would return, which would step from the forest? It seemed long hours ere a step sounded, a rustling in the brush as a man passed through, drawing nearer and nearer the little glade—which?

A long-drawn sigh from the eagerly watching warriors, a joyful cry from A-ta—and Menzono-men, blood trickling from a wound on his shoulder, staggered forth to kneel at the feet of T'san-va-men! The great chieftain rose, grim and stern.

"Menzono-men," he said, "you have returned; what of Ta-nu-kø? Is he in very truth wrapped in death? Has his soul gone into the Long Dark? Or does he lie wounded in the forest? Speak!"

The young man strove to answer, but, exhausted from the hunt, pitched forward at the chieftain's feet. T'san-va-men motioned to the warriors to lift him up, but at that moment Sar-no-m'rai touched his leader on the shoulder, pointing upward. Far above the tree-tops showed a speck in the sky, growing swiftly larger and larger, till presently, clearly seen of all, a vulture, wide and black of wing, dropped from the blue, falling, falling, like a plummet, straight to the forest. Another followed—another—another—

Next morning T'san-va-men called his warriors together, and when all were assembled he spoke to them, saying:

"Men of the Ta-an, A-ta, escaped from the Little Hairy Men, has given counsel. At one spot only can we ford the Farther River, on the southern bank of which the Little Hairy Men make their homes. This ford they guard well, it being further guarded by the high bank of the stream. Therefore, says A-ta—and the counsel seems good—let us pass this river on which we have made our camp, betake ourselves through the forest to the Farther River, and there make for ourselves many of the Cave That Swims On the Water, such as that in which A-ta returned.

"Thus shall we pass the river that guards the Little Hairy Men on the north, avoiding also the morass which—A-ta tells—guards their homes on the south and west. Thus may we cross, falling upon the Little Hairy Men from the east, the up-stream side of their camp, the side unprotected save by themselves. Is the counsel good?"

"It is good! It is good!" cried the warriors. "Let us go! Lead on, great chieftain!"

"One other thing," spoke T'san-va-men. "It is against the law of the Ta-an that a woman go with us to war, yet would I have A-ta, that she may show us the manner of making the Cave That Swims On the Water. What say you, tribesmen?"

A silence followed, each man eying his neighbor doubtfully; the word of the chieftain was strong, yet strong also was the law and the respect due the law. At length spoke Sar-no-m'rai, he who spoke but seldom:

"Men of the Ta-an," he said, "who makes the law? Is it not ourselves? Can we not then unmake the law, even as an artisan can destroy the bow that he has made, or an artist the carving? If then it is our desire that A-ta go with us, shall she not do so? Who is there to gainsay us? It is *our* law!"

A murmur sounded among the warriors, growing in strength and at last breaking into words:

"It is our law! A-ta shall go! It is we who make the law; let the girl go with us to war!"

And the acclamation swelled till the great chieftain held up his hand, saying:

"It is enough; A-ta goes with us! Cross we now the river that lies before us and take we our way through the forest, to fall upon the Little Hairy Men!"

And taking their weapons and falling into formation in their various companies, the warriors of the Ta-an marched some two thousand paces back up-stream to where the river, broad and shallow, offered easy passage, and, fording the stream, plunged into the depths of the thick forest, T'san-va-men, accompanied by L'vu, Sar-no-m'rai, Kan-to, and Sen-va, leading, and with them A-ta, first of the women of the Ta-an to march with the men to war.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SWAMP OF FEAR.

FIFTEEN days later the Great Chieftain sent for Menzono-men, and the latter accompanied Kan-to, the messenger, to their leader. During those fifteen days the Ta-an had pressed through the forest, crossing the broad "V" of land, five days' journey in width, that here separated the river of the Ta-an from the Farther River, and had established their camp several thousand paces up-stream from the homes of the Little Hairy Men and half a day's travel inland.

They had sent out scouts—sentries, rather—to guard against wandering individuals from Gur's tribe who might chance to discover them, and under this protection the artists and craftsmen of the tribe, aided by the warriors, had set to work to fell trees and make canoes, instructed by A-ta, inventor of the Cave That Swims On The Water.

It was, indeed, somewhat unusual for the artists and artisans of the Ta-an to accompany the fighting-men to war, but in such a case as this, when the call went out for the full man-power of the tribe, they did so, and in this instance it was well that they were there, for the warriors, trained to battle and in the hunt, could not handle tools so well as men trained from infancy in their use.

At suggestion of L'vu the canoes were made of the largest logs, capable, when

hollowed out, of holding twenty men, and Sar-no-m'rai also had come forward with advice. To this genius of the trail may be credited the invention of the paddle, fashioned from a tree limb, as a result of which each man of the tribe was furnished with this implement of progress, in more senses than one.

By now three canoes had been completed, and the tribesmen were looking forward eagerly to the day, not far off, when they should make the projected descent upon the Little Hairy Men, the tribe that acknowledged Gur's leadership.

Menzono-men, summoned, followed Kan-to, wondering at the chieftain's sending for him, and questioning Kan-to, who, however, knew naught of the purpose. Coming to where the leader sat, calm and dignified, on his skin-covered log, the young man bowed, tracing with his finger on the grass. T'san-va-men's face relaxed and he smiled at the youth, then said:

"Menzono-men, you being now a warrior, and A-ta being once more among us, doubtless you desire to wed her as soon as may be?"

"In very truth, Great Chieftain!" replied Menzono-men.

"Your endurance have you proven in the test laid upon you; likewise your courage in face of peril. But A-ta, foster-daughter to T'san-va-men, Lord of the Winged Death, is one to mate with the highest. Therefore still further proof must you give, of craft and skill and courage in face of an enemy, even greater proof than in the fight with the Chief Priest. Take, therefore, twenty men, full-armed; take also a Cave That Swims On The Water; cross the Farther River; march secretly upon the Little Hairy Men, spying out their camp on all sides and bringing word to me of where and when and how we may best attack. It is said; go!"

Menzono-men bowed respectfully and asked:

"Great Chieftain, may I take with me Sar-no-m'rai as one of the twenty?"

The corners of T'san-va-men's mouth twitched slightly at this crafty request, but he suppressed a smile and answered:

"No; nor L'vu nor Kan-to nor Sen-va.

Leader are you of the party, and upon yourself must you depend."

The young warrior bowed once more and withdrew, going among the party and choosing his men, instructing each to take weapons and food and join him. Soon they set out, plunging in single file into the trees, and all the rest of the day Menzono-men led his party through the forest, reaching the river about sunset and making camp—a cold camp, lest the fires be seen by any of the Little Hairy Men—a few yards from the shore, where he allowed his men to rest and eat while he waited for dark. Shortly before the woods were utterly dark he sent his followers to bring the canoe and paddles, he himself remaining on guard. Behind him the woods were hushed save for the cries and chirping of nesting birds, and before him the broad river flowed smooth and black in the dusk, its surface broken at times as a fish leaped with silvery flash.

Beyond the stream the forest stretched black and impenetrable to the eye as Menzono-men peered across, seeking any slightest movement which might betray the presence of an enemy on the farther shore. But nothing appeared, and the solitude was unbroken till his men returned bearing the great canoe, when he bade them set it down by the water's edge that he might speak a few words. They did so, gathering in a compact group about him, and he addressed them:

"Men of the Ta-an, great honor has our chieftain done us, in thus sending us to spy out the land of the Little Hairy Men, for on us may hinge the outcome of the war; whether failure or success meets the arms of the People of the Mountain Caves, whether we return victorious or leave our bones to whiten by the Farther River. Be ye then swift and silent, following one who, younger in warfare than yourselves, has yet been named by the Great Chieftain for this work. Cross we now the river, treading softly down the farther bank till we reach the homes of the Little Hairy Men, seeking to leave no trail, seeking to learn of their camp, slaying but at need, and slaying, if slay we must, in silence. It is said!"

Crossing the river, dawn found Menzono-men and his scouts strung out in a long line, belly-down on the grass, peering through screening brush at the open space which lay before the caves of those whom they sought.

This open space, three hundred paces in width and a thousand in length, had on its northern side the broad surface of the Farther River, which here flowed almost due west; on the eastern end—where lay Menzono-men—the ground rose somewhat steeply to a terrace ten times the height of a tall man, and this terrace, curving round to the southern side of the flat below, showed the rude caves and shelters of the tribe of the Little Hairy Men over whom Gur held the chieftainship.

Farther south the hill sloped gradually down into a broad morass, which, turning the western end of the hill, protected Gur's camp on the down-stream end.

Thus the camp, guarded on the north by the river, on the west by the morass, and on the south by morass and hill, lay open to attack only from the east. Part of this the leader of the scouts knew from A-ta's words, part he could see from where he lay, and part was yet hidden from him, to become known at a later time.

As Menzono-men lay watching, there appeared at the mouths of the various caves numerous women, who stirred and made up the fires, then set about preparing the morning meal, and Menzono-men was astonished to see no warriors come forth; the food cooked, it was eaten by the women, companied only by certain youths and old men, and even while Menzono-men wondered over this there rose in the forest behind him a sound as of men approaching.

He whispered quickly to the man nearest, and as the word was passed, the warriors of the Ta-an, grasping their weapons, faced about and waited what might come.

Nearer and nearer came the rustling, and presently, with a shout, there burst forth a great crowd of the Little Hairy Men, who, returning from a hunt, had chanced on the trail of the scouts of the Ta-an and had followed swiftly to attack.

Taken by surprise, Menzono-men and his followers fought desperately, but, out-

numbered, were swept back by the very weight of the swarming savages and were rushed down the slope which lay at their backs. Cornered, it seemed as though annihilation waited them, and they fought like men resolved to sell their lives as dearly as might be, but Menzono-men, struck by a sudden thought, shouted above the noise of battle:

"To the caves, men of the Ta-an! To the caves!" and led the way. No room was there to draw bow or use lance; swarming, surging, the men of Gur pressed close; knee to knee and breast to breast the tribesmen fought, using dagger or swinging the deadly ax.

Onward through the circling masses the Ta-an cut their way, moving forward step by step, feeling in their faces the hot breath of the savages, against their bodies the rough and sweaty skin of the Little Hairy Men; treading on still bodies or on men who groaned and writhed; panting, with contorted faces and snarling lips, shoulder to shoulder, cutting, striking, stabbing, they held their way till at length the caves were reached and a last desperate push cleared the path—into the largest cave—half held the opening while the others swung their bows—a storm of arrows swept the Little Hairy Men back—great stones were piled in the opening—and for the time the warriors of the Ta-an were safe.

Safe! As a wolf is safe in a trap! The heart of the leader sank as he realized, given space for thought, that there was no escape. But one way out, and that through the swarming foes! For a time he could hold them at bay, but in the end hunger must have its way with him and his men—the Little Hairy People need but sit and wait!

No aid could he hope for from T'san-va-men; the Great Chieftain would not move till his scouts returned—or till it was too late! And how long could he hold out? Two or three days at most; but sixteen remained of his twenty men—three had fallen in the fight, and one, snatched from the ranks, had been torn in pieces before his comrades' eyes. Yet, tortured, he had died as became a warrior; no sound had

issued from his lips while the savages wrenched his limbs apart.

And another thing, worse than hunger, worst than wounds—thirst! No water had the men of the Ta-an, and all but two bore wounds; and all began to feel the thirst that comes from battle, of effort, and of loss of blood.

Quickly Menzono-men took count of these things, quickly he formed his decision, and called his men to him.

"Men of the Ta-an," he said, "not long can we hold out here; the Little Hairy Men have hunger and thirst to aid. Word must be carried to the Great Chieftain. Through the morass to the west can one slip out, swimming the river, and mine is it to take this task, since it offers the greatest peril. Ku-ten, yours it is to command in my absence; this night I go, seeking to pass the guards. If I return not, the leadership is yours."

"Nay, Slayer of Wolves," spoke Ku-ten, "rather it be mine to go; yours is it to lead. Further, A-ta awaits you, and none waits me; let me then go, for it is in my mind that he who goes is like to take the last journey—that into the Long Dark!"

Others spoke, each seeking the more perilous task, till at length Menzono-men lost patience and exclaimed, his eyes flashing:

"Am I not leader? Yours is it to obey! To-night I go!" and opposition ceased.

Three times that day the Little Hairy Men, forming in a compact though irregular body, swept up the slope and tried to storm the defenses, and each time, met by a deadly arrow-sleet, they were driven back, broken, fleeing before that storm of wood and stone. At last came night, drawing its kindly mantle over the death and torment that changed that pleasant place to a hell of agony and hate, and with the sinking of the sun Menzono-men prepared.

Drawing a little apart, he prayed to the Great Father for aid, then, rising, cast aside all weapons save only his dagger and flint, long and keen. In a sack hung from his quiver he carried a little stock of grease to keep his bow-string from wetting, and with this he rubbed himself from crown to toe, afterward rubbing the earth, that his

white skin might not betray him. He pressed the hands of his comrades, one by one, and then, it being fully dark, the watch-fires not yet lit, slid like a snake over the rocks which formed a breastwork at the entrance, and, turning, crawled, belly to the earth, up the slope of the hill which lay behind the cave.

It was his plan to cross the hill and skirt along its base to the western end, there plunging into the swamp, for he knew that the Little Hairy Men would have a cordon of guards drawn about the cave, nor, indeed, had he reached the crest of the hill when, looking up, he saw, outlined against the sky, a savage form, not twenty paces before him the brush here growing thin and low.

Menzono-men lay silently as a sentinel passed along the crest, pacing slowly back and forth, meeting at each end of his travel another who also paced his round. Menzono-men's first thought was to creep near and, leaping on the man, slay him, but an instant's reflection told him that this would not do, and he crept toward the right, to the meeting-place of the two.

Silent, scarce breathing, he hugged the ground till they met, exchanged a few words, and parted, when Menzono-men, waiting till they were some paces off, wriggled swiftly past and down the southern slope of the hill. Reaching the bottom, he lay still and rested a few moments, then rose to a crouching posture and turned west. From bush to bush he flitted, keeping ever hidden; at times, where no cover offered, crawling once more, till at length he reached the swamp.

Here he halted for a time, considering. He dared not strike in close to the base of the hill, lest he be seen, nor, on the other hand, could he travel far to the west for fear that, mired, he should be lost, even as he had once seen the mighty bulk of a mammoth sink, wallowing and struggling beneath the mud and slime.

And now the great morass grew lighter, and he could see faint details as the moon peered over the tree-tops, pouring a cold light down upon the swamp—the home of reptiles, of miasma, of lurking death.

Menzono-men cursed to himself, drew a

long breath, and crept into the morass. Deeper and deeper he went, the water rising to his waist as his feet sank into the ooze from which bubbles gurgled upward as from the lungs of a drowning man. The reeds blocked his way, and the sharp-edged swordgrass stabbed and cut at his naked body; swarming millions of mosquitoes, disturbed by his passage, rose in clouds about his head, singing their high-pitched song, biting, stinging, till the blood streamed down his face and chest and back, and, frantic from the torment, he plunged beneath the water. But the relief was momentary; when he emerged they settled once more about him, and through all that dreadful night his myriad torturers followed close.

The moon now gleamed on the swamp, lighting it up with steady glow, as on and on he pressed.

And now he began to grow weak from loss of blood; it seemed to him that mocking faces rose before him, among them the face of Ta-nu-ko, twisted, agonized, as the arrow pierced his vitals; the face of Gur, exulting; unknown, inhuman faces, half man, half beast; and Menzono-men, cursing, struck at them with his dagger, when they fled away, and only the never-ending swamp lay before him, glittering under the now waning moon.

On and on he struggled, the chill of night striking his limbs, numbing and paralyzing, and presently the moon had sunk, and a faint glow in the sky proclaimed the coming of the dawn.

Eagerly he pressed on, catching at times fugitive glimpses of the water, oily in its smoothness—of a sudden he stopped, arrested in mid-stride, for a momentary thinning of the mist, which closed again at once, had shown him the form of a man, one of his enemies, resting on his knees, his head thrown forward as if listening.

Was he to be halted now? Pulling himself together, calling up his failing strength, slowly, silently, more cautiously than ever, Menzono-men crept forward, dagger in hand—he drew near the spot where the closing mist had hid the foe—nearer—nearer—he could make out the form—nearer—he drew back his arm to strike—

one step—he held the blow, staring in amazement—the man was dead!

A deep wound in the chest showed whence the life had fled; stricken to death in the fight of the day before, the Little Hairy Man had rolled into the river; carried down, he had struggled ashore, had made his way to this spot of firmer ground, and here had died, resting against the bush that now unheld his lifeless form.

Menzono-men drew a deep breath, skirted around the body of the foe, and slipped into the river, pushing his way through the sedge till deeper water was reached, then, secure from chance vision, hidden under the fog wreaths of early morning, the cool water bringing new life to his wearied limbs, he struck out for the farther shore.

Late that afternoon the Great Chieftain, directing, deep in the forest, the making of the canoes, was startled at the appearance of a horrible figure that struggled through the brush into the clearing where the trees had been felled. Plastered and caked with mud and gore, blood still trickling from the newly opened wound in his shoulder, green slime from the swamp clinging in his hair, his head and arms and body blotched and swollen and distorted from the venom of the mosquitoes, Menzono-men, exhausted, reeled into the clearing.

Dropping their tools, the warriors crowded about him till L'vu and Sar-nom'rai, pushing through the throng, caught him under the arms and led him before the chieftain. Summoning his failing strength, Menzono-men straightened up, speaking through swollen lips, his voice thick and blurred, mumbling:

"Surrounded—ambush—in the caves—fighting—Ku-ten commands—four slain—through the swamp—mosquitoes—devils—the river—" His voice trailed off into an unintelligible mutter, his head dropped forward, his knees sagged, his body slumped against the arms of the two who held him, and gently they eased him to the ground at the feet of the Great Chieftain.

For the space of ten breaths the chieftain stood in thought, while all watched, none moving, and then he spoke, his orders

rattling like hail, his voice harsh with the note of authority:

"Take weapons, form ranks; leave these logs—those at the river will serve. L'vu, Kan-to, Sar-no-m'rai, with me; Sen-va and A-ta here; you, and you, and you"—with pointing finger he chose five from among the warriors—"here as a guard. Care for this man; bathe and feed him; give him to drink and let him rest; he has done well. To the rescue, men of the Ta-an! Forward!"

By midnight the warriors of the Ta-an had reached the river, bringing down to the shore the two canoes left by Menzomomen and three others since completed and hidden, in readiness for the attack. But now there rose in the mind of the chieftain a question, a doubt. Would it be better to cross far up-stream, making several trips to ferry across the four or five hundred warriors, then march down upon the Little Hairy Men, forcing their defenses, or to take a hundred men in the canoes and thrust straight across the river, trusting to surprise, to terrify, the enemy by their first sight of the Cave That Swims On The Water? He called his counselors to him and laid the matter before them, and, as usual, it was Sar-no-m'rai, the silent, who found the answer:

"Let the men cross straight," he said, "and to each log let as many as may find place cling fast, their bodies in the stream. Thus the logs will not be overweighted, yet may the warriors cross nor tire themselves with swimming. Coming within bow-shot or nearer, let them loose their hold of the logs and swim ashore, those in the Caves That Swim On The Water covering them meanwhile with flight after flight of arrows. Landing, they will make good their footing till the others reach the bank."

"Well is it spoken," said the chieftain. "Thus shall we bring all to the attack, on the least guarded side."

And so was it ordered and so was it done. A hundred warriors, each with his strung bow and a quiver of arrows beside him, manned the canoes, and the rest, armed with ax and dagger for hand-to-hand combat, trailed in the water, hands on the gunwales of the craft, and thus, propelled

by the silent paddles, the men of the Ta-an swept down on their foes.

It was a cloudy night; behind great masses of dark wind-driven clouds the moon shone, but little light did it cast on the river and the shore. From time to time fitful greams broke through as the skyey rack was torn apart by hurtling gusts, which bent and swayed the trees and roughened the surface of the mighty river, making the passage to the unaccustomed paddlers of the Ta-an, doubly, trebly hard.

Yet was the wind an aid; the noise of its rush and sweep among the trees drowned all sounds of the passage, and the rough water was far less likely to show strange sights than had it been as glass. Further, the cloudy darkness helped, since the Little Hairy Men, blinded by their own watch-fires, could not well see the stream. Also, they trusted the river; none could cross it—to their minds—save by swimming, and warriors who swam that broad water would not come to shore with strength to fight. So it was that the men of the Ta-an were within fifty paces of the shore ere Gur, chancing to cast an eye toward the stream at the very moment that the moon peered from behind a cloud, caught sight of armed men coming in strange fashion on the bosom of the water. The Great Chieftain heard Gur's warning shout, and answered it with an order to his own men.

"Now, swimmers! Bowmen, make ready! To the shore!"

The swimmers loosed their grip and with the long, sweeping overhand stroke rushed for the bank, but the canoes, driven by strong arms, bade fair to overtake them, and on the instant T'san-va-men changed his plan. Loud above the roar of the wind and the cries of the gathering enemy sounded his voice:

"Bowmen, ashore! Make good the landing! Forward!" and the canoes crept on, passing the swimming warriors, rushing to the bank, driving high on the sloping ground, and from them sprang the warriors. In open order they knelt, speeding their arrows, holding back the rush of the enemy, till the axmen, landing, ranged themselves in line.

Then followed a dreadful fight, fought

by the ruddy light of the leaping fires and the cold gleams that from time to time broke through the clouds. No quarter was asked on either side, nor was any given; falling, a man died where he fell, from blow of ax or club or from dagger-thrust. Thrice the swarming hordes of the Little Hairy Men fell back, but the fourth time, rallying to Gur's call, they pressed on and closed with the men of the Ta-an.

Ax and dagger and club rose and fell, the camp resounded with the shrieks and groans of wounded men, with the battle-cries of the Little Hairy Men, with the screams of the women, who watched from the slope of the hill. Backward and forward swayed the battle, the Ta-an at times hurled back toward the river-bank by press of numbers, then, rallying, driving their foes before them toward the caves.

In the heat of the fight met Gur and T'san-va-men, and the battle paused about them as they closed. Snarling like a beast, Gur rushed on his foe, his great war-club raised high for the downward sweep, but like the panther of the forest the Great Chieftain waited—the club swept down—the leader of the Ta-an sprang back—the club crashed on the earth, and ere Gur, overbalanced, could catch himself, T'san-va-men leaped.

"This for A-ta!" he cried, and his long, keen dagger flashed in the moonlight; Gur fell, and the Little Hairy Men, disheartened, gave back. At that instant the scouts of Menzono-men, rushing down the hill, fell on the foe in the rear, and the battle swiftly became a rout; some few of the Little Hairy Men escaped, passing over the hill to the east and losing themselves in the forest ere overtaken by the men of the Ta-an; some few, fleeing to the west, won through the morass, but most who chose that route were bogged and mired in the swamp and drowned.

And when the pale light of morning struggled through the clouds even T'san-va-men, stern chieftain that he was, shuddered as he looked about him on the havoc the night had brought. Above, on the hill, the wailing women; nearer, before the caves, three rows of dead, where the Little Hairy Men had broken before the arrows

of the Ta-an; still nearer, on the shore, a ghastly tangled mass of dead and dying, friend and foe mingled in strange, unnatural postures, the sands beneath them red. T'san-va-men sighed deeply and turned to the shore, shaking his head. Across the chieftain's shoulders L'vu, his giant friend, laid an arm.

"Nay, Lord of the Winged Death," he spoke, "it had to be; no other way lay open before us. Not safe were the lives of the Ta-an while the Little Hairy Men held sway in the forest."

"You speak the words of truth, friend of mine," answered the Great Chieftain. "Yet is my soul sick within me. Let us go."

The warriors crossed once more the river, ferried by twentys, and again back in the forest, a litter was made for Menzono-men, two poles being laid side by side and branches wattled across, leaves laid on these making soft the bed. Eight scout warriors lifted it, the young man resting thereon, for the return to the homes of the Ta-an, A-ta walking beside and holding the hand of her lover.

Gradually, as the days passed, Menzono-men recovered his strength, helped thereto in no small measure by the pressure of that soft hand in his and the looks bent on him by those bright eyes, ever turned in love toward his face, toward his contented smile, and the day before the homes of the Ta-an were reached he begged to be set down, that he might return, marching on his own feet, not carried on the shoulders of others.

His request was granted, and so the entry into the camp was made, when the young man saw admiring crowds pressing around him, to touch his hand—the chieftain had sent messengers ahead, to tell of the victory and of the part A-ta and Menzono-men had played. None ventured to touch the hand of A-ta; Menzono-men was a hero, but she was something more; he had crossed the Swamp of Death, but she had made the Cave That Swims On The Water, and the women and children and old men of the Ta-an gazed on her with awe, pressing close, bowing, but not daring to lay hand on hers. Even her own father bent respectfully before her, whereat A-ta

was mightily amused and wished to laugh, but did not.

Reaching the camp, the Great Chieftain sent out a call for all the tribe to assemble next midday at the Rock of Council, sending messengers in all directions, that none might be absent, and when the sun stood overhead on the following day came the throngs, with much buzz of thought, crowding about the Rock.

Presently came T'san-va-men, his own personal followers with him, also Menzonomen and A-ta, and the crowd parted to let them pass. Mounting the Rock, the Great Chieftain waited till silence spread over the multitude, then he spoke, his strong voice carrying to all parts of the clearing:

"People of the Ta-an," he said, "by now is it known to you, from the lips of others, how we fought and won; you have heard of the death of the traitorous Chief Priest at the hands of Menzono-men, in fair fight; you have heard of how Menzono-men, winning through the deadly swamp, brought news of the ambush; and you have heard of how the victory came, in no small measure, through A-ta, first maker of the Cave That Swims On The Water. Well indeed has Menzono-men proven himself, and great shall be his reward, for A-ta shall he have to wife.

"Remains then the reward of A-ta. People of the Mountain Caves, by old tradition, by the law of the tribe, handed down from ere the time of Snorr, Great Chieftain of the Ta-an, each chieftain is one who has aided the tribe. My service, the Winged Death, is known to you, likewise that of him who went before, Na-t'san, Son of the Red God, who first brought the gift of fire to the tribesmen.

"But to you here gathered do I say that the service of this maiden is as great as his or mine; in years to come the Cave That Swims On The Water is destined to bring aid and comfort, food and safety and help to the People of the Mountain Caves. Therefore should she be chieftain in my place when it is mine to make the journey into the Long Dark.

"But since no woman, by the law of the tribe, may rule over us, may hold the baton

of the chieftain, this may not be. Yet reward must she have, and a great one, and therefore, calling to witness the Great Father who rules us all, in his name do I swear, and call upon you to see that the oath is kept, that the first-born son of A-ta shall take my place, ruling over the Ta-an in my stead when I am gone. I have sworn."

Waving his hand, the Great Chieftain stepped down from the Rock of Council, and a mighty shout rose swelling from the crowd:

"Hail, A-ta, Girl of the Mountain Caves! Hail to her who gives us the Cave That Swims On The Water! Hail and long life to her and to her husband, who passed through the Swamp of Death to bring word to the Great Chieftain! Long life and honor and joy be theirs!"

Great feasting was there at the wedding of Menzono-men and A-ta, great feasting and many songs. Wild cattle and horses were roasted whole, in great pits, together with sweet roots and fruit and berries from the forest. Dances also were there, and beating of drums, for had not the Great Chieftain himself ordered that all honor should be paid these two? And when at last the feasting was done, the songs sung, and the dancers wearied, when the Great Chieftain, as became his dignity, had withdrawn to his own cave, torches were seized, and the People of the Mountain Caves, a compact body, escorted the young couple to the cave that was to be their home.

There in the mouth of the cave halted Menzono-men and A-ta, their eyes shining with happiness, she pressing close to him, his arm about her shoulders, while the crowd, a little down the slope, shouted and waved the flaring torches. Thrice Menzono-men strove to speak, but his heart was too full, and at last he merely flung out his arm in sign of greeting and thanks.

And so may we also take leave of them, of Menzono-men, Slayer of Wolves, the man who passed the Swamp of Death, and A-ta, the Girl of the Mountain Caves, who gave to her people the Cave That Swims On The Water.

(The End.)

Man Nor God Nor Devil

by Victor Lauriston



THE participants in these events were one woman and three men—albeit one of the men was dead nigh two centuries, and had grown into a sort of saint. Dr. Radley, be it noted, was, after all, merely a chance observer, not in the least influencing the course of events.

Here are some things Dr. Radley first observed, the morning after he came to *Hôtel Soufrière*, as he sat on the porch.

First, he observed the cripple, Garnett, chatting with the little French waitress, Rosalie. Then, as he frowned and patiently relit his cigar, he observed also the tall, sunburnt young man he was later to know as Dolf Le Clair. Finally, gazing absently into distance, he observed, in a green setting, beyond the whitewashed cottages of the French-Canadian village, the winding road and the silver ribbon of river—beyond all these, the white belfry of the little church of St. Polycarp.

He thought hard, and bit into his cigar, did the good old doctor.

Rosalie was twenty, slim and dark, her native love of bright colors gleaming in her dress; and Rosalie was perilously interested in what Garnett whispered to her, and in Garnett himself. Dr. Radley did not like that symptom—especially when the man concerned was Garnett.

But he minded his own business, did Dr. Radley, which just now was to give his overworked brain a rest.

He beckoned the sunburnt young man to him.

"Sit down," he invited.

Then he sharply rang the bell on his little table.

Thereby he interrupted the too interested tête-à-tête between Garnett and the pretty waitress: Rosalie came reluctantly, with many backward glances. She took their order and went inside. The sunburnt man leaned close.

"Who is that man?" he demanded tensely.

"Garnett?" The doctor smiled reassuringly, for he hated discord. "He's crippled with rheumatism, and wealthy and charming and—"

"The devil!"

"Exactly," agreed Dr. Radley complaisantly. "The devil—that's just what he is."

The waitress came with her tray and set down the glasses; the sunburnt young man gazed into her dark eyes.

"Rosalie—"

Then he burst into a flood of French—eager, excited, with admonitory gesticulations in the general direction of that fascinating cripple.

Rosalie flushed red.

"*Merci, m'sieu!*" She took the money and flounced out.

In a flash Dr. Radley had the whole situation in his mind's eye. The sunburnt young man looked American, acted American, had talked decidedly American with him; but his burst of French, and a certain twist of his fine lips, and a certain shadow

in his black eyes, and his anxious interest in Rosalie disclosed his story.

"You belong to St. Polycarp?" questioned the doctor.

"I did." The man's English was almost perfect. "I was born here. I have been away seven years. Made pretty well out West—mining. Adolph Le Clair's my name. The boys call me Dolf." Then, in a changed tone, "Why is that man here?"

"Rheumatism, with complications. It's too long to explain. He's taking the baths. I met him last night. He's got nerve—can talk to charm you; you can't help liking the fellow, devil and all though he's been."

"And you?"

"I'm here for a holiday, plus curiosity to see the famous Sulphur Springs."

"And the shrine?"

Dr. Radley nodded; not that he had much interest in the shrine, but it was easier to agree than to argue. He had guessed right. The girl was a childish sweetheart, and Le Clair had been working for her, and had come back to—

He frowned. He had known good men, and bad men, and indifferent men. Then there was Garnett. The fellow was handsome, suave, alluring, and—a *beast*.

"Tell me," suggested the doctor; for his French was poor, and the "spik Inglis" of the villagers, and even of the hotel people, had so far proved a little difficult.

So Dolf Le Clair told of his work in the West. Then, too, he told of Rosalie and the boyhood days here; he told it all, his hopes included, with an honest frankness. At last he talked of the famous shrine.

II.

FATHER POLYCARP and St. Polycarp were, it seemed, different entities, though most folk confused the two. St. Polycarp, so Dolf Le Clair averred, was from very long ago—a Greek or Roman martyr. Father Polycarp, however, was of the Société de Jesus, a missionary to the Indians.

"A contemporary of Brebœuf and Lalement?" suggested Radley, to which Dolf returned that he could not say—these had not been priests of the parish in his time.

Then the doctor realized that Dolf's fluent American did not comprehend "contemporary" and that he was not posted on French-Canadian history.

Anyway, many years ago Father Polycarp was a missionary to the Algonquins.

"He had a devotion the most profound," explained Le Clair, "and was doctor and surgeon and had a most all-encompassing pity for these wretched heathen. So he left wealth and rank in France and came to work among the Indians. He cured the sick and maimed of body, and the sick sick and maimed of soul."

"Now, the Indian, he is always an Indian," explained Dolf regretfully. "He professes the true faith, but—*eh bien!*—at heart he is pagan. He attends mass on Sunday morning, and then he creeps away to secret places in the woods and goes through devil rites." The narrator's eyes were much shocked; seven years in the Western mines had not eradicated his native belief in God and the devil. "So," he went on, "when the English down in York State stirred them up, the Indians turned on the good father and bound him to the stake, and jeered as the flames licked him: 'Why not ask of your God help? Surely it will come from One so powerful.'"

Le Clair paused to cross himself, for these were blasphemies.

"And then?" urged Dr. Radley.

"Then, it seemed, Father Polycarp had cried out: 'Father, I ask merely this, to go on curing the maimed and sick of body and soul.'"

"The Indians had no pity, though, till the great Count Frontenac, of whom you may have heard, came and hammered into them the fear of God. And then—"

Dolf frowned. At the other end of the porch, the crippled Garnett was beckoning to some one behind the screen, tossing smiles across the interval and whispering.

"And then?"

Le Clair went on, but his tone hinted suppressed anger.

"Oh, after that, in time people began to look on the good father as a saint. They built the little church where he died, and by and by people got to coming here to be

cured. People that had never seen an Indian came with crutches and faith and went away with yet more faith, but without their crutches. There is a pile of crutches so wide, so high—"Dolf gasped his despair, for his outstretched arms could not tell the dimensions of the pile.

"So you see," he added, "the good father still goes on curing the sick."

"No rest for the good," paraphrased Dr. Radley; for he was a skeptical materialist who found it easier to believe the things he saw than to believe the things he couldn't see.

His eyes sought in the far distance the white belfry against its green background. Then they fell upon Garnett, once more in interested converse with the girl, Rosalie.

"I'll stop that," said the doctor.

So, rising, he crossed the porch and slumped himself into the vacant chair at Garnett's table.

Rosalie flushed and giggled and went in, still glancing back at the young fellow.

"Garnett," said the doctor, daring to be severe, "we're friends, so I can speak to you plainly. You'd better leave that girl alone. There was a young fellow at my table just now. You saw him. Well, if it's necessary, I think he'll kill you."

Garnett laughed cynically.

"I shouldn't be surprised," he said, "if it became necessary. But he will not kill me. The law won't let him."

"The law should—"

"Stop me?" cut in Garnett. He had fine features, and his suave tone showed no hint of anger, even at the doctor's plain words. "It never stopped me yet. And no woman ever got the drop on me, either. There was a girl who tried—"

He chuckled and, cynically unabashed, told Dr. Radley the story. "You ought to be hung!" commented the doctor sincerely. "Anyway," he added, "you'd better leave this girl alone."

"I'm not afraid of that man."

"Then of God—or the devil."

"Neither man, nor God, nor devil."

III.

THEY fell to talking, the good doctor much troubled. For he disliked to offend

any one, even such as for their own good needed to be offended; and he felt anyway that his harshest words would be waste effort with this man.

The talk switched to Garnett's ailment. "Improved?" laughed Garnett. "Not a bit. These sulfur baths are no good."

The doctor eyed him thoughtfully.

"Why not try the shrine?"

Garnett's brows lifted.

"The shrine?"

"Of good St. Polycarp," explained the doctor.

"Oh, yes," said Garnett. "Rosalie was just telling me." Whereat Dr. Radley's heart jump, in hope that the interested conversation of a few moments before, after all, merely indicated the kindness of a good girl, anxious to see a poor cripple cured. "She is eager to see me well again. Then we'll marry and—be happy." He laughed unpleasantly.

Dr. Radley's thoughts were very mixed for a man so clear-headed. Most of all, he was troubled by the girl's manifest infatuation for Garnett.

He was curious, too, to see what the shrine might do for Garnett. Garnett was an incurable—so he had practically determined.

But as Garnett talked on, of purple patches in his wicked past, a thought shaped itself vaguely in the doctor's mind.

He was a skeptic. Garnett was a skeptic, too, and a crude atheist. Yet—there might be more things in this world than their practical philosophy dreamed of. The shrine might hold a bodily cure for a cripple such as Garnett; yes, and moral cleansing. So at last he spoke deliberately:

"Just the same, why not try the shrine?"

Garnett laughed his silvery laugh. "I'll try anything once," he agreed.

"Only," pursued the good doctor with quiet deliberation, "the man who would be cured must leave at the shrine everything he carries—even his sins."

"His clothes?" laughed Garnett grossly.

"Ah! Neither the good saint nor the good father would have a man walk naked and ashamed," he remarked. "But everything else he carries—and especially his wicked desires."

Garnett laughed easily.

"So," he observed, "if I am to have Rosalie I must pit my wits against those of the good Polycarp?"

IV.

ROSALIE had misgivings when she found that Adolph Le Clair had at last come back.

For such a long, long time Adolph had been writing her, telling of what he was doing and of what they would do when he did return. And meanwhile she had gone to work at the new Hotel Soufrière, where pretty waitresses were in demand.

Then she had met M. Garnett, and M. Garnett had smiled at her, and touched her hand with his slim fingers, and paid her such bewildering compliments that her pretty head was turned.

She wished now that Adolph had stayed away. There were doubtless good women where he had been, and he could have married one of them and been very happy. She was sorry for Adolph now. He had gone to all this trouble of coming back for her, and she would have to tell him no—that she had promised to marry M. Garnett and go away with him to the States.

Her ideas of the States were hazy, but she wished to see the great cities, Boston, and York, and Hoboken, and Chi.

She was glad next morning when Adolph went down to the river. From where she worked she could glimpse a canoe on the silvery stream, and knew that Adolph was at the paddle, learning anew the long, swift stroke in which as a boy he had been adept. But she did not wish to stay at La Soufrière all her days, living with a man who paddled a canoe and fished for a livelihood. And doubtless Adolph meant to settle down here like his father before him.

M. Garnett had gone to his room, it seemed. That old doctor sat in a corner of the porch. She heard the tinkle of the bell on his table.

"Coca-cola," he ordered.

She came presently with the tray. Said the doctor:

"Sit down a minute." She was afraid of him. "I want to tell you something, *mademoiselle*." He spoke now in French that was indeed very bad, but she could

comprehend. "Do not take M. Garnett's love-making too seriously. These rich young men, they are inclined to make love when they don't mean it."

Well, she had to listen, for the old doctor was a guest of the hotel; and she said, dutifully, "*Merci, m'sieu*," at the end of his long discourse, the beginning of which she had forgotten. She had flamed at Adolph when he tried to talk to her, but she must be polite to the doctor. But she went out very quietly, believing nothing of what he said, forgetting it all, in the remembered rapture of M. Garnett's warm love-making. If only M. Garnett would go to the shrine and be cured, instead of wasting time at the baths, then they could be married by the good curé, and go away.

She added that last sentence when she spoke to Garnett the same evening about the shrine. He smiled.

"We will be married in the city, *chérie*," he told her. He spoke such beautiful French, too; not at all like that old doctor's crude phrases. So she simpered, and quickly assented; what he wished was of course right. They would go to the city, to Montreal, and be married there—perhaps by the priests of Notre Dame. The thought filled her religious soul with ecstasy.

"And live in a beautiful hotel," he pursued, "and have a maid and people to wait on us all the time." Then she would be a great lady.

Poor Adolph! With all these years of hard work in the West!

Her pretty head was filled with golden dreams that night. For Garnett had promised at last to go to the shrine.

Adolph came stamping up very late, and found her on the lawn, in the shadows. He clutched her to him, and kissed her before she knew it.

"I am going to kill that—that snake!" he whispered hoarsely. "And I'll kill you, too."

She faced him bravely enough.

"I am going to marry M. Garnett," she told him steadily. "And, Adolph, dear, you will kill no one; promise me."

He gazed at her unsteadily an agonized moment.

"For my sake, good Adolph?" she urged.

"I have promised; I cannot call back my promise. He will be good to me. I love him, and he loves me; and you will not do anything to hurt me."

He took her hands in his.

"If you ever need a friend," he muttered brokenly, "send for me, Rosalie."

"You promise?" she insisted.

Then he promised. She went in with eyes brimming. He was a good, honest, steady Adolph, and she liked him, for he would keep his word; always he had kept his word.

Rosalie had unfathomable faith in the efficacy of the shrine, though she was a skeptic as to the sulfur baths. That was in her devout nature. M. Garnett would go to the shrine to-morrow morning. They would go to the city the morning after. So next morning she begged a little time off, and went to the cottage in the valley and quietly packed her dream-chest with its snowy-white things, all put aside in readiness for this great day.

She shrank from telling the old people what had happened—somehow. She would tell them at the last moment; oh, that she was going for a holiday. When she was married she would write them from Montreal. For they might make difficulties, wanting her to be married by the curé of St. Polycarp, which Garnett did not wish.

She thought but steadily of Adolph and the old days. She had liked Adolph. In her girlish way she had loved Adolph. She conceded that if she had never met M. Garnett—she insisted on thinking of him as *m'sieu*—she would doubtless have married Adolph, and settled down here for life at La Soufrière, and been buried in the old churchyard of St. Polycarp when she died.

After leaving Rosalie, Adolph staggered drunkenly into the hotel. At the corner table he saw the old doctor who had spoken to him the other day.

He slumped into the opposite chair.

"Tell me," he muttered, "is he a good man?"

"Who?" demanded the bewildered doctor.

"M. Garnett,"

"Why?"

"Rosalie is to marry him."

"As to that," said the doctor quietly, "if she is going to marry him, very well. That is better than I thought."

He gripped Adolph's sleeve as the latter rose.

"You will do nothing—nothing rash?" he urged.

"No," said Adolph steadily. "I have promised her."

It was then that there came to Dr. Radley that tragic sense of being a mere casual observer of what passed, powerless to influence things. He had spoken to Garnett, he had spoken to Rosalie; to what end?

Oh, it was all out of men's hands now, even Adolph's hands; it all rested with the good Father Polycarp, dead and gone these centuries.

V.

To reach the church of St. Polycarp, you may go around a long way by the white bridge; but from Hotel Soufrière it is quicker to cross the river by canoe. Usually there are Indians with canoes to ferry the pilgrims; and the pilgrims, who are often cripples, prefer this easy access to the shrine.

But this morning no Indians were to be seen; only a single canoe far out on the river.

"Then we must walk all that distance," mourned Garnett.

But Dr. Radley, with a handkerchief, signaled the distant canoeist. It was some moments before he got the man's attention; then the canoe shot swiftly across the waters to the landing-stage.

Dr. Radley made a wry face. He saw trouble. Here was no Indian, but Dolf Le Clair—and, if his haggard countenance told truth, a Le Clair working off the tedium of a sleepless night.

"Is that boat safe?" Garnett glanced dubiously at the light craft.

Le Clair nodded shortly.

"You sit amidships," advised the doctor, "and I'll take the stern. Knees under you."

Adolph made the long crossing with swift, steady strokes. They drew up the canoe,

and then went slowly up the slope. The stony road, a white ribbon, wound in and out before and above them. Adolph strode rapidly ahead. From time to time he halted, pacing to and fro, till the others came up.

Dr. Radley accommodated his pace to the slower steps of his crippled companion. He wanted a last word of warning to this man who was to marry Rosalie.

Rosalie was a nice little thing, and Garnett—if only handsome, devilish, charming Garnett would leave his sins at the shrine, who knew what a saint of present-day utility he might not become? Thus mused the altruistic doctor, and spoke—

"You leave everything at the shrine?"

"Oh, I didn't forget that," laughed Garnett. "I came prepared." Cynically he turned out his empty pockets.

He laughed, and laughed yet more at the doctor's consternation; and still more skeptically at the doctor's well-meant urgings. Dr. Radley had again that terrifying sense of his own futility to avert catastrophe.

Garnett halted. At the roadside was a tree heavy with red-cheeked, luscious harvest apples. Garnett plucked one from a low-hanging branch.

At a turn in the road they came to the little white church, and the shrine. Dolf Le Clair dropped on his knees and muttered a prayer.

Then, rising, he turned to the others. He fixed his eyes on Garnett's; but Garnett responded to the silent, tacit plea with a smile of devilish mockery.

"I shall go back to the canoe," said Dolf, "and wait for you, *messieurs*."

The doctor watched him stride down the road.

"There," he mused, "is a man." He thought of Rosalie, simpering at Garnett. "The little fool!" he ejaculated impatiently.

VI.

GARNETT, with a noisy, triumphant whoop, raced down the stony slope to the landing-stage. There, turning, he waited for Dr. Radley to come up.

"A little faith is better than a lot of medicine—eh, doctor?" he challenged.

The good old doctor remained a materialist. "I still believe it was the baths." For he thought Garnett might at least be reached by antagonism. "You have been taking them a long time, and sitting on the porch. All you need to finish the cure was to stretch your muscles—as you did going up that hill."

Dolf regarded this skepticism with regret, for he liked the old doctor; also, he had supreme faith in the shrine. As who would not, seeing Garnett coming down the slope at a run, he who had hobbled up there slowly, painfully, an hour before.

Garnett, seating himself in the canoe, thrust a hand into his pocket and drew forth a red-cheeked apple.

Dr. Radley smiled.

"You should," he said, "have left that at the shrine."

A little boy, playing about the landing stage, eyed the apple hopefully. Garnett saw his look. "Yes, one *morceau*," the lad begged with his eyes. Garnett made as though to toss the apple to him, then snatched it back, and laughed uproariously at the child's keen disappointment.

"Go to it, friend!" he commanded Dolf Le Clair; and the canoe shot across the water.

"You forgot to leave the apple, eh?"

Garnett grinned cynically.

"Hardly. I remembered it, but it is a long way back, and I might feel hungry, and the tree might be stripped when I passed that way. The joke appears to be on the good Father Polycarp. Will he try to replevin the apple, I wonder?"

Dolf looked troubled, and so did the good doctor. But the French-Canadian was shuddering at the sacrilege that might bring disaster to them all. Dr. Radley was weighed down by the more practical menace to Rosalie.

He leaned toward Garnett and whispered.

"No, no! To be young again—to feel like twenty-one, and you'd have me live like a monk. Not for mine, doctor. Where would your livelihood be if men did that?" Garnett laughed; and if his usual laugh were as pleasant as it was repellent, this one was horrible in its cynical menace. "The good times are come for me again,

and when the bad times come there is always the good Father Polycarp to help me. The arrangement is ideal."

He munched.

Again the doctor whispered anxiously:

"But this girl, Rosalie; at least—"

Garnett glanced at the boatman. He dropped his voice. "I'm no marrying man, to put a halter round my neck. I'll send her back for Dolf here."

He laughed uproariously and took another bite of the red-cheeked apple.

Then he flung his arms wide, and the canoe lurched to and fro like a wild thing, and went over. The doctor came up, gasping and spluttering. Already Dolf Le Clair had found Garnett and held his head above water, now paddling with his free hand, and it seemed almost in a moment wading with him in his arms to the landing-stage.

The doctor, an instant later, went to work with swift precision.

"I can't understand it," he gasped. "It's not like drowning." He sent Dolf at the run to the hotel for his instruments and help.

People had come flocking, excited and questioning. As he worked, the old doctor fancied he glimpsed the terrified Rosalie on the edge of the crowd.

He glanced up at last.

"No use," he said shortly.

Dolf stood aside. The doctor went to him.

"It wasn't the water," he said. "He choked on a piece of apple. That's why he flung out his arms."

Le Clair glanced at Rosalie. He shrugged his shoulders; then went slowly to her through the crowd. The doctor's eyes followed them.

"Man—nor God—nor devil," he muttered. Those had been Garnett's own words.

ROMANCE, TO-DAY

NO sedan chairs, in this, my age,
Upon the waters no craft rides,
That from the high seas exacts wage—
Ah, monstrous strides!

And yet I loved the pirate crew, billowing sails, the dusk, soft-lit,
Hidden gold and powered hair, as in ye olden booke is writ—

Still, yesterday I heard a tale,
"Romance still lives!" It made me cry,
It turned all distance weak and pale,
For, from the sky

It said a planet signaled us, wigwagging in the modern way
Electrically, through space and air. Oh, thrilled am I, to-day!

And yet—I sigh. It cannot be
As once it was when brigantines
Full-rigged and gloriously free
Brought voice, made means

Of carrying with their cargos rich, fresh news from men of other lands.
True, larger spaces conquered now—and gripped the farther parted hands,

But—I know well the clear-flashed code,
The message from the far-set stars,
The burden of them and their mode,
"Buy and build on Mars!"

Or, Venus calling for your kale with news of sudden silver-finds—
Oh, I am tired of modern strides, and—modern minds!

Katharine Haviland Taylor.

A Nurse Named Allenby

by
Bertram Lebhar

Author of "Come Across!" "Thumbs Down," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

VERONICA VANE, star of the Apex Pictures Corporation, had vanished absolutely, leaving no trace, and with her Ito Yamada, a member of the company. Eddie Travers, publicity man for the Apex, after some difficulty, persuaded Keith Fenton, detective, to take up the case. Travers, in confidence, confessed his love for the young woman, stating that she herself, however, was partial to McCullough, the director.

And the story that Travers told was so improbable that, knowing his penchant for plausible prevarication, Fenton was inclined to credit it. Briefly, while working on a scenario written by one Mortimer, in an old château, while on location on an island in the Hudson, near Hillhaven, Miss Vane and Yamada having entered the house as a part of the business of the scene, had never again emerged. Rigid search failed to disclose any trace of them, but later on a tour of investigation by Fenton resulted in several discoveries.

A secret panel leading to an underground stairway, and thence to the river; the fact that a power-yacht had been seen in the distance; and that the house itself had been originally the seat of a Bonapartist conspiracy, the daughter of the last owner, the Count de Bethune, having there committed suicide by hanging. The statement that the company had been followed by a mysterious automobile containing two men might or might not lend an added significance to these discoveries.

Travers, in his turn, was able to tell Fenton that the star's actual name was Mary Brown, if that indeed was the correct one; that absolutely nothing was known of her antecedents. Then, with the report of the discovery of Yamada's body in the river, the mystery deepened. This was in truth no press-agent's yarn, but grim tragedy and grimmer mystery. The author of the scenario had suggested the old house as peculiarly fitted to the script. On a sudden impulse Fenton visited the address which he had given, finding it to be a bakery kept by one Aaron Kolb, who explained that "Mortimer" was a young woman who had simply called for her mail, and of whom he knew nothing.

"A young woman, eh! Where can I find her?" asked Fenton.

"I couldn't tell you, sir. The letter arrived a few days ago, and the same party called for it. I handed it over to her without asking any questions."

CHAPTER VII.

THE CLUE OF THE BROKEN E.

FENTON was not inclined to doubt the bakery proprietor's story. The man appeared honest and ingenuous enough, and it was quite plausible, the detective thought, that he should have done this simple favor for a perfect stranger without inquiring into the why and wherefore. He frankly admitted that it was not by any means the first time that he had lent himself to a transaction of that sort.

The bakery was situated in a neighbor-

hood which was frequented by many persons who had no permanent post-office address, or had reasons of their own for not wishing their mail forwarded to them directly or even through the medium of the general delivery window at the post-office. The good-natured Mr. Aaron Kolb was always willing to oblige a regular customer by consenting to have his or her correspondence addressed in his care; and even if the party was not a regular customer he did not object, provided he was paid something for his trouble.

He was equally frank in admitting that

This story began in *The Argosy* for May 1.

the young woman who had represented the mysterious Stanley Mortimer had promised to pay him well for the accommodation, and had subsequently carried out that promise when she came to claim the mis-sive. There the matter had ended so far as he was concerned.

"What did the woman look like?" Fenton asked. "I suppose you can give me a pretty good description of her?"

"She was a blonde. A very good-looking young woman, and fairly well dressed. That is about all I can tell you, sir. I have seen so many other people since then, and, of course I didn't have any particular reason for bearing her in mind."

"What printing was on the envelope of the letter? You remember that?"

"Not exactly, sir. I remember that there was the name of some moving-picture concern printed in one corner, but I couldn't tell you what the name was now to save my life."

There was a smile of satisfaction on Fenton's face when he finally departed from Mr. Kolb's bakery and lunch-room. He was not greatly disappointed by the result of his visit, even though it looked as if the mysterious Stanley Mortimer was going to be a mighty hard person to locate. On the contrary, he was well pleased at the way the thing had turned out.

If the author of "The House On the Island"—as the manuscript in his pocket was entitled—had proved to be a perfectly open and above-board sort of person, whose whereabouts and antecedents were known to the bakery proprietor, it would have been reasonable to assume that there was nothing to the theory that the scenario played an important part in the mystery of the disappearance of Veronica Vane, and the tragic fate of her Japanese companion.

But the fact that the writer of the script was keeping under cover was decidedly encouraging. It caused Fenton to feel almost certain that the play had been written and submitted to the Apex Pictures Corporation solely with the sinister motive of luring the leading lady of that concern, and possibly the Jap, too, to the château on the island.

The detective was quite sure now that the running of the elusive playwright to earth would be a big step toward the solving of the entire enigma. And in spite of the paucity of the information he had to work on, he was confident that the case could be successfully tackled from that angle. He had succeeded in tracking down many other persons in the course of his career, whose trails had been equally well, or even better covered; so he did not despair of eventually bringing to light this obscure Mr. Mortimer, on whose real identity, he was convinced, the whole problem hinged.

Ascending the stairs of the Third Avenue Elevated station at Fifty-Ninth Street, he boarded a southbound train. During the ride down-town he occupied himself in studying the manuscript of the play, examining the lines of typewriting with the aid of a powerful, pocket magnifying-glass.

As he had remarked to Travers, he was no typewriting expert, but even with the imperfect knowledge of the science which he possessed he was able to make one or two discoveries as a result of that examination which he regarded as decidedly encouraging.

Alighting from the train at the City Hall station, he proceeded to an office building on Park Row where he visited an office on the twentieth floor. There he found a heavy-featured, bearded man in great, horn-rimmed spectacles, who sat at a table bending over a document to which he was applying a chemical with a camel's-hair brush.

At Fenton's step this man looked up from his work, and a gleam of pleased recognition came into the keen eyes behind the spectacles.

"Ah! My dear Meester Fentong!" he exclaimed, with a markedly foreign accent. "So long it is since I have seen you that I was beginning to be of the fear that you had quite forgotten your old friend." He smiled. "Or it is that the pupil has become so profecient himself that he no longer has need to consult the master?"

"Not that," Fenton answered laughingly. "I have made a little progress, I hope, but I am still a long way off from that

stage of efficiency. The reason you haven't seen me here for some time, Professor Esclanon, is that I haven't had anything in your line lately. But I need your help now."

He drew the manuscript of "The House On the Island" from his pocket. "I wish you would take a look at this and let me know if you agree—if there is anything in certain conclusions I have arrived at."

Professor Etienne Esclanon, the greatest handwriting and typewriting expert in New York, if not in the entire world, and who was equally eminent as a specialist in papers, inks, ancient manuscripts, and antiques, scrutinized the sheets of typewriting which the other handed him; then looked up with an expectant smile.

"Well, what are your deductions, my son?"

"It was written on a Lockwood Visible, of course."

"Undoubtedly. That is child's work. It is the only machine on the market which has this large, bold type. What else?"

"The letter e has been repaired recently." Fenton frowned anxiously. "I hope I am right about that?"

"Of a surety you are correct," the professor approved. "The other lettaires in this writing show signs of wear that are even to the naked eye apparent, but the e's, they are perfect. That would not be if he had not been recently repaired; for, as I have often to you pointed out, my dear Fenton, the e is used more times in ordinary writing than any other lettaire in the alphabet, and therefore is always the quickest of them to become imperfect."

Fenton nodded. "That is what I thought. The letter must have either broken from the bar, or become too worn to use any longer, and so was replaced with a brand-new one." He smiled. "I was pretty sure of it—thanks to the lessons you have given me in your art—but the detail was so important that I decided I had better make quite certain by seeking your infallible judgment in the matter."

The expert shrugged his shoulders. "It was hardly necessary," he rejoined. "The thing was so vaire obvious." He paused. "Anything else, my friend?"

Fenton hesitated. "Well, I am not so positive about this," he ventured, "but it seems to me that another repair was made, also—and not at the same time that the new e was put in. There are indications that the machine was badly out of alinement when the first page of this manuscript was done on it, while the alinement is greatly improved on the second page. It would appear that either those two pages were done on different typewriters, or else the machine was overhauled in the middle of the work."

"Excellent!" Professor Esclanon approved. "My son, I congratulate you. Of a certainty you are advancing in your studies." He glanced again at the manuscript. "You can rest assured that two typewriters were not used. That all this work was done on the one machine there is proof unmistakable. He was overhauled in the middle, as you have said. But why do you think that both repairs were not at the same time made—the adjustment of the alinement, and the replacing of the broken e?"

"The first page shows that," Fenton pointed out. "The alignment is poor on that page, but the letter e makes a perfect impression. Therefore it is a safe bet that one repair was made later than the other."

"Very true. Anything more, Meester Fenton? Of course it has not your observation escaped that the crossing of the t on the left is slightly broken; that the h still slants a leetle too much to the right; that part of the upper ceriph from the m has gone; that the s is in the middle too flat; that the a is not light enough in the upper right-hand part; that the q is still slightly out of position; and that part of the interrogation point is meesing?"

Fenton laughingly confessed that even with the aid of a good glass he had failed to perceive most of these minute details. He had observed that all of the type, except the letter e, showed signs of wear and tear, but when it came to detecting the exact imperfections of each individual letter—that was a little bit beyond his powers.

"However," he added, "the fact that the machine has been twice repaired will be enough for my present purpose. These

additional means of identification you have pointed out, and any others your expert eye may bring to light, will no doubt come in mighty useful later, professor—after I have located the typewriter on which this manuscript was done—but I don't need them just now. All I wanted was to make sure that I was not mistaken about the letter e, and the readjusted alignment. Now that I have your assurance on those points, I can go ahead with confidence."

"But," the expert protested, frowning, "you cannot hope the typewriter to locate by those two clues alone. The identification would not be positive. You will probably find that there are at least a dozen machines in New York which have been twice repaired in that way. How—"

"If there are a dozen we shall have to run them all down and obtain samples of their work," the detective cut in, undaunted by the prospect of the amount of effort and patience such a task might entail. "That is where your expert services will come in, professor. From those samples it would, of course, be an easy matter for you to pick out the right typewriter."

He folded the manuscript and put it back in his pocket. "Well, I'll be getting along now. Much obliged for the help you have given me."

Fenton returned to his own office, where he summoned two of his best operatives into his presence.

"Here's a little job for you fellows," he told them. "Go to the office of the Lockwood Visible Typewriter Company. Interview the head of their service department. Get him to look over his records carefully and see if he has an entry of a repair job on a machine which needed a new letter e. That's the first step."

"Then have him go over his records again and see if he has the same machine entered for another repair made at a later date. The alignment was adjusted that time. If he has more than one case of that sort on his books, get the names and addresses of the owners and look all of them up without letting it be known what you are after. Manage to get a sample of the writing of each typewriter. You understand?"

The men nodded. "Is that all, chief?" one of them asked. "It looks like a simple enough job," he ventured to add.

"It may not be as simple as it appears," Fenton remarked dryly. "If we are lucky your work may end there, but—it is not at all unlikely that the machine we are looking for was not repaired by the Lockwood Company's service department. It may have been attended to by some other concern. That, of course, would greatly complicate matters. In that case it will be necessary for you to visit the repair department of every typewriter dealer in the city until you succeed in locating the right one. And there are hundreds of such concerns in New York." He grinned. "So you see this assignment may not turn out to be such a soft snap as you boys imagine."

"That machine has got to be landed," he continued, his face suddenly becoming grim. "No matter how long it takes, or how much shoe-leather you have to wear out, I don't want either of you to come back here until you are in a position to report success. And don't forget that when you have succeeded in locating a Lockwood Visible which looks as if it might be the one we are looking for, you are to obtain a sample of its work without arousing the slightest suspicion on the part of its owner. That's important."

"Very good, chief," one of the operatives acquiesced, and without further parley they started out to execute these orders.

Fenton pressed a button on his desk which summoned another operative.

"Here's something I wish you'd attend to immediately, Cavanagh," he said, when the latter appeared. "Go to the office of the Apex Pictures Corporation and see Mr. Edward Travers, the publicity man there. Tell him I sent you, and ask him to let you have the serial number and date of a check which the scenario department sent out some days ago to a man named Stanley Mortimer. Then go to the bank and find out if that check has been cashed. If they have it, bring the canceled voucher to me and if possible get a description of the person who presented it."

As Detective Cavanagh departed on this errand his chief again put his finger on the

ivory button which connected with the buzzer in the operatives' room. Almost instantly a fourth operative came in response to the summons.

"I want all the particulars you can gather about a small power yacht that was anchored in the Hudson, off Hillhaven, three days ago," he told this man. "Find out the name of the craft, who owns it, and what has become of it since it weighed anchor and left that part of the river."

"Very well, sir. Will that be all?"

"Not quite. You will no doubt have to run out to Hillhaven to get a line on the yacht. While you are up there, Dougherty, I wish you would make some inquiries about a gray roadster containing two men which was seen in those parts on the same day that the boat weighed anchor. I haven't the number of the car, unfortunately, or any particulars about the men, so, to be frank, I haven't much hope of your accomplishing much in that direction. Still, it's just possible that you may be lucky enough to pick up some information concerning them from some of the natives of the town. See what you can do, old man—but, at all events, be sure to bring me back the particulars about that yacht."

Having thus marshaled his forces, Fenton put on his hat, lighted a fresh cigar, and, going down to the street, hailed a passing taxicab.

He had decided to take a run out to Yonkers and have a look at the body of the Japanese which had been picked up in the Hudson River.

CHAPTER VIII.

A WOMAN IN THE CASE.

CHIEF COLEMAN, of the Yonkers police department, greeted Fenton as an old friend.

"Welcome to our city, lieutenant," he said cordially, addressing the visitor by his old police title. "We haven't seen much of you out here since you left the central office to go into business for yourself. What's on your mind now, old man?"

"The same little matter which, if I am not greatly mistaken, is responsible for the

creases I observe on your brow, chief," Fenton answered, with a whimsical smile. "I thought I'd like to take a look at the Japanese gentleman who was found in the river," he added more seriously.

"Ah! So you, too, are interested in that case! I understood that the Shapiro Agency was handling it. Abe Shapiro, himself, was in here half an hour ago. He told me that his concern had been retained by the moving-picture company which employed the Jap. He didn't mention that you, also, were tackling the job."

"Possibly he did not know it. I have not been retained by the moving-picture concern. I am making an independent investigation for—er—another client." He paused. "If it isn't betraying any confidence, may I ask what Shapiro did here?"

"Nothing much. He merely went to the morgue to look at the body which had already been identified as Ito Yamada by a newspaperman. Then he dropped in here to pay his respects, and went back to New York. He seemed to be satisfied that there was nothing more to be learned about the murder by hanging around Yonkers. Maybe he's right about that. After all, the body was merely brought ashore here. There's no particular reason to suppose that the crime was committed in these parts."

Fenton arched his eyebrows. "You seem to have thoroughly made up your mind that it wasn't a case of accidental drowning," he remarked.

"Yes; I have. You'll say so, too, after you've examined the body."

"What do you mean?" Fenton's tone carried an inflection of astonishment. "I understood that there were no marks of violence—nothing to suggest that there had been foul play."

"We were under that impression ourselves at first. A superficial examination led us to believe that the poor fellow had either committed suicide or fallen into the water. But later on we made a discovery which caused us to change our minds. We found a dent in the man's skull—undoubtedly the result of a blow from a blackjack or a sandbag. Dr. Morton, after examining that mark, is positive that the victim

must have been either dead or unconscious before he was thrown into the river. There'll be an autopsy later, of course, to confirm our suspicions, but even now we're quite convinced that it's a case of murder."

Fenton's face lighted up. "I suppose Shapiro and the newspapermen have been informed of this development?" he asked.

"We haven't told the reporters, yet. Perhaps we sha'n't give it out to the press until we've made considerably more headway on the case. Not that I have any hard feeling toward the newspaper boys, but it may be good policy to let the public remain under the impression that we have no suspicion of foul play.

"As for Shapiro," the chief of police continued, "of course it's possible that he may have observed that significant dent himself when he examined the body. I don't like the fellow—he's always impressed me as being crooked—but there's no denying that he's got a pair of mighty sharp eyes. However, if he did notice it he didn't say anything to me about it, and I didn't broach the subject to him."

He grinned. "Apart from my personal prejudice against him, I never feel inclined to tell you private-agency chaps any more than I am obliged to."

"But you told me—"

"Oh, you're different. You're an ex-cop, and even though you're running an agency, now, we still look on you as one of us, old man. I assure you I haven't forgotten the valuable assistance you gave us on more than one occasion while you were attached to the central office, and any time we have a case out here in which you're interested you're always welcome to all we've got. Besides"—the head of the local force grinned again—"I knew that if I didn't tell you about that mark on the body you'd be sure to discover it yourself. It's possible that Shapiro may have overlooked it, sharp though he is, but you never overlook anything."

Fenton expressed his appreciation of this compliment and of the other's good-will toward him.

"May I see the silver cigarette-case which was found in the dead man's pocket?" he requested.

"Certainly." Chief Coleman went to the safe in the corner of his private office and returned with the article, which had already been tagged as an exhibit in the case.

The New York detective examined it closely. "Was this all that was found on him?" he asked.

"That was all, except a box of safety matches. Not much of a clue in them, I guess."

Fenton was not so sure about that. He had once scored one of the most brilliant triumphs of his career by following the lead which the printed advertisement on a package of paper matches had furnished him. However, he was not so lucky in this instance. A close inspection of the water-soaked box which had been taken from the Jap's pocket satisfied him that it bore no distinctive characteristics which were likely to be helpful to him in his present investigation. It was just an ordinary box of safeties, with nothing on it except the name of the Swedish firm from which it had been imported.

The silver cigarette-case, too, seemed to be equally unpromising as a clue. He had asked to be allowed to inspect it on the faint chance that he might discover something about it which would throw some light on the fate of its owner, but it looked as though he was going to be disappointed in that expectation. The initials engraved on its shining exterior, and the half-dozen Turkish cigarettes which it contained, might have interested him greatly if the identity of the body snatched from the river had been an unsolved problem. But assuming that the unfortunate Japanese was really Yamada, those clues were superfluous.

"Has any one from the moving-picture concern been out here to identify the body?" he asked.

"No one but Shapiro, who said he was investigating the case for them. They telephoned that they were sending Mr. McCullough, their director, to attend to the funeral arrangements, but he hasn't shown up here yet." The chief of police smiled grimly. "Of course we're not going to hand him over the body when he does

get here, but I didn't tell them that over the telephone. I didn't let on to them that we're working on the theory that their man was murdered. Time enough for that later.

"I'm letting them send their director out here, anyway," he added. "I'd like to have a talk with him. As a representative of the concern, which employed the Jap, he may be able to give us some information which may help clear up the mystery. At present, I don't mind admitting, we're completely in the dark as to the circumstances surrounding the case."

Fenton was somewhat astonished to learn that the worthy head of the local police force had heard nothing of what had happened at the château on the island off Hillhaven. A brief reflection, however, caused him to realize that, after all, there was nothing so very surprising about that. The morning papers were willing enough now to print the remarkable story which Eddie Travers had told them, but they would not come out with the startling news until the next day.

The evening press, in all probability, was still in ignorance of the facts of the case; for it was only to the city editors of the morning dailies that the worried publicity man had appealed for assistance in locating his missing film star.

Moreover, the chances were that each of those city editors, being under the impression that he had a "beat" on the story, had warned the reporter assigned to "cover" the tragic incident at Yonkers not to "spill any information" to the local authorities.

Fenton, seeing no reason why his friend should be kept in the dark, acquainted him with what he knew about the affair.

"Do you mean to say that Shapiro didn't explain to you why he had been retained by the Apex Pictures Corporation?" he began.

"Sure he explained that. He said that, being the Jap's employers, they were naturally anxious to learn how his body happened to be found floating in the river, so had gone to the expense of hiring his agency to get to the bottom of the affair."

The New York detective smiled. "Was that all?"

"All! What do you mean?"

"I mean that our friend Abe might have been a great deal more communicative with you if he had wished. You will no doubt be astonished to hear, my dear chief, that both he and I were working on this case *before* the Jap was pulled out of the Hudson."

He proceeded to repeat the story which Eddie Travers had confided to him. The other's eyes grew wide with amazement as he listened, and a scowl darkened his features.

"And Shapiro knew all that, and never told me a word!" he growled. "The dirty crook—that's just like him. That fellow is so doggoned mean that—"

"After all," Fenton cut in with a laugh, "you have hardly the right to complain, you know. I'm not exactly an admirer of Abe Shapiro myself, but you must admit that if he held out on you, chief, he was merely paying you back in your own coin. You weren't exactly frank with him, either, about that dent in the dead man's skull."

"I'd like to put a dent in his skull," the irate police official muttered. Then his manner changed. "Well, I'm much obliged to you, anyway, old man, for tipping me off. I always knew that you were white." He reached for the telephone on his desk. "I'll get the chief of police of Hillhaven on the wire right away and tell him to get busy on his end of the case."

Fenton started to object to this, but changed his mind. "All right," he acquiesced with a shrug, "the more the merrier. I'd like to have a clear field if I could, but that, of course, is out of the question now. What with the sleuth-hounds from Park Row, and the operatives from the Shapiro Agency, the little town of Hillhaven is doomed to be overrun with detective talent, so a few additional investigators on the scene can't do much harm."

While Chief Coleman was in telephonic communication with the police chief of the little town farther up the river, his visitor sat musing over the situation. Reviewing the developments of this remarkable case to date, the latter had to admit to himself that he was completely mystified as to their relative significance. Never in his career

had he been given a problem to solve which presented so many puzzling features.

He had come to Yonkers practically satisfied in his mind that the tragic death of Ito Yamada was a case of accidental drowning—that the man must have fallen overboard while he and Veronica Vane were leaving the island via the underground channel. If that had been so the mystery of the woman's present whereabouts and the motive for her vanishing would have been perplexing enough; but what Chief Coleman had told him about the mark of violence on the dead man's skull added greatly to his bewilderment.

Of course, even now, it was not to be taken for granted that the Jap's fate had been the result of foul play, Fenton reflected. It was possible that in falling overboard from the boat he had struck his head. As to that, he would be able to decide better after he had paid a visit to the morgue. He certainly had no intention of taking the local police chief's word for it that the injury had been sustained by a blow from a black-jack. An expert in making such examinations, he was confident that a careful inspection of the wound would reveal to him the nature of its origin.

As he sat thus meditating, the New York detective had picked up again the silver cigarette-case which bore Yamada's initials, and was absently fingering it. Suddenly a gleam of interest came to his keen eyes, and he scrutinized the article with as much attention as if this were the first time he had had it in his hands.

Subconsciously he had hit upon a discovery. His fingers, traveling aimlessly along the edge of the silver container, had come in contact with a slight, elongated protrusion which had escaped his observation before. It was a semiconcealed hinge—but not one of the hinges on which the case swung open in the regular way.

It did not take him long after that to bring to light the secret compartment in the cigarette-case, the presence of which was suggested by this additional hinge. The contrivance was rather ingenious. In less than a minute Fenton had the thing apart, and he was gazing triumphantly at its contents.

"What is it?" Chief Coleman asked eagerly, as he finished at the telephone and stepped to his friend's side. "What have you found, old man? Ah! A photograph! The portrait of a woman! That looks interesting. *Cherchez la femme, eh!*"

"There certainly does appear to be a woman in this case," Fenton remarked whimsically.

"There always is—in every case. And this is a white woman, too—not one of the Jap's own race." The police official studied intently the fair face which stared up at him from the silver frame in his companion's hand. "A mighty good-looking girl, too, I should say. Who is she, I wonder? Not the missing movie actress?"

Fenton shook his head. "No; this certainly is not Veronica Vane. It doesn't bear the slightest resemblance to her," he declared thoughtfully.

CHAPTER IX.

M'CULLOUGH ARRIVES.

FENTON took out his pocket knife, and with the aid of its blade, carefully lifted the oblong of glass which covered the photograph in the secret compartment of the cigarette-case. Then he separated the picture itself from its frame in the hope that he might find on the reverse side some clue to the identity of the original of the portrait, or her relation to the dead man.

He was disappointed, however. There was no writing on the back of the photograph—not even the imprint of the photographer, although it appeared to be the product of a professional camera artist.

The picture was that of a very young woman. She could hardly have been out of her teens at the time it was taken, the detective decided. Her face was unusually prepossessing, and if the human physiognomy could ever be relied on as an index of character, its owner was as gentle and guileless as she was beautiful.

"I wonder who she is," Chief Coleman remarked again, as his companion replaced the portrait in its frame. "It would be worth something to know that—eh, Fenton? The Jap must have thought a pow-

erful lot of her to have carried her likeness about with him. And him a married man, too—I understand he was married to a lady of his own nationality. The plot begins to thicken, I should say.”

He paused, and his face lighted up. “I have a hunch that a chat with Mrs. Ito Yamada wouldn’t be exactly a waste of time. We must look her up pretty soon. I’m willing to bet my head that jealousy was at the bottom of this murder.”

“You suspect Mrs. Yamada of killing her husband?”

“I’m inclined to think it’s a pretty fair theory to work on. The Japanese lady may have found out about this secret love affair of Ito’s, and was so worked up about it that she made herself a widow. How does that strike you?”

Fenton laughed. “Men have been killed by jealous wives before now,” he remarked dryly. “But I’ve never heard of the victim being black-jacked in such cases, and his body thrown into the river. A black-jack is hardly a lady’s weapon.”

“The woman may not have attended to the business herself. She may have got some of her relatives or men friends interested in her wrongs; or she may have hired a bunch of gangsters to settle with Yamada.”

“That’s a bit more plausible,” Fenton conceded. “Still, it fails to take into account the disappearance of Veronica Vane. If—”

“No; it doesn’t,” the other cut in excitedly. “Great Scott! Don’t you see, Fenton, how nicely that feature of the case works in with my theory? Let us suppose that Mrs. Yamada knew that she had a rival, but did not know who her rival was. She had found out in some way that the Jap was smitten with another woman, but she had never met the original of the picture in the cigarette-case. In the circumstances what more likely than that she should jump at the conclusion that it was the moving-picture actress who had supplanted her in her husband’s affections?”

“So she avenged herself by kidnaping Miss Vane as well as by killing the Jap?”

“Who says the Vane woman has been kidnaped?” the other rejoined. “I

wouldn’t be greatly surprised if her dead body, too, shows up in the river before very long,” he added sardonically. “It isn’t usual in such cases to croak the guilty man and let the lady escape with her life.

“Or here’s another theory,” Chief Coleman exclaimed. “Possibly the Jap’s wife didn’t figure in this affair at all. We’ll be able to decide better about that after we’ve had a talk with her and had a chance to see how she sizes up. If she turns out to be innocent, it may have been the Vane lady herself who acted the rôle of the jealous avenger.”

“You mean—you are suggesting that Veronica Vane was jealous of Yamada’s devotion to the original of this photograph?”

“I’m not saying I think so. I’m merely offering it as an alternate theory. If Mrs. Yamada’s hands are clean in this affair, I’d say it’s not a bad bet that it was the moving-picture actress who settled the Jap’s hash, and is now keeping under cover because she’s afraid of being prosecuted for the crime. Yamada was a pretty good-looking chap, you know, and he looks like the sort who may have been a devil among the women.”

Fenton frowned thoughtfully. “If there were any reason to suppose that Miss Vane was in love with the Jap I’d be inclined to favor this second theory of yours, chief,” he remarked slowly. “But I have been told—I have been given to understand that there was nothing of that sort between them; her affections were centered in another direction.”

The head of the Yonkers police force shrugged his shoulders. “Who can tell anything about a woman’s affections?” was his sententious response. “They’re a great sex for stalling, as you’ve had experience enough with them to realize—in a professional way, I mean, of course. Yamada having a yellow skin—and a wife besides—it isn’t likely that the Vane woman would have worn her heart on her sleeve, even if she was gone on him. She may have pretended to be in love with another man so as to keep the rest of the bunch at the studio from getting on to the real state of affairs. Pshaw! That’s an easy one.”

"Very true," the New York detective assented, the flesh between his eyebrows still gathered in lines of uncertainty. He snapped the cigarette-case closed and held it out toward his companion. "Well, I suppose you might as well put this back in the safe, chief. You won't—I hope you will agree with me that for the present it would be just as well not to let anybody else examine it too closely."

"Don't worry about that, old man. The fact that it contains anything else besides cigarettes is going to remain a secret between you and me until we've made considerable more headway on this case. If—"

He was interrupted by a uniformed attendant who came to announce a visitor.

"He's a Mr. McCullough, from the motion-picture concern," the man informed him.

The chief nodded. "Let him come right in," he ordered.

The man who presently entered the room was a stockily built, smooth-shaven chap, apparently on the sunny side of forty, with the dreamy eyes of a poet, and the square jaw of a prize-fighter.

"Sorry I couldn't get here before, chief," he apologized. "Some important matters at the studio detained me."

"That's all right, Mr. McCullough. I was hoping, though—er—I thought that possibly you were waiting to bring Mrs. Yamada with you. She, of course, would be the best person to make a positive identification of the body."

"Mrs. Yamada, unfortunately, is not in town," McCullough informed them. "We have telegraphed her, but it will be some time before she can get here. However, if there's any doubt about the—about its being Yamada, I can soon settle that point myself. I know the Jap well enough to identify him positively."

"Ah! So Mrs. Yamada has left town, has she?" exclaimed the chief of police, with a significant glance in Fenton's direction.

"Yes; she is in California, visiting some friends."

"When did she go away?"

"She has been out there for the past month. Her health is not good, and the

New York climate did not seem to agree with her."

Fenton could not help smiling at the police official's evident disappointment.

"Oh, well, it's of no great consequence—about her being here to make the identification, I mean," the chief said. "As you say, Mr. McCullough, you ought to be able to attend to that detail just as satisfactorily as the widow." He paused. "So you have already telegraphed the sad news to her! It must have been an awful shock to the poor woman. Were they a devoted couple?"

McCullough hesitated, and the others did not fail to observe the shadow which flitted across his face.

"Mrs. Yamada was very much attached to her husband—there's no doubt about that," he declared. "She is a splendid little woman—as pretty as a flower, and thoroughly Americanized. She went to college in the United States, and has spent most of her life in this country."

"A college-bred woman, eh?" the police official commented. "Well, even a college education doesn't prevent a woman from being jealous. You haven't completely answered my question, Mr. McCullough. You say there's no doubt about Mrs. Yamada being a devoted wife, but—what about the Jap—did he ever give her cause to be jealous of another woman?"

Again the motion picture director hesitated.

"I can't say that he did," he answered, diffidently. "He always impressed us all as being a pretty decent sort of chap. And he seemed as fond of his wife as she was of him, but—"

"But what?" Chief Coleman put in sharply. "Don't hold anything back, man. We've got to get to the bottom of this business, and if you know anything about Yamada's affairs which might throw some light on the situation it's your duty to be absolutely frank with us."

McCullough frowned. "I don't know anything," he said moodily. "I merely—I can't help having my suspicions, though. I don't want to do him an injustice, but Veronica—Miss Vane's startling disappearance, and the astonishing circumstances surrounding it, compel me to suspect that—that the

Jap may not have been the honest, harmless fellow we thought him."

"What do you mean?" Coleman demanded, eagerly. Then, with another significant glance at Fenton: "Have you any reason for assuming, Mr. McCullough, that there was a secret love affair going on between Yamada and your leading lady?"

"Between them! Certainly not." The motion picture director scowled. "I—I'll thrash any man who dares to make such an insinuation against Miss Vane," he threatened, hoarsely. "It was—it must have been all one-sided. Veronica never gave him the slightest encouragement. You can be quite sure of that. If she had he wouldn't have had to resort to that rascally kidnaping plot."

"Kidnaping plot!" The police official's eyebrows went up. "Then your idea is that the Jap was trying to carry off the lady against her will, and was killed in the attempt?"

McCullough made a deprecatory gesture. "I don't know how he was killed," he responded. "There are lots of things about this queer affair which are incomprehensible to me. The more I try to make them out the more I am puzzled. But I can't help suspecting the Jap of being responsible for that poor girl's disappearance. Heaven forgive me if I am unjust to him, but I—there doesn't seem to be any other way of explaining what happened at the château on the island."

Chief Coleman stroked his chin reflectively. Then, with a grin, he turned to Fenton.

"Well, there's another theory for you to choose from, lieutenant," he said, ironically. "How does Mr. McCullough's version strike you?"

"About as favorably as the others we have discussed," the detective replied, dryly.

CHAPTER X.

FENTON GETS A LIFT.

FENTON and the Chief of Police accompanied McCullough to the local morgue, where the latter was shown the grim exhibit in which he was interested.

"It is he," was his positive assertion. "It is Ito Yamada without any question. That zigzag scar on his left wrist would be enough to settle the matter, if there were the slightest doubt."

He shuddered as he gazed on the still, waxlike countenance. "Poor fellow!" he muttered. "I always liked him. I always thought he was a good scout. If—I wish I knew now whether to feel sorry for him, or—or glad that he has got his just deserts."

The matter of the identification thus being disposed of, the motion-picture director and Chief Coleman did not linger on the scene.

Fenton, however, remained there for a moment longer and satisfied himself that the depression in the dead man's skull, to which the chief had called his attention, was undoubtedly the result of a blow from a blackjack or some similar weapon. The skin was not broken and the scalp was hardly bruised and yet the blow had been delivered with sufficient force to dent the bone.

McCullough was just stepping into a racing car as the detective reached the street.

"Going back to New York?" the latter asked. "I'm bound that way myself. If you've no objection I'll ride in with you."

"I shall be pleased to have your company," the director told him. "Jump in." He smiled deplorably. "After what I've just seen in there," he added, pointing to the grim building from which he had recently made his exit, "I don't feel much like traveling back to town by myself. I'm glad you're going my way."

Fenton was equally glad of the opportunity the ride would give him to discuss the case with his interesting companion. He had listened attentively to the colloquy between the latter and Chief Coleman. He had heard McCullough give the local police official a detailed account of what had happened at the château on the island, and, furtively studying the narrator, had been on the whole rather favorably impressed with him.

He desired, however, to learn a little more from this man, who, if Eddie Travers was to be believed, held first place in the affections of the missing Veronica Vane. That was why he had practically invited himself

to a place aboard the director's two-seated car.

McCullough, he found, as they began their trip back to New York, was willing enough to talk about the case. The motion picture man was not fully aware of the identity of his passenger, but having met him at police headquarters, and hearing Chief Coleman address him as lieutenant, he was under the impression that Fenton was a member of the Yonkers detective force. The New York detective did not see fit to undeceive him on that point.

"So you believe that Yamada deserved what he got?" Fenton began, after they had traveled a few blocks in silence.

"I'm afraid it looks very much that way," the other responded. "If he tried to carry off that poor girl by force, and was—and fell into the river during the struggle, he—it certainly served him right. Drowning would be too good for a cur who would be capable of such an outrage."

"But how could he have attempted to carry off Miss Vane by force? The story which you have told us doesn't seem to bear out such a supposition. Why didn't she cry out for help? You say you heard no scream?"

"Not a sound. But the ruffian may have overpowered her before she had a chance to cry out. They were in that confounded house all alone. There's no telling what means he employed."

Fenton paused for a moment as though considering this argument. "Yes; he might have taken her by surprise," he acquiesced presently. "How did he get her out of the château, though, without attracting the attention of you folks outside? That's a point which is not so easily explained."

"I know it," said McCullough, deploringly. "It's the most bewildering feature of the whole astonishing affair. They seemed to disappear almost before our eyes. One minute we saw them both at the attic window, apparently without a thought in their minds except for the picture we were shooting—the next minute they had vanished into thin air." He laughed nervously. "Don't ask me to explain a thing like that, old man. It's beyond me entirely. I—

I've almost gone nutty trying to figure it out."

"Of course there might have been a secret means of exit from the château," the detective remarked. "A concealed stairway, or something of that sort."

As he spoke he watched the man beside him narrowly. He was rather curious as to how the motion picture director would take this suggestion.

The latter nodded eagerly. "Yes; a secret stairway would appear to be the only possible solution of the mystery," he responded. "Of course, I'm not such an idiot as not to have thought of that myself. But we searched the house pretty thoroughly and couldn't find any signs of such a thing. And the operatives of the Shapiro agency, who have been working on the case, made a thorough examination of the premises, too. They ought to be experts at discovering a device of that sort, but they didn't meet with any success."

"Besides, if there was a secret exit from the château, how could Yamada have known about it? And assuming that he and the girl left the house in that way, what became of them after that—why didn't we catch sight of them as they came out? The building is located in the center of the island. There is considerable ground on every side of it. From where we stood we ought to have been able to see them before they reached the water's edge."

The man's manner seemed sincere enough. Even though he did not fail to take into consideration the fact that he was dealing with one whose livelihood depended on his skill in counterfeiting human emotions, Fenton was almost convinced that the director of the Apex Pictures Corporation was not aware of the existence of the subterranean channel which connected the ancient château with the river.

The detective decided to change the subject. "I understand that Miss Vane was engaged to be married," he said abruptly.

McCullough started violently. "Who told you that?" he demanded.

"I—er—am not at liberty to reveal the source of my information, at present. I assure you, though, that I heard it on pretty good authority. Is it the truth?"

The other's attention seemed to be confined to the steering wheel of the car for a moment, for no response came from him.

"The engagement, I am aware, was supposed to be a secret," Fenton continued, lightly. "But, of course, it couldn't have been a secret kept from you, Mr. McCullough."

"Why not?" There was a note of irritation in the director's tone. "Why should you expect me to know—"

"Because—according to the information I have received—you were the lucky man."

McCullough received this with a bitter laugh. "You have been misinformed," he declared. "I—Miss Vane has not done me the honor of promising to marry me, if that is what you mean. We—she refused—" He broke off suddenly, with an ejaculation of anger. "Hang it all, Mr. Detective!" he exclaimed, "I don't see why I should discuss my personal affairs with you, even in view of what has happened. I am willing to give you all the help I can, but a discussion of my relations with Miss Vane cannot possibly throw any light on the mystery of her disappearance."

It was clear to Fenton that he had touched a raw spot. Nevertheless he persisted. "I beg your pardon for dwelling on a subject which is evidently painful to you," he said. "You are mistaken, however, about the matter not being relevant to the case I am investigating. Your own personal affairs are none of my business, of course, Mr. McCullough, but every detail of Miss Vane's private life is of supreme importance to us at this moment."

He paused. "If she had some reason for refusing you—if she told you of something in her earlier life which made it impossible for her to accept your proposal of marriage, I feel that I ought to know about it," he continued. "For I am pretty thoroughly convinced that it was some incident in Veronica Vane's mysterious past which was responsible for what happened at the château on the island."

There followed another brief interval of silence. It was broken by McCullough.

"I suppose you are right," he said. "I apologize for losing my temper just now. As you say, the subject is rather a painful

one to me. Besides, I gave her my word that I would not repeat what she told me, when she refused—er—on the occasion to which you have referred. However, when I made that promise I, of course, had no idea of the astonishing thing that was going to happen the very next day. In the circumstances, I suppose I am justified in sharing her secret with you, since you think it might help you to get to the bottom of this remarkable affair.

"Yes; I asked her to marry me—and she turned me down," he went on, grimly. "She was grateful to me for all that I had done for her, but she—er—didn't care for me in that way. She made that very clear. Besides, she wasn't in a position to marry anybody, she told me. She already had a husband."

A sparkle of interest came to Fenton's eyes. So the missing Veronica Vane, alias Mary Brown, was a married woman! Here was important news indeed.

"She gave you some particulars about her marriage, of course?" the detective suggested, eagerly. "You know who the husband is?"

"I am sorry to say I don't know a thing about him," was the disappointing response. "All she told me was that she was already married. She didn't make even that admission willingly. It was only after I had bullied the poor little woman shamefully that I wrung it out of her."

"She burst into tears after that," McCullough continued. "She was so upset that I didn't have the heart to pursue the matter further that evening. Of course, I fully intended to persuade her to confide the details to me later. But I never had a chance; for it was the very next morning that we went out to that confounded island where she and the Jap vanished so mysteriously."

"The very next morning, eh?" Fenton muttered, musingly. "What a pity that you weren't successful in getting a little more information out of her that night! It might have saved us a lot of trouble."

Presently, as the car sped onward through the streets of upper Manhattan, he began to question his companion regarding the circumstances under which the young woman who had wished to be known as Mary

Brown had entered on a motion picture career. He hoped to learn more on this subject from the director than Eddie Travers had been able to tell him.

In this he was disappointed, however. McCullough swore that, in spite of the growing intimacy of their relations, he had never been able to get a word out of the missing actress as to her past history except on that painful occasion when he had forced from her the reluctant confession that a formidable obstacle existed in the shape of a husband.

Still, Fenton was greatly encouraged by that one revelation. On the whole, he was very well pleased with the results of his trip to Yonkers, and particularly congratulated himself on the happy thought which had prompted him to ride back to town in the motion picture man's car.

"We are going to find out some more about friend husband before we are very much older," he promised himself. "And more about the lady in Yamada's cigarette case, too."

"I may be wrong," he reflected, his brow furrowed, and his eyes very thoughtful, "but I have an idea that both of them play important parts in this interesting little drama."

CHAPTER XI.

A VISIT FROM A RIVAL.

CAVANAUGH, the operative who had been assigned to make inquiry at the bank regarding the check which the scenario editor of the Apex Pictures Corporation had mailed to the mysterious author of "The House on the Island," was ready to report to Fenton when the latter returned to his office.

"The bank people told me that the check hasn't been presented for payment yet," he announced. "It would have come through the clearing house long before this, of course, if he had cashed it through another party; so it looks, boss, as though this Mr. Stanley Mortimer must be more prosperous than most writer chaps. He's the first author I've ever heard of who could afford to carry an uncashed, perfectly good check for

two hundred and seventy-five dollars around in his pocket for several days."

"Perhaps in his case it was more a matter of excessive caution than prosperity," the head of the Fenton Detective Agency remarked. "He was probably clever enough to foresee that he might be traced if he cashed the check. He had to accept the slip of paper—he realized that if he did not make arrangements for it to reach him the motion picture concern might become suspicious of his good faith and decide not to produce his play—but considerations of safety first caused him to resist the temptation to collect that two hundred and seventy-five dollars."

Fenton laughed softly. "It appears to be a pretty wise bird that we're after," he muttered. "Fortunately, though, we were not relying entirely on the clue of the scenario department's remittance. By the typewriter on which the manuscript was written we shall eventually put salt on his tail if we have any sort of luck."

"All right, Cavanaugh," he told the operative, "you can forget about the check, for the present. Here's another job for you that will require a great deal more digging on your part, I imagine. I want as full a history as you can get on Miss Veronica Vane, leading lady of the Apex concern. We want to know who she was and what she was doing before she went into the pictures. You won't get the information at the studio, but you might go and see Travers again and find out from him the name and address of the agency which supplied them with extra people at the time a young woman known as Mary Brown began her film career. Mary Brown later became Veronica Vane, so a visit to the theatrical agency will probably be a good lead. See what you can dig up concerning her."

As Cavanaugh made his exit, Fenton summoned another operative and gave him similar instructions regarding the antecedents of Ito Yamada. Both of these men were seasoned investigators who excelled particularly in this branch of detective work. Their employer felt confident that if success was humanly possible, neither of them would fail to achieve concrete results even though it took months for them to un-

cover the hidden chapters in the lives of the two principal figures in this strange case.

With five of his most skilled operatives now assigned to the investigation, to say nothing of the demands it was making on his own time and energy, even a less hard-headed business man than Keith Fenton might have paused to reflect that, inasmuch as he had promised Eddie Travers that there would be no charge for his services unless the affair turned out to be a press-agent's hoax, he was engaged in a not very profitable venture.

If such a thought did occur to the former central office man, however, it did not bring with it any regret that he had thus impulsively committed himself, nor cause him to consider subordinating the matter to the business of more remunerative clients.

Fenton was no altruist—at least, he would indignantly have resented being called one—and it was not particularly considerations of friendship for the worried publicity man of the Apex Pictures Corporation which had prompted him to undertake the investigation in the first place, and was now inducing him to employ the activities of the most efficient members of his staff on an enterprise that, even though successful, was bound to net him a dead loss from a financial standpoint.

The fact was that the possibilities of the remarkable story which Travers had told him had appealed to his imagination. All his instincts as a professional solver of intricate problems in human affairs had been aroused by what he had thus far learned about the vanishing of Veronica Vane, and the tragic fate of the Japanese actor. And it was characteristic of the man that, although he was not "in business for his health," the degree to which a case challenged his professional skill always weighed more with him than the question of what it was likely to bring him in dollars and cents.

In short, he had tackled this problem because it interested him more than any other mystery which had ever been brought to his attention.

That was one reason why he was resolved to get to the bottom of the queer happening at the château on the island, no matter how great a sacrifice of his own time

and the work of his subordinates the task entailed. There was another reason. It was a secondary one, but by no means negligible. It had to do with the fact that Travers, in appealing to him for aid, had mentioned that the Shapiro Detective Agency was already at work on the case.

If there was one man in New York with whom Fenton took especial pleasure in matching wits, it was Mr. Abe Shapiro, proprietor of the above-mentioned concern. Cordially detesting the fellow's personality and his professional methods, he did not fail to appreciate his competitor's shrewdness and indefatigability—qualities which added to the former central office man's eagerness to cross swords with him whenever opportunity offered.

From a financial standpoint the Shapiro Agency was one of the most successful private detective firms in the United States. Its long list of triumphs in obtaining evidence in divorce cases, and in certain other kinds of cases which more conservative agencies hesitated to touch, had brought the little, swarthy, ferret-eyed man at its head a nation-wide, if rather unsavory reputation, and a degree of prosperity which kept his bookkeeping department working overtime.

Shapiro's waiting-room was always thronged with gentlemen who had become tired of their wives or near-wives; ladies who entertained an equally ardent yearning to free themselves of objectionable male entanglements; unscrupulous business men who sought the detective's aid in "putting something over" on a trade rival, and members of the demi-monde who had axes to grind and came there confident that the grindstone would be efficiently provided.

Not all the clients of this distinguished firm were drawn from these sinister walks of life, however. Little Abe Shapiro's skill in conducting criminal investigations brought him considerable business of a legitimate nature. So long as he was well paid for his services he was not so squeamish as to object to handling a case simply because there was nothing irregular about it.

While attached to the central office Fenton's path had sometimes crossed that of Shapiro's when both of them happened to

be at work on a case of this latter sort. In the clashes which had resulted the private agency man had invariably come off second best.

But since he had retired from the force to run an agency of his own the former police lieutenant had never had occasion to renew these duels of wits. It happened that their respective activities had thus far kept them apart.

Therefore Fenton had received with interest the news that his old-time opponent had been retained by the president of the Apex Pictures Corporation to investigate the disappearance of the leading lady and the Japanese actor. That information had greatly stimulated his inclination to yield to Eddie Travers's frantic appeal to him to tackle the problem himself.

If he held Shapiro in contempt for his mean nature and unscrupulous practices, and was always glad of a chance to lessen the fellow's prestige by proving that he was the better detective of the two, the dislike was by no means one-sided. Only, dislike is entirely too mild a word to use in characterizing little Abe's sentiments toward his rival. He hated Fenton with an intensity which amounted almost to mania.

The latter was fully aware of this hatred. Consequently, he was somewhat curious when presently an office boy brought him an engraved card which bore the following legend:

SHAPIRO DETECTIVE AGENCY, Inc.

Licensed and Bonded Detectives

Civil, Criminal, and Confidential Investigations

Courier Building, Times Square, N. Y.

Presented by Mr. Abe Shapiro

"Presented by the redoubtable Abe himself, eh!" Fenton remarked, dryly. "By all means conduct him hither immediately, Billy. He's too busy a gentleman to be kept waiting."

The visitor's face wore a deprecatory expression as he came into the room. There was nothing hostile about his manner. He appeared pained rather than angry.

"I understand that you are working on that motion picture case," he began, getting right down to business at once.

"Motion picture case! That's rather indefinite, isn't it?"

Shapiro shrugged his shoulders. "I mean the disappearance of the Vane woman and the drowning of the Jap, if you prefer it in that form," he rejoined, still without any show of spleen. "I'd like to know just what you mean by horning into another agency's business, Fenton. It's deucedly unprofessional, you must admit."

"Unprofessional! In what way?"

"In every way. You must have known that we had already been exclusively retained by Mr. Solbaum, president of the Apex Pictures Corporation, to make the investigation. I learn from him that he hasn't made any attempt to call you in, too—hasn't even consulted you about the matter. So far as I can make out, your activity is entirely unauthorized. If you have any sense of professional ethics at all you must realize that that sort of thing isn't done by a reputable concern—such as you claim yours to be."

Fenton arched his eyebrows. "Dear me, is it possible that I have done anything to lower the standards of our honorable profession, Mr. Shapiro!" he exclaimed, deploringly. "I assure you that I am deeply appreciative of your courtesy in calling my attention to it. But won't you explain the real purpose of your call? Surely you haven't come here merely to give me a lesson in ethics?"

The other hesitated. "No; I am here for another reason," he admitted. "But before I go into it, I would like to know just where you fit in, Fenton. I'm a good sport, and I'm willing to lay all my cards on the table; but I think I have the right to demand equal frankness on your part. Let me hear just what your interest is in this case, before I spring my proposition."

The former police lieutenant regarded his visitor searchingly. "That sounds fair enough," he returned. "And I haven't the slightest objection to gratifying your curiosity as to my motive in interesting myself in this affair without any prospect of being remunerated for my services." He

paused. "The fact is that I sometimes tackle a case of unusual interest solely for the fun I expect to get out of the job."

"Fun?"

"Exactly. Just as a high-priced surgeon will occasionally operate on a needy patient for nothing, you know, if his symptoms are sufficiently out of the ordinary to make it worth the trouble. Perhaps fun isn't exactly the proper word, though. We might more happily call it professional enthusiasm. You see, the circumstances under which Miss Vane disappeared and the Jap's body was found in the river constitute such a pretty little mystery that I couldn't resist—"

Shapiro interrupted him with an impatient ejaculation. "You're trifling with me," he protested. "Why waste time, Fenton? Both of us are busy men—too darned busy to beat about the bush."

"Mystery!" he went on, with an ironical laugh. "Bah! There's not much mystery about this case—and you know it. I give you credit for being too smart to take seriously the preposterous yarn that liar of a press agent and his pal the director have tried to put over on us. They couldn't feed me that stuff, and I know you're too wise a bird to swallow it, either."

Fenton gazed at him with an air of surprise that was not feigned. "Then you don't believe—" he began.

"That the Vane woman and the Jap disappeared while they were inside that house, without the rest of the bunch having the slightest idea what became of them—no; I don't believe that," the other sneered. "And neither do you. It's the most asinine, far-fetched alibi I've ever been offered since I went into the detective business."

"What really happened is as clear as daylight to me," he declared. "There's no mystery about it at all. The Jap got gay with the woman while they were on the island making pictures, and she resented it with a sufficient display of force to send him toppling into the river. It didn't happen inside the house, as they claim. It must have occurred right near the water's edge."

"Yamada couldn't swim a stroke, and was drowned before the others could go to his rescue. Then the Vane lady naturally

got scared, and decided to beat it. Her friends agreed that it would be a good idea for her to remain under cover for a while, and helped her to make her getaway. Then they came back to the studio and, with the help of the press agent, got up that wild yarn to account for her absence and the fate of her victim."

"The fools thought that they could make it sound so convincing that they could put it across. They didn't reckon on their boss putting the case in my hands. Solbaum's attitude, of course, is entirely on the level. They didn't take him into their confidence. That is where they made one big mistake."

Fenton still regarded his visitor curiously. He was by no means convinced that this was the latter's honest estimate of the situation, even though the shrewd little man had spoken with a show of earnestness which might have deceived one who did not know him so well.

"So that's your theory, is it?" the former police lieutenant remarked.

"It sure is. If—do you see anything the matter with it?" In spite of himself a trace of anxiety revealed itself in Shapiro's tone. "Do you—have you any other way of explaining the woman's disappearance?" he added, his ferretlike eyes fixed intently on his rival's face.

"I don't know that I have—at present. But, of course, I have only just started to work on the case."

The other scowled. "Why are you working on it at all? That's what I want to know," he exclaimed.

"I have already told you—"

"Bah! Don't be childish. You can't make me believe that you've butted into this business merely to gratify your curiosity." Shapiro grinned reproachfully. "Why not be on the level with me, lieutenant? Lay down your cards like a good sport, and spill me the real reason why you're anxious to find the Vane woman."

His manner suddenly changed. He leaned forward in his chair, with a deprecatory gesture. "Do you suppose I'd be here now if I wasn't satisfied that you—that our interests in this matter are identical?" he went on. "I told you that I'd come to make you a proposition. Well,

here it is, whether you're willing to be frank with me or not:

"I propose that we join forces in hunting for the missing actress. I'd prefer to have the job all to myself, of course; but, since you've declared yourself in on it, we might as well tackle it together instead of getting in each other's way. That would be the sensible plan. What do you say?"

Fenton shook his head. "Much obliged, but I prefer to work alone," he replied decisively.

"Suppose you give the matter a little thought before you turn my offer down. I am sure it would be greatly to our mutual advantage to work together instead of in opposition."

"Possibly it would. But just the same, I am going to turn down your offer."

"That's final, is it?"

"Absolutely final, Mr. Shapiro."

For a moment the little man sat there with an expression on his face in which disappointment and something else were blended. Presently he shrugged, and got to his feet.

"Very well," he said, a rasp in his voice. "If that's the way you feel about it, I guess I won't take up any more of your valuable time." And he made an abrupt exit.

"Now, I wonder what he was really after," Fenton mused. And for the rest of that day he continued to speculate as to the significance of his rival's unexpected visit.

The following afternoon Dougherty, the operative whom he had sent to Hillhaven to make inquiries about the yacht which had been anchored in the vicinity of the island, returned to the office.

"Back already!" Fenton exclaimed. "You work pretty quick. You've located the boat?"

"Not yet, chief. I've got a line on her—figuratively speaking—but I'm not ready to report, at present. There's something else, though, that I thought you might want to hear about immediately." The operative paused. "You told me to make inquiries about a car—a gray roadster—while I was in Hillhaven. Well, I've made some headway in that direction. I've suc-

ceeded in identifying the two men who were in the car that day."

"The deuce you have! Who were they?"

"I'm not sure of their names. But they were a couple of operatives employed by the Shapiro agency."

"Ah!" exclaimed Fenton, a sparkle of interest in his eyes. "So Shapiro was shadowing Veronica Vane *before* she disappeared! That's an important bit of news, indeed!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE TYPEWRITER.

IN a few words Operative Dougherty explained to his chief how he had succeeded in learning the identity of the occupants of the gray roadster whose apparent interest in their movements had attracted the attention of the moving-picture troupe during that fatal trip to the château on the island. Modestly he disclaimed any great credit for getting such prompt results. A stroke of luck had favored him, he admitted.

"As soon as I got out to Hillhaven I began to make inquiries about that car, as you instructed me, boss," he said. "The prospects didn't look particularly bright, inasmuch as we didn't have the number of the machine, and there are lots of gray roadsters traveling over that route. But it just happened that I struck the one man in the town who was able to put me on the right track. He runs a restaurant, near the river front, and those two birds from the Shapiro agency went there that day to eat.

"He remembered that they came there in a gray roadster, as soon as I discussed the matter with him. They left the machine standing outside his front door, and—fortunately for us—they left it facing in the wrong direction. That's what fixed the incident in the restaurant keeper's memory; for it seems that the local constabulary of Hillhaven is out to make a record for rigid enforcement of the traffic regulations, and those two fellows were pinched for violating the rules of the road. They were taken to court and fined, and, of course, the license number of the car was entered on the official records.

"With that for a lead the rest was a cinch. I looked up the ownership of the machine in the license directory, and found that it was listed as belonging to a New York man named Saunders who runs a public garage on West Fortieth Street. This Saunders is an old pal of mine, so when I dropped in on him and told him what was on my mind he didn't make any bones about slipping me the information that although the gray roadster was listed under his name it really belonged to the Shapiro agency, and that two operatives from that concern, who were known to him as such, had taken it out that day.

"That was all there was to it, chief. Of course, I wouldn't want to swear that this gray car was the one you are interested in. I've no proof that such is the case, and it's possible that, after all, I followed the wrong lead, and—"

"It was the car, all right," Fenton cut in, confidently. "You needn't worry about that, Dougherty. Even making due allowances for the fact that there's such a thing as the long arm of coincidence, I am entirely satisfied that Shapiro's men didn't visit Hellhaven that day to admire the scenery." He paused. "You say you haven't had much success with the yacht so far?"

"Not much. I've interviewed some of the natives who noticed her anchored there on the other side of the river, and who gave me some details about her which I am hopeful may lead to something pretty soon; but I am not as yet able to tell you who owned her, or what became of her after she weighed anchor and sailed down the Hudson."

"All right. Keep after that boat. We've got to locate her." Fenton frowned thoughtfully. "She may have nothing whatever to do with the case," he muttered. "But we can't afford to overlook the possibility that she was one of the properties used in this pretty little drama."

The operative went out presently, and for some time after his departure his employer sat meditating over the interesting information he had brought.

"So it was Shapiro's men who have been shadowing Veronica Vane for the past few

months," mused Fenton, recalling what Eddie Travers had told him about the furtive strangers who had been annoying the motion-picture star. "Little Abe's interest in the case didn't begin when the president of the Apex Pictures Corporation retained him to investigate the mysterious vanishing of his leading lady and his Japanese actor. He was on the job long before that. It seems, of course, that he knows the secret of the woman's past. That's one advantage he has over me.

"But Shapiro has an idea that I am in possession of the secret, too," was his further reflection. "Which, no doubt, goes a long way toward explaining his queer behavior yesterday. He believed I knew, but he wasn't sure—so he came to feel me out.

"That was one reason why he paid me that visit. But it wasn't the only one. I am certain that the fellow came here on more than a mere fishing expedition. I could see that he was badly worried about something. Unless I am greatly mistaken, it was that which prompted him to propose that we join forces in hunting for the missing actress. It was fear which caused him to decide that it would be to his advantage to have me for an ally instead of for a competitor. Now what's his game, I wonder? What is he afraid of?"

He was still deliberating over the matter when two more of his operatives came back to the office to report.

These were the men whom he had assigned to conduct the hunt for the typewriter which the anonymous scenario writer, known as Stanley Mortimer, had used for the preparation of the manuscript of "The House on the Island."

"Got it?" he greeted them expectantly, reading success on their faces.

"We believe we have, chief," one of them answered, producing a folded sheet of paper which he straightened out and offered to his employer. "Looks pretty good."

"We didn't have to wear out as much shoe-leather as you expected, boss," the other put in, with a grin. "Our visit to the headquarters of the Lockwood Typewriter Company did the trick, so it wasn't necessary to go the rounds of the second-hand dealers.

"The Lockwood concern's repair department looked up their records and gave us a list of machines in which a new letter e had been put in recently. That seems to be a very frequent repair job in the typewriter business. But there was only one case on their books where the same machine had been twice repaired, lately, along the lines we wanted. The same repair-man did both jobs. We interviewed him, and he told us that the first time he went there it was to fix the broken letter, and that a couple of weeks later he was called back again by the same party. This time the carriage strap had broken, and while he was fixing it he adjusted the alinement."

Fenton's face lighted up. He opened a drawer of his desk and took therefrom the scenario of "The House on the Island." With the aid of a magnifying glass he compared this with the typewriting on the sheet of paper which his subordinates had brought.

"Great Scott! I believe we've landed it," he exclaimed, triumphantly. "Where is this machine, boys?"

"In the office of a sanatorium run by a party named Dr. Biggars. It's a big, old-fashioned house, located up in the Washington Heights section, overlooking the river. Barney and I went right up there as soon as we got this lead, and managed to get a sample of the typewriting as per your instructions."

Fenton frowned anxiously. "You were careful not to arouse suspicion?"

"Don't worry about that, boss. We took the Lockwood company's repair-man along with us—the same one who did the jobs on the machine. We sent him in to get the sample, without appearing in the matter ourselves at all. It was done as smooth as silk. He explained that he was working in the neighborhood on another job and had dropped in to inquire if the machine was behaving satisfactorily. The young woman in charge of the office remembered him and naturally didn't see anything out of the way in his sitting down at the typewriter to make a test."

Fenton's face lost its expression of anxiety. Presently he left his office and went over to see his friend, Professor Escla-

non, the handwriting and typewriting expert.

"I wish you'd make a careful comparison of these," he told the latter, handing him the manuscript and the single page of typewriting, "and let me know whether I am too optimistic in assuming that they were both done on the same Lockwood Visible."

The professor studied the two exhibits.

"Of a surety they were both on the same machine written," was his verdict. "But not by zee same person. Zee touch shows clearly that two different—"

"Of course they weren't written by the same person," the detective cut in, impatiently. "I am fully aware of that, professor. But you are quite sure that the writing is identical?"

The expert laughed softly. "What a question, my dear Fentong! There cannot be the slightest possibility of doubt. In both cases the crossing of the t on the left is slightly broken; the h slants a leetle too much to the right; part of the upper ceriph from the m has gone; the s is in the middle too flat; the a is not light enough in the upper right-hand part; the q is slightly out of position; and the letter e is newer than the rest of the type.

"All of these same distinguishing characteristics on two different typewriters could not possibly be found. That much I can tell you even by this superficial examination, but if you a thoroughly scientific report wish you will have to give me more time, my friend. Leave with me these specimens for laboratory treatment, and I will later point you out many other details which may of interest be to you."

"All right; I'll leave the papers in your hands," Fenton acquiesced. "All I wanted was your positive identification of the machine, but perhaps later on a detailed report from you will come in handy. Especially if your analysis should bring to light some facts about the personality of the typist who wrote the manuscript," he added. "For, after all, although we've located the typewriter, we haven't quite put our hands on Mr. Stanley Mortimer yet."

The professor nodded. "Of a certainty I shall be able to tell you much about the personality of the typist," he declared, con-

fidently. "For, as I have to you often pointed out, my son, every person who a typewriter uses has a different touch, just as on the piano. One strikes the keys harder with one finger, another harder with the other." He paused, and his eyes behind the great, horn-rimmed spectacles twinkled. "Even now I think I can the prediction venture that you will find this manuscript was not by a man written."

"Not written by a man?"

"I believe not. Without a laboratory test I cannot for sure the assertion make. Even with a laboratory test I shall not be able to speak with a positiveness. For, although, as a rule, there are certain traits in a specimen of typewriting which indicate the sex of its producer, there are often, I must admit, exceptions which to a wrong conclusion lead us. However, my dear Fenton, there are indications here that your Meester Stanley Mortimer is a woman—or, at least, that by a woman he had the manuscript typed."

Fenton thought that was quite likely. Had not Kolb, proprietor of the Third Avenue bake shop to which the motion-picture concern's check had been sent, told him that the missive had been called for by a young woman? The possibility that, instead of being a mere emissary, this person might be the actual author of "The House on the Island," masquerading under a masculine name, had suggested itself to him.

"Well, we shall soon see," he remarked aloud. And he spoke with assurance. For while it was true enough that the running to earth of the elusive Stanley Mortimer was not yet an accomplished fact, he had little doubt but what it would be in the very near future, thanks to the information which his operatives had brought him.

There might be a hundred or more people within Dr. Biggars's sanatorium. Even so, the task of picking out the right one by the process of elimination was not likely to be a very formidable one, he imagined. Now that the typewriting machine had been located, the problem of spotting its operator promised to be comparatively simple.

Taking his leave of Professor Esclanon, Fenton descended to the street and hailed a passing taxicab in which he rode up-town

to the extreme northwestern end of the city. An hour later he alighted from the vehicle and proceeded on foot in the direction of the Hudson River.

With the directions his subordinates had given to him, he did not have much difficulty in finding the house he sought. It stood all alone on a promontory overlooking the water—a great, weather-beaten, shingled structure surrounded by considerable grounds, and enclosed by a high spiked fence which circled the property.

A broad, asphalted driveway sloped down from the house to a gateway in this fence. The gates were closed, but a brass plate clamped to one of them bore the legend:

NATHANIEL BIGGARS, M. D.

Visitors' Entrance

RING BELL

The detective, approaching this sign, observed the bell-button accommodately protruding below it, but he did not avail himself of the invitation. He was not quite ready to go inside yet. He had come merely on a scouting expedition—to look the ground over on the chance that a personal inspection might prove helpful to him in the formulation of his future plans.

As his gaze wandered from the lettering on the brass plate to the house in the background, his attention was suddenly drawn toward a woman who stepped out of the building and came slowly down the driveway.

He hastily moved away from the gate, for his native caution warned him that it would be unwise to attract the notice of any one connected with the establishment. With his future course of action as yet undetermined, such observation might lead to embarrassing recognition later.

But if he desired to escape observation he had no intention of failing to observe. Across the road a clump of woods offered him a convenient refuge. From that point he watched the approaching woman.

She was dressed in a nurse's uniform, and as she drew nearer he could see, even from where he stood, that she was young, trim of figure, and fair of face.

Unlatching the gate, she stepped out into

the road. There were some letters in her hand, and a street mail-box stood only a few feet away from the wooded spot into which Fenton had dodged; so that, although she appeared to be coming straight toward him, he divined that her purpose was to drop the letters into the box, and that she was probably unaware of his near proximity.

Nevertheless, a thrill shot through him as she drew close enough for him to get a full view of her face, and a half exclamation of mingled astonishment and recognition escaped from his lips.

Yes, he recognized her. He was quite positive of that—even though he had never beheld her in the flesh before. He did not have to search his memory to realize why those attractive features were so familiar to him. Instantly he knew that this slender, blond young woman in the nurse's uniform was the original of the photograph he had discovered in the secret compartment of Ito Yamada's silver cigarette-case.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

Much Stranger Than Fiction

by Katharine Haviland Taylor



I USED to think that a man could do what he pleased with life, that is, if he pleased hard enough, but I've got through with that stage. Now I think the whole thing's planned. Fate handles the lights and the music and rings up the curtain.

I met Fate in her most insidious form and now I bow me low and take off the Stetson to her, acknowledging her existence in the same mood that one does one's landlady's. Fate made me lose a bet, she did!

She's a lady all right. No one can doubt that who considers. There is too much variation in her temperament for her to be otherwise; and, even when she doesn't like a man, she keeps her fingers on his shoulder just to let the world know that he belongs to her (ain't that feminine?) and now and again she'll shove him into something good, just to make the little round

world wonder and to give it a jolt. While, on the other hand, she may be running smoothly with a peach of a partner, and seem to be only smiles, when suddenly she'll land him one under the jaw with a "Think you're smart" flavor tangled up in the jab. Woman? You bet!

Has aught of good been said of her? Never. When you come down to it, what is generally said by Reginald to Eloise, Muriel or Mabel during the first clinch? He usually draws away, looks up at the ceiling and remarks with the soulful pedal down hard: "It is Fate, darling! It is Fate!" or some like sentiment meaning the same.

After the white pine begins to show through the mahogany set they brought to decorate the flat and he can't come home without stumbling over a Pike's Peak of bills falling off the hat-rack—when the last

quarter's gone in the meter and the honey-moon dribble has dried—well, would Reggie give Fate a bouquet if he met her some dark eve at the corner of the alley? He would, he would! Of the *brickus* variety and, if I am any student of human nature, he would give it to her right back of the left ear.

But now for my story.

Fate pushed the button that spelled "Memory" for me and I forgot.

I awoke in a depressingly clean-looking room with a saloon door. It flopped and had slats, but the proper smell was not hidden behind its elusive folds, no—nothing but cleanness breezed about the place. I sniffed and thought of dentists' hands. Then I looked around my boudoir which was not strong on garnish. There was a white bureau which had on it a mess of carnations surrounded by fuzzy fern which was molting eyelashes. Near this was a stack of letters and a glass of water covered with a plate. On the wall was a picture of some one who looked as if she might be "Miss Abbot, missionary to Chocki Chu, China, for forty-five years." She glared from a surrounding black frame. I looked at her for three minutes and then began to cry.

Then the door flopped and some one touched me on the shoulder. But it wasn't Petey Maloney who *could* mix 'em, any kind—it was a feminine person in white.

"There, there," she said soothingly.

"Here, here," I answered and then I pointed to the picture. "Who is she?" I asked, my voice threatening to jam again.

"Miss Darling," answered my little white angel; "she endowed this room."

"Take her away," I ordered, "or I'll be endowed with a fit!" and then I closed my eyes.

The next day I was shoved into some clothes. I noticed that I wore detached cuffs and I decided that I was either a Unitarian minister or a plumber in Sunday garb. A great fear stole over my soul, for I was afraid I wasn't the plumber, so I asked.

"Those aren't yours," said the nurse.

"Oh," said I, "second story man?"

"No," she said, "I mean they aren't

those that came with you. Those are in the laundry. I bought this shirt, I had too. They only had those with isolated cuffs in the shops here."

I tried to draw her out about the place, but she wouldn't talk. She said I mustn't be excited and then I began to realize that I had lost my memory.

The days that followed were interesting. I was not bored. Everything in new and scientific treatment was let loose on me. I had ephemera or anastasia, I can't remember which, but it has some cures. The nurse used to slide up a picture of an iron bed and then say, "Is this a dog?"

I would say, "No, I don't think so."

Then she would say, "What is it! Try to remember!"

Then I said, "A bed."

But that put her out terribly and she answered so dismally, "Yes, it is. But the chart doesn't say what to do next if you know it. What is this?" And then she slid out one of those chickens with ruffles around its feet, and done up in yellow crayon against a background of two grains of corn and a hen house.

"Fifth Avenue," I answered, not wanting to disappoint her.

"There," she said with relief, "that's going better. Now, is this green or pale gray?" (pointing to a red disk.)

"Exit," said I, "ok—or—"

"That will do for to-day," she said. I will call Dr. Bumkin. He will be much pleased with your progress. Now lie down and rest."

And that kind of thing went on and on, punctuated by periods of oat absorbing. And all the time they tried to make me remember, but it was no go. My remember-stop was frozen over and it wouldn't work. Once in a great while I felt as if the nurse ought to pick lint off my shoulder, but that was really the only instinct I had. And the doctor said it might have been inherited. He said that that was not a unique experience in the outer world. But to get on:

After I finished up my treatment every morning, I was allowed to read. Cure? Oh, sliding little round disks in round holes and oval ones in oval places and stringing pink and green beads on a wire. After the

first few days I got sorta tired of it. Then I put a green one on first just for spice and eighteen doctors came in to look at it and talk it over. Great men, doctors, noticing and full of elongated conversation.

But the books—they were great! How people thought of the stuff to put in them—! They were wonderful. They let me sit out on the lawn of the sanatorium and read of princesses who married fellows of Kansas City and shop girls from Minneapolis who married counts; and of ranch maidens who married lords, who had, being temporarily out of cash, naturally turned their hand to cooking for the Bar X or whatever it happened to be.

Then on the third day of my book interviewing I tackled the greatest! It was all about a fellow and a girl who were shipwrecked on an island, alone—together. The things they did—! Had a fire department made out of a samovar and a rattlesnake skin, built a raft, dressed for dinner (oh, yes, they were all the time; they did everything that was respectable and unnecessary) and of course they finished up the job by falling in love and the next day a curate was cast ashore. Everything neat and proper.

The day I read that book my favorite doctor wandered up.

"What are you reading?" he asked.

"The greatest!" I exploded. "Original? Well, pay attention and listen—a fellow and a girl were shipwrecked on a desert island and—"

"Poor Townsend," he murmured with the sad and resigned expression while looking on a sure thing who is sure pay. "Poor Townsend!" and then he went off joyfully and I heard him gurggle, "Hopeless!" to a brother artist of the Cut-Chu tribe, and they both watched me with the worshipful eyes of a hungry Fiji who sees before him a fat missionary.

Two weeks after that I began to understand. You see, I remembered everything since that first awaking in that white room and actually, I'm not exaggerating at all, I'd read seventeen books, full of girls and men and rafts and islands, all of them unchaperoned. One day I picked up a new book and turned to page seventy-four

which is usually the spot where the island appears, if it is to appear. It didn't; instead I read:

Eons ago I loved you. I do not need to know you more. Oh, sweetest, Fate tells me that you are mine, were mine and are to be; through time!

And—you can believe it or not, but the fellow who said that had never met the girl before. The book said that "their eyes met and they knew!" It was a great book. I read it out on the lawn while a Boston lady who was recovering from an attack of ptomaine poison talked about Isen.

Just at this time the doctor, my favorite, wandered up.

"Here's a book for you!" I said, waving it. "Original? Not an old line in it!" and then I outlined the plot. He sighed joyfully.

"You mustn't be too active," he said and then, "Townsend, if that ever happened, I'd buy you the drinks!"

I sat up. That was my one taste that I remembered. I decided that I would get the juice that floats the clove. And I thought that if anything did come of my remark, that if she did take me up on it, we would go to Reno for a honeymoon. It was easy enough to say, but the doctor said that no man would ever, could ever say it in place of "Pleased to meetchu." He said it wasn't *done*.

I said it could be and then I went into my room and lay staring at that door that looked right and smelled wrong. I would have said it to the nurse, but I knew her, and rules barred even a remark about the weather coming before the declaration. Lord, how I did want skirt society!

Not more than a week after that the doctor came in and said we were going home (it seemed I had one) and that I needn't string any beads that day. The experiment was made to try the effect of the little old red schoolhouse and the well and to see whether I was strong enough to enter my den without swooning. It was a last resort, not a summer one.

My house and grounds were pretty good and I found on inquiry that I'd been run-

ning an affair for helping the down-trodden and furthering the equality of man. And of course I was wealthy.

They kept bringing out things that should have been familiar and weren't. The only thing that looked familiar was a bottle that stood on the sideboard. The doctor vanished with that. He said he hid it and when he spoke to me I knew where it was.

I said, "I'll help you hide it next time, doc," and he smiled and said, "Poor Townsend!"

But here's where my story really begins. The story always begins with the entrance of the She. I began to win my bet, but even as I began, my soul cried out, "To the devil with the drink!"

It was this way; there was a small stream on my place, and artificially wild foliage strewn carelessly around. The effect was pretty good. I felt grateful to the "Helping Hand Company" as I gazed.

I was wandering by this small St. Lawrence shortly after my return when I saw approaching me a female, one of those fluffy ones who look nice in sunshine, too. She stopped before me and raised her eyes. I forgot my bet, but I heard myself say, "I love you!"

And she (it's the truth), she answered softly, "For eons I have loved you. Until death and after, will I love you!"

Then I sat down and mopped my forehead and she sat down too. I put an arm around her, but somehow without doing anything she put a period after that. After a while she pulled away and gave me one of those "promise-of-heaven" smiles while she whispered, "To-morrow—here, my Abelard!"

"My name's Pete," I said, "but it's all right, I'll be here for the first show."

Then I went home and read that book, the one in which he and she "knew." The doctor joined me in the middle of the "he-gits-her" chapter, and I said, "It's true, doc, these things do happen!"

"Damrot," he said, but he looked unhappy. "You're getting better," he added after a moment. "Your belief in that stuff shows it."

Well, the next day after lunch I was

fooling around the river bank feeling shaky. After about fifteen or sixteen years she came on. When she was about ten feet away I began to swallow my tonsils and feel like the first few minutes of an express elevator going down!

"My Abelard!" she breathed.

"Pete," I corrected, but I didn't really care what she called me so long as she called.

We sat down and I said, "I've always loved you."

"And I, you," she answered softly.

I put out my arms and said, "Well—"

"Not yet," she answered, "Not yet! That is to be the trial!"

"It won't be to me!" I replied.

She was a peach! But what's the use of telling you? You can only see one variety anyway—which is your Emmy Jane, Doris or Marguerite. I calculated that mine assayed eighty per cent gold, with enough alloy thrown in to bring her down to the human class, and to make her mortal enough to bug without meditating on heaven.

Suddenly she held out a hand to me, left hand, get it? And said, "Look!" And there was that little band of gold that the brothers of the velvet coat and long hair call a shackle and the half-owners call a mistake. I took a chill and then I began to gnaw my nails, which I nearly always do in emotional crises.

We parted, parted without my touching her lips—my lips through all eternities (I was dead sure of it) and I decided to be a nun; and then I remembered that I'd read that job was relegated to the gentler sex, and I began to get thirsty.

When I reached the house I found the doctor on the porch. I remembered that I'd won the bet, anyway.

"Doc," I said, "Bring forth the red-eye. I want to play hide and seek. She's a peach, but oh, Lord, she's married!"

"H-m?" he inquired.

"If I could get at him!" I hissed. "If I could!" I was thinking of her husband. I was all excited.

"H-m," he grunted again and then he smiled. "Married, you said?"

And I told the story. I raved, spoke

casually of suicide, mentioned a bitter cup and ended it all with a request for that drink. I did need it.

"Well," said the doctor, "you're mighty sure, aren't you?" He lowered his feet from the railing and stood up. "But," he continued, "you lose. She is married, I'll give you that, and you love her and you love her so, but—not exactly on the first night. Not exactly. She's married to you and she told me it took you five months to reach the boiling point—"

"Honest?" I heard something that sounded like the tottering ghost of my voice say.

"Honest," answered the medicine man, and I put my hands over my eyes.

"Buck up, old top!" said the winner, "and look who's coming around the oleanders!"

I looked. Then I arose and went toward her. Slowly, for my knees felt like the leaves of an aspen tree before a storm. Half way to her I saw a worried line creep between her brows.

"Peter," she said, in a low, thrilling tone, "your collar button shows!" and the rest of the way I ran. After she'd wept down my neck and spotted my favorite tie, which is the privilege of wives, she raised her head.

"You remember?" she said. I nodded, for my epiglottis, or whatever it is, was tangled up. "It is my kiss," she said, "My kiss!"

"No, it wasn't, Betty," I disagreed with firmness. "I know better. It was my collar button!"

The doctor was jumping around back of me and allowing to be insanely joyful over my return to earth. After he'd swatted my back and made a general ass of himself, he snickered and said, "Yuh lose your bet!"

And I answered, "Hell, what's whisky?" and then I kissed Betty again.

But, what I want to know it, did I lose? Did I lose? Did I, huh? Can't tell me I did!

I went to sleep and happened to wake up in this world, but she woke me. Suppose I'd slept on, waking up perhaps a million years later, all dressed up in another man's skin, well—drop in one Betty, would I know her, would I?

So Fate made me lose my bet, but I don't care about the drink now. I've got another thirst. Not the kind that goes before a coffee bean or before a chaser. The kind I have leaves long, yellow hairs on my shoulder.

What? Yes, she's a blonde.

BEAUTY

O BEAUTY, I have hunted for you long!—
O Beauty, I have sought for you in vain,
In crowded mart of seething city street,
In daisied meadow and in dozing lane—

But though you always flee away from me,
I catch the glamour and the gleam of you
Beckon from sunset and from twilight star;
Lurk in the grass and in the glint of dew,

Sometimes I see you darting in a pool;
Or feel you hiding in a mother's grace;
Sometimes you light a line of poetry;
Sometimes you hover on a lover's face!

Yet howsoever I may hunt for you,
Always from me your glory you will keep,
So that my flesh is but a bolted door,
Where only through a keyhole I can peep!

Louis Ginsberg.

Lonesomeness

by George Washington Ogden

Author of "The Duke of Chimney Butte," "The Listener," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

ABANDONING his position as school-teacher at Jasper, with the ambition to become a sheep-herder, John Mackenzie, on his way to Tim Sullivan's ranch, met and overcame a giant, Swan Carlson, whose wife, chained like a dog, Mackenzie had set free. Joan, Sullivan's daughter, exacting a promise from him that he would teach her all he knew, he was taken on by Sullivan, who was impressed by his victory over Carlson, the terror of the countryside.

Then Mackenzie's education as a sheep-herder began, as also Joan's introduction to the mysteries of "book-learning." A "character"—one Dad Frazer—was Mackenzie's coach at his new employment, who somewhat broadly hinted that Sullivan had tricked the new man into working for forty dollars a month, with no near prospect of an interest in the sheep. The "book" lessons progressed, however—so well, indeed, that there was a new look in Joan's eyes, a warm look, a shy hesitancy not all due to her interest in the printed word. She spoke of the "lonesomeness"—a form of nostalgia which was inevitable in the vast reaches of the monotonous grazing lands—how men had been driven insane by it. But for herself, the wide world beckoned when she would be ready to go. And Mackenzie was learning, too—both from Dad Frazer and from Joan.

Then followed two significant events: the visit of Hector Hall, two-gun man, of the Hall brothers, and his order to Mackenzie to vacate his grazing ground; and the visit in the night of a monster of senseless fury who tore sheep asunder with his hands. Sullivan and Frazer insisted it was a grizzly, but Mackenzie knew better. It might be Swan Carlson, who had recovered from his hurts—or it might not. But Mackenzie knew that when he should meet that wild night-prowler he would face a thing more savage than a bear, a thing as terrible to grapple with as the saber-tooth whose bones lay deep under the hills of that vast pasture-land.

CHAPTER X.

WILD RIDERS OF THE RANGE.

JOAN missed her lessons for three days running, a lapse so unusual as to cause Mackenzie the liveliest concern. He feared that the mad creature who spent his fury tearing sheep limb from limb might have visited her camp, and that she had fallen into his bloody hands.

A matter of eight or nine miles lay between their camps; Mackenzie had no horse to cover it. More than once he was on the point of leaving the sheep to shift for themselves and striking out on foot; many times he walked a mile or more in that direction, to mount the highest hill he could discover, and stand long, sweeping the blue distance with troubled eyes.

Yet in the end he could not go. What-

ever was wrong, he could not set right at that late hour, he reasoned; to leave the sheep would be to throw open the gates of their defense to dangers always ready to descend upon them. The sheep were in his care; Joan was not. That was what Tim Sullivan would say.

Joan came late in the afternoon, rising the nearest hilltop with a suddenness quite startling, waving a cheerful greeting as if to assure him from a distance that all was well. She stood looking at him in amazement when she flipped to the ground like a bird, her face growing white, her eyes big.

"Well, what in the world! Where did you get those guns?" she said.

"A fellow left them here the other day."

"A fellow?"—coming nearer, looking sharply at the belt. "That's Hector Hall's belt—I've seen him wearing it. There his

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This story began in *The Argosy* for April 24.

initials are, worked out in silver tacks! Where did you get it?"

"Mr. Hall left it here. What kept you, Joan? I've been worried about you."

"Hector Hall *left* it here? With both of his guns?"

"Yes, he left the guns with it. What was the matter, Joan?"

Joan looked him up and down, her face a study between admiration and fear.

"Left his guns! Well, what did you do with him?"

"I suppose he went home, Joan. Did anything happen over your way to keep you?"

"Charley was sick," she said, shortly, abstractedly, drowned in her wonder of the thing he told with his native reluctance when questioned on his own exploits. "Did you have a fight with Hector?"

"Is he all right now?"

"Charley's all right; he ate too many wild gooseberries. Did you have a fight with Hector Hall, Mr. Mackenzie?"

She came near him as she questioned him, her great, soft eyes pleading in fear, and laid her hand on his shoulder as if to hold him against any further evasion. He smiled a little, in his stingy way of doing it, taking her hand to allay her tumult of distress.

"Not much of a fight, Joan. Mr. Hall came over here to drive me off of this range, and I had to take his guns away from him to keep him from hurting me. That's all there was to it."

"All there was to it!" said Joan. "Why, he's one of the meanest men that ever lived! He'll never rest till he kills you. I wish you'd moved off and let him have the range."

"Is it his?"

"No, it belongs to us; we've got a lease on it from the government, and pay rent for it every year. Swan Carlson and the Hall boys have bluffed us out of it for the past three summers and run their sheep over here in the winter-time. I always wanted to fight for it, but dad let them have it for the sake of peace. I guess it was the best way, after all."

"As long as I was right, my last worry is gone, Joan. You're not on the contested territory, are you?"

"No; they lay claim as far as Horse-thief Cañon, but they'd just as well claim all our lease—they've got just as much right to it."

"That ends the matter, then—as far as I'm concerned."

"I wonder what kind of an excuse Hector made when he went home without his guns?" she speculated, looking off over the hills in the direction of the Hall brothers' ranch.

"Maybe he's not accountable to anybody, and doesn't have to explain."

"I guess that's right," Joan said, still wandering in her gaze.

Below them the flock was spread, the dogs on its flanks. Mackenzie pointed to the sun.

"We'll have to get to work; you'll be starting back in an hour."

But there was no work in Joan that day, nothing but troubled speculation on what form Hector Hall's revenge would take, and when the stealthy blow of his resentment would fall. Try as he would, Mackenzie could not fasten her mind upon the books. She would begin with a brave resolution, only to wander away, the book closed presently upon her thumb, her eyes searching the hazy hills where trouble lay out of sight. At last she gave it up, with a little, catching sob, tears in her honest eyes.

"They'll kill you—I know they will!" she said.

"I don't think they will," he returned, abstractedly, "but even if they do, Rachel, there's nobody to grieve."

"Rachel? My name isn't Rachel," said Joan, a little hurt. For it was not in flippancy or banter that he had called her out of her name; his eyes were not within a hundred leagues of that place, his heart away with them, it seemed, when he spoke.

He turned to her, a color of embarrassment in his brown face.

"I was thinking of another story, Joan."

"Of another girl," she said, perhaps a trifle resentfully. At least Mackenzie thought he read a resentful note in the quick rejoinder, a resentful flash of color in her cheek.

"Yes, but a mighty old girl, Joan," he

confessed, smiling with a feeling of lightness around his heart.

"Somebody you used to know?"—face turned away, voice light in a careless, artificial note.

"She was a sheepman's daughter."

"Did you know her down at Jasper?"

"No, I never knew her at all, Rach—Joan. That was a long, long time ago."

Joan brightened at this news. She ceased denying him her face, even smiled a little, seeming to forget Hector Hall and his pending vengeance.

"Well, what about her?" she asked.

He told her which Rachel he had in mind, but Joan only shook her head and looked troubled.

"I never read the Bible; we haven't even got one," she said.

He told her the story, beginning with Jacob's setting out, and his coming to the well with the great stone at its mouth which the maidens could not roll away.

"So Jacob rolled the stone away and watered Rachel's sheep," he said, pausing with that much of it, looking off down the draw between the hills in a mind-wandering way. Joan touched his arm, impatient with such disjointed narrative.

"What did he do then?"

"Why, he kissed her."

"I think he was kind of fresh," said Joan. But she laughed a little, blushing rosily, a bright light in her eyes. "Tell me the rest of it, John."

Mackenzie went on with the ancient pastoral tale of love. Joan was indignant when she heard how Laban gave Jacob the weak-eyed girl for a wife in place of his beloved Rachel, for whom he had worked the seven years.

"Jake must have been a bright one!" said she. "How could the old man put one over on him like that?"

"You'll have to read the story," said Mackenzie. "It's sundown; don't you think you'd better go?"

But Joan was in no haste to leave. She walked with him as he worked the sheep to their bedding-ground, her bridle-rein over her arm. She could get back to camp before dark, she said; Charley would not be worried.

Joan could not have said as much for herself. Her eyes were pools of trouble, her face was anxious and strained. She went silently beside Mackenzie while the dogs worked the sheep along with more than human patience, almost human intelligence. Frequently she looked into his face with a plea dumbly eloquent, but did not again put her fear for him into words. Only when she stood beside her horse near the sheep-wagon, ready to mount and leave him to his solitary supper, she spoke of Hector Hall's revolvers, which Mackenzie had unstrapped and put aside.

"What are you going to do with them, John?"

She had fallen into the use of that familiar address only that day, moved by the tenderness of the old tale he had told her, perhaps; drawn nearer to him by the discovery of a gentle sentiment in him which she had not known before. He heard it with a warm uplifting of the heart, all without reason, he knew, for it was the range way to be familiar on a shorter acquaintance than theirs.

"I'm going to give them back to him," he said. "I've been carrying them around ever since he left them in the hope he'd get ashamed of himself and come for them."

Joan started at the sound of galloping hoofs, which rose suddenly out of complete silence as the riders mounted the crest behind them.

"I guess he's coming for them now," she said.

There were two riders coming down the slope toward them at a pace altogether reckless. Mackenzie saw at a glance that neither of them was Hector Hall, but one a woman, her loose garments flapping as she rode.

"It's Swan Carlson and his wife!" he said, unable to cover his amazement at the sight.

"What do you suppose they're doing over here?" Joan drew a little nearer as she spoke, her horse shifting to keep by her side.

"No telling. Look how that woman rides!"

There was enough in her wild bearing to excite admiration and wonder, even in one

who had not seen her under conditions which promised little of such development. She came on at Swan's side, leaning forward a little, as light and sure in the saddle as any cowboy on the range.

They bore down toward the sheep-wagon as if they had no intention of halting, jerking their horses up in Indian fashion a few feet from where Mackenzie and Joan stood. The animals slid on stiff legs, hoofs plowing the soft ground, raising a cloud of dust which dimmed the riders momentarily.

Neither of the abrupt visitors spoke. They sat silently staring, not a rod between them and the two on foot, the woman as unfriendly of face as the man. And Swan Carlson had not improved in this feature since Mackenzie parted from him in violence a few weeks before. His red hair was shorter now, his drooping mustache longer, the points of it reaching two inches below his chin. He was gaunt of cheek, hollow of eyes, like a man who had gone hungry or suffered a great, consuming sorrow.

His wife had improved somewhat in outward appearance. Her face had filled, the pathetic uncertainty had gone from her eyes. She was not uncomely as she sat astride her good bay horse, her divided skirt of corduroy wide on its flanks, a man's gray shirt laced over her bosom, the collar open, showing the fairness of her neck. Her abundant hair was braided, and wound closely about her head like a cap. Freedom had made a strange alteration in her. It seemed, indeed, as if Swan Carlson had breathed into her the breath of his own wild soul, making her over according to the desire of his heart.

Mackenzie stepped out in invitation for Swan to state the occasion of his boisterous visit, and stood waiting in silence while the two strange creatures continued to stare. Swan lifted his hand in a manner of salutation, no change either of friendship or animosity in his lean, strong face.

"You got a woman, huh? Well, how 'll you trade?"

Swan glanced from his wife to Joan as he spoke. If there was any recollection in him of the hard usage he had received at Mackenzie's hands, it did not seem to be bitter.

"Ride on," said Mackenzie.

Mrs. Carlson urged her horse with sudden start close to where Joan stood, leaned far over her saddle and peered into the girl's face. Joan, affronted by the savage impertinence, met her eyes defiantly, not giving an inch before the unexpected charge.

In that pose of defiant challenge Swan Carlson's woman peered into the face of the girl whose freshness and beauty had drawn the wild banter from her man's bold lips. Then, a sudden sweep of passion in her face, she lifted her rawhide quirt and struck Joan a bitter blow across the shoulder and neck, Mackenzie sprang between them, but Mrs. Carlson, her defiance passed in that one blow, did not follow it up.

Swan opened wide his great mouth and pealed out his roaring laughter, not a line of mirth softening in his face, not a gleam of it in his eyes. It was a sound without a note to express human warmth, or human satisfaction.

Joan flamed up like a match in oil. She dropped her bridle-reins, springing back a quick step, turning her eyes about for some weapon by which she might retaliate. Hector Hall's pistols hung on the end-gate of the sheep-wagon not more than twenty feet away. It seemed that Joan covered the distance in a bound, snatched one of the guns and fired. Her own horse stood between her and the wild range woman, which perhaps accounted for her miss. Mackenzie was holding her wrist before she could shoot again.

Swan let out another roar of heartless laughter, and together with his woman galloped down the hill. Ahead of them the sheep were assembled, packed close in their huddling way of seeking comfort and courage in numbers, just beginning to compose themselves for the night. Straight into the flock Swan Carlson and his woman rode, trampling such as could not rise and leap aside, crushing such lambs as were not nimble enough or wise enough to run.

"I'll kill her, I'll kill her!" said Joan.

She panted, half crying, struggling to free her arm that she might fire again.

"All right; let 'em have it!" Mackenzie said, seeing the havoc among the sheep.

Swan and his woman rode like a whirlwind through the flock, the dogs after them with sharp cries, the frightened bleating of the lambs, the beating of two thousand hoofs, adding to the confusion of what had been a peaceful pastoral scene but a few minutes before. Joan cut loose at the disturbers of this peace, emptying the remaining chambers of the revolver quickly, but without effect.

Half-way through the herd Swan leaned down and caught a lamb by the leg, swung it around his head as lightly as a man would wave his hat, and rode on with it in savage triumph. Mackenzie snatched the rifle from the wagon. His shot came so close to Swan that he dropped the lamb. The woman fell behind Swan, interposing herself as a shield, and in this formation they rode on, sweeping down the narrow thread of green valley, galloping wildly away into the sanctuary of the hills.

Mackenzie stood, gun half lifted, and watched them go without another shot, afraid to risk it lest he hit the woman. He turned to Joan, who stood by, white with anger, the empty revolver in her hand.

"Are you hurt, Joan?" he asked, in foolish weakness, knowing very well that she was.

"No, she didn't hurt me—but I'll kill her for it!" said Joan.

She was trembling! her face was bloodless in the cold anger that shook her. There was a red welt on her neck, purple-marked on its ridge where the rawhide had almost cut her tender skin.

"Swan Carlson has pulled his woman down to his savage level at last," Mackenzie said.

"She's worse than he is; she's a range wolf!"

"I believe she is. But it always happens that way when a person gets to going."

"With those two and the Hall boys you'll not have a ghost of a chance to hold this range, John. You'd better let me help you begin working the sheep over toward my camp to-night."

"No, I'm going to stay here."

"Swan and that woman just rode through here to get the lay of your camp. More than likely they'll come over and burn you

out to-night—pour coal oil on the wagon and set it afire."

"Let 'em; I'll not be in it."

"They'll worry you night and day, kill your sheep, maybe kill you, if you don't come away. It isn't worth it; dad was right about it. For the sake of peace, let them have it, John."

Mackenzie stood in silence, looking the way Swan and his woman had gone, the gun held as if ready to lift and fire at the showing of a hat-crown over the next hill. He seemed to be considering the situation. Joan studied his face with eager hopefulness, bending forward a bit to see better in the failing light.

"They've got to be shown that a master has come to the sheep country," he said, in low voice, as if to himself. "I'll stay and prove it to all of them at once."

Joan knew there was no use to argue or appeal. She dropped the matter there, and Mackenzie put the gun away.

"I'm sorry I haven't anything to put on it," he said, looking at the red welt on her neck.

"I'm sorry I missed her," said Joan.

"It isn't so much the sting of a blow, I know," he comforted, "as the hurt of the insult. Never mind it, Joan; she's a vicious, wild woman, jealous because Swan took notice of you."

"It was a great compliment!" said Joan.

"I wish I had some balm for it that would cure it in a second, and take away the memory of the way it was done," said he, very softly.

"I'll kill her," said Joan.

"I don't like to hear you say that, Joan," he chided, and reached and laid his hand consolingly upon the burning mark.

Joan caught her breath as if he had touched her skin with ice. He withdrew his hand quickly, blaming himself for the rudeness of his rough hand.

"You didn't hurt me, John," she said, her eyes downcast, the color of warm blood playing over her face.

"I might have," he blamed himself, in such seriousness as if it were the gravest matter he had risked, and not the mere touching of a blood-red welt upon a simple maiden's neck.

"I'll be over early in the morning to see if you're all right, John," she told him as she turned again to her horse to mount and go.

"If you can, come—even to show yourself on the hill," said he.

"Show myself? Why, a person would think you were worrying about me."

"I am, Joan. I wish you would give up herding sheep, let the share and the prospect and all of it go, and have your father put a herder in."

"They'll not hurt me; as mean as they are they'll not fight a woman. Any way, I'm not over the dead-line."

"There's something prowling this range that doesn't respect lines, Joan."

"You mean the grizzly?"

"Yes, the grizzly that rides a horse."

"Dad Frazer thinks you were mistaken on that, John."

"I know. Dad Frazer thinks I'm a better schoolteacher than I'll ever be a sheepman, I guess. But I've met bears enough so that I don't have to imagine them. Keep your gun close by you to-night, and every night."

"I will," she promised, moved by the earnestness of his appeal.

Dusk was thickening into darkness over the sheeplands; the dogs were driving the straggling sheep back to the bedding-ground, where many of them already lay in contentment, quickly over the flurry of Swan Carlson's passing. Joan stood at her stirrup, her face lifted to the heavens, and it was white as an evening primrose under the shadow of her hat.

She lingered as if there remained something to say or be said, something to give or to take, before leaving her friend and teacher alone to face the dangers of the night. Perhaps she thought of Rachel, and the kiss her kinsman gave her when he rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and lifted up his voice and wept.

Mackenzie stood a little apart, thinking his own swift-running thoughts, quickening under the leap of his own eager blood. But no matter for Jacob's precedent, Mackenzie had no excuse of even distant relationship to offer for such familiarity. The desire was urging, but the justification was

not at hand. So Joan rode away unvisited, and perhaps wondering why.

CHAPTER XI.

HECTOR HALL SETS A BEACON.

MACKENZIE sat a long time on his hill that night, his ear turned to the wind, smoking his pipe and thinking the situation over while listening for the first sound of commotion among the sheep. He had pledged himself to Tim and Joan that he would not quit the sheep country without proving that he had in him the mettle of a flockmaster. Hector Hall had been given to understand the same thing. In fact, Mackenzie thought, it looked as if he had been running with his eyes shut, making boastful pledges.

He might have to hedge on some of them, or put them through at a cost far beyond the profit. It came that way to a boaster of his intentions sometimes, especially so when a man spoke too quickly and assumed too much. Here he was, standing face to a fight that did not appear to promise much more glory in the winning than in the running away.

There had been peace in that part of the sheep country a long time; Mackenzie had come to Jasper, even, long after the feuds between the flockmasters and cattlemen had worn themselves out save for an outbreak of little consequence in the far places now and then. But the peace of this place had been a coward's peace, paid for in money and humiliation. A thing like that was not to be expected of Tim Sullivan, although from a business reasoning he doubtless was right about it.

It was Mackenzie's work now to clean up the camp of the Hall brothers, along with Swan Carlson, and put an end to their bullying and edging over on Tim Sullivan's range, or take up his pack and trudge out of the sheep country as he had come. By staying there and fighting for Tim Sullivan's interests he might arrive in time at a dusty consequence, his fame, measured in thousands of sheep, reaching even to Jasper and Cheyenne, or even to the stock-yards commission offices in Omaha and Chicago.

"John Mackenzie, worth twenty thousand, or fifty thousand sheep."

That would be the way they would know him; that would be the measure of his fame. By what sacrifice, through what adventures, how much striving and hard living he might come to the fame of twenty thousand sheep, no man would know or care. There in the dusty silences of that gray-green land he would bury the man and the soul that reached upward in him with pleasant ambitions, to become a creature over sheep. Just a step higher than the sheep themselves, wind-buffed, cold-cursed, seared and blistered and hardened like a callous through which the urging call of a man's duty could pierce no more.

But it had its compensations, on the other hand. There must be a vast satisfaction in looking back over the small triumphs won against tremendous forces, the successful contest with wild winter storm, ravaging disease, night-prowling beasts. Nature was the big force arrayed against a flockmaster, and it was unkind and menacing seven months out of the year.

That must be the secret of a flockmaster's satisfaction with himself and his lot, Mackenzie thought; he could count himself a fit companion for the old gods, if he knew anything about them, after his victory over every wild force that could be bent against him among those unsheltered hills.

The Hall brothers were a small pest to be stamped out and forgotten in the prosperity of multiplying flocks. As for Swan Carlson, poor savage, there might be some way of reaching him without further violence between them. Wild and unfeeling as he seemed, there must be a sense of justice in him, reading him by his stern face.

As he sat and weighed the argument for and against the sheep business, the calling of flockmaster began to take on the color of romantic attraction which had not been apparent to him before. In his way, every flockmaster was a hero, inflexible against the unreckoned forces which rose continually to discourage him. This was true, as he long had realized, of a man who plants in the soil, risking the large part of his capital of labor year by year.

But the sheepman's risks were greater,

his courage immensely superior, to that of the tiller of the soil. One storm might take his flock down to the last head, leaving him nothing to start on again but his courage and his hope.

It appeared to Mackenzie to be the calling of a proper man. A flockmaster need not be a slave to the range, as most of them were. He might sit in his office, as a few of them did, and do the thing like a gentleman. There were possibilities of dignity in it heretofore overlooked; Jean would think better of it if she could see it done that way. Surely, it was a business that called for a fight to build and a fight to hold, but it was the calling of a proper man.

Mackenzie was immensely cheered by his reasoning the sheep business into the romantic and heroic class. Here were allurements of which he had not dreamed, to be equaled only by the calling of the sea, and not by any other pursuit on land at all. A man who appreciated the subtle shadings of life could draw a great deal of enjoyment and self-pride out of the business of flockmaster. It was an ancient calling. Abraham was a flockmaster; maybe Adam.

But for all of the new comfort he had found in the calling he had adopted, Mackenzie was plagued by a restless, broken sleep when he composed himself among the hillside shrubs above the sheep. A vague sense of something impending held him from rest. It was present over his senses like a veil of drifting smoke through his shallow sleep. Twice he moved his bed, with the caution of some haunted beast; many times he started in his sleep, clutching like a falling man, to sit up alert and instantly awake.

There was something in the very tension of the night-silence that warned him to be on the watch. It was not until long after midnight that he relaxed his straining, uneasy vigil, and stretched himself to untroubled sleep. He could steal an hour or two from the sheep in the early morning, he told himself, as he felt the sweet restfulness of slumber sweeping over him; the helpless creatures would remain on the bedding-ground long after sunrise if he did not wake, waiting for him to come and set them about the great business of their lives. They

hadn't sense enough to range out and feed themselves without the direction of man's guiding hand.

Mackenzie had dipped but a little way into his refreshing rest when the alarmed barking of his dogs woke him with such sudden wrench that it ached. He sat up, senses drenched in sleep for a struggling moment, groping for his rifle. The dogs went charging up the slope toward the wagon, the canvas top of which he could see indistinctly on the hillside through the dark.

As Mackenzie came to his feet, fully awake and on edge, the dogs mouthed their cries as if they closed in on the disturber of the night at close quarters. Mackenzie heard blows, a yelp from a disabled dog, and retreat toward him of those that remained unhurt. He fired a shot, aiming high, running toward the wagon.

Again the dogs charged, two of them, only, out of the three, and again there was the sound of thick, rapid blows. One dog came back to its master, pressing against his legs for courage. Mackenzie shouted, hoping to draw the intruder into revealing himself, not wanting the blood of even a rascal such as the night-prowler on his hands through a chance shot into the dark. There was no answer, no sound from the deep blackness that pressed like troubled waters close to the ground.

The dog clung close to Mackenzie's side, his growling deep in his throat. Mackenzie could feel the beast tremble as it pressed against him, and bent to caress it and give it confidence. At his reassuring touch the beast bounded forward to the charge again, only to come yelping back, and continue on down the hill toward the flock.

Mackenzie fired again, dodging quickly behind a clump of bushes after the flash of his gun. As he crouched there, peering and straining ahead into the dark, strong hands laid hold of him, and tore his rifle away from him and flung him to the ground. One came running from the wagon, low words passed between the man who held Mackenzie pinned to the ground, knees astride him, his hands doubled back against his chin in a grip that was like fetters. This one who arrived in haste groped around until he found Mackenzie's rifle.

"Let him up," he said.

Mackenzie stood, his captor twisting his arms behind him with such silent ease that it was ominous of what might be expected should the sheep-herder set up a struggle to break free.

"Bud, I've come over after my guns," said Hector Hall, speaking close to Mackenzie's ear.

"They're up at the wagon," Mackenzie told him, with rather an injured air. "You didn't need to make all this trouble about it; I was keeping them for you."

"Go on up and get 'em," Hall commanded, prodding Mackenzie in the ribs with the barrel of his own gun.

The one who held Mackenzie said nothing, but walked behind him, rather shoved him ahead, hands twisted in painful rigidity behind his back, pushing him along as if his weight amounted to no more than a child's. At the wagon Hall fell in beside Mackenzie, the barrel of a gun again at his side.

"Let him go," he said. And to Mackenzie: "Don't try to throw any tricks on me, bud, but waltz around and get me them guns."

"They're hanging on the end of the coupling-pole; get them yourself," Mackenzie returned, resentful of this treatment, humiliated to such depths by this disgrace that had overtaken him that he cared little for the moment whether he should live or die.

Hall spoke a low, mumbled, unintelligible word to the one who stood behind Mackenzie, and another gun pressed coldly against the back of the apprentice sheepman's neck. Hall went to the end of the wagon, found his pistols, struck a match to inspect them. In the light of the expiring match at his feet Mackenzie could see the ex-cattleman buckling on the guns.

"Bud, you've been actin' kind of rash around here," Hall said, in insolent satisfaction with the turn of events. "You had your lucky day with me, like you had with Swan Carlson, but I gave you a sneak's chance to leave the country while the goin' was good. If you ever leave it now the wind 'll blow you out. Back him up to that wagon wheel!"

Mackenzie was at the end of his tractable

yielding to commands, seeing dimly what lay before him. He lashed out in fury at the man who pressed the weapon to his neck, twisting round in a sweep of passion that made the night seem to burst in a rain of fire, careless of what immediate danger he ran. The fellow fired as Mackenzie swung round, the flash of the flame hot on his neck.

"Don't shoot him, you fool!" Hector Hall interposed, his voice a growl between his teeth.

Mackenzie's quick blows seemed to fall impotently on the body of the man who now grappled with him, face to face, Hector Hall throwing himself into the tangle from the rear. Mackenzie, seeing his assault shaping for a speedy end in his own defeat, now attempted to break away and seek shelter in the dark among the bushes. He wrenched free for a moment, ducked, ran, only to come down in a few yards with Hector Hall on his back like a catamount.

Fighting every inch of the way, Mackenzie was dragged back to the wagon, where his captors backed him against one of the hind wheels and bound him, his arms outstretched across the spokes in the manner of a man crucified.

They had used Mackenzie illy in that fight to get him back to the wagon; his face was bleeding, a blow in the mouth had puffed his lips. His hat was gone, his shirt torn open on his bosom, and a wild rage throbbled in him which lifted him above the thought of consequences as he strained at the ropes which held his arms.

They left his feet free, as if to mock him with half liberty in the ordeal they had set for him to face. One mounted the front wagon wheel near Mackenzie, and the light of slow-coming dawn on the sky beyond him showed his hand uplifted as if he sprinkled something over the wagon sheet. The smell of kerosene spread through the still air; a match crackled on the wagon-tire. A flash, a sudden springing of flame, a roar, and the canvas was enveloped in fire.

Mackenzie leaned against his bonds, straining away from the sudden heat, the fast-running fire eating the canvas from the bows, the bunk within, and all the furnish-

ings and supplies, on fire. There seemed to be no wind, a merciful circumstance, for a whip of the high-striving flames would have wrapped him, stifling out his life in a moment.

Hall and the other man, who had striven with Mackenzie in such powerful silence, had drawn away from the fire beyond his sight to enjoy the thing they had done. Mackenzie, turning his fearful gaze over his shoulder, calculated his life in seconds. The fire was at his back, his hair was crinkling in the heat of it, a little moving breath of wind to fill the sudden vacuum drew a tongue of blaze with sharp threat against his cheek.

In a moment the oil-drenched canvas would be gone, the flaming contents of the wagon, the woodwork of box and running gears left to burn more slowly, and his flesh and bones must mingle ashes with the ashes, to be blown on the wind, as Hector Hall had so grimly prophesied. What a pitiful, poor, useless ending of all his calculations and plans!

A shot at the top of the hill behind the wagon, a rush of galloping hoofs; another shot, and another. Below him Hall and his comrade rode away, floundering in haste through the sleeping flock, the one poor dog left out of Mackenzie's three tearing after them, venting his impotent defiance in sharp yelps of the chase.

Joan! Mackenzie knew it was Joan before she came riding into the firelight, throwing herself from the horse before it stopped. Through the pain of his despair—above the rebellious resentment of the thing that fate had played upon him this bitter gray morning; above the anguish of his hopeless moment, the poignant striving of his tortured soul to meet the end with resolution and calm defiance worthy a man—he had expected Joan.

Why, based on what reason, he could not have told, then nor in the years that came afterward. But always the thought of Joan coming to him like the wings of light out of the east.

And so Joan had come, as he strained on his bound arms to draw his face a few inches farther from the fire, as he stifled in the smoke and heavy gases of the burning

oil; Joan had come, and her hand was cool on his forehead, her voice was tender in his ear, and she was leading him into the blessed free air, the east widening in a bar of light like a waking eye.

Joan was panting, the knife that had cut his bonds still open in her hand. They stood face to face, a little space between them, her great eyes pouring their terrified sympathy into his soul. Neither spoke, a daze over them, a numbness on their tongues, the dull shock of death's close passing bewildering and deep.

Mackenzie breathed deeply, his brain clearing out of its racing whirl, and became conscious of Joan's hand grasping his. Behind them the ammunition in the burning wagon began to explode, and Joan, shuddering as with cold, covered her white face with her hands and sobbed aloud.

Mackenzie touched her shoulder.

"Joan! Oh, Joan, Joan!" he said.

Joan, shivering, her shoulders lifted as if to fend against a winter blast, only cried the harder into her hands. He stood with hand touching her shoulder lightly, the quiver of her body shaking him to the heart. But no matter how inviting the opening, a man could not speak what rose in his heart to say, standing as he stood, a debtor in such measure. To say what he would have said to Joan, he must stand clear and towering in manliness, no taint of humiliation on his soul.

Mackenzie groaned in spirit, and his words were a groan, as he said again:

"Joan! Oh, Joan, Joan!"

"I knew they'd come to-night—I couldn't sleep," she said.

"Thank God for your wakefulness!" said he.

She was passing out of the reefs of terror, calming as a wind falls at sunset. Mackenzie pressed her arm, drawing her away a little.

"That ammunition—we'd better—"

"Yes," said Joan, and went with him a little farther down the slope.

Mackenzie put his hand to his face where the flames had licked it, and to the back of his head where his scorched hair broke crisply under his palm. Joan looked at him, the aging stamp of waking and worry in

her face, exclaiming pityingly when she saw his hurts.

"It served me right; I stumbled into their hands like a blind kitten!" he said, not sparing himself of scorn.

"It's a cattleman's trick; many an older hand than you has gone that way," she said.

"But if I'd have waked and watched like you, Joan, they wouldn't have got me. I started to watch, but I didn't keep it up like you. When I should have been awake, I was sleeping like a sluggard."

"The cowards!" said Joan.

"I let one of them sneak up behind me, after they'd clubbed two of the dogs to death, and grab me and get my gun! Great God! I deserve to be burned!"

"Hush!" she chided, fearfully. "Hush!"

"One of them was Hector Hall—he came after his guns. If I'd been a man, the shadow of a man, I'd made him swallow them the day I took—the time he left them here."

"Matt was with him," said Joan. "You couldn't do anything; no man could do anything, against Matt Hall."

"They handled me like a baby," said he, bitterly, "and I—and I wanting to be a sheepman! No wonder they think I'm a soft and simple fool up here, that goes on the reputation of a lucky blow!"

"There's a man on a horse," said Joan. "He's coming this way."

The rider broke down the hillside as she spoke, riding near the wreckage of the burning wagon, where he halted a moment, the strong light of the fire on his face. Swan Carlson, hatless, his hair streaming, his great mustache pendant beside his stony mouth. He came on toward them at once. Joan laid her hand on her revolver.

"You got a fire here," said Swan, stopping near them, leaning curiously toward them as if he peered at them through smoke.

"Yes," Mackenzie returned.

"I seen it from over there," said Swan. "I come over to see if you needed any help."

"Thank you, not now. It's gone; nothing can be done."

"I smelt coal oil," said Swan, sniffing the air like a buck. "Who done it?"

"Some of your neighbors," said Mackenzie.

"I knowed they would," Swan nodded. "Them fellers don't fight like me and you, they don't stand up like a man. When I seen you take that feller by the leg that day and upset him off of his horse and grab his guns off of him, I knowed he'd burn you out."

Joan, forgetting her fear and dislike of Swan Carlson in her interest of what he revealed, drew a little nearer to him.

"Were you around here that day, Swan?" she asked.

"Yes, I saw him upset that feller, little bird," Swan said, leaning again from his saddle, his long neck stretched to peer into her face. "He's a good man, but he ain't as good a man as me."

Swan was barefooted, just as he had leaped from his bunk in the sheep-wagon to ride to the fire. There was a wild, high pride in his cold, handsome face as he sat up in the saddle as if to show Joan his mighty bulk, and he stretched out his long arms like an eagle on its crag flexing its pinions in the morning sun.

"Did he—did Hector Hall sling a gun on Mr. Mackenzie that time?" she asked, pressing forward eagerly.

"Never mind, Joan—let that go," said Mackenzie, putting his arm before her to stay her, speaking hastily, as if to warn her back from a danger.

"He didn't have time to sling a gun on him," said Swan, great satisfaction in his voice as he recalled the scene. "Your man he's like a cat when he jumps for a feller, but he ain't got the muscle in his back like me."

"There's nobody in this country like you, Swan," said Joan, pleased with him, friendly toward him, for his praise of the one he boldly called her man.

"No, I can roll 'em all," Swan said, as gravely as if he would be hung on the testimony. "You ought to have me for your man; then you'd have somebody no feller on this range would burn out."

"You've got a wife, Swan," Joan said, with gentle reproof, but putting the proposal from her as if she considered it a jest.

"I'm tired of that one," Swan confessed,

frankly. Then to Mackenzie: "I'll fight you for her."

He swung half-way out of the saddle, as if to come to the ground and start the contest on the moment, hung there, looking Mackenzie in the face, the light of morning revealing the marks of his recent battle.

"Not now, you've had a fight already," said Swan, settling back into the saddle. "But when you brace up, then I'll fight you for her. What?"

"Any time," Mackenzie told him, speaking easily, as if humoring the whim of some irresponsible person.

With a sudden start of his horse Swan rode close to Joan, Mackenzie throwing himself between them, catching the bridle, hurling the animal back. Swan did not take notice of the interference, only leaned far over, stretching his long neck, his great mustaches like the tusks of an old walrus, and strained a long look into Joan's face. Then he whirled his horse and galloped away, not turning a glance behind.

Joan watched him go, saying nothing for a little while. Then:

"I think he's joking," she said.

"I suppose he is," Mackenzie agreed, although he had many doubts.

They turned to look at the wagon again, the popping of ammunition having ceased. The woodwork was all on fire; soon it would be reduced to bolts and tires. Joan's spirits seemed to have risen with the broadening of day, in spite of Swan Carlson's visit and his bold jest, if jest he meant it to be. She laughed as she looked at the sheep, huddled below them in attitude of helpless fright.

"Poor little fools!" she said. "Well, I must go back to Charley. Don't tell dad I was over here, please, John. He wouldn't like it if he knew I'd butted in this way—he's scared to death of the Halls."

"I don't see how I'm to keep him from knowing it," Mackenzie said, "and I don't see why he shouldn't know. He'd have been out a cheap herder if it hadn't been for you."

"No, you mustn't tell him, you mustn't let anybody know I was here, John," she said, lifting her eyes to his in an appeal far stronger than words. "It wouldn't do for

dad—for anybody—to know I was here. You don't need to say anything about them tying—doing—*that*."

Joan shuddered again in that chilling, horrified way, turning from him to hide what he believed he had read in her words and face before.

It was not because she feared to have her father know she had come riding to his rescue in the last hours of her troubled night; not because she feared his censure or his anger, or wanted to conceal her deed for reasons of modesty from any one. Only to spare him the humiliation of having his failure known, Mackenzie understood. That was her purpose, and her sole purpose, in seeking his pledge to secrecy.

It would hurt him to have it go abroad that he had allowed them to sneak into his camp, seize him, disarm him, bind him, and set the fire that was to make ashes of him for the winds to blow away. It would do for him with Tim Sullivan entirely if that should become known, with the additional humiliation of being saved from this shameful death by a woman.

No matter how immeasurable his own gratitude, no matter how wide his own pride in her for what she had done, the sheep country never would be able to see it with his eyes. It would be another smirch for him, and such a deep one as to obscure him and his chances there forever.

Joan knew it. In her generosity, her interest for his future, she wanted her part in it to remain unknown.

"You must promise me, John," she said. "I'll never come to take another lesson unless you promise me."

"I promise you, God bless you, Joan!" said he.

CHAPTER XII.

ONE COMES TO SERVE.

AN hour after midday there came riding over the hills Tim Sullivan and a stranger. They stopped at the ruins of the sheep-wagon, where Tim dismounted and nosed around, then came on down the draw, where Mackenzie was ranging the sheep.

Tim was greatly exercised over the loss

of the wagon. He pitched into Mackenzie about it as soon as he came within speaking distance.

"How did you do it—kick over the lantern?" he inquired, his face cloudy with ill-held wrath.

Mackenzie explained, gruffly and in a few words, how the wagon was fired, sparing his own perilous adventure and the part that Joan had borne in it. This slowed Tim down, and set him craning his neck over the country to see if any further threat of violence impended on the horizon.

"Them Hall boys ought to be men enough not to do me a trick like that after the way I've give in to them on this side of the range," he said. Then to Mackenzie, sharply: "It wouldn't 'a' happened if you hadn't took Hector's guns away from him that time. A sheepman's got no right to be fightin' around on the range. If he wants to brawl and scrap, let him do it when he goes to town, the way the cowboys used to."

"Maybe you're right; I'm beginning to think you are," Mackenzie returned.

"Right? Of course I'm right. A sheepman's got to set his head to business, and watchin' the corners to prevent losses like this that eats up the profit, and not go around with his sleeves rolled up and his jaw slued, lookin' for a fight. And if he starts one he's got to have the backbone and the gizzard to hold up his end of it, and not let 'em put a thing like this over on him. Why wasn't you in the wagon last night watchin' it?"

"Because I've been expecting them to burn it."

"Sure, you've been expectin' 'em to burn you out, and you hid in the brush with your tail between your legs like a kicked pup and let 'em set my new wagon afire. How did you git your face bunged up that way?"

"I fell down," Mackenzie said, with a sarcasm meant only for himself, feeling that he had described his handling of the past situation in a word.

"Runnin' off, I reckon. Well, I tell you, John, it won't do, that kind of business won't do. Them Hall boys are mighty rough fellers, too rough for a boy like you that's been runnin' with school children all his life. You got some kind of a lucky

hitch on Hector when you stripped that belt and guns off of him—I don't know how you done it; it's a miracle he didn't nail you down with lead—but that kind of luck won't play into a man's hands one time in a thousand. You never ought 'a' started anything with them fellers unless you had the weight in your hindquarters to keep it goin'."

"You're right," said Mackenzie, swallowing the rebuke like a bitter pill.

"Right? You make me tired, standin' there and takin' it like a sick cat! If you was half the man I took you to be when you struck this range you'd resent a callin' down like I'm givin' you. But you don't resent it, you take it, like you sneaked and let them fellers burn that wagon and them supplies of mine. If you was expectin' 'em to turn that kind of a trick you ought 'a' been right there in that wagon, watchin' it—there's where you had a right to be."

"I suppose there's where I'd been if I had your nerve, Sullivan," Mackenzie said, his slow anger taking place of the humiliation that had bent him down all morning like a shameful load. "Everybody on this range knows you're a fighting man—you've fought the wind gettin' away from this side of the range every time you saw smoke; you've got a reputation for standing out for your rights like a man with a gizzard in him as big as a sack of bran! Sure, I know all about the way you've backed out of here and let Carlson and the Halls bluff you out of the land you pay rent on, right along. If I had your nerve—"

Tim's face flamed as if he had risen from turning batter-cakes over a fire. He made a smoothing, adjusting, pacificating gesture with his hands, looking with something between deep concern and shame over his shoulder at the man who accompanied him, and who sat off a few feet in his saddle, a grin over his face.

"Now, John, I don't mean for you to take it that I'm throwin' any slur over your courage for the way things has turned out—I don't want you to take it that way at all, lad," said Tim.

"I'm not a fighting man"—Mackenzie was getting hotter as he went on—"everybody in here knows that by now, I guess.

You guessed wrong, Sullivan, when you took me for one and put me over here to hold this range for you that this crowd's been backing you off of a little farther each spring. You're the brave spirit that's needed here—if somebody could tie you and hold you to face the men that have robbed you of the best range you've got. I put down my hand; I get out of the way for you when it comes to the grit to put up a fight."

"Oh, don't take it to heart what I've been sayin', lad. A man's hot under the collar when he sees a dirty trick like that turned on him, but it passes off like sweat, John. Let it go, boy, let it pass."

"You sent me in here expecting me to fight, and when I don't always come out on top you rib me like the devil's own for it. You expected me to fight to hold this grass, but you didn't expect me to lose anything at all. Well, I'll hold the range for you, Sullivan; you don't need to lose any sleep over that. But if I'm willing to risk my skin to do it, by thunder, you ought to be game enough to stand the loss of a wagon without a holler that can be heard to Four Corners!"

"You're doin' fine holdin' my range that I pay solid money to Uncle Sam for, you're doin' elegant fine, lad. I was hasty, my tongue got out from under the bit, boy. Let it pass; don't you go holdin' it against an old feller like me that's got the worry of forty-odd thousand sheep on his mind day and night."

"It's easy enough to say, but it don't let you out. You've got no call to come here and wade into me without knowing anything about the circumstances."

"Right you are, John, sound and right. I was hasty, I was too hot. You've done fine here, you're the first man that's ever stood up to them fellers and held 'em off my grass. You've done things up like a man, John. I give it to you—like a man."

"Thanks," said Mackenzie, in dry scorn.

"I ain't got no kick to make over the loss of my wagon—it's been many a day since I had one burnt up on me that way. Pass it up, pass up anything I've said about it, John. That's the lad."

So John passed it up, and unbent to meet

the young man who rode with Tim, whom the sheepman presented as Earl Reid, from Omaha, son of Malcolm Reid, an old range partner and friend. The young man had come out to learn the sheep business. Tim had brought him over for Mackenzie to break in. Dad Frazer was coming along with three thousand sheep, due to arrive in about a week. When he got there, the apprentice would split his time between them.

Mackenzie received the apprentice as cordially as he could, but it was not as ardent a welcome as the young man may have expected, owing to the gloom of resentment into which Sullivan's outbreak had thrown this unlucky herder on the frontier of the range.

Reid was rather a sophisticated-looking youth of twenty-two or twenty-three, city broke, city marked. There was a pool-room pallor about his thin face, a pool-room stoop to his thin shoulders, that Mackenzie did not like. But he was frank and ingenuous in his manner, with a ready smile that redeemed his homely face, and a pair of blue eyes that seemed young in their innocence compared to the world-knowledge that his face betrayed.

"Take the horses down there to the crick and water 'em," Tim directed his new herder, "and then you'll ride back with me as far as Joan's camp and fetch over some grub to hold you two fellers till the wagon comes. Joan, she'll know what to give you, and I guess you can find your way back here?"

"Surest thing you know," said Earl, with easy confidence, riding off to water the horses.

"That kid's no stranger to the range," Mackenzie said, more to himself than to Tim, as he watched him ride off.

"No, he used to be around with the cowboys on Malcolm's ranch when he was in the cattle business. He can handle a horse as good as you or me. Malcolm was the man that set me up in the sheep business; I started in with him like you're startin' with me, more than thirty years ago. He was the first sheepman on this range, and he had to fight to hold his own, I'm here to say!"

"You'd better send the kid over into peaceful territory," Mackenzie suggested, crabbedly.

"No, the old man wants him to get a taste of what he went through to make his start—he was tickled to the toes when he heard the way them Hall boys are r'arin' up and you standin' 'em off of this range of mine. 'Send him over there with that man,' he says; 'that's the kind of a man I want him to break in under.' The old feller was tickled clean to his toes."

"Is he over at the ranch?"

"No, he went back home last night. Come down to start the kid right, and talk it over with me. It was all a surprise to me, I didn't know a thing about it, but I couldn't turn Malcolm down."

Tim winked, looked cunning, nodded in a knowing way.

"Kid's been cuttin' up, throwin' away too much money, gettin' into scrapes like a boy in town will, you know. Wild oats and a big crop of 'em. The old man's staked him out with me for three years, and he ain't to draw one cent of pay, or have one cent to spend, in that time. If he breaks over, it's all off between them two, and the kid's sole heir to nearly half a million!"

Mackenzie turned to look again at the boy, who was coming back with the horses.

"Do you think he'll stick?" he asked.

"Yes, he promised the old man he would, and if he's anything like Malcolm, he'll eat fire before he'll break his word. Malcolm and me, we come to terms in ten words. The kid's to work three years for me without pay; then I'll marry him to my Joan."

Mackenzie felt his blood come up hot, and sink down again, cold; felt his heart kick in one resentful surge, then fall away to weakness in him as if its cords had been cut. Tim laughed, looking down the draw toward the sheep.

"It's something like that Jacob and Laban deal you spoke about the other day," said he. "Curious how things come around that way, ain't it? There I went ridin' off, rakin' up my brains to remember that story, and laughed when it come to me all of a sudden. Jacob skinned them willow sticks, and skinned the old man, too. But I don't

guess Earl would turn a trick like that on me, even if he could."

"How about Joan? Does she agree to the terms?" Mackenzie could not forbear the question, even though his throat was dry, his lips cold, his voice husky at the first word.

"She'll jump at it," Tim declared warmly. "She wants to go away from here and see the world, and this will be her chance. I don't object to her leavin', either, as long as it don't cost me anything. You go ahead and stuff her, John; stuff her as full of learnin' as she'll hold. It'll be cheaper for me than sendin' her off to school and fittin' her up to be a rich man's wife, and you can do her just as much good—more, from what she tells me. You go right ahead and stuff her, John."

"Huh!" said John.

"Earl, he'll look after your sheep while you're teachin' Joan her books. Stuff her, but don't founder her, John. If any man can fit her up to prance in high society, I'd bet my last dollar you can. You're a kind of a gentleman yourself, John."

"Thanks," said John, with a dry grin.

"Yes," reminiscently, with great satisfaction, Malcolm made the proposition to me, hit me with it so sudden it nearly took my breath. 'Marry him to your Joan when you make a man of him,' he says. I said maybe he wouldn't want to hitch up with a sheepman's daughter that was brought up on the range. 'If he don't he can go to work and make his own way—I'll not leave him a dam' cent!' says Malcolm. We shook hands on it; he said he'd put it in his will. And that's cinched so it can't slip."

When Tim mounted to leave he looked around the range again with a drawing of trouble in his face, as if he searched the peaceful landscape for the shadow of wings.

"I ain't got another sheep-wagon to give you right now," John; I guess you'll have to make out with a tent till winter," he said.

"I'd rather have it," Mackenzie replied.

Tim leaned over, hand to one side of his mouth, speaking in low voice, yet not whispering:

"And remember what I said about that matter, John. Stuff, but don't founder."

"Stuff," said John, but with an inflection that gave the word a different meaning, quite.

CHAPTER XIII.

A FIGHT ALMOST LOST.

DAD FRAZER was not overly friendly toward the young man from Omaha who had come out to learn the sheep business under the threat of penalties and the promise of high rewards. He growled around about him continually when he and Mackenzie met, which was not very often, owing to their being several miles apart.

Tim had stationed Dad and his big band of sheep between Mackenzie and Joan, leaving the schoolmaster to hold the frontier. No matter for old man Reid's keenness to have his son suffer some of the dangers which he had faced in his day, Tim seemed to be holding the youth back out of harm's way, taking no risks on losing a good thing.

Reid had been on the range about two weeks, but Mackenzie had not seen a great deal of him, owing to Tim's plan of keeping him out of the disputed territory, especially at night. That the young man did not care much for the company or instruction of Dad Frazer was plain. Twice he had asked Mackenzie to use his influence with Tim to bring about a change from the old man's camp to his.

In Mackenzie's silence and severity the young man found something that he could not penetrate, a story that he could not read. Perhaps it was with a view to finding out what school Mackenzie had been seasoned in that Reid bent himself to win his friendship.

Dad Frazer had come over the hills to Mackenzie's range that afternoon, to stretch his legs, he said, although Mackenzie knew it was to stretch his tongue, caring nothing for the miles that lay between. He had left Reid in charge of his flock, the young man being favored by Tim to the extent of allowing him a horse, the same as he did Joan.

"I'm glad he takes to you," said Dad. "I don't like him; he's got a graveyard in his eyes."

"I don't think he ever pulled a gun on anybody in his life, Dad," Mackenzie returned, in mild amusement.

"I don't mean that kind of a graveyard; I mean a graveyard where he buried the boy in him long before his time. He's too sharp for his years; he's seen too much of the kind of life a young feller's better off for to hear about from a distance and never touch. I tell you, John, he ain't no good."

"He's an agreeable kind of a chap, anyhow; he's got a line of talk like a saddle salesman."

"Yes, and I never did have no use for a talkin' man. Nothin' to 'em; they don't stand the gaff."

In spite of his friendly defense of young Reid, Mackenzie felt that Dad had read him aright. There was something of subtle knowledge, an edge of guile showing through his easy nature and desire to please, that was like acid on the teeth. Reid had the faculty of making himself agreeable, and he was an apt and willing hand, but back of this ingenuous appearance there seemed to be something elusive and shadowy, a thing which he tried to keep hidden by nimble maneuvers, but which would show at times for all his care.

Mackenzie did not dislike the youth, but he found it impossible to warm up to him as one man might to another in a place where human companionship is a luxury. When Reid sat with a cigarette in his thin lips—it was a wide mouth, worldly hard—hazy in abstraction and smoke, there came a glaze over the clearness of his eyes, a look of dead hardness, a cast of cunning. In such moments his true nature seemed to express itself unconsciously, and Dad Frazer, simple as he was in many ways, was worldly man enough to penetrate the smoke, and sound the apprentice sheepman to his soul.

Reid seemed to draw a good deal of amusement out of his situation under Tim Sullivan. He was dependent on the flock-master for his clothing and keep, even tobacco and papers for his cigarettes. If he knew anything about the arrangement between his father and Sullivan in regard to Joan, he did not mention it. That he knew it, Mackenzie fully believed, for Tim

Sullivan was not the man to keep the reward sequestered.

Whether Reid looked toward Joan as adequate compensation for three years' exile in the sheeplands, there was no telling. Perhaps he did not think much of her in comparison with the exotic plants of the atmosphere he had left; more than likely there was a girl in the background somewhere, around whom some of the old man's anxiety to save the lad revolved. Mackenzie hoped to the deepest cranny of his heart that it was so.

"He seems to get a good deal of humor out of working here for his board and tobacco," Mackenzie said.

"Yes, he blatters a good deal about it," said Dad. "'I'll take another biscuit on Tim Sullivan,' he says, and 'here goes another smoke on Tim.' I don't see where he's got any call to make a joke out of eatin' another man's bread."

"Maybe he's never eaten any man's bread outside of the family before, Dad."

"I reckon he wouldn't have to be doin' it now if he'd 'a' been decent. Oh, well, maybe he ain't so bad."

This day Dad was maneuvering around to unload the apprentice on Mackenzie for good. He worked up to it gradually, as if careful not to be too sudden and plunge into a hole.

"I don't like a feller around that talks so much," Dad complained. "When he's around, a man ain't got no time to think and plan and lay his projec's for what he's a goin' to do. All I can do to put a word in edgeways once in a while."

It appeared plain enough that Dad's sore spot was this very inability to land as many words as he thought he had a right to. That is the complaint of any talkative person. If you are a good listener, with a *yes* and a *no* now and then, a talkative man will tell your friends you are the most interesting conversationalist he ever met.

"I don't mind him," Mackenzie said, knowing very well that Dad would soon be so hungry for somebody to unload his words upon that he would be talking to the sheep. "Ship him over to me when you're tired of him; I'll work some of the wind out of him inside of a week."

"I'll send him this evenin'," said Dad, eager in his relief, brightening like an uncovered coal. "Them dogs Joan give you's breakin' in to the sound of your voice wonderful, ain't they?"

"They're getting used to me slowly."

"Funny about dogs a woman's been runnin' sheep with. Mighty unusual they'll take up with a man after that. I used to be married to a Indian woman up on the Big Wind that was some hummer trainin' sheep-dogs. That woman could sell 'em for a hundred dollars apiece as fast as she could raise 'em and train 'em up, and them dad-splashed collies, they'd purt' near all come back home after she'd sold 'em. Say, I've knowed them dogs to come back a hundred and eighty mile!"

"That must have been a valuable woman to have around a man's camp. Where is she now, if I'm not too curious?"

"She was a good woman, one of the best women I ever had."

Dad rubbed his chin, eyes reflectively on the ground, stood silent a spell that was pretty long for him.

"I hated like snakes to lose that woman—her name was Little Handful of Rabbit Hair on a Rock. Ye-es. She was a hummer on sheep-dogs, all right. She took a swig too many out of my jug one day and tripped over a stick and tumbled into the hog-scaldin' tank."

"What a miserable end!" said Mackenzie, shocked by the old man's indifferent way of telling it.

"Oh, it didn't hurt her much," said Dad. "Scalded one side of her till she peeled off and turned white. I couldn't stand her after that. You know a man don't want to be goin' around with no pinto woman, John."

Dad looked up with a gesture of deprecation, a queer look of apology in his weather-beaten face. "She was a Crow," he added, as if that explained much that he had not told.

"Dark, huh?"

"Black; nearly as black as a nigger."

"Little Handful, and so forth, must have thought you gave her a pretty hard deal, anyhow, Dad."

"I never called her by her full name,"

Dad reflected, passing over the moral question that Mackenzie raised. "I shortened her down to Rabbit. I sure wish I had a couple of them sheep-dogs of hern to give you in place of them you lost. Joan's a good little girl, but she can't train a dog like Rabbit."

"Rabbit's still up there on the Big Wind waiting for you, is she?"

"She'll wait a long time! I'm done with Indians. Joan comin' over to-day?"

"To-morrow."

"I don't guess you'll have her to bother with much longer—her and that Reid boy, they'll be hitchin' up one of these days, from all the signs. He skirmishes off over that way nearly every day. Looks to me like Tim laid it out that way, givin' him a horse to ride and leavin' me and you to hoof it. It'd suit Tim, all right; I've heard old Reid's a millionaire."

"I guess it would," Mackenzie said, trying to keep his voice from sounding as cold as his heart felt that moment.

"Yes, I think they'll hitch. Well, I'd like to see Joan land a better man than him. I don't like a man that can draw a blinder over his eyes like a frog."

Mackenzie smiled at the aptness of Dad's comparison. It was, indeed, as if Reid interposed a film like a frog when he plunged from one element into another, so to speak; when he left the sheeplands in his thoughts and went back to the haunts and the companions lately known.

"If Joan had a little more meat on her she wouldn't be a bad looker," said Dad. "Well, when a man's young he likes 'em slim, and when he's old he wants 'em fat. It'd be a calamity if a man was to marry a skinny girl like Joan and she was to stay skinny all his life."

"I don't think she's exactly skinny, Dad."

"No, I don't reckon you could count her ribs. But you put fifty pounds more on that girl and see how she'd look!"

"I can't imagine it," said Mackenzie, not friendly to the notion at all.

As Dad went back to unburden himself of his unwelcome companion, Mackenzie could not suppress the thought that a good many unworthy notions hatched itself be-

neath that dignified white hair. But surely Dad might be excused by a more stringent moralist than the schoolmaster for abandoning poor Rabbit after her complexion had suffered in the hog-scalding vat.

Toward sundown Earl Reid came riding over, his winning smile as easy on his face as he was in the saddle. The days were doing him good, all around, toughening his face, taking the pool-room pastiness out of it, putting a bracer in his back. Mackenzie noted the improvement as readily as it could be seen in some quick-growing plant.

Mackenzie was living a very primitive and satisfactory life under a few yards of tent canvas since the loss of his wagon. He stretched it over such bushes as came handy, storing his food beneath it when he slept, save on such nights as threatened showers. Reid applauded this arrangement. He was tired of Dad Frazer's wagon, and the greasy bunk in it.

"I've been wild to stretch out in a blanket with my feet to a little fire," he said, with a flash of the eagerness belonging to the boyhood buried away too soon, as Dad had remarked. "Dad wouldn't let me do it—fussed at me three days because I sneaked out on him one night and laid under the wagon."

"Dad didn't want a skunk to bite you, I guess. He felt a heavy responsibility on your account."

"Old snoozer!" said Reid.

Reid was uncommonly handy as a camp cook, far better in that respect than Mackenzie, who gladly turned the kitchen duties over to him and let him have his way. After supper they sat talking, the lusty moon lifting a wondering face over the hills in genial placidity as if sure, after all its ages, of giving the world a surprise at last.

"Joan told me to bring you word she'd be over in the morning instead of to-morrow afternoon," said Reid.

"Thanks."

Reid smoked in reflective silence, his thin face clear in the moonlight.

"Some girl," said he. "I don't see why she wants to go to all this trouble to get a little education. That stuff's all bunk. I wish I had the coin in my jeans right now

that the old man spent on me, pourin' stuff into me that went right on through like smoke through a handkerchief."

"I don't think it would be that way with Joan," Mackenzie said, hoping Reid would drop the discussion there, and not go into the arrangement for the future, which was a matter altogether detestable in the schoolmaster's thoughts.

Reid did not pursue his speculations on Joan, whether through delicacy or indifference Mackenzie could not tell. He branched off into talk of other things, through which the craving for the life he had left came out in strong expressions of dissatisfaction with the range. He complained against the penance his father had set, looking ahead with consternation to the three years he must spend in those solitudes, to come at last into what he most desired.

"But I'm goin' to stick," he said, an unmistakable determination in his tone. "I'll show him they're making as good men now as they did when he was a kid."

He laughed, a raucous, short laugh, an old man's laugh, which choked in a cigarette cough and made a mockery of mirth.

"I'll toughen up out here and have better wind for the big finish when I sit in on the old man's money."

No, Joan was not cast for any important part in young Reid's future drama, Mackenzie understood. As if his thoughts had penetrated to the young man's heart, making fatuous any further attempt at concealment of his true sentiments, Reid spoke:

"They've sewed me up in a sack with Joan—I guess you know about it?"

"Tim was telling me."

"A guy could do worse."

With this comforting reflection Reid stretched himself on his blanket and went to sleep. Mackenzie was not slow in following his example, for it had been a hard day with the sheep, with much leg-work on account of the new dogs showing a wolfish shyness of their new master most exasperating at times. Mackenzie's last thought was that Reid would take a great deal of labor off his legs by using the horse in attending the sheep.

A scream woke Mackenzie. He heaved

up out of his sleep with confusion clouding his senses for the moment, the thought that he was on water, and the cry was that of one who drowned, persistent above his struggling reason.

It was a choking cry, the utterance of a desperate soul who sees life fleeing while he lifts his voice in the last appeal. And between him and his companion Mackenzie saw the bulk of a giant-shouldered man, who bent with arm outstretched toward him, whose hand came in contact with his throat as he rose upright with the stare of confusion in his eyes.

Mackenzie broke through this film of his numbing sleep, reaching for the rifle that he had laid near his hand. It was gone, and across the two yards intervening he saw young Reid writhing in the grip of the monster who was strangling out his life.

Mackenzie wrenched free from the great hand that closed about his throat, tearing the mighty arm away with the strength of both his own. A moment, and he was involved in the most desperate struggle that he had ever faced in his life.

This interference gave Reid a new gulp of life. The three combatants were on their feet now, not a word spoken, not a sound but the dull impact of blows and the hard breathings of the two who fought this monster of the sheeplands for their lives.

Swan Carlson, Mackenzie believed him to be, indulging his insane desire for strangling out the lives of men. He had approached so stealthily, with such wild cunning, that the dogs had given no alarm, and had taken

the gun to insure against miscarriage or interruption in his horrible menu of death.

A brief tangle of locked arms, swaying bodies, ribs all but crushed in the embrace of those bestial arms, and Mackenzie was conscious that he was fighting the battle alone. In the wild swirl of it he could not see whether Reid had fallen or torn free. A little while, now in the pressure of those hairy, bare arms, now free for one gasping breath, fighting as man never fought in the sheeplands before that hour, and Mackenzie felt himself snatched up bodily and thrown down from uplifted arms with a force that must have ended all for him then but for the interposition of a sage-clump that broke the fall.

Instantly the silent monster was upon him. Mackenzie met him hand to hand, fighting the best fight that was in him, chilled with the belief that it was his last. But he could not come up from his knees, and in this position his assailant bent over him, one hand on his forehead, the other at the back of his neck, a knee against his breast.

Mackenzie tore at the great, stiff arms with his last desperate might, perhaps staying a little the pressure that in a moment more must snap his spine. As the assassin tightened this terrible grip Mackenzie's face was lifted toward the sky. Overhead was the moon, clear-edged, bright, in the dusk of the immensities beyond; behind the monster, who paused that breath as in design to fill his victim's last moment with a hope that he soon would mock, Mackenzie saw young Reid.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)


A MODEST MAN

AH, me! Too late to regret,
The echoes answer back "too late";
It is no use to weep and fret,
She is not meant for me by fate.

My fond love now is but a ghost
Where once it was exceeding bright;
I asked for her sweet hand by post;
My rival called himself that night.

Alack! The thought now gives me pain,
Why did I write on love's behalf?
I'll not propose by post again;
Next time I'll telegraph.

Laying Captain Morley's Ghost



by May Emery Hall

NO quainter hamlet is to be found the entire length of the New England coast than Shaleport, and no more picturesque spot in Shaleport than Cemetery Mount. The seaward slope of this jutting peninsula, grass-grown, swept by the crisp, salt breezes of the bay, has a charm nobody can escape, be he dreamer, lover or mere idler. With the jade-colored waters flashing myriad dimples up at the sun, one can afford to laugh at the crazy, toppling old grave-stones, and forget what lies beneath.

The half-obliterated inscriptions about this "relict" and that "departed consort," sepulchral references to "the silent, moldy tomb," and dark hints of horrible sentences to be meted out on "the final judgment day" seem as meaningless and antique as the Chinese alphabet. In fact, they but add to the attractiveness of the place.

After spending a delightful hour on Cemetery Mount the first morning of my vacation, I came to the conclusion that it wanted but one thing to be perfect—a ghost. So intense was this conviction that I half resolved to manufacture one myself, as writers have the privilege of doing.

But there was not necessity. At the lunch-table that noon I learned that Shaleport already had a ghost—or, rather, had had one. Captain Andy Redding—every seafaring man in the vicinity is "captain"—my host, and a kindly, grizzled old

salt of some seventy years, was my informant.

"Ne'er hearn tell o' Mark's ghost, ye say?" was his astonished exclamation. "Well, I swan! S'posed 'twould git ez fur's Noo York, seein' the Boston papers took it up."

For the brief space of a second or two, he regarded me half resentfully for having hailed from the unenlightened metropolis.

"Still," he ruminated, with a show of conciliation, "come to think on't, 'twas a chap from your town thet laid the ghost at that."

"Laid it?" I echoed, disappointedly. "Then the apparition doesn't walk o' nights any longer?"

"No," Captain Andy chuckled as at some amusing recollection as he sent a significant glance across the table to his wife. Her faded eyes answered with a gleam of humor. "No. Mark 'll ne'er disturb nobody agin, I reckon."

"Go to it, captain," I wheedled. "You really owe me the story, you know, to make up for my disappointment."

Nothing loth, the old mariner began, having first refused a fourth helping of "Aunt" Prue's golden doughnuts in favor of a rank, blackened, old pipe.

"Cimtery Mount's a mighty purty outlook, ez ye've found out a'ready; ez purty an outlook ez there be in these here parts. But there was a time, only ten years agone,

thet Shaleport didn't waste no more time up yender on the hill then it hed to—specially nights. When darkness smudged out everything like a spilled bottle o' black ink, then the dead hed it all to themselves.

"'Twas Mark's hints 'bout comin' back from the beyont to have a look over thet set 'em a goin'. Mark Morley, understan', was cap'n o' the Jenny Kelton, 'n' I was Mark's fust mate. We two grewed up together from little shavers. A whiter, cleaner man than Mark Morley ne'er drewed breath. Straight ez a die. Hard ez nails, maybe, ez some said, but none could p'int a finger at him 'n' say he was unjust 'r cruel. Hed his little kinks o' make-up, but which one on us hain't?

"The gossips whispered there was a 'queer' strain in him handed down from some witch 'r gipsy forebear, generations back in the Morley fam'ly. Wall, all I got to say on thet score is"—Captain Andy threw a succession of excited puffs into the air—"ef more hed queer streaks like hisn, so much the better off would Shaleport be. An' more. I call it a low-down trick to be pickin' flaws in dead-'n'-gone wimmin what can't answer back. Unfair advantage, thet—eh, Prue—not to give 'em the last word.

"But when ye sizzled down Mark's peculiarities, what did ye find, arter all? Nothin' much. Fur one thing, he hed a grudge ag'in' steam. Stuck by him, too, till the day o' his death. 'I've made out,' he used to say, 'to git along with the wind 'n' t'other elements all my life, 'n' I will to the end. Ef they're good eno' fur God Almighty, why not good eno' fur Mark Morley?"

"Then there was the question o' savin' banks. Mark would have none on 'em, and kin ye blame him? Cashiers skippin' every month 'r so, institootions bustin' up, 'n' all one's hard-earned scrapin's thrown to the dogs—who *wouldn't* cast a weather eye on the bunco game? No. There was plenty who said Mark was cracked on thet p'int, but I say he showed only horse sense.

"Thirdly and lastly—ez the parson says—he hed a powerful deep passion fur thet gal o' hisn. But there, agin, is lovin' the only thing a man hez left in the world a sign o' craziness? Why *shouldn't* she uv be'n heaven 'n' airth to him? Her grandad's

heart wa'n't the only one little Bernice Morley hed worked her way inter, not by any manner o' means. Prue 'n' me, fur instance, was clean daft 'bout the child ourselves. Who could uv helped it? Brown 'n' sound ez a ripe nut was she, purty ez a wild rose, but with no namby-pamby goodness 'bout her, ye kin jes' bet. Hed a will of her own, all right, this slip of a seven-year-old, a dash o' the genu-ine Morley spice. She was her grandad all over.

"But to git back to ghosts. It all begun one day down to the village when Hal Short, Si Taylor, 'n' two 'r three t'others brung up the subject. They all bragged there wa'n't no ghost thet could scare them—not by a long shot. 'Sperrets?' they scoffed. 'They'd jes' like to see a spook come snoop-in' round, they would. Powerful quick work they'd make of it, afore ye hed time to say 'Jack Robinson.'

"Mark listened a spell 'thout sayin' nothin'. Then he give 'em a piece o' his mind, good 'n' plenty. 'Ye all talk almighty big,' says he, 'bout what ye'd do 'n' what ye wouldn't do ef a specter tapped ye on the shoulder. But I'm tellin' ye there be not a man 'mong ye but ud turn tail 'n' scuttle blamed hard. Half a mind to try it out later on, 'n' see fur myself. Come to think on't, I will. One thing is sartain sure, at any rate, ef anybody e'er does wrong by my gal, he'll have to reckon with my ghost. An' don't ye furgit it.'"

Captain Andy paused to draw breath. Into his sea-green eyes crept a far-away, somber look, and he signed heavily.

"Mark passed away thet very summer," he resumed. "Died o' typhoid while we was on our way back from the B'hamas. Some solemn things he made me promise at his death-bed. To take care o' little Bernice was the fust, o' course. Lord, but 'twan't a very hard bargain that. I 'greed, quick eno', fur Prue 'n' myself, to give her a home, tend her like our own, 'n' send her to the academy fur schoolin' ez soon ez she got big eno'. Yes, 'n' I promised, too, to keep good-fur-nothin' cubs from danglin' arter her.

"There was still another promise—not ez easy as the rest. 'Twas an amazin' thing this last thet Mark asked, 'n' no mistake. I

objected fur a spell, but after a while give in. What could ye do with a dyin' man? What the promise was I'll tell ye, all in its proper place.

"Ye may better b'lieve an oneasy chill run down the back o' Shaleport when I come home with the news o' Mark's passin' away. Every mother's son was perfec'ly willin' I should hurry the coffin unopened inter the Morley lot up on the mount. An' the half-fear they'd allus hed o' Mark kep' 'em from talkin' much o' ghosts them days. Ay, 'n' fur years arterwards.

"Long arter the Jenny Kelton was in the scrap-heap, whene'er the chilly gray mist ud crawl landward, I'll be bound more 'n one peered round the cimitery headland, half expectin' to see a spectral ship take shape, full-rigged, bearin' down inter the harbor with Mark in command, ez in the old days. Not thet any one on 'em would let on they was scared—oh, no! But I took note nobody choosed the cimitery slope fur his evenin' pipe, 'n' on nights when lovers took moonlight strolls, they did their sparkin' this side the hill, 'n' never wunst wandered by mistake up the stone flaggin' to the saggin' graves. Nobody craved the job o' bein' ghost-layer; no, siree.

"Wall, the years come 'n' go, 'n' Mark kep' quiet, like a well-behaved ghost oughter. Little Bernice growed up handsomer 'n ever. Then Prue's 'n' my troubles begun. The beaus come thicker 'n spatter, 'n' we hed our han's full aplenty. The little minx didn't turn 'em down, 'n' she didn't draw 'em on—but they kep' comin' jes' the same. Ye couldn't tell who she liked 'n' who she didn't, but arter a spell Prue 'n' me b'iled 'em down to two pertik'ler ones.

"Jack Gilbert come fust. He was a strappin' giant of a feller, black-browed, with crisp, curly hair, 'n' a devil-may-care air like a villain in a play. His dark, good looks set all the girls a sighin', all 'cept Bernice. One reason the wimmin-folks took to him was his bein' a stranger. People you've growed up with hez faults ye ne'er see in a newcomer, ye know. Jes' who Jack Gilbert was, 'r where he come from, nobody seemed able to figger out, 'n' he wa'n't inclined to help 'em.

"Seemed like I'd knowed him afore,

some time, somewhere, but to save my neck I couldn't give no fac's ner dates. He got a job in the yacht-yard, worked hard, minded his own business, 'n' I, fur one, got to have a sneakin' likin' fur the chap. He wa'n't good eno' fur our Bernice—no young fool was thet. 'But,' says I, 'ef the girl must git married some day, why—' Whiniver I'd git thet far with Prue, maybe she wouldn't spit fire! Eh, mother?"

Aunt Prue's withered cheeks took on a tinge of pink. "An' with good reason, too, Andrew Redding," she snapped, with unwonted vim. "Wimmin sees a thing 'r two now 'n' then thet passes clean by you stupid men folks. Ye're the dumbest animals, take ye all in all, as e'er I did see."

Captain Andy's weather-beaten face wrinkled into a grin of amusement at the implied reproof. "Ye've got the right on't, mother," was all he said.

"What was it that you didn't like about this would-be beau of Bernice's?" I asked Aunt Prue.

She sniffed audibly. "Well, fur one thing," she went on, "people don't keep tight watch on their lips 'cept there's somethin' to keep back. An' fur the same reason, they don't fight shy o' lookin' ye straight in the eye. But what made me most suspicious o' Jack Gilbert was somethin' diff'rent. 'Twas the scamp's right arm."

"Right arm?" I echoed.

Aunt Prue gave a vigorous nod. "Right arm," she reaffirmed. "Jack Gilbert ne'er unbared it e'en when at work. I took note on't, agin 'n' agin. He hed a habit, too, o' layin' his left hand over it ez ef fur double protection. 'Thet arm,' says I to myself, 'hez somethin' to do with what he's coverin' up, Prudence Redding, 'n' don't ye furgit it.' I didn't say this out loud, but I kep' up thinkin' 'n' I watched 'n' watched. Arterwards, when everything come out—"

"S'pose I take up the story at this p'int, mother," suggested Captain Andy. Then to me: "Seems like we've strayed a good bit from Mark's ghost, don't it?" he said. "But not so fur ez ye think. T'other one o' Bernice's sparks thet appeared to have a good show was young Hollins. Jes' ez I stood up fur Jack Gilbert, so Prue took sides with *him*. Bernice, too, I reckon, liked

him from the start, but to git the little flirt to say so 'r not was another story.

"This Hollins was a city chap, 'n' we Shaleporters allus did hold city chaps cheap. 'Twa'n't nothin' in his favor, neither, that he painted fur a livin'. Called himself a' artist. But, gosh, it looked all-fired foolish to us, I kin tell ye, ez worked by the sweat of our brow 'n' the strength of our muscle to see him a settin' out on them rocks, takin' down sunsets 'n' sails 'n' sech common things."

"They was beautiful, jes' the same," put in Aunt Prue decidedly.

"P'rhaps," rejoined her husband, "but 'twas too much like loafin' to suit me. Even though some Noo York folks here on a vacation said people paid money—*acchal* money—fur them daubs. 'There allus will be fools in the world,' I used to answer to sech argyfyng. Young Hollins wore purple ties 'n' socks 'n', good Lord, yes, wiped his nose on silk han'kerchiefs. He got the name o' 'dude' 'n' 'Charley-boy,' 'n' everybody—the men, anyway—treated him like a joke."

"Behind his back," supplemented Aunt Prue grimly.

"Hollins was countin' on stayin' here only a fortni't—we made arrangements to board him thet long—but when the two weeks was up, I'll be jiggered ef he didn't throw two months' board 'n' room-rent in my face, 'n' say he'd decided to stay on all summer. 'Sech wonderful tides 'n' rocks 'n' surf as there be at Shaleport!' says he; 'twould be a crime to travel further in search o' better.' He didn't fool me; I knowed his little game. 'Specially when I seen Bernice's cheeks turn the color of a rose. I begun to calc'late how to git red o' him. But what could one solitary man do ag'in' two wimmin—an' his own wimmin at thet?

"So Hollins stayed on. There was bad blood twixt him 'n' Jack Gilbert from the start. Ef looks could kill—wall, one on 'em ud uv be'n dead at short order. I kep' my eyes wide open, ye may better b'lieve. Hedn't I give my word to Mark thet I'd hev no young calf nonsense? What-e'er Gilbert 'n' Hollins hed to say to Bernice they hed to say in my hearin', though

eyes can pass a powerful lot that ye can't figger out at thet.

"The day come when Hollins put it to me straight. 'I want to marry Miss Bernice,' says he, 'provided she wants me fur a husband.'

"I hemmed 'n' hawed 'n' beat round the bush, but he made me come out in the open. 'Ye're from the city,' says I, 'n'—'n'—"

"'Ye don't trust city men,' he finished fur me.

"'No, I don't, ef ye want the truth,' I answered. 'No more than did Mark Morley, the gal's grandfather. He made me take my solemn oath I'd look arter Bernice good 'n' proper, 'n' I intend to keep that promise. He'll see to it, too. P'raps ye don't know his ghost may walk ef—'

"He laughed, short 'n' scornful. Got all-fired mad, too. To be honest, I ne'er liked him so well ez when he blazed out at me. 'Mark Morley's ghost?' shouted he. 'What do I care fur Mark Morley's ghost 'r anybody else's ghost? I kin give a good eno' account o' myself. I'm an honest man. I'm off'r'in' honest marriage. What more do ye want?'

"'A whole lot more,' I held out. 'The man who gits Bernice Morley hez got to show he kin do more then sling paint round. Show thet he ain't a sissy, at any rate.'

"'But how?' says he, holdin' out his soft hands, helpless-like.

"'Thet's fur ye to find out,' 'n' I turned my back on him. Jiminy, wa'n't he huffy fur the next few days! Bernice, o' course, played the very devil with him, 'n' thet didn't help much. She was sweeter to Jack Gilbert then she had be'n fur months. An' thet young scalawag swaggered round like ez ef the word hed be'n given 'n' 'twas all settled twixt him 'n' the gal.

"Well, young Hollins's chanct come sooner then what I thought. One arternoon I hed a matter o' business to attend to over to Peach's P'int, 'n' Hollins asked to go 'long in the sailboat with me. Wanted to sketch some pertik'ler scenery 'r other t'other side the bay. Mighty glum company he was, I swear, though Bernice hed veered about agin 'n' was makin' eyes at him while Gilbert she'd hardly look at.

He wouldn't say nothin' 'cept when I put a question, then bit his words off sharp 'n' quick.

"The business took me longer then what I thought, 'n' 'twas well arter dark when we sighted Cimitery Mount. A overcast, threatenin' evenin' 'twas, with a fresh south'ard wind promisin' rain, 'n' the moon peekin' out twixt heavy, lowerin' cloud-banks only a minute 'r two at a time, then scuttlin' back outer sight. I felt a trifle oneasy, fur Prue here, like all the wimmin-folks, can't abide keepin' vittles warm arter mealtime. I must uv said somethin' o' the sort to young Hollins.

"'Why not land here, then?' says he, sullenlike, 'n'stead o' makin' the p'int? A crosscut up over the hill 'll save quite a piece.'

"I chirped back same ez ef he'd be'n handin' me the civilest words all day: 'Good idee,' say I, hearty ez I knowed how, then, without meanin' to rile him, 'thet is, ef ye ain't afear'd o' Mark's takin' it inter his head to walk to-night.' Hoity-toity, but he was in dead airnest ef I wa'n't. Ne'er seen a poker stiffer.

"'I'll remind ye, Cap'n Reddin',' says he, 'thet I hev a'ready explained my stand on the ghost question.'

"Wall, the upshot of it was thet we made the boat fast in the little inlet t'other side o' the hill, 'n' begun to climb. Hollins kep' a few feet ahead o' me most o' the time. He was miffed, fur one thing, then, natch'ly bein' younger 'n' spryer 'n' me, he wa'n't put outer breath so easy. I knowed the way like 'twas day, but he stumbled purty often, 'n' wunst 'r twice come plumb up ag'in' them crazy stones. They clean bowled him over. Jiminy, but his shins must uv been skinned in a dozen places! Ne'er a word pass'd his proud lips, howsome'er. He jes' pulled himself to his feet, gritted his teeth, 'n' went on.

"'Fore long we veered t'wards the Morley lot. 'Now's the time,' says I to myself, 'my fine young gentleman 'll lag behind—he'll lose a bit o' thet powerful courage o' hisn. Not he! He jes' trudged straight on. At fust, thet is. All to wunst the moon made shift to push her way through a heavy bank o' clouds. Seemed like a silver

sheet was spread o'er the airth 'n' water—beautiful, ye bet, but with a sort o' ghostly, shivery beauty.

"Then I seen thet Hollins hed stopped short—come to a dead stan'still. When I caught up, he clutched me by the shoulder with one arm, 'n' t'other p'inted t'wards Mark's plot. 'Look!' he whispered in a hoarse voice. 'Look!'

"I looked. An' ef I was to kiss the Book on't, I should uv sworn thet Mark Morley's sperret hed riz from the grave. Yes, siree. Tall 'n' big 'n' commandin, with sou' wester 'n' pea-jacket 'n' all the rest of his get-up same ez ef he was on the deck o' the Jenny Kelton. I, who'd never took no stock in the ghost stories, seen my old mate ez plain ez daylight 'n' jes' ez natch'.

"He seen us at the same time. An' sech long, groanin' wails ez he let out! An' sech a scarecrow flappin' of his long arms ez he set a goin'! Mark was my mate 'n' friend, but I don't make no bones o' confessin' thet I was scared stiff. My knees knocked together with awful bumps, 'n' ef 'twasn't thet young Hollins stood by, I'd uv slumped in a heap.

"Hollins took a couple o' quick steps furrard. The ghost let out more groans at thet, louder 'n' more horrible then the fust. The blood friz in my veins. I tried to say somethin', but my dried mouth couldn't manage the words. But I did hev strength eno' to reach out 'n' clamp Hollins's arm tight. An' when I got my speech back, I whispered: 'Be ye plumb daft?'

"He jes' glared. Shook me off. Thet was all. But I wa'n't to be fooled with. 'Ye can't take chances with a ghost,' says I. 'How d'ye know but—'

"'Ghost! Ghost!' he throwed back at me. 'Watch me, 'n' I'll make quick work o' yer ghost. I ain't done nothin' that I should run away like a criminal.'

"All this time the sperret kep' gettin' more 'n' more excited. It jumped up 'n' down like a crazy man 'n' kep' them arms flappin' harder 'n' ever to warn us away. I was about to turn tail, same ez Mark hed said any on us would, but 'twa'n't no use. Thet young fool was bound to see the thing through. I didn't know it at the time, but he told me arterwards thet a good bit o'

thet courage was all on the surface. 'Here was my chanc't at last,' said he, 'to prove I wa'n't no sissy. I didn't know when another'd come my way. One part o' my brain kep' whisperin'; "Run," but t'other shouted: "Bernice" louder, 'n' the "Bernice" part won the day.'

"Hollins made a suddint dive t'wards the ghost. All I could do was to look on, rooted to the spot. I couldn't uv moved a muscle hed I be'n shot fur it. The ghost now took a new tack. Seein' ez Hollins meant business, 'nstead o' facin' the music, it started to run. But Hollins was too quick fur it. He lunged furrard 'n' made a grab, 'n'—would ye b'lieve it—found 'nstead o' clutchin' a gray shadder, he hed a live man in his grasp! Flesh 'n' blood, by Jiminy, 'n' blubberin' at thet.

"Lemme go!" he whimpered. 'Lemme go!' My ears pricked up at thet voice. It sounded like one I knowed.

"Go?" yelled Hollins. 'Not by a damned sight, ye rat!' He flung him at my feet. 'Here's yer ghost, Cap'n Reddin', says he, jerkin' off t'other's pea-jacket 'n' sou'wester. 'Strikes me he looks powerful like Jack Gilbert. Was he 'n' Cap'n Morley in anyways related?'

"Jack Gilbert! 'Twas him, sure eno'. My eyes didn't play me false. 'Ye—ye—' I yelled, 'what do ye mean masqueradin' ez a dead man? Purty low-down trick, I take it, to set out to scare decent folk in this fashion!' I was all-fired mad, I kin tell ye. Gilbert answered ne'er a word.

"'P'raps,' spoke up Hollins, 'these'll explain a thing 'r two.' With one hand still clutchin' Gilbert tight, he stooped over a pile o' somethin' on the ground. It was tools: a pick, a shovel, screw-driver, 'n' sech. The moon obleeged us by stayin' out long eno' fur us to see thet much.

"Aha! Grave robber!" yelled Hollins. 'Fine business, thet!'

"Jack Gilbert, still grovelin' on the ground, set up a cryin' like a baby. I didn't blame Hollins fur kickin' him. 'Stop yer snivellin', he ordered. 'Ye've got somethin' else to do. An' thet somethin' is to clean up this night's work. Onter yer feet!'

"Jack Gilbert obeyed like a whipped cur.

"'Furrard, march!'

"Then I stepped in. Fur I was beginnin' to git an inklin' which way the wind blew, though one 'r two p'int's was clean beyont my power o' reckonin'.

"'Not so fast, lad,' says I. 'He's yourn, but ef ye don't mind, I'd ruther see this business through. Put him to his diggin' agin.'

"I could see Hollins thought I was clean loony, all right. 'What,' he bellowed, 'dig up the coffin o' Cap'n Morley, yer friend 'n' mate? Ye can't mean—'

"'I do mean,' I finished. 'But don't be afeared my old mate's goin' to be disturbed in any wise. Mark Morley's safely sleepin' at the bottom o' the ocean—the rightful bed o' any mariner deservin' the name—'n' hez be'n this twelve year' back.'

"His eyes bulged out big at thet. 'But the coffin—' he begun, all bewildered.

"'Is a coffin, all right,' I chuckled, 'e'en ef Mark's body ain't in't. The only thing thet I can't git daylight on now is how this varmint come to know on't. Mark asked me—'n' me alone—on his death-bed to carry out his wishes. None other wa'n't near. 'N' I ain't let on what 'twas he said to me, not e'en to the wife o' my bosom. Though there's a sealed note in a dead-sure hiding-place thet Prue's to open ef I should die fust, 'n' 'nother jes' like it in Lawyer Bain's han's. But set the scoundrel to work, lad; there be time fur the truth arterwards.'

"Now Jack Gilbert hed on one o' them loose gray blouses sech ez they wear hereabouts. He rolled up the left sleeve brisk eno', but when he got to the right, he sort o' halted. At last, with a quick fling, defiantlike, he laid bare his arm to the elbow. Then I seen thet thet made me stare, the same thing thet Prue be'n tryin' to figger out. Not clear, mind ye, fur there wan't light eno' fur thet, 'n', to cap it all, the moon ducked jes' then.

"I tried to light the scamp's lantern—fur he'd brung one along—but my hand trembled too powerful. Hollins had to come to my help. When the flame did flare up, it throwed light on a tattoo-mark, big ez yer palm, a five-pointed star with a fancy letter G plumb in the middle, all quirks 'n'

curves. I hed seen thet mark afore—I was sure on't—but when 'r where I was too befuddled to think.

"The diggin' went on. *Thud! Thud!* The shovelfuls o' airth piled up on each other till a mound ez high ez the head-stone reared itself afore us. Not a minute was wasted, ye kin bet. Jiminy! but young Hollins made thet scamp sweat! At last the shovel struck somethin' hard. 'Twas the box. All three on us set to, then, 'n' with the pick 'n' shovel 'n' our bare arms pried it outer its restin'-place 'n' up on the level with the graves. The openin' on't 'n' the coffin inside we left to Gilbert. Ye kin better b'lieve 'twas a diff'rent party from what he'd looked furrard to.

"Hollins had gone white—dead white. He couldn't yit quite figger out thet wa'n't Mark's body, arter all, thet hed laid in the ground. A groanin', 'n' a creakin', 'n' a strainin', 'n' Gilbert throwed the last o' the splintery boards to one side. I stepped furrard 'n' took a sharp look inter the coffin, holdin' the lantern close.

"Everythin' looked 'zactly ez I calc'lated 'twould. Mark Morley's fortin laid afore me ez on the day I packed it aboard the Jenny Kelton—neat piles o' green bills, a trifle damp 'n' mildewed, but safe, coins, 'n' some weights to make the whole heavy. The color come back inter Hollins's face. He breathed easier.

"'But what a joke fur a man to play!' says he.

"'Joke?' I answered. 'I dunno 'bout thet. I call it downright shrewdness on Mark's part. 'Tis the gal's dowry, understan', to be give' her when she's j'ined to a man thet's showed himself worthy. Feelin' ez Mark did 'bout these wobbly savin's institootions, what better way could he take then to bury it till he meant she should hev it? He might uv give it to me fur safe-keepin'—he did think on't fur one spell—but there's allus fires 'n' burglars 'n' sech, 'n' he didn't want to take no chances. The story he started afloat 'bout his sperret comin' back was to make 'em throw a fit 'r two—fur Mark would hev his fun—but likewise to keep 'em a respectable distance from his grave. The scheme worked, too—till a half-hour agone.'

"All this while Jack Gilbert stood restin' on his pick. Handsome devil! He looked e'en handsomer 'n' bolder then in the days when I used to think him straight. Agin his dark, flashin' eyes, crisp black hair, 'n' manner o' standin' stirred some half-mem'ry inside me. In a dim way I knowed thet he 'n' me had met years back. 'Twas the same man, yet not the same. He give his arm a turn jes' then 'n' brung the tattooed star in plain sight. I leaned furrard, looked at it hard, 'n' then seemed like I'd choke. Fur all of a suddint, like a flash o' lightnin', that mark whisked me back to the sailin' days o' the Jenny Kelton. At last I knew.

"'Gil Starr—you!' I flung at him.

"He answered naught; jes' dropped his head.

"'So this,' says I, 'is the way ye pay back Cap'n Morley 'n' the rest on us fur past favors! This is the way ye show yer gratitude fur bein' picked up, a half-starved waif, given clothes 'n' vittles, 'n' made an all-round seaman. Turnin' up years arterwards to rob the grave o' the man thet did the most fur ye!'

"'I didn't mean no harm at the very fust,' he sulked. 'Was it my fault that I heerd the cap'n 'n' ye makin' yer plans? Wa'n't I obeyin' orders cleanin' up the deck out there, jes' t'other side the port-hole? I never meant to listen, but ef things come a feller's way, why—'

"'He may hev to carry the secret round,' says I, 'but he ain't obleeged to act on't. Ye're a mis'able, scoundrelly thief, thet's what ye are, Gilbert Starr!'

"'There's thieves 'n' thieves,' he muttered.

"'I never seen a white one yit,' I sneered, 'but ef ye kin show me—'

"'Is it thievin',' he run on, 'to simply dig up the coin fur the gal it's meant fur? Ef she married me—'n' thet's what I be'n bankin' on—I never meant to tech a penny.'

"'Kind o' ye,' I said sarcastic, 'but s'pose she took it inter her head *not* to hev yer fur a husband?'

"'Thet's what druv me to it to-night,' says he. 'Ye kin b'lieve me 'r not, jes' ez ye like. One time back along I did mean to git the money. Thet's what I come to Shaleport fur. But arter seein' the gal, 'n'

—'n' losin' my head over her, I changed my mind. I wa'n't goin' to lay a finger on the old man's hoard, 'n' I wouldn't uv, neither '—at this p'int he looked Hollins over with blood in his eye—'ef it hadn't be'n thet this dude come hangin' round. Curses on him! She commenced playin' fast 'n' loose with me the minute he landed in town. I couldn't reckon so sure ez afore thet she'd hev me. But I says to myself thet ef I couldn't hev *her*, I'd hev the money, anyway. I wa'n't goin' to stan' by while he made a getaway o' both!'

"Seems like ye're losin' out on both counts," I reminded him. 'Ye deserve a whole lot, Gil Starr, but most on us don't git what we deserve in this world. So, because o' the days thet is past, I'm not goin' to give ye what I oughter. Go!'

"He got. Answered ne'er a word. Only one long, last look o' hate at young Hollins afore he shambled down the hill 'n' was swallowed up in the darkness. I turned to Hollins. "Shake!" says I.

"Hev I proved I ain't a sissy?" says he.

"Shut up!" I roared. Then we laughed, 'n' was friends from thet day on."

Captain Andy reloaded his pipe and smoked on in meditative silence. - I had to remind him that I impatiently awaited the

dénouement of his story, though it was easily guess. "Hollins got the girl, of course?" I queried.

He nodded emphatically. "Sure thing! Hedn't he aimed her? Ez fur Bernice herself, the little minx made out ez how she allus meant to hev Hollins fur a husband—hed made up her mind the very fust day she sot eyes on him."

"And they're happy?" I asked.

"Ef not," chuckled Captain Andy, "they're putting up a mighty big bluff they be. Hollins hez done purty well with his daubs. The price on 'em hez be'n goin' higher 'n' higher. Mother visits Bernice every winter to Noo York. They want I should go, too—allus send a' invite—but I ain't strong on tea-drinkin's 'n' studio goin's on. My good time comes in the summer, when they all come here fur their vacation."

"All?" I echoed.

"Yes. Bernice, her husband, 'n' the boys—Mark 'n' Andy. Say, but ye oughter see them little shavers! Brightest youngsters goin'. Reg'lar clips, both on 'em; like their old great-grandad afore 'em. Not afeared o' nothin', they ain't. Say, ef Mark's ghost really should come back, I swan I b'lieve they'd walk straight up to it 'n' beg fur a sea-yarn."

THE HOUSE OF SPRING,

WILL you not fare with me
For old remembrancing,
Over the barren lea
Seeking the House of Spring?

Beyond the hills it lies
In the sweet Vale of Rest,
Under the quiet skies
That arch the overcrest.

Can you not hear the streams
That sing in unison?
They shall call through our dreams
Until the bourn is won!

Can you not see the blooms
That cluster round the sill?
Pansies from purple looms,
And the rathe daffodil!

Heart, let us brave the Fates,
Hastening on before
Whither I know Love waits,
Beckoning from the door!

Clinton Scollard.

The Butt of Neptune's Jest

by George Mariano

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A DAUGHTER'S LOYALTY.

MARION HOPE had been wakened by the first heavy bump of the ship's bottom on the bar, wide enough awake to recognize the scream of terror from the room beyond hers. Swiftly she had noted the silence of the engines, the babel of other sounds. Swiftly—like a stab—had flashed the wonder if Dan had done this.

She dressed herself hastily, and ran out into the passage. She was just in time to see her father dash out of his room, and, without a look in her direction, turn, running for the foot of the stairs to the bridge.

An instant later she was listening to the wild cursing her father bestowed on the mate. Its note struck terror to her heart as no such language, even on his lips, had ever done before. He was mad. His voice had lost all semblance of control, had become the shriek of a maniac.

She dashed out onto the open deck and looked up. There was little to see; the bridge was purposely in darkness, that those on it should be blinded by no near lights. But—the savage fury of her father's voice guided her eyes to distinguish the swift-moving forms against the heavily clouded sky.

For an instant fear paralyzed her. Then she leaped forward toward the bridge stairs. She must save her father from his rash anger—perhaps from the defense Dan might be compelled to put up.

She stopped half-way up the stairs. In the light from the lantern on the upper deck, she had glimpsed a hurtling body. A fraction of a second brought the sound of its splash, heavy enough to distinguish against the booming of the near-by surf.

She could not go on up. She ran back down and peered into the black over the side. She could see nothing—nothing!

She dared not try to learn whether it had been Dan or her father. The one who was gone was lost. The one who had done the deed must forever remain beyond her forgiveness.

And then she learned without trying. Her father's still furious voice was bellowing at those below:

"Drop that ring! Suicide is a fit end for the dastardly fool!" He jumped in himself. Let him stay there—him!"

Somehow the words sounded as if the speaker believed them himself. The truth was that Hope's madness had not contemplated murder; that the start of seeing his quarry leap overboard had, however, given it a posthumous impulse in that direction, and left him wild to see that no effort should save the man responsible for the ship's plight.

Of the rest of the preparations for departure from the vessel, of even the crunching, clanking crashes that marked the steps of her way to the bottom—Marion hardly knew anything at all. She still stood at the rail when the boats were being prepared for loading. She still peered blankly down into the black water below.

This story began in *The Argosy* for April 3.

Dan had quit in the end!

She knew now that all her efforts to forget her love, to turn it to hate—had failed. She knew that, in spite of herself, in spite of the black and white evidence against him, she had hoped he would somehow be proved what she had believed him at first. She knew that there had remained with her a lurking admiration for the fact that he had stuck, even when she had withdrawn all the support she had believed she had been giving.

And now—he had quit! He had ended everything in the last, uttermost quit of which man is capable!

It seemed to prove everything else she had been forced to believe against him. He had been such a man as could fall into the toils of such a woman as Mrs. Bartington. He had been such as could strive to take advantage of her father's illness to reestablish himself the more firmly in the shipping world, which would recognize such abilities as could run a ship over a sick captain's orders. And then, when he had seen his ambition overreach itself—he had quit!

A quiver of fear shot through her heart lest her loyalty to her father was breaking upon the wish that, rather than this, she had learned that he was all the worst they had said of him.

And then, at his hurried bidding she climbed into the boat, while he kept his men off it with the pistols in his hands. It seemed that they, too, lacked all the heroic elements she had mentally attributed to manhood. Only when her father had been at his best had there been really good discipline aboard the vessel. In this moment of strain their own restraint could not hold down their fears, and the captain could handle them only through a more immediate fear.

As the boat started down she felt the pressure of the life-preserver about the waist of the missionary's wife sitting next her. It appeared that she was the only person in the boat not provided with one. She shrugged her shoulders indifferently.

Then came a discovery that aroused her. Her father had not got into the boat. He would play the skipper's part—stick to his ship to the end, and go down with her. She

leaped to her feet, stretched her hands upward—

"Daddy! Daddy!" she called up into his face. "Don't—"

Her hand caught in one of the slipping lines from the davit. The terrible burning of the running rope and the instant wrench as her sleeve caught between two lines and lifted her from her feet—turned her words into an articulate scream of pain. And then—the rope had snapped off—the boat was falling—she was falling after it—after the people spilling from the stern.

She had thought she could swim a little, before the weeds struck their slippery, loathsome tangle about her face and hands. The unexpected sensation sent her splashing in a momentary frenzy of terror before she could get her mind to act and to tell her the things were not the great tentacles of some hideous monster of the deep. She had used a deal of her strength in the struggle. The pain from her injured hand would have made her faint anywhere out of the cold water.

And she was in the midst of an utter turmoil of humanity. Once she was dragged down by a heavy hand that caught her with the insane grip of one drowning. She came up from her fight to loosen the grasp, coughing and gasping so that she could make no attempt to see if she might really be of help to the person who must be drowning to be so desperate.

At length she got breath and heard the frantic shrieks of a grown man who struggled madly, though he was buoyed head and shoulders above the surface by a life-preserver.

And then a horrible thing happened while, in the midst of all this excitement, her mind tried to grasp the significance of the strange actions of a husky, Swedish seaman. With a quick jerk the man shot straight toward her and downward.

The next instant he had caught her feet. She was being dragged—dragged at fearful speed through the weeds. Down—down to what seemed unfathomable depths, tangled, snarled, buried, helpless in the long grass that she collected—drowning. She had held her breath until her lungs were bursting. It seemed as if she could hardly expel

it through the mat of kelp that held her. Then—the breath of water. She could not cough—gasped—breathe—

But she could feel the terrific snap of her ankle as it brought hard against something. And—she was at the surface—and her hands, the only free part of her body, since she had gone down with them extended before her and kept them thus to protect her face with her arms—were clutching at something firm, smooth, hard, cloth-bound, with a strap into which her fingers caught.

With her other hand, hurt as it was from the rope, she made one dying effort to tear the weeds from her face. For a second she could see a little—enough to discern the long hair of the person to whose life-preserver she was clinging and from whom her grasp was tearing it. The next second the woman had dealt her a blow on the face that seemed to take the last of power to move from her relaxing muscles. She was going down again, this time slowly enough—but to stay.

Vaguely she imagined that a strong arm had caught her—that she was being lifted up. Somewhere she had heard that drowning people rise twice or thrice—she could not remember which—she did not care which.

"Marion! Marion! I've got you—I've got you—oh, my little girl—"

It was her father's voice. He had gone down before her after all. And he and she were setting forth on that dark voyage that begins where this life's journey ends. And—she was glad—glad to rest in his arms, as she had been held in many a moment of fear in the first of the years that were gone—glad to have him carry her in his arms—to his boat—for the last harbor of all.

The intense pain of her awakening might well have made her wish that she had passed the end she had thought. She was in the familiar surroundings of a stateroom—but looking into the faces of strangers. A young Brazilian doctor had chanced to be among the Anduria's passengers, on his way home from a vacation in the Falkland Islands. He had set the broken bones in her ankle and was dressing the wound on her hand.

"My father?" she asked, as soon as she could get breath to speak.

"Verree well, miss," the doctor replied hastily, with a quick glance at the others in the room—a matronly looking woman, who could not talk English at all, a cabin-boy pressed into service as nurse, and the white-haired captain of the ship. "He verree much not is hurt any."

It was good enough news on which to relapse into unconsciousness. But, as she came to a condition where she could note things a little better, and began to wonder why she was not visited by her loving parent, they told her a few times that he had just gone before she awoke, but finally admitted that he had been hurt almost as badly as she herself, insisting, however, that he was recovering with due rapidity.

Her own recovery was not rapid. It was weeks before she was carried to the deck by the young doctor and the faithful old woman who never could understand her or make her understand, but who seemed a very witch at contriving dainty foods such as certainly have no place on the hearty but not always delicately appetizing menu of a tramp steamer's dining-saloon.

By then she had learned that, besides her father and herself, only four members of the City of Altoona's crew had survived. The peculiar circumstances of the wreck had made the casualties unusually heavy, in view of the fact that it had occurred within sight of land and in weather which, while rather heavy, hardly amounted to enough to call a severe storm.

It had been ascertained that at least one shark had helped to add to the list of those who had perished. The turn of the hull had caught a number of the others.

Three of these survivors had come half a dozen times to the door of her room to ask after her progress in convalescence, their big, weather-beaten faces showing no other signs that they had passed a tragic crisis in their lives. They smiled at favorable reports, and thanked her, if she herself told them she was doing well.

She had never got up interest to notice that the fourth did not show as an alternate among the three. Her shattered nerves seemed unable to arouse much interest in

anything. Only her father's progress toward complete recovery awakened anything like a responsive chord in her heart. They had told her that he had come out of his room a day or two before her first visit to the deck. But, as she lay in a long chair, wrapped deep in heavy rugs against the chill air of late September, and an hour passed and was succeeded by another, she felt a keen disappointment.

"Isn't my father out?" she finally put a query she had been afraid to put lest the answer be what she now knew it must be.

"He feel tired to-day—he is this morning on deck long time; this afternoon he long sleep," the doctor informed her with that nervous haste he seemed to show in answering satisfactorily every query she put as to her parent.

The captain of the ship happened to pass at that moment. The suspicion in her breast that she was being deceived about her father caused her to forget the implication against the kindly young doctor's veracity as she demanded:

"Captain Davids, is that true?"

"What's that?" he asked in turn, adding with bluff gallantry: "If it's that I'm glad to see you out here, it's several times true."

She smiled wanly. "Thank you—but—was my father out this morning?"

"He was," affirmed the captain—but he did it after a quick glance toward the doctor. "He's like you—in need of a whole lot of rest. But, please God, he'll be able to make shore all right when we land in Gowanus Bay once more. And—I'm thinking you'll be able to walk down the ladder."

"I hope so," she answered tonelessly. "I hope I'll soon be able to go to his room, if he can't come to mine."

She meant it as a threat. But it failed to cause any alarm visible on the doctor's face. She hoped they were not making their statements too wide of the truth. The captain went on up the bridge. Her listless attention was attracted by the action of a gaunt figure which seemed to hurry out of a passage in the after deck-house and across to the one on the other side, as if the man had waited for the captain's back to turn.

Suddenly her attention was not listless. As the almost furtive appearing individual

reached his passage, he glanced back to assure himself he had not been seen—if she interpreted his rather strange actions aright.

And—it had been Dan Corwin's face that she saw.

Dan Corwin—hardly less haggard and thin, a lot less upstanding and confident in his gait than when she had first seen him after his months of squalid want on the Limanou Beach! Little wonder she had not recognized him. The Dan Corwin she had known had never acted furtively.

But the fact that roused her most was not his apparent loss of weight and spirit—it was the fact that he was there at all. What business had he here? Her first sentiment had been one of joy at sight of him alive and able to walk. A moment later she was despising herself for having felt even a quiver of joy.

Dan Corwin had wrecked her father's ship. She had thought he had finished in the worst way possible. It seemed now that here was one thing worse than she had thought of—and that he had done it. It scarcely occurred to her that her father had pursued him to that leap from the City of Altoona's bridge. Dan had been more than a match for her father in strength at that time, could have resisted the momentary madness of her parent had he chosen to do so, could have stayed to do what he might to save the crew. He had gone overboard—not to die, but to save his own skin.

She suddenly despised him as she had never done before. She wanted to do something to him to hurt, to avenge those his recklessness had sent to their doom, to avenge the great wrong her father must suffer in the loss of his vessel. In a vague way she knew the officers would stand trial before some court for that loss and the loss of the lives. She had thought of it with a dread wonder whether her presence would be required as a witness at such an investigation.

Now she knew she wanted to attend that investigation. The man who had deserted the ship after wrecking it would not hesitate to shift the blame from his shoulders by any hook or crook.

Her certainty that she wanted to be there when he was examined was but increased

two or three days later. Her father had come to her at last. He walked—he used his hands—he showed no signs of recent injury. But his face had become a pitifully haggard thing, the color of yellow parchment, with eyes deep-ringed and heavy; his gait was that of a feeble old man with knees that trembled under his weight. But, throughout their conversation, he maintained that exaggerated air of extreme gallantry which had once seemed to her a symptom of the approach of one of those dread spells that were the occasion, if not the cause of all but the last of his ship's misfortunes.

She told him of having seen Dan—of her fears that he would testify in his own favor and twist any fact to his own advantage.

"I still hope, dear," her father had told her in his almost mincing tone of accentuated courtliness, "that he isn't so bad as that. We must remember that the boy is very young. I don't doubt he thought he was doing the best he could. Give the—I had almost said, poor devil—his due."

"I hope the judges will do that," she retorted, passionately. "He has done enough to damage you. Don't try to protect him."

"I'm afraid I sha'n't be able to," he said wearily. A strange look had flashed up in his wan face, a look of terror. She glanced hastily behind her, where he had seemed to see something that frightened him. There was nothing behind her but a strip of blank, white-painted wall.

"Father!" she cried, as she returned her gaze to his face and found him still staring with that horror-struck expression, at the same spot. "Father! What's the matter?"

He seemed to pull himself together. "But she's dead," he said firmly, as if in answer to her query.

"Father!" the girl cried again. "Who's dead? What is it?"

"Oh—funny thing," he responded, with a hasty effort at the easy, affected drawl he had been using. "I was just thinking about—about your mother. I—I have passed the hour for taking my medicine. Good night, dear. I hope you keep on getting better as you have been."

She stared after his hasty, tottering fig-

ure. A cold certainty gripped her that the wreck, coming so early after his former illness, had unhinged his reason. He had seen something that was not there to see; he had talked incoherently as he recovered from the hallucination. And—Dan Corwin was to blame for this.

It was a week later. She was beginning to get about the deck on her own feet now. In three days the ship would land in New York. She wondered how she could stand those three days of waiting. No doubt the young Brazilian doctor had done well by them, in coming with them all the way to New York to attend their cases. He had well earned any fee he might choose to charge, save one she was beginning to fear he thought to ask—her hand in marriage.

But in New York were the great specialists in nerve diseases, around New York were the famous sanatoriums where such troubles could be treated as nowhere on a ship—New York would restore her father to his health.

The weather was quite calm. For half an hour she had paced the after-deck. Back there she could generally be left alone. And the great troubles that were upon her were such as she could not share with others. It seemed they always evaded if she tried to get their opinions of her father's condition. He had come to her but the once in the whole voyage.

Once since she had insisted on seeing him until Dr. DoGanao had confessed that he had administered morphine to quiet her father's stomach pains and had still insisted until the young Brazilian yielded and let her see that her father slept. It was a sleep like that in which she had found him the day Dan Corwin tried to have Mrs. Bartington arrested at Ancud.

The half-hour of walking had tired her. She started through the passage of the after deck-house to reach her own room in the forward one. Then she paused, her steps arrested by the words of one of her father's seamen hidden from her view around the forward corner at the passage's end.

"Sure—Ay know he ban drunk as hell. He ban drunk all the time. It ain't ban right you should take alretty de whole tam

blame, when the skipper has so drunk he—"

She had started forward again, her face ablaze. Once more she halted. Dan had peered around that corner and turned hastily upon the speaker.

"Sh-h!" he whispered so loud that she heard him. "Be careful—Miss Hope—"

"Yes," she cried, bursting upon them like a fury. "Miss Hope is in hearing. You'd better be careful. You miserable—*curs*! You dare to accuse him because he's helpless in his room and can't defend himself. If you ever let me hear you say again that he was ever drunk, I'll prove to you that he's not wholly defenseless, if I have to horsewhip you!"

Perhaps she would not have stood so long or stared so fiercely wide-eyed from her room's porthole had she known that Dan Corwin had been engaged at the moment in a strenuous assertion that her father would come clean with the truth in an investigation, and that he was now insisting that, should their skipper fail to do so, they might never testify in his behalf that the captain had been drunk, if his daughter were present to hear.

"I've got to take mine, anyhow," he told them, "for sinking the *Castonia*. There's no use breaking her heart any worse to save me."

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE INQUISITION.

THERE had been few times in the long voyage aboard the *Anduria* when Dan Corwin had been able to view things with quite such calm indifference to his own fate. For the first few days there had been the indifference of utter physical collapse. But that had passed with the return of enough strength to enable him to be up and about.

For two days, when he might have been breathing the fresh air of the deck, he felt half suffocated in the stuffy stateroom he had been forced to share with the three sailors saved from the *City of Altoona*. He was locked in. The stern old avenger into whose hands he had fallen would take no chance of his making any attempt to escape

while the ship finished her loading in Montevideo.

The same precaution had been observed at the half-dozen ports at which the ship touched on her way to New York. For the rest of the time, when the ship was under way, he was given the freedom of the after half of the deck. He was given his meals, with the three members of the late crew, at a special table in the saloon.

Dan had never given consideration before to the thought of the sensations of imprisonment. The restraint on the ship had provided him with a foretaste of what he might expect ashore. And it had provided moments when he thought his reason was tottering, when he could not stand at the rail and look into the sea without an almost irresistible impulse to leap overboard and die, when he ached with hate for his captors and the longing to slip into the hold and open the sea-cocks.

Then, because the whole prospect was so hideous he could not bear it, there had been hours of reaction, when he hoped, when it seemed that the intolerable thing could not and, therefore, would not have to be borne. At such moments he wildly marshaled the last vestiges of things which might come to his aid.

For all old Captain Davids's harsh sternness and uncompromising intolerance of the very sight of him, he knew the man was honest. Long before this Captain Davids had had to give account of the sinking of the *Castonia*. And he had promised to leave Dan out of prison without any question of his keeping out of America.

It was difficult to see how the old man could have left things so that he could reopen them and put his mate's responsibility in a light different enough from that formerly given to bring about a conviction to a penitentiary for something from which he had in the first inquiry been held at least not guilty of any prison offense.

Dan was pretty sure that no order had even been issued by the Bureau of Steamboat Inspection and Licenses for the cancellation of his mate's ticket. Otherwise Captain Hope would hardly have dared take him on at all, lest it affect the insurances of his ship.

And yet he could imagine ways in which Davids might have left his case open. Davids was so well and favorably known to all shipping interests, among both owners and officials, that he could get away with less complete explanations than might be required of some others. And—Davids was not a man to bluster or bluff or threaten what he could not inflict.

In the same way he wavered between hope and despair with respect to the last sinking. Somehow he could not believe that Captain Hope would, if sober enough to appear before any investigative body, be guilty of a deliberate injustice. If Hope did not get sober, that would afford evidence enough itself to make his own true explanation of this last disaster acceptable and almost sure to exonerate him.

But it had been largely a forced hope he had expressed for fair treatment from his last skipper, as he had held to it in his talk with the three Swedish sailors who, perhaps for sheer sympathy with his misery in his restraint, had grown more and more openly friendly to his cause. The real hope had died three days before, a few minutes previous to Marion's interview with her father.

It had been the first and only time he had seen the captain out of his room. And, as he had met the eyes of his skipper, he had thought he saw in them something encouraging, something of that friendly, fair spirit he had felt must exist in Marion's father. He had got up from the box on which he was sitting, in instinctively deferential hope of an interview from which he could carry some comfort.

And there had been no such interview. Captain Hope's face had gone suddenly blank, as he turned abruptly on his heel and tottered away, with his affectation of grandeur even in gait turned ridiculous by his weakness. All that was left to Dan was the knowledge that it was all but impossible to tell when Hope was himself. One of the least encouraging circumstances was in the fact that the man seemed still to be indulging his alcoholism and other drug habits, though Panama Liz had been a corpse when Dan had pushed her body onto the platform of wreckage. The excuse

for such abuse of his health and his very soul had gone, but he continued the abuse.

And then it seemed to Dan Corwin that he had been fooling himself about the whole thing. That he had not made up his mind to spend the rest of his days in prison had been the height of optimistic madness. For—

They had taken him off the ship and over to Ellis Island, and locked him up—a real prisoner.

The door was locked on him. It was not the door of a ship's stateroom, so familiar that its lock had seemed likely to open any minute. This was a door in a very substantial building. And the bare room had a window with iron bars before it. It seemed that this door could never open.

It did, however; and he was led out to a table to eat with other suspicious characters detained for one reason or another upon their attempt to land in a free man's country. There were guards handy, and they were armed to shoot if he tried to escape.

And this was but a mild foretaste of the thing that would be his after the steamboat inspectors and then the criminal courts had found him guilty of criminal negligence and disobedience and sent him to one of the Federal prisons for the term of a slayer of his fellow men.

Oh, this was the cruellest of all the wretched jokes fate had played on him! This was the real climax to them all! It was to this they all led. He had had such chances to die—and he had lived for this!

No, he would never get used to it. It galled and ground like sand on raw flesh. The time would come when the strain would break down what he had left of nerve and reason. He would go mad. Well—perhaps he would have desperate sense enough then to dash his brains out against his cell wall.

But again and again, through two nights and a day, the depth of despair wrought reactions, because his restless soul must rise or sink, and had sunk already to the utmost bottom. He did not hope. He raged now, against his fate, against all who had had to do with that fate. And—he would fight like a rat in a pit.

The breath of open air as he was taken the next morning by ferry to the Battery and led to the customs house steadied him a little. He would not fight madly. He would fight wisely. No lawyer could watch for every loophole in the statements of his accusers as he would; none could plead for him as he would plead for himself.

"Oh, they would hear his side. If the *Castonia* sinking was coming up first, he'd tell of Captain Davids's fury at the mate who had waked him before Dan had needed to waken him. They would know why he had hesitated too long. As for the *City of Altoona*—let Captain Hope beware! If he wanted to keep so secret his vile drunkenness, he had better hush up any prosecution of Dan Corwin before it was begun. Before Dan Corwin spent many more days in jail all the world would know to what extent he was to blame for the loss of the last ship.

And, under all this lay the vague belief that Captain Hope would hush it up; would, if need be, confess to his own shortcomings before he would let an innocent man suffer. Dan still believed in mankind, still expected to find honor of soul, though it be hidden under manifestations of sad weakness of the flesh.

He had crossed the park with a policeman on either side of him, an obvious prisoner, his head hanging and his hat drawn far over his eyes. He had entered the great building with its throng of busy people passing in and out, with averted face and shame writ large all over it. In the elevator he had stood with eyes to the wall.

But he entered the big room on the seventh floor with his head raised. These people might see him now if they would. They would see him again when he was not a prisoner. For truth was on his side, and he would tell the truth.

There was very little of a crowd. It was some months since a freight steamer with largely foreign-born crew and but four passengers had gone down. Dan quickly picked out the friends and relatives of the dead missionary and his wife. The rest were company officials, witnesses, and the ex-

aminers who would decide whether his story were false or true, and whether it excused or did not excuse what he had done. The three Swedish sailors were there, the members of Davids's crew who had been on the boat that had picked up the survivors of the wreck, Captain Davids himself—

But where was Hope? Dan's heart sank. If they were going to take the second-hand tales of Davids and his crew he might as well plead guilty of everything. Dan had still believed Hope's honesty would have to turn him a witness against himself and in his mate's favor. And—Hope had not come.

Then his heart sank lower. Through the door came hurriedly—Marion!

An instant his soul hardened against the girl. She had taken her father's word against his. Now she would find out her mistake.

Slowly that feeling melted. Marion was suffering; her face was tragic. It might or it might not be impossible to convey intentionally all her look conveyed to Dan. But it seemed to him that she was hoping against hope that he would still prove man enough to exonerate her father.

Once—twice—he rebelled against it all. But—she should never learn from him that her father was a drunkard; she would never believe of him that he lied to save his own skin and put blame on the innocent, even though he did just that, with himself as victim, to keep her from believing it.

The men took places at the sides of a big table. The proceeding lacked the formidable accompaniments of a court trial. But Dan was quickly to discover that there was an able lawyer there to prosecute the case against him—sent by the insurance company whose interests lay in proving that an officer for the ship company was responsible for the loss of the insured vessel.

This man seemed to assume control of the situation, to dominate it from a standing position opposite the sitting government officials, to suggest that the inquiry proceed at once, to gain the permission to quiz the witnesses, to turn things generally into a court trial with himself as the prose-

cutting attorney. It was not more than five minutes before he was ready to begin his examination before the members of the bureau.

"But—where's the captain—Captain Hope?" one of the members suddenly interjected into the beginnings.

It was Marion who volunteered the answer:

"He's sick—in Bellevue Hospital."

"Oh," gasped the lawyer—"I thought this was the captain."

"Of the ship that brought the rescued ones in," Davids himself put in.

"Well—can't we get at most the facts without him?" asked the legal light, with a dark frown on his luminous brow. "And—can't we send and see if he's not in condition to be brought here? Miss—Miss—er—does this young lady know anything about his condition?"

"Nothing except that he's there. I haven't been permitted to see him since coming ashore," Marion told them.

At the lawyer's suggestion again, the messenger was sent to find out what could be learned as to the prospects of getting testimony from the skipper.

"I suppose," he then asked of Davids, "that you can tell us something as to what you saw of the lost ship, and of the probable means of her getting into that situation?"

"I can that," said Davids impressively. The lawyer had him set down in a chair. "There ain't a doubt in my mind that she got into that situation because of the man on her bridge."

"That's a trifle too vague, captain—let's get down to the facts. Where's the chart?"

A harbor chart covering the immediate vicinity of the wreck on the South American coast was put off the table. Swiftly Davids pointed out the two shoals with the comfortably deep passage between them, and the spot where the City of Altoona had toppled over on her side. The lawyer drew from him that the wind was a fair gale, but that there was neither rain nor fog or other interference with normal visibility.

Dan got a moment of hope an instant

later. The old captain had started again to accuse him directly.

"You saw that the mate was on the bridge?" demanded the lawyer.

"Why—no," gasped Davids, taken back by the suddenness of the idea.

"Of course we can only consider what you saw yourself," the legal expert told him, with a questioning nod toward the chief inspector, who assented to this first principle of evidence. The captain of the Anduria found himself suddenly counted out for the time being.

The hope lasted Dan through the detailed testimony of the second mate of Davids's vessel, descriptive of the ship's position and the direction in which she finally lay pointed. Then it went out. One of the Swedish sailors was brought up.

"Yass, sir," he burred heavily—"the mate ban on the bridge, sir, when we stroock. The captain didn't come out of his room till we'd bumped the bottom twice."

"He did come out?" instantly urged the lawyer. It was the first time it had struck Dan that this was the real crux of his situation. It left him no ground for having failed to get the captain earlier, since it proved the captain could have been got.

"What was the captain's condition when he came out?" demanded the attorney.

The sailor gave an uneasy glance at Marion Hope, another in Dan's direction.

"Wall—he ban pretty mad," he said slowly. "He ban chase the mate off the bridge with a gun, I tank."

Slowly the lawyer got more details of this feature of things out of the man.

"Do you think the captain was under the influence of liquor—drunk?" was the final query in this connection.

"Wall—Ay don't ban sure—Ay don't know any'ting about that," the witness replied so slowly that it seemed a grudging reply. But, he had soon proven that the captain's actions in lowering the boats were all a sober man's could have been.

And two more Swedish sailors told the same story. Dan was then put in the improvised stand.

All through the testimony of the others it had been coming home to him more and

more deeply that he could not tell his story as he had thought to tell it. He could give no satisfactory ground for the idea he had had that it would be impossible to get advice from the skipper at the time. He could not tell all the truth with Marion there. As a matter of fact, he could not have given any direct evidence that the captain's malady was plain intoxication, or that it rendered him incompetent. He had seen the captain drink but one single glass of brandy in his life.

And all talk about peculiar long sleeps and irrational actions after them went to pieces. There was but one reasonable explanation of those actions—drink. The lawyer came back to it.

"Don't you really mean to tell us that Captain Hope was utterly intoxicated so much of the time that your instant impression on seeing those breakers was that he had been half drunk when he ordered the course he did?"

Marion had been watching him closely all the while. He caught her eye now, as he struggled for the answer to that query. On her face was a look of hope—hope in him—hope that he was not going to shift the blame to her father.

"No—I don't mean that at all," Dan answered firmly.

"Then you mean that the captain had been half sick during the voyage down the west shore, had spent much time in his room, had slept some when he should have been awake, had betrayed the quick and rash temper of a sick man when you did things without orders—is that all you mean?"

"I—I guess that's all," Dan faltered wretchedly. He was sealing his own doom.

"Then," the lawyer shouted, as lawyers do in bullying the last admission of guilt from a witness in his own behalf—"then, why, in God's name, didn't you, without a reason for doubting your captain's competence, with such confidence in his orders as could alone excuse you for proceeding on them in such waters as even your most general knowledge must have considered these—why, I ask, didn't you keep on through? Why didn't you even guess at

the possibility of a channel between the shoals on which you perceived the breakers?"

"I don't know," Dan sighed.

"Do you happen to recall just how many drinks you yourself had taken that night?" the inquisitor snapped.

"I hadn't taken any," retorted Dan.

The lawyer shrugged his shoulders, smiled toward the officials across the table. "Oh, well," he sneered, "we can hardly expect a man to testify directly against his own innocence. Have any of you any other questions you wish to ask?"

And the chief inspector looked at Dan.

"Yes—I have one question," he said shortly. "I'd like to ask how many drinks he'd taken the afternoon he put the Castonia on Death Reef for Captain Davids there. But—" The door had opened and a man in uniform brushed in. "What about Captain Hope?"

"Nothing doing," the young officer responded nonchalantly. "He's not likely to live twenty-four hours."

He was not an observant young officer. He might have turned and seen the sudden pallor on the face of the girl who sat near the wall behind him. He didn't.

"Is—is he in condition to make any sort of affidavit?" the lawyer asked.

"Hardly," the messenger replied with a shrug. "The doctor says it's the worst case of delirium tremens complicated with half a dozen other drugs—"

He broke off, at last aware of the young woman's presence in the room. Marion had leaped to her feet—his voice was drowned by her shrill scream of indignation gone furious—

"It's a lie—a lie—a miserable, cowardly lie! My father couldn't have delirium tremens. That's a disease of drunkards. He—

"But a man who could say that of him couldn't appreciate that he's above all suspicion of such a beastly vice as drink. It's all a wretched trick to put the blame on him because he's too ill to defend himself. Oh, I thought there were some other men in the world.

"I dare any of you—all of you—to come with me to the hospital and to tell

him that he has delirium tremens. I *dare* you—*dare* you to. I'll get his statement. I'll bring it back here to fling into the faces of men who don't dare to go with me, lest I tell him what they've said."

She started toward the door. Her eyes fell upon Dan Corwin's face once more—met his own worried stare into them.

"And this is the last of your treachery!" she flung at him. She caught the door-knob, swayed a little as she held it, steadied herself, opened the door.

"I'll go with her," half a dozen volunteered at once, as if there were no question in any mind that somebody must go.

"You go," the chief bade an elderly member of his staff who looked as if he might own daughters enough to understand them.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE CAPTAIN MAKES PORT.

THE Anduria had arrived off Tompkinsville so near dark that, in view of certain difficulties at the Brooklyn piers, she had been ordered to remain at anchor until the following morning. Marion slept rather late. The ship was docked very early. She was finally awakened by her aunt, who had come to meet her—the loved aunt who had brought her up.

She was told only that her father had already gone ashore. Her aunt took her to a hotel. It was not until late in the afternoon that she really grew alarmed about her parent. She had expected he would have many things to make his day of arrival a busy one. She began to realize that the business was lasting too long for a man to endure who was in such condition as she believed him to be in.

And then her aunt told her some of the truth. Her father had been taken immediately to the hospital. It had been in order to avoid worrying her that she had been permitted to sleep until the removal was accomplished. So far as she knew, the aunt was telling the truth when she said that he doctor hoped to get her father over the slight "spell" and on his feet by morning. Even the officials of the line

whose ship he had lost had been informed only that he would not be well enough to report to them before the following day.

As a matter of fact, Dr. DoGanao had hoped that, with the captain cut off from the opportunities for drinking that even Davids had felt obliged by hospitality to give him, he could be sobered up enough to attend to a little business. The hospital doctors at Bellevue were more familiar with the results of extreme alcoholism than a Brazilian doctor is apt to have opportunity to study.

Dissatisfied, Marion had visited the hospital that evening. Her father was comfortably provided with a private room, she was told; he was sleeping well, and could not be disturbed. She had gone again early in the morning. It was only then that she was put off from the expectation of finding him able to accompany her to the proceedings of inquiry before the steamboat bureau.

The feeling that her presence there was all the more needed in his absence had sent her hurrying from the hospital without a closer quizzing that might have forced her informants to divulge a little more of the truth that the last spree had run into delirium.

No doubt that had relieved the doctors for the time. Those doctors were not the only ones who preferred to leave to others the task of shattering a trusting, unusually loving daughter's faith in her father.

The big, kind-hearted man who caught up with her as she waited for the elevator from the upper floor of the custom house listened gently to her agitated ravings as to the injustice every one was doing her parent, and told her he was sure there had been some mistake—that even the doctors might be fooled by a mental breakdown caused by the terrific strain through which the recent events had put her father.

He had little success in soothing her. She reached the hospital in mood to fight her way by physical force to her father's side. Inasmuch as heavy hypodermic injections of morphine had got him temporarily quieted into sleep, her demand was yielded to without any resort to violence. The doctor and an orderly preceded her

into the room. The old inspector followed her.

She spent but a moment looking at the wan, pallid, but momentarily relaxed features of the sleeping patient. Through her still surged, above every other emotion, that of hot indignation at the injustice of his defamers. The need of defense for his reputation urged before even considerations of his physical condition, which appeared only as much worse than she had once seen before as his recent state might have warranted.

"Now," she uttered, in a whisper that was almost a hiss of rage, "I want to know who is responsible for the report that this is delirium tremens."

The doctor flushed, caught in an unexpected situation, for which only his wish to spare her had been responsible. He hesitated for an instant between his desire to defend himself and the wish to keep up the deception upon her.

"I don't know," he finally muttered. He knew that his embarrassment took the conviction out of his untruth. But a sudden move on the part of the patient interrupted any further attempts to bolster up his first prevarication. Marion wheeled and faced her father.

The look in the eyes that stared at her was one of such terrific combined horror and hate that, for an instant, she shrank back and hid her face from it with her hands. Then, as she knew this must be some aftermath of a dream from which he had but half awakened, she stepped toward him again, her hands outstretched.

"Daddy!" she cried, in hope of bringing him wide awake.

"Get back!" he screamed with a terrible oath. "Get back! Get away from me. Oh, God! Can't you ever quit? Haven't you had enough, done enough?"

"You beast! You wretch! You vilest scum God ever made in form of woman!"

"Oh—look at me! You made this of me! You gave me the first drink, and laughed at the wild inheritance of thirst it started. And then you gave me more—and married me! And you laughed because that broke the heart of the girl I had loved, the girl who loved me. You laughed be-

cause she threw herself away upon the poor devil who was but a little better than you were making me. And then—you left me and your baby—oh, God—*my* baby!

"Drop that! Don't talk again of missing a daughter's love! I've been drinking and drinking in hope I'd get drunk enough to kill you. You've made me a thief and taken away what I hoped to pay my thefts back with. I'll be little worse off for murdering you. Oh—by God! I'll do it. I'll—

"Oh, *hell!* You're right. I can't kill you. I haven't the guts, as your vile mouth puts it. I can't get drunk enough to kill a woman. But I'm drunk enough to kill your damned game here and now and tell the truth. Listen, Panama Liz:

"You haven't got all this because I was afraid to have you tell her you're her mother. You're *not*. I've paid and paid and gone to hell to keep from having to tell her she's not my daughter.

"Her mother—great God! *Panama Liz!* They've named you that from the equator to the Horn because there was no other name vile enough for you. Her mother was all the decent things in womanhood that you're not. Her mother was the Marion Jones whose love you stole. And her father was Pete Hone—it wasn't much change or improvement to make it Hope for her.

"Your child and mine was dead before anybody found it after you left it to die. Oh, God! I ought to have set the sleuths of the world on your trail and brought you back to stripes for that. I drank instead. And then Marion Hone died—died of the break you'd made in her heart. And poor Pete left a note asking me to look after the child, and blew his worthless brains out.

"And that child was Marion's child—looked like her, bore her name. And I've loved her as I couldn't have loved a child that was yours, though it had been mine as well. I kept straight for her; I let you wreck my career as captain of a real ship; let you put me down to this, rather than tell her she wasn't mine. But you've got me finished. I'll tell her before I let you tell her the other thing.

"Prove it? Oh, there's plenty of proof. My sister, Anna, has the papers. She

adopted the child for me. I couldn't take her—Anna did that for me—and took care of the child for me when I was at sea. Yes, my sister was a woman as unlike you as heaven is unlike hell. She never asked even to have that baby call her mother, so that she might always call me father.

"Now—off my ship! Off it! Take your baggage! Go! Go, and live as you've lived all these years! You—" He spat the name unprintable.

"No—wait. Let me thank you for telling me the joke on that poor mate of mine. It'll help me clear him of any danger from your filthy claws. God knows I've wrecked his career almost; but I can save that now. And you're done! Done! Done! Oh, I'm not sure but this is better than killing you. Oh—

"Why, here's Marion now! Come, don't you want to tell her? No! Damned if I'll let you open your foul mouth to speak to her. Off! Off!

"Marion! Don't listen to her! Don't let her speak to you! It isn't true. She's my wife—oh, God forgive me—but she's not your mother. No, no. Your mother was good, clean, sweet—

"Marion, tell Mr. Corwin to put her off the ship. Tell him not to be afraid of what she can say. I'll explain it all. I'll—

"Say, Marion, wasn't Liz—I mean that Mrs. Bartington—wasn't she dead?" The dawn of returning reason found him staring up with a puzzled frown into the white face of his daughter.

Marion went slowly toward him.

At the first of his horrible onslaught of curses and threats Marion had shrunk back again as if struck a blow in the face. Then the coverlet had fallen back from him enough to show the strait-jacket that bound him. At the same time she had begun to catch enough of his ravings to know he was not really speaking to her at all.

And then, as she caught the revelation of his history involved in his words, she had stood, frozen with the ghastly horror of it, torn by the pity of it. The doctor and the inspector sought to lead her away; she pushed them off. Some instinct told her he would yet know her—would yet speak to her.

And then had come the words about Dan. She could not have left him after those had been spoken until the last chance of hearing more was done. All the resentment and vindictiveness she had almost deliberately cultivated within her had melted before the first breath of hope that Dan Corwin might yet prove innocent of any fault.

And now her father knew her. She dropped to her knees beside his bed, laid a trembling hand on his brow.

"Yes, daddy," she tried to say soothingly, "she was dead when Dan pulled her out of the water."

It seemed as if the whole idea had almost vanished from his mind by now. His next words had no bearing on the question she had just answered.

"Marion, there was something I was going to say to you before she came back. It was—we were talking—oh, yes—about Mr. Corwin.

"Marion, you and I must straighten him out about this thing Captain Davids has against him. He's lived it down. If he hadn't kept the ship sailing when he did I'd have been ordered off it long ago. And it was all my fault about the wreck.

"He couldn't have done anything but what he did. He had come on the bridge thinking I was—I knew what I was talking about. And I did know. I hadn't always known before. But I'd kept sober—knowing—long enough to throw him off his guard. He took the course I gave him without any question or attempt to find out for himself, which was his right.

"The question never came until he saw the breakers in the night. It was too late for him to find out anything then, except that I had got—gone wrong during the watch, and had probably been wrong before it. He tried to save the ship. And that was just the wrong thing to do, if he could have known it.

"Oh, I had thought of just what happened as I left him on the bridge. I meant to get back. But I had taken enough to make me take more.

"I ought to have talked this over with Davids before. But that woman keeps coming back and bothering me. She won't

come any more, Marion. And we must fix things up for Mr. Corwin and—"

She suddenly realized that he was dying. She thrust her face closer to his ear to whisper his name—to call him back.

"Forgive me, Marion," she heard him whisper. "Tell Mr. Corwin—I'm sorry. Forgive me—"

"No, daddy, no," she cried in protest. "Forgive you for being a father to me all these years? Oh, daddy! Let me thank you—thank God for what you've done for me."

She drew back with the sudden realization that he could never hear again. She stared down into the withered, wrecked remnant of his once fine features. She had learned more of him in the past moments than in all the past years before. She had learned that he was weaker than she would allow herself to believe. She had learned that he was finer than she would allow herself to believe. She had learned that he was finer than the best she had thought of him. And he had come clean of the bad in the end.

She bent down and kissed the drawn, lifeless features again and again in a passion of weeping that was not all of grief. Then they drew her gently to her feet, and she followed them from the room.

Out in the big corridor she straightened her bowed head, wiped the tears from her eyes. There was work to be done. She had forfeited all right to Dan's love by her distrust of him. But she would undo the injury she had helped to inflict.

"We must get right back to the custom house to Dan," she spoke hurriedly to the inspector, her mind too intent upon the task before her to note that she used a name for her father's mate she might hardly claim the privilege of using.

"Yes, we must get back. I—I'm very glad I came," the inspector said slowly. "But you don't need to come. I'll send you to your hotel in a taxi. Your aunt will want to take steps about your—"

"My father," Marion supplied firmly. "I've never wished a better father; I don't wish a better one now. But I must see Mr. Corwin first of all."

And then she saw him. Dan was walking

down the corridor straight toward her as fast as his two legs would carry him.

CHAPTER XXXI.

SAFE HOME.

THINGS had gone quickly in the big room on the seventh floor of the custom-house after Marion had left. The chief inspector got to his feet and eyed Dan a moment, then asked:

"Didn't you suspect something like that?"

"Of course I did," Dan answered. "I knew he was drunk or drugged most of the time from Limanau, where I joined the ship, until we got to Ancud. I took the responsibility of running the ship in there because—well, there was a woman aboard I thought had something to do with his drinking, and I hoped they had enough on her in Ancud to arrest her."

"What fooled me was the fact that he stayed sober from Ancud to the watch before the wreck. I'd watched the course before. Then he seemed so perfectly competent—and we were short-handed enough so that I was too busy to look after things not really my affair, anyhow."

"I was mistaken about the woman; there's no use putting that sort of thing on him. He didn't drink any more, except right at the end, until she was dead. I'm afraid he's been pretty drunk ever since."

"He seemed all right when he gave me the course. Even when he did not come back for the middle watch, as he'd said he would, I believed he'd been sober when he gave me my orders. And the event proved that all right. But, finding that he was drunk, otherwise he never failed to come when he said he would. When I saw breakers I thought he must have been a bit off before. There was no time to try anything but a quick back out."

"But—why didn't you say this before, Mr. Corwin? Don't you see that it puts a very different face on your case?" asked the puzzled inspector.

"I didn't say so before, sir," Dan answered firmly, "because I seem to be only one of a lot of people who'd rather go to

prison than tell that girl her father was a drunkard. She believed in him too hard. I—I guess he was always good to her."

The inspector called up the three Swedes again. Readily enough now they corroborated the statement of the captain's habits. But they had not told, because Dan had threatened them if they ever told in the girl's presence.

"Captain Davids, didn't you know this, sir?"

The old man looked nervous. He turned twice from red to white and back again.

"I did. That is, I knew Captain Hope was drinking hard aboard my vessel. I didn't know just why this man had sunk the Altoona. I know how he sunk my ship, though. And I told him I'd send him to prison for that if he ever set foot on a bridge again. But—but—"

"Well, I don't know. Maybe he was young at that. He looks ten years older than he did a year or so ago. I guess—"

"I guess you wouldn't care to have that case reopened, would you?" the inspector said, softly and significantly. "It would be rather late to make any great changes in the evidence about it. And you're nicely out of that now. Wouldn't you rather—"

"Shake hands and call it off, if he's willin'," Davids grasped the opportunity to hurry out of a pinch. He held out his hand. "Maybe he's just been the victim of ship luck. I figured he was a regular Jonah. You can't never tell, though." He was growing loquacious from embarrassment. The inspector relieved him by turning to the real subject of the investigation.

"It looks as if the most of the blame rested on Captain Hope. The company was not, I believe, kept properly informed; but the ethics of the sea hardly look to mates for that kind of information about skippers. Captain Hope's previous record had nothing in it to raise a suspicion of drunkenness. He was allowed to leave the passenger line, for his failure to keep disorderly characters off his ship, but without any hint that he harbored them. It was kept rather quiet. There was a woman in it, I believe, though.

"It's too bad. We'll have to order Hope under guard. I would suggest that Mr.

Corwin be given immediate freedom, and that it is up to the company at least to provide bail against any possible prosecution beyond this bureau, if there should be any. Mr. Corwin is, of course, entitled to full pay for the length of the voyage.

"We have nothing against you here, Mr. Corwin. You may go, so far as this office is concerned. Of course, you will stand ready to testify—"

"I'll stand in contempt before I'll testify in Miss Hope's presence again," Dan declared.

"We'll try to keep Miss Hope away," said the chief.

It was to get her away from the discovery that her father was under arrest that Dan had used his first moments of freedom and almost his last penny bowling up the lower East Side in a taxicab. As he came unexpectedly upon her, he paused in sudden embarrassment. He was not sure that he dared speak to her. He had hoped to have others get her out of the way before any officers of the law were brought into her presence.

The embarrassment was mutual. Marion had treated him very badly, very unfairly. But she pulled herself together for the task of fighting the wrong she had done.

"Mr. Corwin," she said solemnly, "I can't hope or ask that you'll pardon me, but I want you to come back with me and let me undo one of the wrongs I've done you. I—I understand now. And they shall all understand."

Dan looked at her. A great wave of sympathy for her swept over him. On her face was written the confirmation of her words. He stepped up to her and caught her in his arms as, in a moment of hesitation the tears sprang to her eyes.

"Marion," he cried, "I didn't want you to understand. I'd rather you never did."

"Dan," she spoke firmly, once more brushing the tears from her cheeks, "I'm afraid I understood all the while. I wouldn't believe what I all but knew. And it's so much better than I was afraid it was, that I'm glad to know it all. But, Dan, come back and let me prove to them that you were right. I can't make up for what I've done or said. I can do this much, and—"

"That's done-already, Marion; don't you see that they've let me off?" he spoke gently.

"Then," she said with a quiver in her voice, "there is nothing I can do at all."

"Oh, yes, there is," he told her quickly; "you can marry me right now. If you'll do that I'll think I owe you and your father both for life."

They had both forgotten the old inspector. Marion tried to tell what had just happened in the room beyond. It overcame her as she uttered the first words:

"My father—my father—"

"Excuse me," the old man now reminded of his presence, "I think that is just what your father would have wished, that you should have the happiness of which he was robbed. And I think your father's other wish would have been to see Mr. Corwin be what, unless I'm much mistaken, he has only to come back to the custom-house for a license to become—a ship's master. But any time for that. You see her home now, Dan."

The other day Captain Daniel Corwin returned from his tenth successful voyage

in command of the *Brabonia*, formerly of the American Line, but now in transport service. The *Brabonia* had fired upon and, it was generally believed, sunk a submarine on the voyage out. It looks as if old Neptune had tired of making him the butt of all the worst jokes the hoary god springs from behind his dripping whiskers. As Dan hurried home from the Atlantic port to which he had brought his vessel, he grinned at sight of his waiting wife.

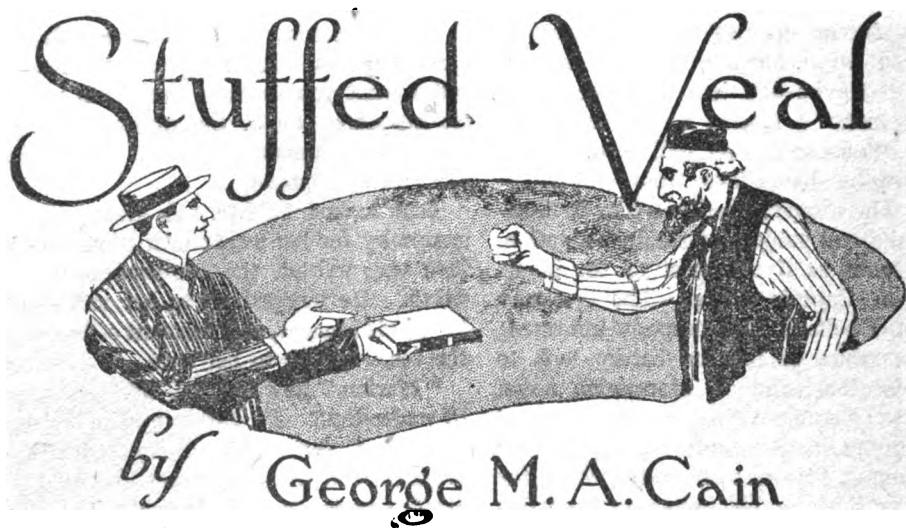
"I just heard a story, Marion," he told her, as soon as the proper greetings had been attended to. "Your father was a better skipper than I ever realized. This story was about his method of securing a good mate. It seems that—"

Time has softened the tragic memories of the last voyage Captain Hope ever made on the high seas. Marion smiled as she interrupted the start of the story.

"I remember how he secured a good mate for me," she said mischievously.

She lost the story by it. At that moment out trooped the two little Corwins, Charles, and Marion, Jr. By the time Captain Dan had got through with them he had forgotten the tale.

(The End.)



MOSES GABRILOWITCH greeted his wife with a smile as she opened the door of the flat to his hurried feet coming from the store across the street.

"I bet you"—she fairly beamed the

words with the answering smile of admiration—"you make it a good deal with young Flickman."

"How would you know that?" Moses grinned with happy reminiscence.

"Ain't I just seen him come out a minute ahead of you? And didn't you say as you went out this very morning, you would do some business by him if he come around? And—well—don't that settle it you make a sucker mit any salesman what would put something over by you? And ain't that what all salesmen would try to do by anybody?"

"I don't give you right, Sadie," objected her spouse. "You would make it I always beat the salesmen. But I would say one thing—never yet did any of them salesmen beat me."

"Come into the dining-room. I guess I got it a surprise for you," she now invited.

He followed, sniffing. "What is it?" he asked with interest.

"*Gefüllte Rinderbrust*—er—stuffed calf's breast," she translated hurriedly. German had been taboo ever since Moses had heard of the first internment. A loyal American was Moses—the more so since the war was over, and his son, Solly, had escaped the call on the second draft.

The prospect of the stuffed breast of veal opened Moses's heart to be more explicit as to his morning's triumph, which he proceeded to relate.

"Honest, Sadie—I hate to tell you for what Flickman takes my order for them dry powders this morning. Before the war I don't get them so cheap. But I knowed it he was all ready to bite. A long time he's been coming. He figures he would get my trade; then he could sometime get a chance to sting me and even up. And—that's where I fool them. I take the next sucker when it gets time to even up."

He had got to the table. Sadie bustled to the kitchen and back again. She lifted a lid from a smoking dish. A moment later he tasted it judiciously. His face fell. He pushed back his plate.

"*Nu—was ist los?*" begged Sadie. "Always you have said you liked *gefullte*—stuffed veal. And only to-day I find it the recipe. It's in that new book from the flour-miller people."

Moses flung out his hands in a gesture of despair. Despair came easy to him after a gastronomic disappointment—

"A flour-miller cook-book!" he groaned.

"What you would expect mit such a book? Ain't it just the same like them hair-restoration receipts what's always got the patent medicine to be mixed into them? What are those flour-miller recipes but ads for ways to use the flour? But, of course, Sadie, I ain't got it no right to expect you should see things like a business man. Besides, I guess there's ways and ways to cook *rinder*—veal. My mother, *olav hasholom*, she is from Budapest, Hungary. By nobody else have I ever tasted such—veal—like she cooked it."

Sadie looked wobegone through the remainder of the meal. So did Moses. But the dessert served to revive within him the pleasant memories of a deal like most of the buys by which he kept the little drug-store supplied. No matter how many salesmen he stuck, there was always something freshly enjoyable about the latest victim. Flickman had fairly writhed in enjoyment over the deal.

Back at the store things continued to come Moses's way. A woman bought Doom's Headache Powders, which cost him eight cents a bottle, instead of Soothum's, which cost him fifteen—and paid the same price for Doom's. A stranger drifted in and learned that Del Dopo Cigarettes had taken another jump of two cents since before breakfast that morning. Then came another stranger. He, too, learned something about raised prices in cigarettes. Then he opened up a grip.

"Couldn't interest you in a book, I reckon," he said lightly.

"I got no time to read," Moses snapped sharply.

"But this book ain't for you to read, anyway. It's for your wife to read—and you to eat after. Huh? Sure—it's a cook-book."

"Huh? But, wait a minute. Wait till I tell you what that book is. And—do you see the price?"

"I ain't interested," Moses decided again. Eight dollars for a cook-book!

"Don't blame you. No cook-book ought to cost eight dollars. But this one—say, you know who's the real author of this? It's the reason I got to pick people to sell it to. This book was translated from the

German of Herman Krant, chef to his late Imperial Highness, Franz Josef. They're Austrian recipes.

"Now—can you guess any particular reason why it cost something to get that book out in English right at this time? Huh? I guess so. Maybe, ten years from now, an Austrian cook-book could be brought out in English at a cheap price—only the Bolsheviks will have everything leveled off in ten years, so there ain't a chef left but them that are just fit for running a soup-house. Huh? Sure—look 'em over. Glad if you do. Here—ever eat *gefultte Rinderbrust*? Just look at those recipes!"

Moses looked. Then he looked again. The second title under "Stuffed Breast of Veal" read in plain letters:

"*À la Budapest!*"

Moses's eyes grew hungry. But his lips pronounced:

"No cook-book is worth so much as eight dollars."

"Well—who said you had to pay eight dollars for this one?" asked the airy stranger. "You see, what's happened is this: The government got after that company for violating the trading with the enemy act. That ends the business. But my house got hold of a mere hundred copies before they were caught. We're afraid to keep 'em, though. And so—"

"They told me to take them out and slip them to the right people at half price."

"A-ah!" came from Moses's throat. He sensed a chance to do business. "I'll give you a dollar for one," he offered.

"You will—like blazes. You'll give me four dollars, or you'll keep your bills in your pocket with the extra three cents you just stung me for those cigarettes. If I want to give them away, there are public libraries."

"Give you two," Moses raised.

"Nothing doing—four dollars is the price. I've only these three copies left, anyhow. I got all afternoon to sell 'em in."

"Two fifty." But the stranger picked up the volume and dropped it into his grip. "Three," cried Moses Gabrilowitch. The stranger paused.

"Tell you what I'll do. It's practically

all of my commission. But I like to start out with a sale every time. I just had a hunch which was so butt I want a little business to cheer up on. It's yours for three fifty."

Moses declined the offer—until he made sure that he could not better it by any amount of argument. By then he had argued himself to where he could hardly turn about and pay a price he had, a moment since, declared he would not pay in a thousand years. He resorted to camouflage to save his face.

"Well, I wouldn't buy a cook-book, not for ten cents, unless my wife saw it," he declared.

"That's up to you," said the salesman with a shrug. Again he packed the book. He took time, however, to observe: "I bet you make money here. I'd hate to be a traveling salesman making regular stops. You'd have a man paying you his salary to let him stock you up. You're what I call a wise buyer. In business that is everything, ain't it?"

Moses smiled faintly. He wasted nothing more than the smile.

"I tell you what—I live right across there—No. 22—on the ground floor. You take the book over by Mrs. Gabrilowitch, and tell her I said she should look it over and take it for three fifty if she would want it. And look—I stand here in the door and nod my head so she would understand it's all right."

"Well—I ain't making anything on it; but I'll do it to call it a sort of sale," the bookseller consented grudgingly, and crossed the street. Mrs. Gabrilowitch came to the door. Moses stood in the store's entrance. He nodded vigorously when his wife looked questioningly over the book-agent's shoulder.

Then he went back to his counter and indulged in a luscious day-dream of real *gefultte*—no—*stuffed* breast of veal like mother used to make. The salesman returned after a while.

"She says it's all right, you should go ahead," he told Moses.

Moses looked across the street. His wife nodded from the front window, smiling encouragingly.

"All right, we'll take it, even if it is highway robbery," said Moses. He paid the salesman three and a half. He took his cook-book. He turned from the index to page 126. He feasted his eyes on the ingredients mentioned under:

"Stuffed Breast of Veal *à la* Budapest."

Mrs. Gabrilowitch had been busy feeding Solly, who kept the store while his father ate. The book-agent had lengthened the time Solly had to wait for his dessert. He had read twenty-three pages of the novelized "Dangers of Delphine." Now, conscience-smitten, he hurried in and hurried out with some pills for which a telephone call had come five minutes before he had gone to lunch.

Mrs. Gabrilowitch hurried over. She had discovered that the cook-book had a recipe for Stuffed Breast of Veal *à la* Budapest. She wanted to tell Moses. As she entered the store she opened the newly purchased volume to page 126. Then she stopped dead.

"For why you got it another cook-book?" she demanded. "You going to try to make *gefüllte Rinderbrust* by yourself in the back room yet?"

"Oi-yoi!" yelled Moses. "The *gonnef*! The thief! He told me you said I should—"

"He tole me you said I should—" They broke off the duet together. Both had the same hope. Both rushed for the sidewalk. Both stared up the street. Then both started to run.

"That's him! That's him! Oi-yoi!" howled the pair.

"Hey—what is it?" Solly's errand had not taken him far. He almost collided with his hurried parents. Neither of them was in track-racing trim. Both were glad to stop without any more running.

"Solly—you see that young feller three blocks up yonder—the one with the blue serge suit and the green hat—yes? You see which one? Yes?"

"Well—run after him—quick—quick! Catch him. Bring him back here."

"What for?" demanded the bewildered Solly.

"Never mind it what for. You get him. Say it is very important, he should come

back. I must see him immediately. Oi-yoi—hurry. Don't let him get away."

They stood watching until Solly had vanished after the stranger into the distance. They stood waiting for his reappearance, hoping against hope that he would not reappear alone.

Vain hope. The blue serge suit was not with him. But Solly's gait was elastic and cheerful—so triumphant that it raised another, though fainter, hope. Perhaps they would get back the money for one. Solly held his hand behind him. He was a great boy for playing jokes.

"He wouldn't come back. He said he had an engagement right away up at Jones Street. But—"

Having thus prepared them to disappointment, he was ready to reveal the more gratifying truth. He brought his hand from behind him.

"I got it just the same. He said he—"

But Solly stopped. He stared at the book he had bought, stared back at his parents. For once even his father was rendered speechless.

"He said he knew what you wanted—he'd offered you the book at a bargain, and you'd decided to take it, and I could bring it along. You owe me three bucks, though. The other fifty cents I just collected for the pills by Mrs. Roth's.

"But—popper—what is it? Wait—wait—also he wrote a note on the fly-leaf. Maybe that would explain."

"Oi-yoi!" groaned Moses, shifting his spectacles to read the hasty scrawl:

DEAR MR. GABRILOWITCH:

You're a wise buyer, just like they all say. One of them books will show your wife how to cook *gefüllte Rinderbrust*. If you need still more you could speak to my brother, Ab. Flickman, the next time you see him. And you could have them for the regular price of a dollar after this. But the three what you got ought to be enough to cure you any time you got the idea there ain't a salesman on earth what can beat you.

Ihr. Erg.,

N. FLICKMAN.

"Did that explain?" anxiously asked Solly.

Feebly but affirmatively his father nodded.



The Log-Book

By the Editor

THE Eighteenth Amendment has undertaken to keep people sober by law; now comes a device to make them good by machinery. They are using in England a contrivance consisting of a narrow roll of paper covered with black dots. This roll is unwound through a slit in the framework that holds it, and the patient—or shall I say the victim?—must prick holes with a sharp stick in these dots as they reveal themselves. By the number of dots pricked the boss understands how late hours have been kept by his employee at a poker game or the like the night before, fatigue rendering it impossible for a man to concentrate sufficiently to catch all the dots as they issue from the orifice.



A house of illusion, founded upon sand; a house of dreams, lies, fashioned for love's visioning, and yet in the end builded upon the rock of an unconquerable faith—that is

“THE HOUSE OF FRAUD”

BY JACK BECHDOLT

Author of “Resurrection Day,” “The Torch,” etc.

Ambition was *Frank La Salle's* god, that other house, the house of his dreams, a vast, many-sided structure, growing, story by story, into a towering fabric of steel and stone, without mercy and without ruth. *Temple*, blind indeed; *Jean*, of the indomitable heart; *Devree*, crusader of the courts; *Diana*, the delectable; all these on one side—and on the other: the ruthless brain, the spider, the man alone—*La Salle*, the digger of pits. This begins as a five-part serial in THE ARGOSY for May 15.



Rapid-fire action, breathless situations, comedy, pathos, mystery, and, at the end, sordid tragedy as a grim foil for hearts insurgent with happiness. These make

“TEN MINUTES TOO LONG”

BY FRANK BLIGHTON

Author of “Not on the Field of Runnymede,” “Without a Rehearsal,” etc.

all too short, indeed, for it is entertainment *de luxe*, the sort of story, dramatic in its swift development, which you have come to look for from this master of moving tales. It is published complete in THE ARGOSY for May 15.



One does not need the stir and bustle of the city to stage drama in real life. Indeed, to my notion, the most powerful play of the emotions may be found, not necessarily in the wilds, but in those farming districts where distractions are few. In

"COVERED UP" William Merriam Rouse has written a highly wrought tale of jealousy, passion, crime, with an astounding outcome against a setting such as may be found in a thousand spots dotted across these broad States of ours. On the lighter side, in next week's ARGOSY, you will get "TWENTY MILES FROM MILLVILLE," by Samuel G. Camp, a sprightly account of the novel fashion in which an advance man wriggled the show out of a hole. You may be certain of strong meat from Grace Lovell Bryan. "THE DAGGER" is no exception to the rule, except that it overtops in strength even the very powerful narratives she herself has already given us.

WANTS MORE LIKE "BETWEEN WORLDS"

Elkton, South Dakota.

I enjoy your magazine very much, and *very much* enjoy reading the Log-Book, although I have never seen any letter from my State. I wish you would have some more stories like "Between Worlds," I enjoyed that so much.

Well, I don't know whether I'll see this in the Log-Book or not, but, anyway, I simply had to tell you how much I like THE ARGOSY.

(MRS.) WM. SCHADE.

THE BEST AND THE WORST TO HER MIND

Atlanta, Georgia.

I think THE ARGOSY is the best magazine I have ever read. "Cold Steel" was a fine serial, and so were "Square Deal Sanderson" and "Green Spiders." I like serial stories better than novellies and short stories, but there is no kick coming, for some of the novelettes and short stories are good.

I don't see why any one should kick on stories they don't like; there are plenty more they will like. The best I ever read was "A Clash of Identities." It was exceptionally good. I do not like "The Torch" at all.

(MRS.) G. S. CAREY.

DRIVING EIGHTEEN MILES FOR AN ARGOSY

Carthage, Missouri.

Have been reading THE ARGOSY for several years, and think it is some magazine, though not as good as a year or two ago. Some weeks the short stories are fine, and some weeks I wonder where you found them.

Seltzer is the best writer, although there are several good ones. Don't care for stories of the East. Have driven eighteen miles in a Ford to get THE ARGOSY when I was living in Kansas, so you see I like it a little. Give us more stories of the West and outdoor life.

BLANCHE THOMAS.

HER TWO KICKS

Bellevue, Idaho.

I have just got two kicks against THE ARGOSY: First of all, I read in the Log-Book that several persons prefer such stories as "After a Million Years," "Between Worlds," etc., but I for one don't like them because they are too impossible. I detest such imagination. Such an impossible

thing I never heard of, and I am very glad indeed that you don't have very many of them in THE ARGOSY.

Another kick is that there are not enough serials. Serials are my favorites. The ones I like best are "Cold Steel," "Beau Rand," "Square Deal Sanderson," "Forbidden Trails," and others.

I read in a letter in the Log-Book that one reader didn't like the stories of Seltzer because they were too much alike. "The heroine was always ready to listen to things that were said about the hero, and believed them." I don't think he does at all. He writes stories as near like the West as possible. You see, I live in the West, and I know.

Well, I guess this will see the waste-basket anyway, so I suppose I'll just stop.

(MISS) ALICE L. HAZELTON.

MORE NORTHWEST STORIES TO COME

Two Rivers, Wisconsin.

I have been taking THE ARGOSY for the past two years, and I can truly say that there is no better magazine on the market. In regard to "The Big Muskeg," I think that it couldn't be beat, and wish you could have some more like it. If you have any stories of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police, please publish them, because I have a liking for the Northern settings, and would like to have more of them like "Going North." Also railroad stories like "A Man to His Mate." Stories by John Frederick and Charles Wesley Sanders are very good.

I have noticed no letters from Wisconsin, so I thought I would write to you. THE ARGOSY cannot come fast enough for me and many others.

Well, I hope to see some Northwest stories soon.

LLOYD ARLE.

KNOCKING THE KICKERS

Kansas City, Missouri.

As I have been a reader of THE ARGOSY for some time, I thought I would write, as I wish a certain person to see this. As I was reading the Log-Book I came across a letter written by C. H. M., and I must say the party sure is some knocker. I am tired of hearing people knock about "Luck" and saying it ended wrong. I think "Luck" ended just fine, and I guess plenty of other readers did, too. So when those people who are always knocking, write and begin to kick, just put the letters in the waste-basket, as that is where they belong.

"Yellow Soap," by Katharine Haviland Taylor, is surely great. "The Big Muskeg," by Victor

Rousseau, was good, too. "Drag Harlan" was great. "Crossroads" is sure going to be good, and "A Man to His Mate" is starting out fine.

Well, I think I will have to stop for this time. May we hear no more from the knockers. I wish good luck to THE ARGOSY.

(Miss) ABBIE PARTRIDGE.

HAS SMALL USE FOR SHORT STORIES

Stanton, Nebraska.

I have been a reader of THE ARGOSY for several years, and I'm telling the world it's a real magazine. I have read a good many, but THE ARGOSY beats them all. I only wish it came at least twice a week. As a usual thing I do not care to read the short stories, but once in a while I read one, just to kill time.

I sure like Seltzer's stories. John Frederick comes next, and then there are several others, including Charles Wesley Sanders.

The best stories I have read in THE ARGOSY are "Drag Harlan" and "Beau Rand," by Charles Alden Seltzer. I thought "Cold Steel" and "Luck" were humdingers. I would enjoy another Zane Grey story again.

This is my first letter, and here's hoping it will escape the waste-basket. Don't forget your Western stories by any means. Again telling you THE ARGOSY can't be beat,

PAUL BRUVELLE.

BEST IN THE WORLD AND MORE

Williamsbridge, New York.

I've been reading THE ARGOSY since July, 1919. I call it the best magazine in the world, and more. All your stories are fine. I like detective, Western, and Northern woods stories. I'm not a kicker, and never will be. I say that all your stories are good for me.

"Drag Harlan," by Seltzer, was one of his best. "Everything but the Truth," by Edgar Franklin, was one long laugh. A few of the latest stories I liked were: "The Big Muskeg," by Victor Rousseau; "Pay Sand," by Victor Lauriston; and "Yellow Soap," by Katharine Haviland Taylor, certainly was a pippin. The novelettes I liked were: "Without a Rehearsal," by Frank Blighthon; "Son of the Red God," by Paul L. Anderson, and "Queen of Kettle Mountain," by J. E. Grinstead. The shorts are all fine, especially "A Voice in the Dark," by William Merriam Rouse.

With best wishes and good luck to the good old ARGOSY,

CONSTANTINE BEVENGA.

THE ARGOSY COVERS THE WORLD

Baltimore, Maryland.

I would like to thank you for the letter of mine that appeared in THE ARGOSY and also to thank through you all who have written me in response to same. I'll say that THE ARGOSY has some circulation, as I got letters from many places throughout the United States.

Did not like "Yellow Soap," but I think "A Man to His Mate" is all right so far; also "Queen of Kettle Mountain." Glad to hear Lebar is coming again next week, also Edgar Franklin.

In regard to shorts: I read almost all of them, particularly those by Marc Edmund Jones and

William Merriam Rouse, not forgetting that old favorite, Samuel G. Camp. Would like to see another story by Francis Stevens.

I think it would be a good idea to have some more stories with the location in the principal cities. Like "Four Forty at the Fort Penn" (Pittsburgh), and "Phyllis of Fountain Square" (Cincinnati). I am sure many other readers would welcome same. As you are asking readers' opinions, the suggestion is offered for what it is worth.

JOHN O'LEARY.

HIS LIST OF BEST SERIALS—WHAT IS YOURS?

Duval, Kentucky.

Enclosed find four dollars, for which renew my subscription to THE ARGOSY, because I do not wish to miss a single copy. Have been reading THE ARGOSY about three years, and think it the best magazine published. I like the serials best. Don't care much for the novelettes and shorts.

Some of the best stories I have read in the past year are "Forbidden Trails," by Seltzer; "The Duke of Chimney Butte," by Ogden; "Luck," by Frederick; "The Single Track," by Douglas Grant; "Whose Gold?" by Frederick R. Bechdolt; "Drag Harlan," by Seltzer; and last, but not least, "Which of These Two?" and "Jerry the Spirited." Have started "Crossroads," the sequel to "Luck," and it is fine.

I see in the Log-Book that we are to have another story by Seltzer. Hurrah! Say, what has become of George Washington Ogden? Please give us another by him. Guess you know by the list that I like Western stories, so be sure and give us lots of them.

LONNIE JONES.

PREFERS LOVE IN REALITY

Huntsville, Ontario, Canada.

I have been a constant reader of your magazine for over two years, and have not been able to find any fault with it. Of course I don't like every story, but you can't please everybody. Personally I don't agree with the Misses Brady on not being able to improve, but I do say that there is not very much room for improvement.

I enjoy your Western stories, and also those that show some life, like "Between Worlds." I would like to see some stories of backwoods life, or wish somebody like Smith, with his wonderful imagination, would write a story about the trappers that would give your readers in Texas, and some of the Southern States, an idea of life in a snow-bound country with weather at fifty below zero, without using my imagination one little bit.

I can't say that I care a great deal for cheerful love stories. I'd rather see it in reality, and it's not hard to see or find.

Your proofreaders and machine-operators are to be complimented on the clean setting that your magazine gets. Being a newspaper man I naturally notice typographical errors.

I have just finished your serial "Crossroads," by Frederick, who, I might say, is one of my favorite writers. I also enjoyed "The Big Muskeg," by Victor Rousseau. Please give us some crackin' good Westerners with lots of life and brainy plots.

Thanking you in advance for the half-day you will take off to decipher this scribble, an ARGOSY-loving patron.

PAUL H. RICE.



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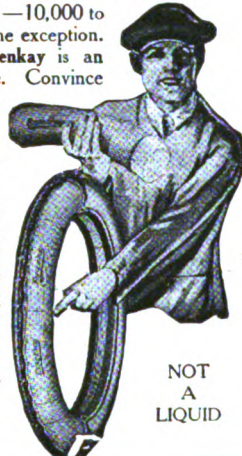
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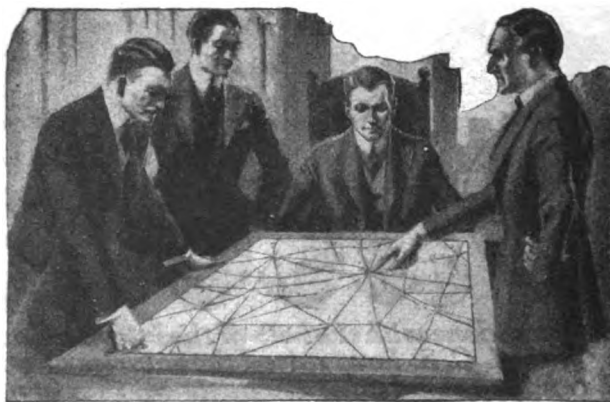
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