ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY

Sleeping Acres

by Brayton Norton

A Powerful Drama of the Wheatlands

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ıe rugs all full room size, 9 ft. x 12 ft. **Very attractive patterns.**

Brings a Splendid RUG

Send one dollar for any one of the four wonderful rug bargains shown above for 30 days' trial in your home. If you are not thoroughly satisfied to keep it, return it to us and we will refund your $1 and pay transportation charges both ways. If you decide to keep rug, take nearly a year to pay. It is practically impossible to do justice to these extremely handsome and attractive rugs by mere descriptions and cold black and white illustrations such as shown above. That's why we offer to send your choice of any of these four beautiful rugs for 30 days' use in your home. Read descriptions carefully, then make your choice for 30-day trial test at our risk.

Rug No. 1 A gold seal "Congoleum" one-piece Art Rug. You know that the name "Congoleum" means quality in floor covering. Is sanitary and very easy to keep clean. There is no burlap so water will not injure it. A damp mop keeps it bright and clear at all times. It will lie flat on the floor and is sun and water-proof. Comes in 9x12 ft. size. **Order by No. 51BBMA45. Price $19.00. Send only $1 down. Balance $2 monthly.**

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gNo.4 A Medallion Pattern Tapestry Brussels Rug. Beautiful combination of colorings. The medallion center is rich and pleasing, neatly arranged border; closely yarns; 9x12 ft. **Order No. 22BBMA17. Price $29.85. $1 now; bal. $2.75 monthly.**

ly Full Year to Pay When you see any of these rugs on your floor, and compare them with other rugs selling much higher, you will wonder how we ve such stunning values and terms. Use 30 days at our risk and nearly a year to pay.

REE Bargain Catalog 432 pages. Mail us a postal for this great book—it will save you many dollars. Filled from cover to cover with stunning bargains in furniture, rugs, m, stoves, ranges, watches, silverware, dishes, washing machines, sewing ma-, aluminum ware, phonographs, gas engines and cream separators. Hundreds of s to select from—30 days' trial. This wonderful bargain catalog is FREE.

ARTMAN **FURNITURE & CARPET CO.**
3913 Wentworth Ave. Dept. 2732 Chicago

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Enclosed is $1.00. Send the Rug marked X below. I am to have 30 days' trial. If not satisfied, will ship it back and you will refund my $1.00 and pay transportation both ways. If I keep it I will pay the amount named each month until full price is paid.

- ☐ Rug No. 51BBMA45. Price $19.00, $1.00 down; balance $2.00 monthly.
- ☐ Rug No. 17BBMA20. Price $23.65, $1.00 down; balance $2.50 monthly.
- ☐ Rug No. 22BBMA8. Price $28.95, $1.00 down; balance $2.75 monthly.
- ☐ Rug No. 22BBMA17. Price $29.85, $1.00 down; balance $2.75 monthly.

Name.....

Address.....

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

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOL. CXXV CONTENTS FOR SEPTEMBER 25, 1920 NUMBER 4

FIVE CONTINUED STORIES

ONE NOVELETTE

SIX SHORT STORIES

Once more the *Occult Detector* takes the stage

BLACK AND WHITE

BY J. U. GIESY AND JUNIUS B. SMITH

A *Semi Dual* Story

Begins in Next Week's Magazine

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

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

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PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY.

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

Secrets of Selling that Make These Men $10,000 a Year Star Salesmen

Some Amazing Stories of Quick Success

IT is hard to believe that a man who has been working for years in a routine job at small pay could almost over-night step into the $10,000 a year class. Yet that is just what many men have done and are doing today. If I should tell you that one man who had been a fireman on a railroad stepped from his old job to one that paid him $10,000 a year, you would be inclined to doubt the truth of my statement.

But I can show you the man's own story. And that is only one instance. I can show you many more. These men were just average men. They came from all walks of life, from all fields of work. Some of them had never earned more than $60 a month—some of them had drudged for years at a dull, uninteresting work without prospects of anything better in life. And then, in one quick jump, they found themselves earning more money than they had ever thought possible.

Send Me Your Name

I have shown hundreds of men how to step from small-pay jobs into the big money class in one quick jump. $10,000 a year—yes, and more—has come to men as a result of writing to me. Just let me send you the whole amazing secret—entirely free of cost or obligation.—J. E. Greenslade, President, N. S. T. A.

The Secret of Their Success

These men decided to get into the great field of *Selling*—they learned about the wonderful opportunities in this fascinating profession—why Salesmen are always in demand—why they receive so much more money than men in other fields of work. **And they became Star Salesmen!**

Probably if you had told any one of these men that it was possible for him to become a Star Salesman in his spare moments at home, without interfering with his work, he would have dismissed your statement as being absurd. For you must remember that most of them had never had a day's experience in Selling—no special qualifications—no thought of ever becoming Salesmen.

As a matter of fact, they would probably be working still as clerks, bookkeepers, mechanics, etc., if they had not learned about the National Salesmen's Training Association's system of Salesmanship Training and Free Employment Service. This is an organization of top-notch Salesmen and Sales Managers formed just for the purpose of showing men how to become Star Salesmen and fitting them into positions as City and Traveling Salesmen.

Through its help hundreds of men have been able to realize their dreams of big opportunity, success, wealth and independence. Men without previous experience or special qualifications have learned the secrets of selling that make Star Salesmen—for Salesmen are not "born" but made, and any man can easily master the principles of Salesmanship through the wonderful system of the National Salesmen's Training Association. Anyone who is inclined to doubt that this is so has only to read the stories of men who tell in their own words what the Association has done for them. Here are just a few examples:

J. P. Overstreet of Dallas, Texas, who was formerly on the Capitol Police Force of Washington, D. C., states: "My earnings for March were over $1,000 and over $1,800 for the last six weeks, while last week my earnings were $856. The N. S. T. A. dug me out of the rut where I was earning less than $1,000 a year, and showed me how to make a success."

C. W. Campbell, of Greensburg, Pa., writes: "My earnings for the past thirty days are $1,562 and I won Second Prize in March, although I only worked two weeks during that month."

You Can Do It Too!

It will not cost you a penny to learn how you, too, can become a Star Salesman and take your place among the big money makers of business. Whatever your ambition may be—$5,000, $10,000 or more a year—find out about *your* great opportunity in the wonderful profession of Salesmanship. See how the N. S. T. A. can open to you the way to a big selling job, to prosperity and a life of fascinating work, travel, contact with influential men. Just mail the coupon or write, and you will receive, without cost or obligation, proof of what the remarkable system of the National Salesmen's Training Association and its FREE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE can do for you. In addition a great book on Salesmanship will be mailed to you without charge. You owe it to yourself to read the secret of big money in the wonderful field of Selling. Mail the coupon or write today.

National Salesmen's Training Association
Dept. 2-M Chicago, Ill., U. S. A.

National Salesmen's Training Association,
Dept. 2-M, Chicago, Ill., U. S. A.

Send me Free Proof that you can make me a Star Salesman and tell me how you will help me land a selling job. Also list showing lines of business with openings for Salesmen. This does not obligate me in any way.

Name .....

Street .....

City .....

State .....

Classified Advertising

The Purpose of this Department

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

Classified Advertising Rates in the Munsey Magazines:

	Line Rate
Munsey's Magazine	$1.50
THE ARGOSY COMB'N The Argosy All-Story Weekly	2.50

Minimum space four lines.

Combination Line Rate $4.00 Less 2% cash discount

Oct. 23rd Argosy Combination Forms Close Sept. 25th.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

AGENTS: YOU CAN MAKE $4000 THIS SEASON taking orders for our new reversible raincoat. Absolutely guaranteed waterproof. Two coats in one. One side rich dress coat, other side storm coat. Not sold in stores. Takes place of an expensive overcoat. Elegant style. Saves customer over $20. Biggest seller ever introduced. Binford made $104 in one week. Write quick for agency and sample. No capital required. We deliver and collect and pay your commission same day. Act quick. Thomas Raincoat Company, 1807 North Street, Dayton, Ohio.

AGENTS—HUSTLERS EARN $50.00 WEEK AND THEIR OWN CLOTHES FREE selling our famous popular priced suits to consumer. Outfits free. Central Tailors, Dept. 1, 219 So. Dearborn, Chicago.

AGENTS: BRAND NEW WIRELESS UMBRELLA. Two handles. Can be used by Lady or Gentleman. Only umbrella ever made without wires to hold stays in place. Handles collapse to fit suitcase. Not sold in stores. Popular price. Write quick for sample. Parker Mfg. Co., 406 Dike St., Dayton, Ohio.

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

SALESMEN—Side or Main Line—to sell low priced 6,000 mile guaranteed tires; 30x3½ non-skid sells for $13.95; other sizes in proportion. Good money making proposition for live wires. Master Tire Co., 1414 So. Michigan, Chicago.

EXTRAORDINARY OPPORTUNITY START BUSINESS for yourself on our capital and make big money in spare time. No investment required. Write Partola Mfg. Co., 321 6th Avenue, New York.

WANTED — LIVE WIRE TAILORING AGENTS. Be in business for yourself without one penny investment. Sell finest made-to-measure clothes at lowest possible prices; also shoes, sweaters and ladies' finest furs. Big income assured you. Complete equipment valued at $100 furnished you absolutely free. Harry Grant made three thousand dollars in six months. Write today for full particulars. Kingsbaker & Co., Kingsbaker Bldg., 902 W. Van Buren St., Chicago.

TAILORING AGENTS. Take orders for our Guaranteed Made to Measure Raincoats. Everybody needs one. $8.50 profit on one coat. We deliver and collect. Profits in advance. Sample Outfit Free. Write quick for our liberal proposition. Davico Raincoat Co., Dept. A, 803 W. Madison St., Chicago.

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-M, Chicago, Ill.

AGENTS—LARGE MANUFACTURER WANTS AGENTS to sell hosiery, underwear, shirts, dresses, skirts, waists, shoes, clothing, etc. Write for free samples. Madison Mills, 503 Broadway, New York.

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 Street, Chicago.

AGENTS—Your own clothes free and $60 a week. Start in your spare time. Tailoring business simply great this year. Write American Woolen Mills Company, Dept. 1433, Chicago, for cloth samples of 60 big sensational sellers.

INSYDE TYRES—Inner Armor For Auto Tires. Doubles mileage, prevents 99% of all punctures and blowouts. Thousands in use. Tremendous demand. Big sales. Liberal profits. Details free. American Automobile Accessories Co., Dept. 165, Cincinnati, O.

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.

REAL ESTATE—MICHIGAN

LAND FOR YOU. Some of the best land we have ever been able to offer is now available. Close to towns, railroads, schools and churches, in Michigan's fruit belt. No swamps or stones. Raise grain, fruit, stock or poultry. $15 to $35 per acre in tracts of 10 to 160 acres. Small down payment, easy monthly terms. This is your opportunity to become independent. We help settlers. Write for free booklet. Swigart Land Company, Y1245 First National Bank Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

BIGGEST MONEY-MAKER IN AMERICA. I want 100 men and women quick to take orders for raincoats, raincapes and waterproof aprons. Thousands of orders waiting for you. $2.00 an hour for spare time. McDonough made $313.00 in one month; Nissen $19.00 in three hours; Purviance $207.00 in seven days. $5,000 a year profit for eight average orders a day. No delivering or collecting. Beautiful coat free. No experience or capital required. Write quick for information. Comer Mfg. Co., Dept. Y 129, Dayton, Ohio.

$85.00 A WEEK AND YOUR SUIT FREE—IF YOU TAKE ADVANTAGE OF OUR STARTLING OFFER. Write us at once and we will send you a full line of samples and everything necessary to start at once, absolutely free, postage prepaid. Spencer Mead Company, Dept. 1195, Chicago.

AGENTS—BEST SELLER; JEM RUBBER REPAIR for tires and tubes. Supersedes vulcanization at a saving of over 800 per cent.; put it on cold, it vulcanizes itself in two minutes, and is guaranteed to last the life of the tire or tube. Sells to every auto owner and accessory dealer. For particulars how to make big money and free sample, address Amazon Rubber Co., Dept. 707, Amazon Bldg., Philadelphia, Pa.

AGENTS—MAKE A DOLLAR AN HOUR. SELL MENDETS, a patent patch for instantly mending leaks in all utensils. Sample package free. Collette Manufacturing Company, Dept. 306-B, Amsterdam, N. Y.

YOUNG MAN, WOULD YOU ACCEPT A TAILOR-MADE SUIT just for showing it to your friends? Then write Banner Tailoring Co., Dept. 400, Chicago, and get beautiful samples, styles and a wonderful offer.

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

DAVIS' LUCKY 'LEVEN SELLING BETTER THAN EVER. $3.35 value sells for $1.25. Mrs. Lewis sold 280 in 7½ days—profit $200. "37" varieties of other big winners—150%-250% profit. Great crew managers' proposition. E. M. Davis, Dept. 58, Chicago.

HELP WANTED

THE WAY TO GET A GOVERNMENT JOB is through the Washington Civil Service School. We prepare you and you get a position or we guarantee to refund your money. Write to Earl Hopkins, President, Washington, D. C., for books RJ--2001, telling about government positions with lifetime employment, short hours, sure pay, regular vacations.

LADIES TO SEW AT HOME FOR A LARGE PHILADELPHIA FIRM. Good pay; nice work; no canvassing. Send stamped envelope for prices paid. Universal Co., Dept. 26, Walnut Street, Philadelphia, Pa.

DO YOU want to earn $3,000 to $5,000 a year? You can do it easily. See Anderson Steam Vulcanizer Display Ad in this issue.

WRITE NEWS ITEMS AND SHORT STORIES for pay in spare time. Copyright book and plans free. Press Reporting Syndicate, 433, St. Louis, Mo.

DETECTIVES EARN BIG MONEY. Excellent opportunities for travel. Great demand everywhere. Fascinating work. Experience unnecessary. We train you. Particulars free. Write, American Detective System, 1968 Broadway, New York.

BE A DETECTIVE—BIG PAY; EASY WORK; great demand everywhere; fine chance for travel; experience unnecessary; we show you. Write for full particulars. Wagner, Dept. 201, 186 East 79th Street, New York.

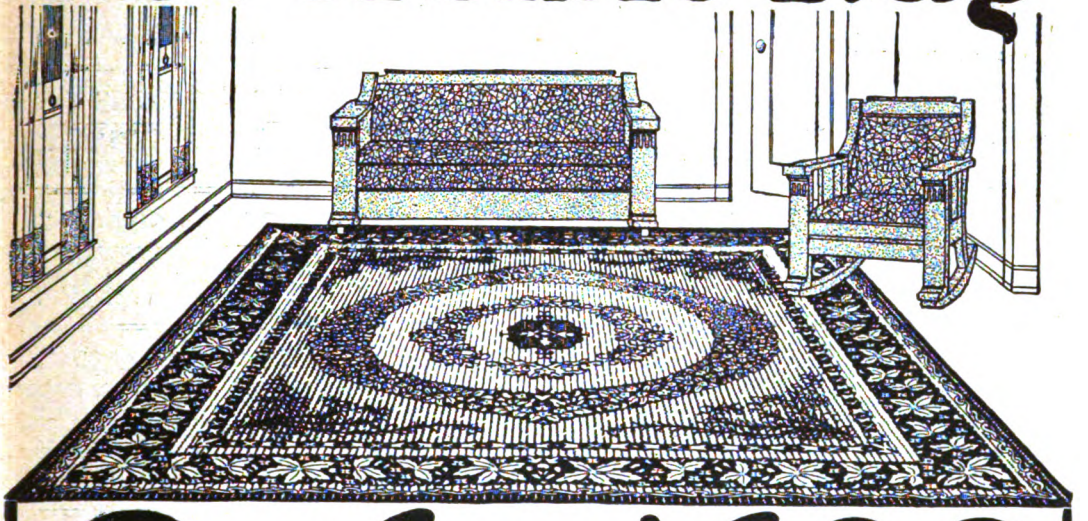
GIRLS—WOMEN, 15 or over. Become Dress-Costume Designers. Earn $150 month up. Fascinating work. Sample lessons free. Write immediately. Franklin Institute, Dept. C-905, Rochester, N. Y.

FIREMEN, BRAKEMEN, BAGGAGEMEN, $140-$200. Colored Porters, by railroads everywhere. Experience unnecessary. 836 Railway Bureau, East St. Louis, Ills.

WANTED EVERYWHERE—Men to become Finger-print and Identification Experts; big demand, fascinating work. We teach you how. Address Dept. A, for facts. Federal Finger Print Institute, Kansas City, Mo.

Classified Advertising continued on page 6.

9x12 ft. Size Reversible Rug



Only $1.00 Down

A Wonderful Wool and Fibre Rug Bargain

An expertly woven seamless reversible wool and fibre rug of rich charm and beauty.

"Princess" Wool and Fibre Rug. This is a very pretty pattern in a high grade reversible wool and fibre. It is seamless and the fibre and wool yarns used are of the finest quality, soft and warm and rich looking. The special feature of the rug is that it is reversible. Both sides are equally artistic in coloring and it is absolutely seamless.

The design is unusually attractive. Note the beautiful floral center and graceful border. The rug comes in green, rose, and tan, all the colors being soft and blending harmoniously. The rug because of these soft rich colors and fineness of its fabric is suitable for any room in the house and the fact that it is reversible naturally insures it doubly.

This is really a remarkable rug value and must be seen to be appreciated. Send for it on 30 days free trial. **No. A116. 9x12 ft. size. $24.65. $1.00 cash. $2.50 a month.**

Money-Back Guarantee!

We have no dissatisfied customers and don't want any. Order the "Princess" Wool and Fibre Rug shipped to your home today. If at the end of 30 days you are not entirely satisfied with it, return the rug at our expense and we will refund your dollar and any freight charges you have paid. No special discount from this advertised price.

Easy Payments

You can have this Wool and Fibre Rug shipped to you for a very small payment down. After you receive it, you can examine it carefully and, if it is not satisfactory and up to all you expect it to be, you may return it to us and your original payment will be refunded. If you decide to keep the rug, you can pay the balance in small monthly payments. One price to all, no discount for cash. Send coupon NOW!

Send $1 and Coupon

Mail them to us today. Have this "Princess" Wool and Fibre Rug shipped to you on thirty days trial.

L. FISH FURNITURE CO. EST. 1854

Pay the balance in easy monthly payments if you are satisfied. Read the coupon and mail it today *now!*

L. FISH FURNITURE CO., Dept. 1526, Chicago

L. Fish Furniture Co., Dept. 1526 CHICAGO, ILL.

Enclosed find $1.00. Ship special advertised Princess Wool and Fibre Rug No. A116. If I keep the rug I will pay you $2.50 a month. If not satisfied, I am to return the rug within 30 days and you are to refund my money and any freight charges I paid.

☐ No. A116—9 x 12 ft. size Princess Wool and Fibre Rug. $1.00 down, $2.50 a Month, Total price, $24.65.

Name.....

Address.....

Post Office.....*State*.....

It you only want Furniture, Rug, Stove, Phonograph and General Household Catalog, put X in box ☐

Learn Motor Mechanics Right

Prepare yourself for the biggest-paying jobs in the city or on farms—or to start a profitable business of your own. Big demand for trained men. Our master mechanics teach you by standard, practical, "horse sense" methods. You work on the most modern equipment and motors of latest design—including Liberty motor. Our Test and Trouble-finding work is alone worth the price of whole course.

Learn by Big Shop Standards IN SEVEN WEEKS.

You don't need education or experience. Age is no drawback. No text books or unnecessary lectures. You learn by doing, every detail in connection with autos, tractors, trucks, aeroplane mechanics and stationary engines.

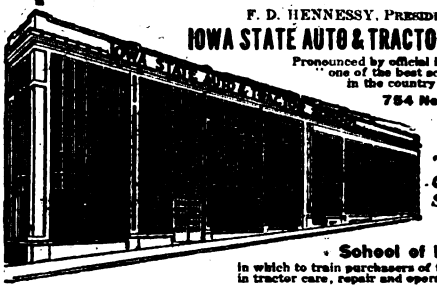
Our graduates are recognized everywhere as the best trained, most competent workmen. Life membership privileges. (No colored students.)

Special Business Course—shop records and management—included in regular course.

Y. M. C. A. Membership included—wrestling, boxing, swimming pool, etc.

My FREE Book—tells all. Write for it NOW.

F. D. HENNESSY, PRESIDENT



IOWA STATE AUTO & TRACTOR SCHOOL

Pronounced by official inspectors "one of the best schools in the country."

784 Nebraska St. Sioux City Iowa

"The Quality School."

Official School of Hart-Parr

In which to train purchasers of their tractors in tractor care, repair and operation.

Send No Money

Snap this bargain up right now before it is too late. Only limited quantity. Amazing underwear bargain. Greatest offer ever made. **Two Guaranteed $4 Each, Wool Unionsuits $5.75.**

Save big money on your underwear. Send postcard or letter today—this very minute, for these 2 beautiful perfect fitting heavy weight gray elastic rib unionsuits. Full cut. Seams reinforced and overcast. **Send No Money**—pay only $5.75 on arrival, no more; we pay delivery charges.

We Guarantee to refund your money if you can match these 2 wonderful **wool** unionsuits for $8.00. Order this amazing bargain this minute before it is too late. Just give name, address and breast measure.

BERNARD-HEWITT & COMPANY
Dept. U249 800 W. Van Buren St. Chicago, Ill.

9 TOYS all for 2¢

TO introduce our new catalogue of a thousand tricks and jokes, toys and novelties, we make this big bargain offer. For only a two cent stamp we will send you prepaid, 9 toys; a game of anagrams, the 1921 joke book, genuine decalcomania transfer pictures, pictures to paint, a railroad cut-out (an engine, four cars, station, signal and water tank), puzzle picture, checker-board puzzle, the broken match trick and a mind reading trick. All yours for only a two cent stamp. Nothing more to pay.

Send 2c Today Write today and enclose a two cent stamp for 9 toys. We will send you our new catalog free. Write your name and address plainly.

JOHN PLAIN & CO., 200 South Peoria Street, Dept. 9276, Chicago, Ill.

Classified Advertising continued from page 4.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

AN EXCELLENT BOOK OF MONEY MAKING IDEAS, including formulas, business plans, sales schemes, etc. Write for free particulars. H. A. Johnson, 5325 Glenwood Avenue, Chicago, Ill.

AUTHORS—MANUSCRIPTS

WANTED: COMPOSERS OF VERSE OR MUSIC to write at once. Brilliant opportunity for good talent. Address, Burrell Van Buren, L28 Grand Opera House, Chicago.

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

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BE AN AUTO OR TRACTOR EXPERT. Unlimited opportunity for civil and Government Work. 5000 successful graduates. Write at once for our big free catalog. Cleveland Auto School, 1819 E. 24th Street, Cleveland, Ohio.

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IN ONE YEAR I REDUCED MY WEIGHT FROM 265 LBS. TO 190 LBS. BY MY SPECIAL METHOD. No medicine. Send your address and two-dollar bill at our risk and receive this method complete. Rita Moore, Room 506, 21 Maiden Lane, New York, N. Y.

MOTION PICTURE PLAYS

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

FREE BOOKLET containing 65 helpful suggestions on writing and selling Photo Plays, Stories, Poems, Songs. Atlas Pub. Co., 301, Cincinnati, Ohio.

MISCELLANEOUS

YOU read these little advertisements. Perhaps you obtain through them things you want; things you might never have known about if you had not looked here. Did it ever strike you other people would read your message—that they would buy what you have to sell; whether it is a bicycle you no longer need, a patented novelty you desire to push, or maybe your own services? Our Classified Service Bureau will gladly show you how to use this section most profitably and at the least cost. Write to-day to the Classified Manager, The Argosy Combination, 280 Broadway, New York.

PATENT ATTORNEYS

INVENTIONS WANTED. CASH OR ROYALTY for ideas. Adam Fisher Mfg. Co., 181A, St. Louis, Mo.

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.

PATENTS—Write for Free Illustrated Guide Book and Evidence of Conception Blank. Send model or sketch and description for our opinion of its patentable nature. Free. Highest References. Prompt Attention. Reasonable Terms. Victor J. Evans & Co., 762 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS. BOOKLET FREE. HIGHEST REFERENCES. BEST RESULTS. Promptness assured. Send drawing or model for examination and opinion as to patentability. Watson E. Coleman, 624 F Street, Washington, D. C.

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PHOTO ENLARGEMENTS. Our beautiful bromide enlargements from your own Kodak negatives are offered for a limited time at 3 for $1.00. Size 8x10. Send your negatives at once with money order. The Camera Shop, Concord, N. H.

TYPEWRITERS

Typewriters—Rebuilt Typewriters, all makes $8.00 up. We sell for cash at prices 20 to 30 per cent lower than instalment houses. Every machine fully guaranteed. Send for free descriptive circular A. M & M Typewriter Co., 40 N. Wells, Chicago.

HEALTH, BEAUTY, ENERGY

From New Kind of Electricity.

THINK of scores of volts of electricity going completely through your entire system, yet with no trace of shock or pain! Think of the helpful, healing force of this mysterious power massaging every cell in your body, strengthening you, reviving you, giving you double or treble your present energy and vitality, yet with no trace of pounding or vibration. That is what you get with Violet Rays! Nicola Tesla's great discovery! Now used by thousands of physicians, chiropractors, osteopaths, drugless healers, hospitals, sanitariums. Amazing records made in quick relief of rheumatism, asthma, catarrh, colds, constipation, lumbago, nervousness, insomnia. Used by greatest beauty specialists in the country for ending dandruff, falling hair, pimples, blotches, skin eruptions, sallow skin. And now YOU can have Violet Ray treatments in your own home.

VIOLET RAYS

At last—a portable Violet Ray machine with which you can treat yourself in your own home at less than one cent per treatment. Tens of thousands already in use. Attach to any electric light socket or use Battery Outfit Complete if you have no electric light. Carry it anywhere.

The Violet Ray, as used in the treatment of the body, sends a stray of mild, tiny currents through every part and organ; flowing through each infinitesimal cell, massaging it, invigorating it, and vitalizing it. That is why one is left with such a delightful feeling of health and buoyant energy after Violet Ray treatment.

Unlike Any Other Form of Electricity!

The Vi-Rex is not a Vibrator. It does not contract the muscles or shock the nerves. Its magic rays pass through every cell and tissue, creating "cellular massage"—the most beneficial electrical treatment known. It leaves no soreness after use, only a delightful sensation of agreeable relief. Violet Rays penetrate glass, yet are harmless even to infants. No shock. No vibrations. Better than gallons of drugs and liniments. Better than tons of cosmetics. Soothing or stimulating, as desired. There is nothing else that even remotely resembles Violet Ray treatments.

FREE BOOK and Trial Offer

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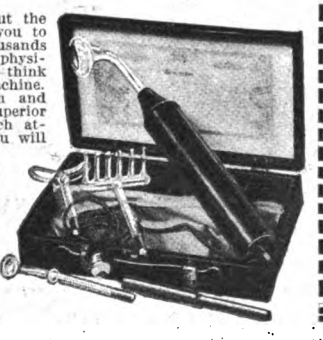

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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY
WEEKLY

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Sleeping Acres*

by Brayton Norton

CHAPTER I.

THE WAYFARER.

"WHERE'S your hat check, kid?" The brakeman of the red-ball freight confronted a red-haired youth standing in the lighted doorway of the caboose.

"I've got eighty-five cents. How much do you want?"

"Six-bits."

The boy handed over the money with the reminiscent observation:

"Could have gone a whole division for four-bits once. Now I have to pay six-bits just to ride down from Los Baños, not over a hundred and fifty miles. You're a train robber, shack."

"This is an up-to-date railroad, kid," said the conductor, laughing. "We charge 'all the traffic will bear.'"

"You won't save anything by riding into town, Red," the brakeman snapped. "They've got a judge down in Pico that puts 'em over."

The boy grinned cheerfully.

"I don't want to cause anybody any trouble," he said, "so I got a stop-over at the junction."

"We don't stop there," announced the brakeman.

The freckle-faced youth glanced keenly into the darkness. A long blast of the whistle sounded above the roar of the moving train, and the boy's expression changed swiftly.

"I'll leave you now," he drawled, hitching up his trousers and disappearing in the darkness. "Look out for my baggage. It's checked through to Pico. So-long."

The trainmen hurried to the doorway as the speed of the train lessened for the crossing, and surveyed the empty platform.

"One fool less in the world," commented the brakeman.

The conductor smiled as he jammed the shag deeper into his pipe.

"Don't you ever think it, Bill. That kid can take care of himself anywhere. He's hitting the grit now without a scratch, and if he's a fool, they've forgot how to make 'em wise."

The proprietor of the Sanitary Fruit Shop was engaged in his nightly game of solitaire. All he needed was a red jack. He leaned eagerly over the table, and wet his stubby finger, peering at the next turn-up. The queen of diamonds. The jack of hearts lay just behind the royal lady. He had surely made a misdeal. As he set

about to remedy his clumsy error he heard the sound of whistling without, and a bright red-head appeared in the doorway.

"Did you beat the game, daddy?" a cheery voice inquired.

The old man shook his head.

"No, but I come mighty near doing it," he replied.

The boy laughed.

"I came mighty near winning at Los Baños last night," he volunteered. "However, I didn't. So I'm here."

He looked about the shop with interest. His eye brightened as he beheld an object on the counter, covered by a piece of mosquito netting.

"What's the machine covered up for?" he inquired. "Isn't she working?"

"I guess it's all right," hazarded the proprietor, as he removed the netting. "Haven't had much call for it lately. The boys is doing all their gambling over at Tia Mona across the line."

He slipped a nickel into the rusty slot and pressed the lever. The card-wheel revolved lazily, and finally came to rest with the cards hanging in all manner of despondent attitudes. The old man thumped the machine with his pudgy fist and the listless row of cards straightened up with new interest.

"All you got to do is to thump her," he directed.

His prospective customer at once dived into his pockets and produced a couple of nickels.

"The little wheel goes round, and another soul is made happy," he chanted as he dropped in one of the coins and pressed the lever.

The old man slipped on his close-up spectacles and bent over the machine.

"You come mighty near winning, son," he consoled. "You just missed getting two pair."

The boy grinned.

"There is nothing in just missing," he rejoined as he dropped in the remaining coin. "Here goes for a royal flush."

By dint of much thumping the cards righted themselves and slid sullenly into place, and the old man announced:

"By thunder, son, you've got a couple of pairs, and you just missed getting a full house." He rummaged in a drawer and produced four dingy slugs. "You've got twenty cents coming in trade," he declared, again verifying the cards to see that he had made no mistake.

The lucky gambler turned the checks over in his hand, engrossed in deep thought. He looked again at the fortune-dispenser, wavered for a moment, and turned away with a sigh.

"I'll shoot the whole thing in bananas," he said, tossing the checks on the counter.

His smile was reflected on the face of the old man as he cut off the fruit.

"What's your name, son?" he asked with interest.

"Terry."

"Terry what?"

"Name it yourself. I'll bet I've been called worse."

"Haven't you got a 'hind name'?" the old man faltered.

"Maybe I have and maybe I haven't. Anyway I'm not giving it out for publication."

The old man shoved his spectacles high upon his shining forehead, and peered at the boy.

"Poor devil," he said feelingly.

Terry's face lighted in a smile.

"It mightn't be so bad as you think, daddy," he said, "for a fellow not to have a hind name. You see he never has anything hanging over him that he isn't responsible for himself. Nothing to live down that he can't help. No debts to pay that aren't his. He can act quick, without stopping to think how it's going to affect his family, and if he slips or gets in bad, there isn't anybody else that has to suffer or help him square himself."

The boy lined the bananas in a row along the counter.

"Breakfast, dinner and supper," he observed, "with one in the rack for to-morrow. I'm running late. The train I came in on didn't carry a diner. I'll begin with supper first and work back; then I won't be so hungry."

The old man stared.

"You don't mean to say you haven't had anything to eat all day? I'll bet those

nickels was your last money, too," he added.

Terry grinned.

"That's why I shot them," he remarked. "Two bananas wouldn't have done me any good. They would have jolted so hard they'd have hurt."

"You can get a job a little below here, son, if you want it," the old man suggested. "There's plenty of work on the San Miguel."

Terry looked up quickly.

"Where's that?"

"You aren't fooling, are you?" the old man faltered. "Do you mean to say you never heard of the San Miguel Ranch?"

Terry shook his head, and the old man grunted his astonishment.

"Well, you won't go much further south, I bet, before you hear of it," he said. "They own plumb down to the Mexican border. They got more land now than some States, and they're stealing more all the time. You could get a job with the farmers. They're all stuck for help, and it's harvest time. I'd advise you to stay clear of the ranch gang, though, if you want to stay straight, for they'll make a crook out of you in no time if you hold your job."

The old man glanced at the clock, whose hands pointed to the hour of nine. "I reckon I'll be turning in," he said. "It's getting late." He glanced toward a door in the rear of the shop. "I've got an extra bunk if you want to use it."

"Just as much obliged, dad, but you see the doctor told me never to go to bed on a full stomach, so I guess I'll go out and walk around a bit." At the door he paused and looked back. "So-long, dad," he called, "maybe I'll see you again after breakfast. Anyway, I won't forget that you staked me to a bed."

As the red-head disappeared into the night the atmosphere of the room seemed to undergo a change. The walls pressed closer together, the floor was dirtier, and the dingy light which swayed to and fro seemed hopelessly inadequate to dispel the dark shadows which slanted grotesquely across the mosquito-netted fruit-boxes upon the floor.

The old man walked to the door and stood listening to the sound of whistling growing each minute fainter.

"I'll swear I kind of hate to see him go," he admitted. "He's an amusing little cuss, and I shouldn't wonder if he wasn't one of them natural-born gamblers."

With hands jammed deep into his empty pockets, his tousled head held high, Terry whistled his way down the dusty highway, his sturdy body throbbing with life and energy, eager and responsive to the call of the open road. The waving fields breathed softly upon him, and he stopped and inhaled their fragrance joyously; the night whispered to him, and he recognized a familiar voice; the stars looked down from the vaulted stillness and smiled, and he understood.

A slight rise in the roadway brought a vision of flashing lights huddled together in the valley like a cluster of brilliants banded about by ebony. He paused and his eye brightened. The city spoke in another tongue, with smoke-scented breath and eyes which twinkled with merriment, and Terry listened to its discordant jargon as one listens to the voice of a friend.

Terry rolled a cigarette and looked at the lights. It was the hour when the tide of pleasure-seeking humanity would be surging strongest. The theaters would be filled with handsomely gowned women and well-dressed men. Wine would flow in the cafés, and the restless, chattering populace would throng the streets in gay forgetfulness of the crime and poverty which stalked within their gates, masked by the glare of the bright lights.

The boy's face hardened, and the smile faded slowly from his eyes. The city drew its lines sharply. A man who was broke was an object of suspicion, tempered at rare intervals with pity, sometimes even charity. One half didn't know how the other half lived, and cared less. Every class of society was represented, even those who had no class. And these were catalogued and herded together by a judge who, the brakeman had boasted, "put 'em over."

Terry flung away his cigarette, and as

he scrambled to his feet he renewed again an old decision that a city at night is no place for a "square-shooter" who's broke.

Turning into a tree-shadowed lane which shunted the northern limits of the town, he again took up his whistle and strolled off into the darkness. The road wound through fields of waving alfalfa and dipped sharply to the bottom-lands, where stubborn nature vigorously disputed the invasion of the Japanese truck gardeners. Close by the roadside, Terry caught sight of a shadowy figure.

"Good evening," he called.

The figure remained rigidly alert, but made no answer to his greeting.

Terry tried again.

"Buenas noches, señor—Buon notte—Bon soir."

Still there was no reply. Terry's face brightened. Maybe it was a Jap.

"Ohio," he suggested in desperation.

The discourtesy of the stranger was, to say the least, unethical, against all rules of the road. He walked nearer the silent figure in the truck-patch, and the frown passed swiftly from his features as he beheld the gaunt form of a grotesquely garbed scarecrow.

Smoking a cigarette, Terry again took to the highway. A sharp bend in the road disclosed a glimmer of lights, bobbing fitfully in a dense wood which fringed the roadside. Borne upon the breath of the night breeze came the plaintive throbbing of guitars, the drone of drowsy-voiced clarionets, and the lament of muted violins. Sharply to his sensitive nostrils was wafted the odor of cooking meats, onions, garlic, and chile-peppers.

Lights, music, and food! Terry took his way down the winding path leading to the garden. In the shadow of the cracked adobe wall he paused and listened to a woman's voice as it soared upward through the trees on the trembling wings of "La Golandrina." Only a crumbling structure of sun-baked brick separated him from the merriment within.

In the applause which rewarded the singer at the conclusion of her song, Terry clambered up the rough bark of a pepper tree which lopsidedly overhung the wall, and crept along a bushy limb which pointed like a stubby finger to the garden. The dry leaves from a bough overhead drifted down upon him and the pepper-gum stuck to his clothes as he crawled along.

A brittle branch snapped, and he stopped and listened. Slowly and painstakingly he continued his way to the dense foliage at the end of the limb. There he parted the leaves with an eager hand and looked within.

In a sunken garden, beneath a cluster of spreading live oaks, through the branches of which vari-colored lanterns dimly shone, white-topped tables were scattered about on a carpet of thick Bermuda, and faintly appearing through the vista of overhanging evergreens, rose the adobe wall of a Spanish hacienda.

Beneath the trees strolled monks and Spanish dancing girls, sturdy soldiers in flashing armor, and ladies with powdered hair and jeweled shoe-buckles, gaudily attired jesters with caps and bells, and somberly garbed Quakers, Indians, hulu-hulu girls, and red-robed cardinals; dancing, eating and drinking together in riotous disregard of rank or convention.

Terry watched the scene with hungry eyes, his head appearing above the green leaves in his eagerness, like a great cluster of ripe pepper-berries.

Society reveled at his feet with leveled barriers. Princes and beggars danced together in joyous abandon. Names faded into nothingness behind a mask of muslin-friendliness, and the voice of the dollar was stilled.

From his perch, the silent witness to the social millennium in the heart of the wilderness pondered upon the strange phenomenon, and swiftly there grew within his heart a long-felt desire to mingle upon an equal footing with those who rested secure behind the formidable portals of society. Just to have an "even break" for once.

With Terry, the wish was father to the deed. But there were ways and means to consider. He surveyed his attire critically. Too shabby for a gentleman, and not shabby enough for a bo. Further than that there was the question of a mask. No,

he couldn't get by in a blind asylum with a rig like that.

His brow wrinkled in deep thought as he glanced longingly within the coveted enclosure. Then his eye brightened, and a smile flashed through the freckles as he thought of a guy who would give the shirt off his back to help a fellow out.

Carefully he retraced his steps along the limb and slipped to the ground, and with fast-flying feet sped away into the darkness.

CHAPTER II.

THE SCARECROW INTERVENES.

WITHIN the vine-crusted walls of Casa Blanca the ninth annual revel of the Pico Ramblers was in full sway. The gaily-costumed masqueraders danced beneath the dim lights which swayed from the rustling oak leaves, the orchestra played soft Spanish airs from a smilax-veiled court near by, and wine bubbled at the tables scattered about upon the lawn. It was the hour when the convivial tide of mirth should have been at the flood. Yet even the youngest Rambler neophyte felt that something was lacking.

The master of ceremonies stood in the patio with the proprietor, and looked ruefully upon the scene.

"They're dead," he complained peevishly to the fat man in a tuxedo who stood by his side. "They haven't the pep of a basket of clams."

The wrinkles deepened upon the proprietor's brow. He had worked hard for the Rambler's patronage. They were "live ones," the best spenders in Pico. For that reason he had secured an orchestra from Los Baños, and bribed the chef from the "Corodino" to supervise his kitchen. Still, his patrons were unsatisfied. He shrugged his shoulders and spread out his pudgy hands with an apologetic gesture.

"I have done my best, *señor*," he said, stiffly. "If you will suggest anything more I will be glad to do it."

The youth in lace and velvet swore softly.

"That's just it," he explained. "It is up to me to suggest something, but they've got me guessing. I've circulated among them trying to jolly them up until I'm sick. The music is the best I've heard in a long time, the wine can't be beat, but it just seems to run them further into their shells."

He looked toward the shaded end of the patio in deep disgust.

"What's the use?" he snapped.

The proprietor's troubled eyes followed his slowly. Then both started and stared into the shadows, where the figure of a grotesque scarecrow stood rigidly silhouetted against the lights in the garden.

"Who dragged that in?" muttered the masked youth.

A faint flicker of interest was noticeable among the guests as they beheld the ludicrous figure, which deepened into amusement as the dark form slowly advanced within the circle of lights, and they caught sight of the varied articles which made up his apparel.

He was clad in faded blue overalls, through which flashed patches of many colored fabrics. His fancifully colored waistcoat, as if proud of its former grandeur, looked brazenly out from beneath the dark folds of a rusty old Prince Albert. Upon his head was a sorrowful derby of ancient pattern out of which strayed wisps of bright red hair. His face was completely covered by a wide strip of burlap, and his eyes shone brightly through the slits as he came jerkily to a halt, and with a deep bow surveyed the company.

"What is this, a church festival, or an Old Ladies' Home?" he inquired.

A court jester who had just wandered into the patio saw a chance to play his part, and called out:

"What's the matter, Jim, weren't you ever in high society before?"

The scarecrow turned to the cap and bells.

"High society," he repeated. "Well, if this is high society, me for the truck-patch. There's something doing out there. This is the first funeral I've seen since I been on the job."

A gray-cloaked Quaker laughed uproariously, and the hulu-hulu girl cried gleefully:

"You said it, bo. Tie a can to 'em."

The jester sought another opportunity to redeem his reputation. Pointing at the shabby figure, he grumbled:

"He'll come in here now and scare away all the birds."

The scarecrow turned again to his tormentor.

"Birds, did you say, Mabel? No, you have them wrong. I sized them up when I came in. They're a bunch of old hens that are used to going to bed at sundown."

He looked keenly about him, then he concluded:

"If they're birds, let's hear them sing, not cackle."

As the jester sought a less conspicuous place in the patio, the master of ceremonies asked a question.

"I'd like to know what's the matter with our party," he said truthfully.

The scarecrow walked stiffly across the adobe toward the speaker.

"If you really want to know," he began seriously, "I'll tell you. You're too long on minors, and too short on jazz. You have too much soul-music, and sole-dancing's going out. Everything's too comfortable and dreamy. There's no kick to your party; it has no punch."

A ripple of laughter greeted the frankness of his criticism, and he amended with a low laugh:

"Hope I haven't made any one sore. That's only the opinion of a rank outsider."

But the master of ceremonies did not hear the laughing apology, for he was in earnest conversation with the proprietor. Then he hurried out into the garden with the fat man wheezing in his wake.

A moment later the orchestra struck up the opening bars of "The Yelping Hound Blues," the live-oaks blossomed with flashing lights, and the dancers surged forth to retrieve their fallen spirits with gay laughter and brightening eyes.

Within the well-lighted patio the wine took on a new flavor as it bubbled freely at the tables, the eyes beneath the masks reflecting its sparkle. Old "King Cole" forgot that his shoes were tight, and cavorted about with calf-like steps, crying boisterously for his bowl and pipe, while a spare gentleman in black velvet knee breeches, dubbed the "human clothes pin," danced with the hulu-hulu girl until his silken stockings caressed the tops of his buckled shoes.

The master of ceremonies was radiant as he stood again with the proprietor and witnessed the resurrection of his party. Before their admiring eyes passed and repassed the shambling figure of the scarecrow, and as he circulated amongst the tables the laughter rang ever clearer and the last grouch melted away.

A man in civilian clothes hastily approached the two men and spoke in a low tone, nodding toward the newcomer in the ventilated derby. When he had concluded the proprietor shrugged his shoulders and looked at his masked companion, who burst out:

"I don't care if he did climb the wall. He brought our party alive, and if he hasn't a ticket I'm going to make him a present of one. I don't know who he is. What's more, I don't care. He has his nerve, all right, but he has the '*Sabe*,' too. And he's doing it all on an empty stomach, for I'll swear I haven't seen him take a drink yet."

Unaware of the favorable nature of the verdict concerning him, Terry looked hungrily at the chattering crowd clustered about the tables. The lights burned brighter than ever before as he contrasted them with the still darkness of the truck-patch. He stared gloomily at the door. Then the eyes beneath the burlap mask widened and brightened as they focused upon the slender figure of a young Indian girl standing upon the threshold.

"An Indian princess," he breathed softly. "A real, honest-to-God princess!"

The girl was clad in soft, amber-colored buckskin which followed the lines of her comely figure like the brown bark of a graceful sapling. Her moccasined feet were small and as delicately molded as the gold-beaded ankles which flashed above them. Her long black hair hung loose

about her shoulders, adorned by a broad bank of dull gold from which shone a single ruby brilliant.

With head held high she stood for a moment in the entrance to the patio, and surveyed the rollicking crowd. Many eyes rested upon her with frank admiration as she walked to a table within a small alcove almost hidden with vines, followed by her only attendant, an old Indian woman.

"God save the princess," a voice cried, and the Indian girl bowed graciously, accepting the homage as a natural right.

There was a cultured grace in her movements which spoke more eloquently of the drawing-room than of the freedom of the woods.

"Who was she?"

Even her dancing partners had to admit that she had them guessing.

"She knew me before I said a half dozen words," grumbled the jester, who prided himself upon his perspicacity. "She might be any one of a dozen people, as nearly as I can figure."

The cardinal adjusted his red hat with care as he rejoined sarcastically:

"No trouble about knowing you, Charlie. If you had disguised yourself as anything but a fool you'd have had a chance and you might have 'got by.' But as a fool, well, you're too life-like."

"I suppose she never had the slightest suspicion of your identity," snarled the jester. "Your nerve in wearing that rig would fool St. Peter himself."

The cardinal laughed as he stuck a cigarette through his mask.

"You're wrong again, fool," he said. "She asked me if I had seen my wife lately, and in the same breath inquired solicitously concerning the good health of Eva Le Gay at the Odeon."

"I'll wager there's one here she can't classify," contributed the master of ceremonies. Nodding toward the flapping coat-tails of the scarecrow as he whirled off with the hulu-hulu girl, he declared:

"If she can stick a pin through him and even name the species, I'll buy."

The blue bird of happiness, having hopped merrily into the discussion, the jester addressed him hopefully.

"We want to know who she is, Ted," he said. "You ought to be able to tell us."

The blue bird, following the jester's nod, strove to focus his eyes upon the Indian maid. He preened his tail-feathers carefully before he replied:

"Thas Minnie-watha, e'r I mean—Hia-haha. You know what I mean, old Nakoma's girl; don' know las' name."

The jester slapped him heartily on the back, dislodging a rain of blue feathers and causing his beak to assume a different angle.

"We want to know her last name, Ted," he said. "If you find out I'll buy you a bottle of champagne."

The blue bird adjusted his beak with an unsteady hand, and glanced with grave concern at the feathers upon the floor.

"Moulting," he explained sadly. "Shouldn't hit a bird when he's doing that." He looked up from his contemplation of his lost plumage and surveyed the princess.

"All you want to know is her last name?" he repeated.

The jester nodded.

The blue bird smoothed his ruffled feathers with conscious pride and stretched his wings.

"I'm going to dance with Indian princess," he announced. "An' find out las' name."

"Here's where he loses the rest of his feathers," muttered the cardinal as the blue bird hopped unsteadily across the patio. "Watch her hand it to him."

Terry moved closer to the princess as he saw the drunken figure lurch across the room, but there was no need for the scarecrow's whispered word of caution, for the Indian girl seemed abundantly able to take care of herself, judging from the bedraggled appearance of the blue bird as he rejoined his companions.

"She didn't understand," he explained soberly. "Thought I was insulting her when I call her Laughing Ha Ha." He looked regretfully toward the princess, and sought to pull his feathers closer about his neck.

"She give me a cold," he sniffed.

The jester laughed sarcastically.

"I see where you don't get any champagne," he said.

The blue bird raised his head quickly and looked again at the girl in the alcove.

"I'll get that laughing water, all right," he announced. "I'll fin' out her whole name, too, or I'm a crow."

"He'd make a better old crow than anything else," commented the cardinal as he watched the blue bird fluttering toward the punchbowl. He removed his red hat and fingered it thoughtfully.

"I wonder if it could be," he began, but his words were interrupted by the sound of merry laughter without, and a noisy party entered, led by a slender young man in the costume of a Spanish cavalier, who guided them to a big table in the far end of the patio.

The proprietor hurried to the newcomers.

"Your pardon, *señor*," he said stiffly. "This one is reserved."

The cavalier slapped him affectionately upon the back.

"Sure it's reserved, Tony," he agreed. "Don't forget what I told you about that De Turk Burgundy."

The fat man bowed low at the sound of the voice, and began hastily pulling out the chairs.

"Your pardon again, *señor*," he murmured. "I did not recognize you. Everything has been done that you wished, and I hope you will find the wine satisfactory."

As the popping of corks resounded at the cavalier's table, Terry watched the party intently through the old-fashioned Spanish mirror which looked out from the vines across the court. Only two of the company held his interest.

The cavalier seemed slightly more than a boy, and even to the scarecrow, he appeared different. He moved with a grace that was not shared by the men about him. His manners spoke of refinement, and he wore his silken clothes naturally. His voice, though vibrant with wine, was never harsh, and he spoke always with the accent of a gentleman.

The girl by his side was attired in the bespangled costume of a gypsy dancer, and she acted the part with a natural easiness of manner which proclaimed it her favorite rôle. Her gestures were the movements of the Latin, and she spoke with the quick emphasis of the Spanish tongue.

As his eyes again sought the alcove, Terry noticed a marked change in the demeanor of the Indian princess. Her listless pose was replaced by an attitude of eager interest. She leaned forward in her chair, her eyes intently following the movements of the young cavalier and the gypsy dancing girl.

Directly against the advice of his soberer half, Terry walked slowly across the patio to the alcove and stood awkwardly in front of the buckskinned figure.

"Could I have the pleasure of the next dance with you?" he asked.

The princess turned her head slightly and surveyed the ungainly figure with an appraising glance, as comprehensive as it was chilling. Terry was thankful for the burlap mask as he felt his face growing hot.

"I never dance with strangers," she said at last.

The scarecrow stood rigidly erect for a moment, his eyes staring into those of the princess. Then he turned slowly and shuffled away to the garden.

"I wonder who he is," the princess remarked casually.

She glanced again at the table of the Spanish cavalier, and as the gaily attired courtier turned abruptly and met her gaze she turned hurriedly away.

Beneath the stars in the garden, the scarecrow reflected soberly upon the ways of royalty.

"Maybe I haven't a chance, but I'm not admitting it. A fellow always has a chance until he owns up to himself to being a down-and-out quitter."

Within the patio, the princess shifted uneasily as she noticed that the cavalier was looking her way with greater frequency. Rising hastily to her feet, she whispered to the old Indian woman:

"I'm rather nervous, Adele. I'm afraid he will recognize me. Let's go out into the garden."

The Indian woman replied in French,

and gathering the princess's outer robe, followed her to the door.

The blue bird watched them go with sullen interest from his nest by the punch-bowl. Forgetful even of the untasted glass and dominated by the compelling force of his sudden resolution, he staggered to the door and hurried out into the darkness.

Terry dropped his cigarette and ground it into the soft earth with his heel as he saw the dim outlines of two figures walking rapidly along the path. Having no desire for company in his present mood, he withdrew quietly into the shadow of the oaks, as he heard a woman's voice exclaim:

"This will be far enough, Adele."

Watching the shadowy forms from his concealment, he heard the crunch of rapidly flying gravel, and another figure abruptly joined the group. A woman screamed, and a drunken voice cried out:

"Guess I'll get laughin' water now."

At the sound Terry emerged hastily from the shadows and precipitated himself into the center of the struggling group. Grasping the blue bird by the neck, he whirled him abruptly about and sent him spinning into a pile of leaves by the walk. Then he turned to the women.

Close by his side, her mask dangling by a single string, stood the Indian princess.

The scarecrow regarded her intently, striving to catch a glimpse of her face, but in the darkness he caught only the profile of a rather straight nose and a very decided chin.

She hastily rearranged her mask and glanced at the shabby figure. Although her breath came haltingly, she said coolly:

"Thank you. If you will give me your address I will be glad to reward you more substantially."

She spoke as a queen extending a rare favor to a worthy subject.

Terry looked calmly at the regal figure and brushed the frayed sleeve of his coat carefully before replying. Then he retorted cheerfully:

"It's a scarecrow's job to chase away birds, your majesty," and walked over to examine the disheveled figure of the Blue Bird as he lay quietly in his leafy nest.

The princess watched him bend over the crumpled figure and tenderly smooth his dumpled feathers. Then she joined the old Indian woman, who came timidly from the shadows, and hurried away in the direction of the lights, as she heard the scarecrow exclaim regretfully:

"Poor old birdie. You look mighty blue. Didn't know you were so far gone. And I wasn't even—introduced to you."

CHAPTER III.

ONE-ROUND TERRY.

WHEN Terry returned to the patio, after having administered first aid to the dilapidated Blue Bird, he noticed that the party had "come alive." His appearance was greeted with a roar of laughter from the table of the cavalier, and a slender wit in purple rose unsteadily and looked with mock alarm at the bright strands of red which shone through the rent of the scarecrow's hat.

"We'd better be on our way, bunch," he cried thickly, pointing toward the tattered derby. "The sun's up."

Terry walked belligerently to the speaker.

"You said it, Alice," he said, looking the laughing youth full in the eyes. "And when it goes down, you won't be taking much notice."

The cavalier pounded loudly on the table with his empty goblet.

"Bully for you, old boy," he exclaimed admiringly. "That's the way to talk." Filling his glass, he extended it to the scarecrow with a flourish.

"Have a drink, old-timer," he called.

Terry shook his head gravely.

"It's against union rules," he said. "Thanks just the same."

As he walked away he noticed that the cavalier drank constantly from the glass which the gipsy girl kept filled at his elbow.

"Looks like she was just trying to fill him up," he commented.

As he circulated among the guests, he noted that the princess was again in the alcove, watching the young man at the

long table in an attitude of strained attention, and once he saw her looking fixedly in his direcion.

At the sound of lively music, the cavalier rose, and throwing aside his silken coat, grasped the gipsy girl by the arm and pulled her laughingly into the garden. A man in scarlet, seated at the foot of the table, rose quickly and followed them a few steps. Then he returned to his chair with a short laugh.

"*Madre de Dios!*" he exclaimed. "He takes them all. I have danced with Reinita only once to-night."

He sought consolation in his goblet.

"The greaser's sore, and he's trying to cover up," observed Terry as he watched the scarlet figure. "The kid had better let him have a dance with the girl unless he's ready for trouble." He shook his red head sagely as he thought of the cavalier's slender figure.

Strolling into the grape-arbor, Terry watched the dancers silently, and as his eyes followed the whirling figures, he missed the familiar one of the Indian princess.

"I suppose she's sore at him, too," he reflected. "If she is, the kid's liable to have trouble before the party's over."

The music stopped, and the dancers again sought the patio for refreshment. Terry rose from his bench and stretched. Were they going to drink all night without a bite to eat? As he glanced expectantly in the direction of the lights he recognized the figure of the dancing-girl standing in the doorway. She was wearing the cavalier's coat about her shoulders. For a moment she stood leaning against the casing. Then she faded quickly from view.

Encouraged by the lull in the music and the sound of rattling dishes, Terry walked eagerly to the patio and, turning aside to allow a party to pass, he brushed against the leaves of the arbor, which rustled sharply. With instinct born of experience he sprang away from the sound and, pausing for a moment, continued on his way.

An agreeable odor penetrated the establishment as he entered, but still there was no display of food. Taking up a strategic position at a small table near the kitchen door, Terry sat down to wait.

Watching the crowds coming in from the garden, he saw the gipsy in their midst, laughing and chattering. Slipping the coat from her shoulders, she placed it affectionately about the cavalier, while the man in scarlet sank back into his chair.

Through the eyes of the mirror the scarecrow watched the scene at the big table.

The cavalier took the brimming glass tendered him by the gipsy girl and, slipping into his silken coat, struggled to his feet. Pounding lustily upon the table, he strove to hold the goblet steady as his body swayed dizzily under the influence of the powerful old Burgundy. The room grew still. All eyes were upon him as he proposed his toast.

"Here's to the lov'lies' lady this side o' heaven," he faltered thickly, flourishing his glass. "Or other side—any side o' heaven. The lov'lies' lady of 'em all, Reinita Vigas!"

In the applause which followed he drained what remained unspilled in his glass, and sank again into his chair.

Looking down the long table, the cavalier noticed that the wine of the man in scarlet was still untasted.

Rising again, he faced the man in the red mask.

"My frien's drink to the lov'ly lady, Ramon," he challenged. "Why do you not drink to Reinita?"

Ramon Garcias rose slowly.

"I drink no toasts to the lady I am going to marry which are proposed by a drunken bum."

The cavalier dropped one hand quickly into the pocket of his coat. Reinita rose from her chair and whispered in his ear. Then he flashed:

"You lie, Ramon Garcias!"

The Mexican hurled his glass at the cavalier, striking him full in the throat, the wine trickling down his open vest like blood.

The cavalier's hand stole from his pocket, his fingers rigidly clutching an automatic.

"Tell them you lied," he commanded.

The Mexican took a quick step backward and freed himself from his chair. The scarecrow leaped to his feet as he saw a knife flash out from the mirror.

"Come alive, kid," he cried, as he ran toward the table. "The Mex has a knife."

Ramon whirled. The princess shrieked, and the cavalier fired twice at the man as he rushed toward him.

Circling the cavalier, Terry knocked the gun from his hand and met the onward rush of the man with the knife.

The Mexican, surprised for the moment by the appearance of the unexpected figure of the scarecrow, stopped and faced the newcomer. As he hesitated, Terry grasped his knife-hand by the wrist and snapped it inward, at the same time dealing the other man a crushing blow full in the throat.

The man in the red mask reeled backward and the knife fell to the floor. Kicking it out of the way, the scarecrow hastily followed up his advantage, and as Ramon strove to regain his balance he found himself an easy target for the quick-footed boy who kept just beyond his reach.

The master of ceremonies looked down from his perch on the top of the table and encouraged lustily:

"Put him away, son; slip over a 'haymaker.'"

And as no one appeared to notice his advice, he muttered in the ear of the cardinal:

"That kid is there. Notice that footwork. Look at the way he handles both hands and ducks under."

But the cardinal only grunted and craned his neck to get a better view.

The Mexican had the feeling that the other man was playing with him, so easily did he evade his blows. His eyes caught the glint of his knife; he cursed to himself as he measured the distance. The scarecrow's fist flashed to Ramon's jaw, and the Mexican's knees crumpled under him and he sank to the floor.

Terry stood over Ramon warily as he lay huddled on the adobe. Then he picked up the knife and walked to the table. Every one in the patio started talking at once. The white-faced proprietor, closely followed by a number of waiters, hurried forward.

Reinita threw her arms about the neck of the cavalier and embraced him warmly.

"Let me have the gun," she cried, reaching for the automatic.

"Just a moment, please, little sister," said the scarecrow quickly, taking the gun from the cavalier's feeble fingers. "I'd like to have a look at that trick myself."

Slipping out the clip, he examined the cartridges carefully. Then he handed it to its owner with the casual remark:

"You got a life membership in the suicide club, mister, if you carry one like that. The 'stingers' are gone. It's 'stuffed.'"

The cavalier looked dully at the blank cartridges, but failed to grasp their significance. Then he glanced at the sprawling figure of the Mexican and as the events of the past few minutes began to crowd themselves into his clouded brain, he mumbled:

"Ramon wouldn't drink to lov'ly lady, an' I shot him."

He passed his trembling hand to his head and, rising from his chair, tottered feebly across the floor to the group of men who were endeavoring to restore the Mexican to consciousness. The sight of the grayish face caused him to stop suddenly and cover his eyes. Then the proprietor pressed forward and led him away.

Terry looked vainly about for the figure of the Indian princess, but the table in the alcove was deserted. The masqueraders pressed about him and shook his hand admiringly as they voiced their praise for his timely act, but the scarecrow appeared little moved by the demonstration. His mind was occupied with weightier matters. His exercise had given an added stimulus to his appetite, and now perhaps the main business of the evening would take place.

Ramon Garcias's eyelids fluttered at the sound of a cornet, and he endeavored to struggle to his feet.

"Supper will now be served in the refectory," a welcome voice announced.

Terry's heart leaped at the glad tidings. He drifted with the crowd to an open door, through which could be seen an attractive array of white tables gleaming with glass and silver.

Again the cornet sounded.

"All masks will be removed, and tickets presented at the tables," droned the announcer.

A cold, gray fog crept before the eyes of the scarecrow, and the white tables faded

from his vision. He groped his way to the door leading to the garden and watched the crowd hurry into the supper-room.

The master of ceremonies stood by the door until the last of his guests had passed within. Then he joined the gaunt figure of the scarecrow, who stood looking out into the garden.

"What's the matter, Jim?" he inquired. "Don't you feel hungry?"

"I had a late dinner," he replied, feeling that his voice lacked proper conviction. "I guess I'll be on my way. I've had a very pleasant evening," he concluded.

The other man laughed.

"And you really feel that you couldn't eat even a bite?" he tormented.

Again Terry shook his head, and the effort left him speechless as the man continued:

"Not even if you had an invitation?"

The figure of the scarecrow shifted uneasily as he heard the sound of rattling dishes. Not waiting for an answer, the other man stepped nearer.

"I've been wise to you for a long time, son," the master of ceremonies informed him quietly. "If I hadn't thought your presence was vitally essential to this party, I'd have given you a hint earlier in the evening. And now it seems to me as if you kind of had something coming from the Ramblers."

He extended a card, and Terry took it mechanically, still maintaining a vigilant lookout for trickery. He eyed the card suspiciously, then his eye brightened, for it read:

*Admit Mr.*_____

RAMBLER'S NINTH ANNUAL MASQUERADE

CASA BLANCA, JUNE 30, 1920

Tickets: Five Dollars

"What name shall I write?" the other was saying.

The scarecrow looked up from his contemplation of the card.

"Terry," he replied quickly.

His benefactor drew a pen from his pocket and wrote the name.

"That all?" he inquired with another laugh.

The scarecrow hesitated.

"I guess that's enough," he said.

"You're not the kid that fought a draw with José Rivas at the athletic club at Los Baños a few days ago, by any chance, are you?"

Terry nodded.

"That was me," he admitted, "but I'm done with the game now. There's nothing to it for a fellow that shoots square."

"Could tell by the way you handled Ramon you were a boxer," admitted the host as he handed Terry the card. "And I guess you're right, at that. I saw that fight myself, and it almost 'queered' me, for you had the best of it from the start."

At the door of the refectory, the scarecrow laid a hand upon his companion's arm.

"Say," he said, "don't tell anybody about that fight in Los Baños, will you? I've quit advertising."

The master of ceremonies promised, and they passed in to supper.

Of the great event which followed, Terry possessed only a confused recollection of an onion-scented mist, through which strange faces floated about upon a crimson sea of enchiladas, tortillas, and chile-con-carne.

Overcome at last by the tide of Mexican cookery which rolled ceaselessly from the adjacent kitchens, the scarecrow gave up the battle with a sigh, and pushed back his chair as he observed the proprietor coming his way.

"Mr. Masters desires to see you when you have finished supper, *señor*," he announced.

Terry drew his tobacco and papers from his pocket, and began work on a cigarette.

"Who's Mr. Masters?" he inquired.

The proprietor gasped as he looked down upon the red head. Then he replied condescendingly:

"The young gentleman whose life you saved is the only son of James Masters."

Terry looked up with a cheerful smile.

"So that was Jim Masters's boy," he observed thoughtfully as he followed the astonished figure of the proprietor toward the

guest-room. To himself he put the question: "But who is James Masters?"

CHAPTER IV.

HIS NEW JOB.

THE proprietor tapped lightly upon the door, and stood aside, regarding the red-headed boy with more consideration. A man who spoke so intimately of Señor Masters was not to be overlooked.

In response to the knock, the door opened quietly, and a smiling Jap stood bowing upon the threshold. Noting the shabby figure by the side of the man in the tuxedo, his expression changed at once to one of quick suspicion, and he cast a furtive glance toward a figure that sat in a big chair by the window.

"What in the devil's the matter with you, Bennie?" a voice cried peevishly. "Why don't you let him in?"

The Jap bowed low, and drew the air sharply through his teeth with a whistling sound.

"Thank you very much," he exclaimed. "I did not understand. Excuse me."

Bowing low before the figure of the scarecrow he escorted him to a big chair, where Terry paused before the slender figure of a youth in pink pajamas. The young man put out his hand with a smile.

"I'm Myron Masters," he said, "and I want to try and thank you for what you did for me down-stairs."

Terry took the young man's hand and regarded him with astonishment, for never before in all his experience had he witnessed such an astounding convalescence. With the exception of a decided nervousness and a rather "shaky" appearance, the young cavalier appeared perfectly sober. Unable to curb his admiration, the scarecrow dropped weakly into a near-by chair, and exclaimed:

"Well, I'd say you're a wonder. I figured you'd be cold till to-morrow noon, at least."

Young Masters laughed and waved a hand in the direction of the Jap.

"Give Bennie the credit," he said. "He's the wonder, not me. Bennie is a specialist. He can get me fairly on the road to recovery after my worst attacks in from three-quarters of an hour to an hour and a half. How long did it take you this time, Bennie?" he asked.

The Jap advanced, smilingly rubbing the tips of his fingers, and again drew in his breath sharply.

"Fifty-five minutes," he replied quickly. "Thank you very much."

Masters nodded.

"That's about all I keep him for," he explained. "So he has to make good. Nobody knows how he does it, but when I get under, they just ring up Bennie, and he does the rest. I feel pretty weak and wabbly for a while, but he gets me out all right."

He ceased speaking abruptly and surveyed Terry carefully.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I didn't get your name."

"Terry."

"That all?"

"I guess that's enough for to-night."

Masters laughed.

"Have it your own way," he said pleasantly; then he continued seriously: "Well, old man, you saved me from a darned awkward mess a while ago, according to all accounts. That crazy fool would have ventilated my anatomy in another minute if you hadn't have been on the job."

He paused and extended a box of cigarettes, and as Terry shook his head and drew out his brown papers, Masters continued thoughtfully:

"I've been trying to figure out how in the devil I ever missed him that close. I'm really not that bad a shot," he concluded.

Terry looked at him fixedly while he rambled on, and strove to figure a motive for any one to frame up on such a clean-cut lad. He was but little more than a boy, and his white face, although marked with dissipation, was sharply featured and intelligent. As he turned his head and exposed his profile the scarecrow noted a straight nose and a square chin. Another eighteen-carat "high-brow," he thought, like the princess. And he wasn't yet wise to the trick somebody had played on him.

"Do you live in Pico?" Masters asked suddenly. "Don't remember of ever seeing you there."

"I was on my way there," replied Terry promptly. "I was interrupted by your party and, not having any fancy clothes handy, I borrowed a suit from a friend of mine."

Myron Masters sat up with interest.

"Do you mean to say you just—er—happened in on us?" he inquired.

"Butted," corrected Terry quickly, with a bright smile.

Masters laughed heartily and again extended his hand.

"Shake," he said. "You've got your nerve in more ways than one, and it's a mighty lucky thing you have, for I guess those other Willies would have let that Mexican dissect me."

He looked into Terry's face with genuine admiration.

"And where are you bound for now," he asked, "if it is a fair question?"

The scarecrow's brow contracted in deep thought. Then he said:

"I can't say exactly just where I'm 'booked' next. I was kind of half-way figuring to beat it down to this big ranch a fellow was telling me about, but they say they're such a crooked outfit that I'm kind of up in the air."

Masters looked curiously at him for a moment. Then he asked:

"What ranch was that?"

"Can't remember the name right now. Some Spanish word."

"San Miguel?"

"That's it. Know anything about it?"

Myron smiled.

"I guess every one around here knows something about the San Miguel Ranch," he replied. Then he changed the subject abruptly.

"Can you drive a car?" he asked suddenly.

Terry beamed.

"Sure," he replied. "I used to own one myself once, that is, a kind of a car."

Myron contemplated him gravely.

"I'll give you a job if you want to drive," the young man said at last. "I canned my chauffeur a couple of days ago for getting drunk. You see, I got kind of jealous of him, for he was drinking more than I was. I pay seventy-five dollars a month with board and room." He looked eagerly at the red-headed boy, who had slid to the extreme edge of his chair and was regarding him intently.

"What do you think?" he said.

"I think you've hired a chauffeur," replied Terry.

Myron seemed pleased. "You think that is better than working for the San Miguel Ranch?" he asked.

Terry nodded.

"I don't want to work for any outfit that's crooked," he said.

A half-smile played over Myron's face as he said:

"How do you know I'm not 'crooked'?"

"I don't," said Terry. "If I find out you are, I'll quit. I've worked for crooks before. It's exciting enough at times, but it can't get a fellow anywhere. I'm shooting straight from now on."

Looking up from his dissertation, his eye wandered to the brightening square of light which marked the window, and he rose at once.

"I must be moving," he explained. "Jim Crow has to be back on the job, or the Japs 'll be docking him. I'll walk down to the truck-path with him, and get my trunk."

Bennie regarded him with supreme contempt, and as Terry went down the stairs he resolved to find out how much the Jap knew about jiu-jitsu.

The sun was peeping over the low, brown hills and the birds were caroling the second verse of their morning song when Terry reappeared at Casa Blanca and inquired for Mr. Masters. Receiving the information that Mr. Masters was sleeping, he wandered out into the garden and looked curiously about him.

Walking through the grape-arbor, he reviewed the events of the preceding night, and as he came to a spot where the vines bulged outward, he stopped and looked about him.

That must have been the place where he heard the rustling of the leaves, he reflected, for the path was narrowed by a

sprawling vine which hung lopsidedly across the walk. He observed the vine carefully, and noticed that a portion of it was mashed as if some one had leaned against the arbor.

Parting the leaves with his hand, he stooped down and examined the ground. Upon the soft earth just off the path, he saw the plain imprint of a woman's heel. Digging up the dirt, he sifted it through his fingers and, rising to his feet, walked around the arbor to the other side, where he again scrutinized the ground and rummaged about in the leaves.

Suspicion is one thing, and proof's another, Terry admitted to himself as he gave up his search and walked through the arbor. The little sister was either mighty clever about hiding the .45's, or else the blanks in the cavalier's gun found their way into the clip without any help from her.

He inclined rather to the former theory as he remembered the gipsy girl's obvious efforts to fill the cavalier up, and her whispered words at the table. It had all the earmarks of a " frame-up," but you couldn't make young Masters see it with a telescope without the " goods."

He walked to the thicket of oaks, where he had saved the princess from the hands of the Blue Bird, and beheld a gardener raking the fallen leaves from the walk. He saw the man stoop and pick up something from the ground. It was a silver finger-ring. Looking over the gardener's shoulder he saw the ring bore the good-luck sign of the Indians.

Terry's eye brightened.

" Oh, you found it already," he exclaimed, " I've been hunting all over the garden for it. It's not worth anything except as a keepsake," he concluded as he saw the old man studying the trinket intently.

The gardener passed it over rather reluctantly, and as Terry held it in his hand he said loftily:

" Thank you. If you will give me your address I will be glad to reward you more substantially."

The man with the rake looked at him with suspicion as he scrawled his name on a card and passed it over, and as he watched the red-headed boy go whistling toward the hacienda he figured he had a small chance of getting his promised reward.

A lean, gray racing-car was drawn up by the side door. Terry stopped admiringly and looked it over. As he endeavored to decipher the monogram on the shining surface of the door, a Jap approached carrying a suit-case, which he put into the car. Terry beamed as he recognized Bennie. Behind the valet came a slender young man clad in a soft gray suit, his cap jammed down over his eyes.

" I guess our red-headed friend lost his clothes check," he began. The Jap coughed discreetly. Myron Masters looked up, and his face lighted in a smile.

" I'd begun to think you'd ditched us," he said. " If you haven't changed your mind about that job we'll run the old bus back to town."

Terry walked to the front of the big car, cautiously raised the hood and whistled.

" It's a regular locomotive," he gasped.

Myron Masters laughed heartily. Climbing into the driver's seat, he started the motor, and beckoned Terry to take a seat by his side while the Jap mounted the rumble.

Speeding along the highway, Myron outlined the plans for the day.

" The first thing is breakfast," he said. " After that it's me for a Turkish bath. While I'm in soak you can go out and buy yourself an outfit and meet me later on. Then we'll drive out to the house, and you'll probably see a better fight than you saw last night, for I have an idea the old gentleman is still sitting up for me."

Mindful of the tone of reverence with which the proprietor of Casa Blanca pronounced the name of James Masters, Terry inquired with interest:

" What does your father do?"

Myron laughed shortly.

" Everybody, from what they say," he answered. " Me to a finish."

He seemed reticent to say more on the subject, which evidently was a painful one, so they drove along in silence into the city.

Left to his own resources after a boun-

tiful breakfast, Terry strolled down the street with singing heart to select his outfit at the store of which Myron had given him a card, and as he proceeded forth some time later, clothed in a neat-fitting regulation chauffeur's livery, he pondered upon the sudden change of fortune which a devious turn in the open road had brought about.

If the princess could only see him now, he thought, as he walked briskly to the garage and presented himself to the man to whom Myron had introduced him. When the workman arrived the new chauffeur secured his services to explain the various eccentricities of the complicated mechanism of the car, paying for the enlightening information from the funds provided by Myron for amusement during his absence.

"Haven't been driving for young Masters long, have you?" inquired the garage man as he pocketed his fee.

Terry shook his head.

"Just starting in to-day," he admitted.

"Well, you'll see something of real speed if you stick around with that bird," the man went on. "That is, if you don't get your neck broke or run foul of the old man."

Terry was interested.

"By the way," he asked casually, "who is James Masters, and what does he do?"

The mechanic looked hard at the new chauffeur. Then he called:

"Hey Art! Here's a fellow that wants to know who Jim Masters is and what he does."

A lanky man in black overalls working on a near-by car, looked up quickly and, seeing the foreman going out the door, hurried over and stood looking at Terry.

"Well, young fellow," he said, "you may be kidding us along, and then again you may not know anything, but I'll tell you mighty quick what I think of Jim Masters. I guess, outside of Mexican Joe, there aren't many men that's got cause to hate the name of Masters more than me. He put me on my uppers after I'd raised a crop for him, and kicked me off his ranch like a dog on a flaw in a lease his own lawyer drew up."

"Does he own the San Miguel Ranch?" asked Terry quickly.

The mechanic's fingers tightened on the wrench he held in his hand.

"He owns damned near two counties," he snarled. "If they don't stop him pretty soon, he'll own the State, for he's stealing it right along. You want to know who James Masters is, do you? Well, he's the biggest land-hog in California, and you can tell him I said so."

The speaker ducked quickly behind a car, and the mechanic nodded hastily and took his leave.

Standing by the roadster, a strange smile playing over his tense white face, stood Myron Masters.

CHAPTER V.

TO MAKE OR BREAK.

SLIDING with trepidation into the driver's seat, Terry drove the powerful roadster cautiously out of the garage into a new world. With great care he piloted the big car through the crowded streets, striving to give his undivided attention to the wheel.

So Myron's father was the great James Masters. Did that lady with the little girl intend crossing the street or was she just waiting for a friend? Why didn't Myron say something when that fellow panned the old man? He'd better have put Bennie on the hind end to flag back. A man would have to have a periscope to see over that hood.

The congestion became somewhat relieved at last, and as his young employer indicated a left turn at the next intersection, Terry's breath came freer and he wiped the perspiration from his cold forehead with a trembling hand.

"What do you think of her?" asked Myron with a smile.

"She's some bus," said Terry; "it's just like shoving another car ahead of you and dragging a trailer."

For some time they rolled along in silence. The road being clear Terry's foot became on more intimate terms with the throttle, and the machine leaped at the touch like

a high-spirited horse at the scratch of a clumsy spur. Nearing a big gate, opening off the boulevard, Myron signaled a halt and Bennie scrambled from the rumble and unlocked the gate. Over the entrance was suspended a sign:

MONTECITA PARK

"Some park," Terry observed, wishing he had an extra eye to conduct a more detailed investigation of its beauty. Guiding the roadster carefully along the graveled roadway which wound through the big trees and across patches of green lawn, he sounded his horn repeatedly, warily upon the lookout for traffic.

"Don't seem to be many here to-day," he observed in a relieved voice. "I suppose it's a great place for picnics at this time of the year. Have they a merry-go-round and a dance-pavillion?"

Myron laughed heartily, and even Bennie's placid face lighted in a pitying smile. Then young Masters explained:

"Yes, there have been quite a lot of picnics here lately. If the old gentleman happens to be about the premises, you're liable to witness one to-day when he greets me after my protracted absence from the shelter of his roof."

Terry flashed a glance at the smiling face of his employer, and narrowly escaped running into the flowered hedge which bordered the roadway.

"You don't mean to say this is your father's place?" he faltered.

Myron nodded.

"It was, unless he's moved within the last week," he answered.

Terry gasped as he saw the outlines of a huge white house appearing through the evergreens, and Myron signaled a halt.

"We'll stop here for a minute, and reconnoiter," he announced.

"Bennie," he said to the smiling Jap, who was already by his side, "stroll casually toward the garage and see if you are able to observe my father in its immediate vicinity. Also pay special attention to the features of said Masters, Sr., and advise me here."

Bennie bowed low and disappeared from view behind a rose hedge.

Myon sat silently contemplating the house while Terry's eyes roved over the well-kept flower-beds and fountain-dotted lawns beneath the big trees. Young Masters's attitude of deep melancholy appeared in striking contrast with the beaming face of well-groomed nature as she smiled from every side in the slanting rays of the summer sun.

Myron leaned wearily against the cushions and lit a cigarette.

"The garden of Eden couldn't have had very much on this place, I'd say," Terry exclaimed with admiration.

Myron laughed bitterly.

"If this is the garden of Eden," he answered, "I guess I'm about due to get fired out like Father Adam." He looked again toward the house, and continued: "I guess the old gentleman will doubtless make good to-day on his time-worn threat to send me to the hot sands of the San Miguel."

Further discussion of the dire probability of such a course of action on the part of Masters, Sr., was interrupted for the time being by the return of Bennie.

"Your esteemed father is at the kennels, sir, and he does not sing, whistle, or otherwise conduct himself as one who is happy. Your honorable sister has returned from the East, and expresses a desire to look upon your face."

Myron's air of melancholy changed swiftly at the mention of his sister's arrival.

"That may help some," he exclaimed, slipping to the ground. "I'll cut across to the house and rehearse sis while you take the car to the garage. Bennie will show you where it is. If you don't think you can run it in all right, dad's chauffeur 'll do it for you if you talk nice enough."

Terry released the brakes, and the car moved noiselessly around the sharp turns of the narrow road leading to the garage, with Bennie acting in the dual rôle of guide and critic.

"You ran over one of the finest of the rose-bushes," Bennie muttered.

Terry ground his teeth.

"Thanks for tellin' me," he gritted, "I'm glad I got the best."

They rounded another turn, Terry swung wide, and a pleased smile warmed his freckles.

"How was that?" he asked.

"You ran over the box," retorted Bennie.

A thin film of red passed over Terry's eyes. Bennie was trying to make a fool of him.

"Must have been a darned little box," he snapped. "I didn't hear it pop. I had to hit that green bush. 'Twas either it, or that fool cat asleep in the road."

Bennie chuckled insultingly, and Terry's anger increased. An educated Jap always did rub him the wrong way. They swung cautiously around another turn, and the garage loomed forbiddingly across their path. Terry noted with intense relief the spacious width of the door, which stood open. Figuring that he had better play safe, he was on the point of seeking the other chauffeur's assistance when he heard Bennie hiss:

"I will get George to park the car."

"Guess again, Togo," he flashed defiantly. "We're not going to let George do it this time."

He sent the car straight for the door which he realized with a start had narrowed considerably. As the roadster rolled sullenly through the opening, Terry's eye beheld a row of cars shining mockingly at him from the darkness, and he heard a rasping voice call out:

"Hey, look out there, you crazy idiot, where are you going?"

Angrily reaching for the emergency, his hand groped wildly for the vagrant lever as Bennie whistled in his ear. Then he set the brake as his fender grated against another car which had mysteriously appeared across his path. The roadster came to an abrupt halt.

"Where did you learn to drive, anyway, you—"

The remainder of the man's words found Terry standing on the cement floor, peering wrathfully into the darkness. Then he felt a big fist, and he staggered against the rumble.

"I'll teach you to scratch me up again," George exclaimed.

"If I could just see you," snapped Terry, "I'd scratch you up so there wouldn't be any again."

He sprang away from the car as he spoke and turned his back to the light from the door. Then he made out the dark outline of a man coming upon him. He side-stepped the rush and retreated warily to the door, breaking the force of the other man's blows with his arms and shoulders. When he reached the light he saw a heavy-set fellow with a bullet-shaped head towering above him.

Immediately Terry assumed the offensive. George stopped with surprise at the suddenness of the attack, and fell back. With muffled grunts of rage he sought to clinch, but each time he came to close quarters his anatomy suffered a number of trip-hammer punches which left him gasping for wind, while his lighter opponent wiggled from his grasp.

It began to dawn upon the burly chauffeur at last that he was up against skill and cleverness. He backed cautiously away. Then he saw his chance. Fanning the air with his long arms, he succeeded in dealing Terry a glancing blow on the chin which caused his head to rock sharply. Eagerly George pursued his advantage and, ducking his head, sought to bore in.

Then he became acutely conscious of the fact that he had made a mistake, and when he stumbled again out of range of Terry's flashing fists, his face was smeared with blood. Cursing aloud, with puffing lips and bleeding nose, rendered oblivious for the moment to all pain by his wild rage, he charged again, and drove Terry across the threshold.

With a triumphant snarl George leaped upon the freckle-faced lad, whose feet slipped upon the inclined runway. Beating down his guard, he struck him a powerful blow in the chest. Terry staggered, and narrowly escaped falling. Then he gathered himself, and, springing to one side, lashed back with unexpected fury, driving the big man before him.

George's vision became clouded. He saw his opponent dancing about him in a gray

haze, always just beyond his reach. Then a sledge came in forcible contact with his jaw, and he crumpled to the floor.

From behind a thick rose-hedge, an interested spectator watched the fight. As the bullet-headed man took the count, he parted the bushes with one hand, and peered out. He was a big man, standing well over six feet. He wore a gray flannel shirt and high, laced boots, and was bareheaded. His hair was streaked with gray. In his hand he held a small puppy.

Terry stood warily watching his prostrate foe, whose head lay but a few feet from the rose-bush. George opened his bloodshot eyes and blinked stupidly. Then he stole a covert glance at Terry and his hand moved slowly to the pocket of his overalls, and closed tightly over a greasy wrench. He would teach that kid to fool with him. The monkey-wrench would even things up. He rolled over and bounded to his feet, clutching the heavy weapon in his hand.

"I'll brain you!" he snarled, leaping at Terry.

The silent observer among the roses opened his mouth to speak. Then he closed his lips tightly as the red-headed boy flung himself upon the man with the wrench with the fury of a maddened beast. For a moment the two figures swayed to and fro, locked in a straining embrace, then the monkey-wrench clattered to the ground, and George shrieked with pain.

"You broke my wrist!"

"I'll break your neck if you raise your hands again!"

The bullet-headed chauffeur glared, nursing his injured wrist. Then he sullenly withdrew into the garage while Terry picked up the wrench and followed him.

It took some time for Terry to roll the car into place. While he worked he kept a sharp lookout for another attack, but George had evidently had enough, for he was nowhere to be seen. When he finished parking the car, the new chauffeur looked about him.

There was just about every kind of motor vehicle made, except a hearse. He walked to the door and looked in the direction of the house. George had, in all probability, gone to squeal. A man who would use a wrench would do almost anything. A screen door slammed, and he saw Myron come out of the house.

"Been fighting again?" young Masters called as he approached.

"Had to," Terry explained. "Drove into the garage and touched a car, and a big bruiser hit me." If George had told his story it was best that Myron hear the other side.

Myron grinned.

"You evidently did a good job, according to dad," he said.

His words confirmed Terry's suspicion.

"I thought he would squeal," he said.

Myron laughed.

"Dad saw the whole thing," he explained. "I heard him telling Cenith about it. He thinks you are all right, and he is going to have you teach him to box. He is going to fire George for not fighting square, too."

"I don't understand," Terry replied. "There was no one around that I could see."

"That is a trick of the old gentleman's," said Myron. "He is apt to show up any time when people least expect him. He likes to see without being seen. He was tucked away around here somewhere, though. He saw the whole business. I haven't seen him in such a good humor in a long time. If I could talk to him now maybe I'd have better luck than I did."

Terry was interested at once.

"You've talked with him already?" he asked.

"He was waiting for me," Myron replied. "He didn't say much, but what he said was right to the point. He went right up in the air over my debts, and told me very forcibly if they were not all paid by to-morrow noon, it would be the San Miguel for mine."

He looked moodily at the floor; then he went on soberly:

"And I have a life-sized picture of myself digging up eleven hundred dollars by to-morrow."

Terry gasped at the fabulous total of Myron's obligations, and the young man continued:

" I guess I'll be on the ranch by this time to-morrow by the looks of things, and as dad won't let me take the car, I'll consequently have no use for a chauffeur."

Terry looked down at the cement, and kicked it soberly with his shining heel. The door to the unknown world was swinging shut. The green garden faded slowly before his eyes. Before him stretched again the white sands of the open road. He glanced down over his spotless livery.

" You'll be wanting these clothes, too," he suggested.

" You are more than welcome to the little you have," Myron said. " I've treated you pretty tough, but I won't set you adrift without something."

He looked curiously at his chauffeur.

" Have you anything to suggest?" he said. " How do you go about it to raise money when you're broke?"

Terry's eyes again sought the cement, and his brow wrinkled in deep thought.

" I'll have to reduce those hundreds to plain, ordinary dollars," he confided, " before I can even start to think."

Myron smiled at the worried face.

" All right," he replied. " You have to raise eleven dollars."

Terry looked up more hopefully.

" Well, I'd pawn my watch if I had one—" he began.

Myron considered the matter from the suggested angle, and his face brightened.

" I have some junk I could put up as collateral," he admitted. " I'm afraid it wouldn't be enough, though. If I could only pawn the car it would be easy. But I don't own that, and everybody around here knows it."

He lapsed again into gloom.

" No, I'm afraid three hundred dollars would be about my limit," he finished.

Terry became businesslike at once.

" All right," he replied. " Now we have something to go on. We have three dollars and only eight more to raise. If I was doing it I'd look around and see how many friends I had who'd give me a little more than sympathy."

The second suggestion awoke no responsive chord in Myron's bosom.

" You'll have to guess again," he snapped. " I'm overcapitalized now. That's my trouble. Sis was my last chance, and she came home broke."

" That leaves us still only eight dollars shy," remarked Terry with cheerful optimism.

" Of course I have some money on hand," Myron continued. " In the neighborhood of two hundred and fifty, I guess."

Terry took a quick step toward his employer.

" You aren't kidding, are you?" he asked, in an unsteady voice.

Myron drew out a bill-case and counted out the bills, while Terry leaned breathlessly over his shoulder, watching the operation.

" Come pretty close," announced Myron. " There's two hundred and seventy-five here."

Terry's grin became unmanageable at the cheerful news.

" That only leaves us five dollars and two-bits shy," he exclaimed. " We have more than half of it raised already."

Myron's face failed to reflect the grin.

" Yes, and we're through," he replied, his deep disgust showing in his voice.

" Oh, no," Terry contradicted. " We have an even break now. That's all any fellow ought to want. I've doubled my capital more than once when I needed the money to eat on. Did it yesterday, in fact, on a slot machine."

Myron's eyes opened wide.

" Do you mean to stake the pile on a game of chance?" he inquired.

Terry nodded, watching Myron closely.

" I can't see it," Myron dissented. " There isn't anything I like much better than gambling, but I never made a dollar at it in my life. I'm a regular 'bait-stealer.' "

Terry's usual smile chilled somewhat as he answered:

" Can you suggest another way to double your money overnight?"

Myron had to admit that his criticism was more destructive than constructive.

" But it's an even chance we'll lose everything," he argued.

Terry admitted that fact with a sober face as he replied:

"And it's better than a one hundred to one shot that unless you play a fifty-fifty, you'll lose out, anyway, isn't it?"

Myron assented, as Terry asked:

"Would it help you much to get to the ranch with two hundred and seventy-five dollars?"

"I'd as soon get there broke," Myron growled. "Money isn't worth much in the sage-brush and cactus." He thought hard for a few moments. Then he asked:

"Do you think you could win enough to get me out?"

Terry grinned.

"I used to play for my friends on a percentage," he answered. "I never had much trouble getting a stake to start on. I'm a fair student of the game, and when I'm playin' on borrowed capital, I play conservative."

Myron seemed impressed, and looked at Terry with new respect.

"We might go over to Tia Mona," he suggested, "and try it. We wouldn't lose it all, maybe."

Terry smiled broadly at the pessimistic tone.

"You don't figure we'll win much, do you?"

"No," said Myron.

"But you're willing to shoot it 'whole-hog' if it comes to that?"

Myron thought a minute, and then nodded.

"Where do you generally lose the most?" inquired Terry.

"At the 'White Moon,'" Myron answered promptly.

"Well, I guess that would be a good place for us to head for, then."

Myron looked at him, aghast.

"But I said I lost there," he repeated.

Terry nodded.

"I know you did," he replied. "That's why I figure it's a good place. When a fellow loses easy enough in a place, somebody else is apt to win just as easy. And I was kind of figurin' I'd be that fellow."

Myron gave the matter grave consideration, frowning at the cement for several moments. Then he said:

"I'll take a chance on you, Terry. If you can pull me out I'll never forget it."

"And if I shove you down deeper, you'll never forget that, either," observed Terry.

Myron Masters looked hard into his chauffeur's freckled face, and his confidence rose perceptibly.

"We'll go down-town immediately after dinner," he said finally, "and cash in the stuff. That will give us plenty of time to get over to the White Moon before it fills up. I'll show you where your room is now, and where you'll get your dinner." He smiled, and shrugged his shoulders. "Can't say much about breakfast yet until we see how we come out to-night."

When Terry arrived at his room over the garage, his satisfaction was clearly expressed by his beaming face as he looked about. A man would have to pay a dollar a day to get a room in Los Baños that would even touch it. And it had a shower-bath and pictures on the wall, and real curtains over the windows. There was even a telephone.

He wandered over to the big chair and sat in it to see if it was as comfortable as it looked. The old man seemed to be a pretty "square-shooter," after all. He rather hated to go with Myron to the White Moon. It looked kind of like "slipping it over" on the old man. He clasped his hands thoughtfully over his knee, and stared at the princess's ring he wore on his little finger.

That recalled his promise to reward the old gardener for his diligence. Rummaging again in his pockets, he found the card upon which the man had scrawled his address. He still had two dollars left of the money Myron had given him. Taking the card to the table he picked up a pencil and wrote upon the other side:

A small reward for finding the lady's ring.

Finding a soiled envelope, he pinned the two-dollar bill to the card and placed it in the letter.

The telephone disturbed him while he was addressing the envelope, and as he took down the receiver a pleased smile spread over his face.

"Can you beat that?" he asked himself as he walked down the stairs. "Being called to your meals by telephone?"

Dinner over, he joined Myron, who was pacing restlessly up and down the garage.

" Climb in," he ordered. " I'll drive. I want to make my getaway before the old gentleman gets too inquisitive."

The big car rolled softly along the winding roadway, and Terry looked over his shoulder, watching the green lawns and bright-colored flowers fade from view. Would the slanting rays of to-morrow's sun salute him in the garden, or beat fiercely down upon him through the wind-swept spaces of the open road?

It was make or break, and there was no telling what the night would bring forth at the White Moon.

This story will be continued in next week's issue of the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY, the consolidated title under which both magazines will appear hereafter as one.

The Flying Ape

by

F. B. Parden

HAMILTON'S position was the only one of its kind in the world. It was the most romantic job of the century. The directors of the Steam Ship Company had just given him final assurance of a permanent appointment as pilot of the Gray Bullets Nos. III and IV.

Over the company's long-distance telephone he had told this good news to Elise Duer, his *fiancée,* and true to her long-standing promise, she was to come to his mother's immediately and marry him, his own peculiar position not permitting him to go to her.

He was now in his sport car on a dusty road, traveling at a fast clip, and within sight of the Steam Ship Company's newly acquired landing field. Here on the field, in the white, two-story cottage built close beside an ancient maple-tree, he was to make his home henceforth with Elise and his mother.

Back from the cottage on a level stretch stood the low fire-proof hangars, glistening white in the May sunshine. In these structures were the two airplanes for his use, the Gray Bullets III and IV. These planes had been tested, found superior to all other types, and purchased by the company for forty thousand dollars.

With two machines at his disposal, one would always be ready on a moment's notice to bear him, when ordered, in pursuit of a ship. If one plane was being repaired the other must be ready.

As Hamilton viewed the field and recalled his numerous good fortunes, he was swept over by an exalted mood. In the short span of his intrepid and adventurous life he had tasted many thrills, but his senses were not yet blasé. He had not yet experienced the bliss of connubial felicity nor that enchantment that comes with the first possession of gold and honor. These were to be his now.

He sped up the last hundred yards of the drive and drew up with shrieking brakes underneath the ancient maple-tree.

Almost simultaneously with the roadster's sudden stop a great, shaggy ape dropped from an over-reaching limb plump into the seat beside Hamilton.

The latter was neither alarmed nor surprised; he was pleased. It was his pet, a gift from his royal friend in Zanzibar. He slapped the intelligent-faced ape congenially on the back as if it were a man.

"Ngami, you act like a monkey. What were you doing up in that tree? Won't you ever grow out of your ancestral tendencies? After steering motor-boats, and flying, and wearing trousers, you revert to tree-climbing! Aren't you ashamed?"

Ngami hung his head. Without question his intelligence was extensive enough to comprehend the meaning if not the words of his master's chiding.

But the secret of Hamilton's power over Ngami was never to prolong a chiding. Besides Hamilton was in an expressive, ebullient mood.

"Ngami," he confided, "I am going to get married. You will have to take second place around here then.

"How would you like to get married, Ngami? Will you live and die a bachelor?" Hamilton left off talking to gaze up through the leaves at the clear sky—most inviting for an altitude flight. Then, with a new thought, he said to Ngami, who was turning the pockets of his ridiculous green trousers in search of nuts:

"Ngami, I never realized before what it means to you to be isolated from your kind all your life."

Ngami had found a butternut, and at that moment crushed the hard shell delicately between his powerful jaws.

"I tell you what I will do," promised Hamilton. "I will buy you a playmate—a nice, coy, jungle lass."

Whether from comprehension or by mere coincidence, Ngami looked up at his master's face, his own small eyes alight with some unfathomable expression. It was always hard to tell how much Ngami understood of what was said to him. The rapid interplay of powerful desires, highly developed instincts and some suggestion of synthetic reasoning in this ape baffled more than one professor of evolution.

Hamilton had finished speaking, with his eyes resting on the dashboard clock. It was after two. He opened the door of the car quickly. "Run, Ngami, get our togs. We will go up and meet the mail plane from Washington."

Ngami leaped down and started on all-fours toward the house. When excited with the anticipation of a trip, or when angry, he always went on all-fours, half upright, and with the knuckles of his forepaws to the ground.

"Hey, hey! Come back here!" commanded Hamilton sharply.

Ngami halted, stood erect and looked back. He seemed to sense the cause of the reprimand, for he made off again on his short, bowed legs, grotesque in his human resemblance. His long, hairy arms swung below his knees with each stride, while his body and shoulders, not yet adapted to the rhythm of upright carriage, swung from side to side. To reach the door his way lay past the living-room window. It was open. One hairy arm reached up and seized the sill.

Hamilton shouted, but the green breeches disappeared through the window.

"He will always be an ape," he observed, smiling. "Always ready to revert at the slightest temptation."

While Ngami went for the togs, Hamilton opened the hangar and debated whether to roll out No. III or No. IV. The machines were identical in type, and in equally fine condition. But he had tested the IV last, and it was already filled with fuel for to-morrow's trip; so he chose the III. He rolled it out from the hangar.

The Gray Bullet III, like the IV, was a land and hydroplane. It was a strutless biplane, extremely powerful, yet delicate and fragile, and as comely as an albatross. The wings stretched straight out from the beautiful birdlike body, leaving the cockpit unobstructed above.

It was as modern with electric lights and starter as the ultra-limousine. There were no visible wires, no braces, no radical lines about it; it was simplicity itself, with curved lines, pliable and yielding as opposed to the rigid principle embodied in the common type of flyer.

With struts and braces the ordinary plane fights its way through the air by sheer force like a square-nosed barge; its rigidity continually keeps the pilot on the alert lest the machine sideslip or fall into a tail spin; the Bullet, left alone, would fly itself on an even keel. It was equipped with new navigation charts and instruments uncanny in their accuracy. With these a man could locate his position on the globe, and navigate with absolute certainty while operating his machine. The secret of these instruments was controlled solely by the Steam Ship Company.

Ngami returned, the goggles, gloves and helmet in his arms, his own leather helmet clapped down upon his head.

Hamilton adjusted his equipment, then turned to tie the leather thongs that held Ngami's helmet and goggles in place. The helmet ill fitted Ngami's poorly developed cranium, particularly the forehead, which receded at a sharp angle from the bony protuberance over the eyes. The crinkled, naked ears stood up in size out of all proportion to the head and were entirely too large to fit under the flaps provided.

When all was in readiness to ascend, it was necessary for Hamilton to force Ngami from the pilot's seat. And to do this he had compromised by allowing the latter to start the engine. A short run of fifty yards and this young American and Ngami were in the air, mutually thrilled, but separated in restraint and intellect by untold ages.

Ngami was a member of the order of primates, the first step below man in the scale of evolution. So nearly do the higher types of this order approach the lower types of man in intelligence that a theory has been developed that a single missing link separates the two.

As the intellects among individuals vary tremendously from the lowest to the highest, so it is among the apes. By a singular selection in nature Ngami possessed a capacity for learning far beyond that of his order. To look at him he was an ape; but things that Ngami mastered showed the intelligence of man. His ability to mimic was highly developed. Hamilton did a thing, let Ngami see how he did it, and Ngami became competent.

Ngami had come to fly the airplane by successive stages. The bicycle, first, was the most difficult because of the pedaling. But possessed with an innate sense of equilibrium, and a keen judgment of distances, he had easily mastered the motorcycle and the automobile, and so far was none in advance of a few others of his species seen from time to time on the vaudeville stage of the country.

But when his daring master had given him the opportunity to fly, he was in a class by himself. Ngami was taught to operate a machine just as regular pilots are taught, except that he had no instructions in theory. He went ahead and learned to fly by watching Hamilton and by operating a set of dummy levers connected with the steering set controlled by Hamilton until he caught the relation to the motion of the machine.

The principle was the same as in riding a bicycle—if he felt himself falling to the right he twisted the handle-bars and restored his balance. The operation of the simple controls of the Bullet, with no danger of collisions nor complications of traffic nor limits of boundaries, was easier for him than any of his previous feats. But Ngami was never tempted to descend when flying over the bay; he did not like water.

Hamilton reached the "ceiling" and circled about, searching the horizon for the mail plane from Washington. To the east lay the Atlantic Ocean, solemn and challenging. On its glistening surface that curved behind the world, ships, dwarfed to sticks by comparison, plodded. With a catch in his breath, Hamilton surveyed what was now his realm, for his job was to help conquer the ocean. He could never gaze at the ocean without a feeling of awe, but now his spirit leaped within him.

He was not afraid. Power and skill put into ships had conquered it once, and with power and skill in an airplane he would conquer it again. Reluctantly swinging the nose of the plane west, he discovered the mail plane poking in from Washington at about eighty miles an hour. He descended to its level and exchanged the high sign of the air. Ngami mimicked, waving his hairy paw over the fusilage.

In his usual good-natured way the government pilot challenged him for a race by crowding on what additional power his clumsy plane possessed. And Hamilton, following his custom, let the mail plane pull a good way in the lead; then he opened the throttle of the Bullet notch by notch while the needle on the speedometer dial quiveringly rotated until it stood at two hundred, and the mail plane, like a machine going the opposite way, passed backward like a clap of thunder.

Truly, thought Hamilton, there was never a craft so swift as the Gray Bullet.

When he was within sight of the company's field he slackened speed and allowed Ngami to take the joystick. The plane was suddenly caught in a high wind blowing out to sea, but Ngami proved equal to the situation.

Ngami, under Hamilton's supervision, made a landing, but a very rough one.

Then Hamilton saw that Elise had arrived. Not stopping to undo Ngami's belly-strap, he snatched the key from the ignition lock and ran to join his betrothed.

"Oh! I thought you were going to have an accident, you came down so hard," she cried.

"I am teaching a 'fellow' to fly. He hasn't quite got on to the landing yet." Hamilton's eyes twinkled with amusement in anticipation of the moment when he would present the fellow, for Elise did not know of Ngami.

"What fellow? You have not told me of him before," pressed Elise.

Hamilton did not reply at once, for as the two walked arm in arm toward the living-room, he was enraptured by a subtle feminine perfume that surrounded her. "His name is Ngami, an old African friend of mine." Changing the subject, he asked:

"Will you allow me to call up the Naval Observation Bureau? I want to ask about a strange air current I struck this afternoon —a regular gale blowing out east."

She gave him permission, and after a few minutes he returned.

"What was it?" she inquired.

"A ninety-mile gale blowing due east. First time they have registered one like it at that altitude. They cannot account for it. I have to keep posted on all these air currents. That's part of my business," Hamilton said.

"Oh, do tell me about this *business*," pleaded Elise.

"Wait until I get out of these togs," countered Hamilton.

But she would not consent to wait, and Hamilton explained.

"I go to sea and overtake steam-ships and deliver mail despatches that have been left behind. When a steam-ship is delayed from sailing on schedule, the expense is enormous, but heretofore this could not be avoided, because some important despatch or instruction could not be prepared in time. My job is to carry such despatches out to a ship after it has left port, even if it is eighteen hours out."

"And do you go across on the ship after you have overtaken it?" Elise asked, beginning to disapprove at once.

"Me go across!" Hamilton had to stop and laugh. "No, I do not stop, even. I spiral low and drop the mail-sack on deck and come back."

"Why don't they send another boat to overtake the ship?" Elise wanted to know.

"Suppose an ocean greyhound is twelve hours out to sea, which means from one hundred and sixty to two hundred and twenty miles from port—why, the chase would go on for days; the ship would be half-way across before even the fastest boat could overtake it. But in my airplane it is a matter of hours.

"One of the company's boats left for Liverpool to-day at three. An extremely important despatch from Denver will not reach here until midnight. If I start at four in the morning that ship will have thirteen hours' lead—over two hundred and fifty miles. But I will overtake it in less than two hours, and if that wind I struck this afternoon is blowing I will reach it in a little over an hour."

Elise was amazed. "What if something happens away out there in the ocean; what if your gasoline gives out?"

"I can land in water as well as on land. But there is no chance to run out of gasoline. The plane has two special tanks that carry enough gas for fourteen hours of con-

tinuous flight with the engine wide open—that means two hundred miles an hour," Hamilton explained ardently.

"I didn't know they could go so fast," Elise objected.

"No. *They* cannot go that fast. But the Bullet can. I made six hundred miles in a dead calm in three hours flat. The engine was just warming up good. It could have kept up as long as the gas lasted, but I couldn't stand the strain.

"That is an unusual engine. When it was tested on the block with a load it ran fifty-six hours at top speed with no perceptible change in a single bearing. Now may I go and change my clothes?" he finished.

Elise reluctantly consented, and Hamilton went into the next room, which was his own, and prepared to change his clothes. He laid out his flannel suit in an absent-minded way. Elise was waiting for him; Elise—to be his for the rest of her life.

Hamilton had observed that a man's enthusiasm for a girl reaches the highest mark at the engagement, and thereafter gradually recedes as time makes him more familiar. But now he was forced to admit that either the theory was wrong or he was an exception, for Elise grew more lovely and exquisite to him every time he saw her. Every meeting revealed a new charm of her naive personality—a new, mysterious enchantment which is the birthright of some women. It was her innocent confidence in his prowess, the rapt way in which she laid her fingers on his arm and looked at him when he related some experience, her anxiety for the dangers, her delight at his triumphs.

"By Jove!" he ejaculated, striking the palms of his hand with his fist. "By Jove!" And with this he set about changing his clothes with a will, in haste to rejoin her. He had not undone the strap that held his binocular case when he heard a scream from the living-room. With one bound he burst through the door. He did not know what to expect.

In the farther corner of the room shrank Elise. Before her crouched Ngami, staring at her from behind his goggles, and tearing at the thongs that held on his helmet. The marble color of her face was contrasted by her flaming bosom half concealed by her right hand which she had pressed with each distended finger over her heart; the contour of her perfectly molded limbs was visible, for the hem of her thin, white dress had caught on a palm stand and stretched it across her form.

Hamilton spoke sharply to Ngami. The ape, his eyes smouldering behind the goggles, after many backward glances at the girl, sullenly left the room on all-fours.

Hamilton's mother had run in at the sound of Elise's cry. Their combined assurance of safety could not quiet the girl.

"It—it—it came through the window—that horrible monster!"

"Never mind, he's tame. He won't harm you." A pet of mine. Why, you should laugh, Elise. That's Ngami, the chap that made the rough landing with the plane. He wanted to meet you. You can lead him about with a string."

Hamilton was talking on, pell-mell, trying to dispel her fear. But she was not to be assured. The memory of her experience was still uppermost in her mind. "When you went into your room I stood looking out the window, wondering how long it would take you," Elise explained. "Then I saw the top of a leather helmet, tan just like yours, rising slowly above the window-sill. I thought you had gone through the house and had come back to surprise me; so I hid in that corner, then I tiptoed to the window to catch you in my arms and saw those big ears and that hairy cheek. Then a long, hairy arm reached through the window and I screamed. It was terrible! It jumped up here and reached for me with those horrid, long arms!"

Elise finished, burying her face in Hamilton's shoulder.

She was in the grip of hysteria. "I want to go home this minute!" she insisted.

In vain did Hamilton extol Ngami's harmless nature and his past unblemished record.

"Take me home!" Elise repeated.

It came to be a choice between Elise and Ngami. In desperation Hamilton made his choice.

"Don't go, Elise. I will telephone and have the city take poor old Ngami to the New York Zoological Park where he can never frighten you again. I will lock him up in the stone garage until they come for him."

With these promises and the solicitations of his mother, Hamilton persuaded Elise to consent to go up-stairs with his mother and rest.

He led the way into the hall. There, just outside the door, crouched Ngami. Hamilton took him by the collar and attempted to coax him from the hall. But Ngami would not move until the girl, who fortunately did not see him, passed the last bend of the stairway. The ape had stood there, in all appearances fascinated by this woman, his muscular body quivering against Hamilton's leg.

The latter had never seen him in such an untractable mood. Yet he could not make himself afraid of Ngami. He was just a great big muscular fellow who had to be taught patiently. Hamilton bitterly regretted the necessity for his promise to Elise, and hoped when she became quieter, and understood Ngami as he did, that she would permit him to keep the ape.

"Aren't you ashamed to frighten the lady?" he coaxed.

Ngami broke loose and left the house. He refused to obey when called, and when Hamilton pursued him he swung himself into the maple-tree. Sitting sullenly in the crotch of a limb, he stubbornly refused to come down.

A breeze had sprung up and was endangering the Gray Bullet III which stood unanchored on the field. Hamilton hesitated before Ngami, then decided to put the plane away and allow Ngami's mood to wear off before locking him in the garage.

The plane was a good hundred yards from the hangar; Hamilton prepared to run it on its own power. He reinserted the ignition key and was about to start the engine when the garage door blew shut. While he was propping the door open he heard Elise scream. The recent experience had left her nerves on edge. The suddenness of the sound aroused an awful fear in his mind. What had Ngami done? Was it another hysterical outburst resultant from Elise's first fright, or had she seen Ngami again?

His fear was increased when he glanced into the maple on passing and saw that Ngami was not there. Aroused to the seriousness of the situation, he ran into the house. In the hallway he met his mother hurrying up from the kitchen where she had been preparing a hot brandy for the girl. He ran first to his own room and snatched his revolver. When he reached Elise's room on the second floor his mother was already there. She pointed dumbly to the open window. Elise was gone.

Hamilton looked out to see Ngami swing from the last limb to the ground, Elise under his arm. To fire would have endangered the girl. He shouted to Ngami and leaped without a moment's hesitation into the upper limbs of the maple. But the ape did not obey; he ran swiftly across the field toward the airplane, clasping the limp body of the girl close to him.

For all his agility, Hamilton could not descend the tree fast enough. A limb broke and threw him to the ground. When he reached his feet the Gray Bullet III was thundering across the field. Above the cockpit he caught one glimpse of the tan leather crown of Ngami's helmet and over the fusilage a fluttering white garment. The next instant the machine was in the air.

Struck to the heart, Hamilton now realized his mistake.

At first he was paralyzed by the utter hopelessness of the situation. If he pursued Ngami, what could he do if he should overtake him? He could not transfer from one plane to the other while piloting his own machine. There were a thousand to one chances that Ngami, in an effort to escape, would descend and wreck the machine and kill himself and the girl.

Hamilton reasoned that if he first flew to the government field and secured a pilot, he would still have a small chance of getting from a pursuit plane to the Bullet III. A sudden dive by Ngami at the moment of transfer would simply dash him, Hamilton, to death. To transfer in the air

requires great steadiness on the part of both planes. To close in on the machine and shoot the ape would be equally fatal for the girl; the machine would come down out of control.

If left alone, Ngami might come down shortly or might remain aloft until the fuel was exhausted; in either case he would descend with fatal results, for he did not understand that a plane must land on a smooth, uninterrupted surface. He had never made a flight alone before. Hamilton had always been at his side to prompt him and point out the landing.

Outside the landing fields there were few safe places to land. Ngami might land in a tree, or among house-tops, or crash into a street. Darkness would come in a few hours. The more Hamilton reasoned the blacker the situation appeared. He regretted that he had not shot Ngami and taken the risk of hitting the girl; at the most she might only have been wounded, now she was lost.

But these speculations and emotions did not proceed like a single-file pageant through Hamilton's mind; they fell upon it in an instant like an avalanche. The next instant his mind staggered free. Though all efforts might seem futile, to be resigned was unthinkable.

Before the fleeing airplane with Elise and Ngami had reached an altitude of five hundred feet, Hamilton had formulated a brief plan and was running to the hangar for the Gray Bullet IV. He had instructed his mother to notify his friends at the government field where the mail planes were kept, not quite three miles away.

He swung the double doors back and rolled out the IV. It required no attention, for it was adjusted and the fuel tanks filled for the next day's intended flight.

When he had ascended to a height to command the government field, Hamilton looked down through his binoculars. His heart swelled with gratitude. His loyal friends had already turned out, mechanics were wheeling airplanes into position, and pilots were disputing for seats. Trained in esquadrilles in Flanders, a situation requiring nerve and despatch put these men on edge.

They were watching him. Then Hamilton noticed that the landing signal device was flashing a code signal. He leveled the elevators and circled while he spelled it out. "Your wireless—your wireless—" the silent flashes read.

"I must be hard hit not to think of that before," he admitted as he adjusted his head-piece, closed the switch, and experimented with the wave length regulator until he was tuned up with the field.

Immediately he picked up the end of a message—"your plan." He waited, then caught the entire message as it repeated: "What is your plan?"

Hamilton thought desperately for a moment, then sent back his reply—"I have none. Have you?"

"Get above and force the plane to land."

"The ape will wreck it," was Hamilton's reply.

"Force it over the bay," the suggestion came after a time, and Hamilton at once saw the wisdom in this.

If there was any hope at all, it lay in this plan. Once Ngami was over the bay, anywhere that he might land would be comparatively safe. There were no obstructions there, and the Bullet was built to land as easily in water as on land. If the mail planes could half surround the III and head it out over the bay, he would swoop down upon it and force it to land.

He looked to see the direction in which Ngami was heading. The ape held no definite course, and was circling and doubling in the vicinity. Success was more than probable. The mail planes could rise behind Ngami's plane and gradually close in and turn its course toward the sea. Hamilton was certain that Ngami would turn aside to avoid collision. He could be depended upon to remember that from his bicycle days.

But one possibility threatened the success of the plan. If Ngami should by chance open the throttle of the III, all would be lost. The efforts of the mail planes would be like so many bumble-bees attempting to direct the flight of an eagle. At present the III was flying at its first speed range, which equaled the best speed of the mail planes; but if the throttle were

opened wide, this speed would be increased to two hundred miles an hour.

For a time Hamilton could not see what was being done below, for he was busy climbing. His position was at the ceiling. After all, he thought, there was not so much danger of Ngami opening the throttle; he had never been taught to make use of it in flying.

At fifteen thousand feet Hamilton straightened out and studied the situation. At this height he had a horizon of more than a hundred miles. Several thousand feet below him five mail planes hung, lazily buzzing like May-flies. With their blue-and-white circles on the wings they looked from above like great, strange moths suspended in a crystal case by an invisible thread. They had made a V formation, which advanced mouth first toward the sea, with Ngami's plane between the legs of the V.

Ngami's plane was surely being forced out over the bay. It would swing out to the left or to the right, but a plane would bear in upon it until it swung back in line. In the immensity of space the airplanes appeared very listless, very sluggish. Their spectacular potency, so impressive when thundering off the field, was lost in the realm of the sky.

But Hamilton, even in his feverish impatience, knew that in reality each plane was speeding through the air at more than a mile and a quarter a minute; that each time a plane swung into the path of the Bullet III and turned it back toward the sea the pilot took his life in his hands.

But the plan was succeeding. Manhattan Island, like a dull strip of plaid between two satin ribbons, was slowly moving back, while the bright immobile surface of the bay was moving nearer. Hamilton maneuvered over Ngami's plane and began to descend gradually to be ready to swoop down when they were well over the bay.

All was well, but if Ngami should open the throttle—

At this second thought of the possibility Hamilton all but lost his nerve. Ngami's plane was still several thousand feet below him. He adjusted his binoculars. There, beneath him, within sound of his voice, it seemed, almost within reach, was the cockpit of the III in every detail.

One of Ngami's hands grasped the controller-lever and one hairy arm supported the slender waist of Elise. The limp posture of her body told that she had not yet recovered from a swoon. Momentarily forgetting the illusion of distance caused by the powerful glasses at his eyes, Hamilton began to shout, but the roar of the motor drowned the words before they reached his own ears.

They were over the bay now. The only opportunity to rescue his betrothed had arrived. With a steady hand he pushed down the elevators and went into a steep nose dive. The descent was a matter of seconds. The planes swam up to him and then out of his range of vision as he swooped upon the Bullet. It was beneath him, rushing upward, every detail sharp now without the aid of glasses.

Lower and lower he dived, yet Ngami held an unswerving course; he had not seen the plane. Every fraction of a second that Hamilton continued to dive threatened a collision.

Ngami did not look up. With that precision and swiftness of action at the last moment that makes a great combat pilot, Hamilton pulled up the elevators and straightened the plane out, scarcely twenty feet over the Bullet. Then Ngami, probably hearing the motor of the machine above, looked up.

His irrational intelligence asserted itself, but not as Hamilton had planned. Seeing his master upon him, he tried to hide the evidence of his guilt by forcing the body of the girl out of sight under the cowl. In despair Hamilton heard the powerful engine of the Bullet rip out with a sound like the world being split asunder. The throttle had been opened. Probably the girl's hair or garment had caught on it while being stuffed under the cowl. The III fairly leaped out from under Hamilton's plane.

The chance of rescue was lost.

Straight out over the Atlantic headed the III like a comet. It would be a pursuit unto death, Hamilton determined, as he opened the throttle of his own plane. The

IV responded sweetly with its full power. The speedometer registered two hundred miles an hour.

Ngami's course did not tack to port or starboard. Perhaps the monotony on the waste of water offered no attraction to turn from the straight course in which he had been headed. Perhaps the suddenness and violence with which the plane had taken off at the accidental opening of the throttle left him too dazed to change the course; or it may have been the fear of his master behind him, but whatever the reason, he steered an undeviating and direct course in the direction he had been started.

The coast fast receded. Hamilton looked back to see the mail planes, hopelessly outdistanced, turn back. He was alone over the Atlantic pursuing the fleetest craft ever made by man.

So nearly was the speed of the two planes standardized that Hamilton could not gain on Ngami. Making a few adjustments from the dash, Hamilton began grimly his sole task—to keep the machine ahead of him in sight. He must not lose it.

For two hours the planes drove on over the Atlantic with mechanical perfection. It would not be a short chase, Hamilton knew; it might go on for hours. Darkness was closing in with a rush. They were meeting the night rolling from the east. The sea was the color of slate; the white caps atop the wrinkled swells appeared like snowflakes that fall on the pavement, then melt.

Sometimes he was above the clouds thousands of feet below, but never for a moment did he allow his eyes to wander from Ngami's plane. The continued perfect performance of his motor imparted confidence; he could not resign himself to failure. With power and skill, and the finest instruments known to man, it seemed impossible that he should fail.

Recovered from his first shock and despair, he was able to speculate on his chances more deliberately. He had his wireless; it was of no use now; but when the machines descended, as they must in time, he could summon aid. Herein lay the imperative necessity of following Ngami's plane until it fell. If it came down alone it might never be found. To lose sight of it for even a moment in the vastness of coming darkness would mean the end.

While any one of a number of things might force Ngami's plane to land any moment, the odds were that it would continue to fly until the fuel was exhausted. This would take thirteen or fourteen hours. On the other hand, his own plane was subject to the same liabilities; he might be forced to descend and abandon the pursuit.

He reasoned that his success depended on two circumstances. The first was to keep Ngami's machine in sight until it descended; this was in his own hands. The second was that Ngami's machine should fall before his own; this was in the hands of Fate.

If it were a matter of fuel, he could sustain his flight the longer, for his machine had left with a full tank, while the machine Ngami rode was less the fuel consumed in his trial flight in the early afternoon. It was not much, this difference, but success or failure would turn on a hair.

It was now so dark that Hamilton found it all but impossible to discern Ngami's plane. He turned a crank at his side which automatically hoisted a compact but powerful search-light above the fusilage. With a pressure on the switch, a beam of brilliant light pierced the darkness and fell upon the pursued plane.

This was more a cause of work than of triumph; though compact, the search-light caused added wind-resistance, and wind-resistance consumed fuel. This could not be helped. Ngami's plane must be kept in sight at all costs.

Once he saw the lights of a ship, but a ship could be of no assistance so long as the machines were in the air.

After nearly seven hours of flight Hamilton glanced at his instruments and charts to take his bearing. He could not be certain, for he did not dare to take his eyes from the plane ahead of him for more than a moment at a time, but it seemed that he was already close to two thousand miles east by south of New York. He was amazed, and could not account for this enormous distance until he made a test

with the wind-gage, one of the secret patents of the company, and learned that he was flying before a ninety-mile gale.

The machines had been caught in the gale which he had struck while on his afternoon test flight. With the power of the machine plus that of the gale he was making approximately two hundred and ninety miles an hour. How long could it last? Would Elise be killed from exposure? It was unbearable to sit thus within sight of her—at least of the plane that bore her—and be unable to assist.

Shortly after he had taken his reckoning the gale ceased; the speed of the planes was considerably decreased. At first Hamilton thought the engine was fagging and glanced apprehensively at the instrument-board. When he raised his eyes Ngami's plane had disappeared.

It had dropped out of sight, instantaneously, absolutely. A moment before it had hovered before his eyes in the beam of light. Now it was gone. The light ended in a flare like a blow-torch against a wall.

Before the mystery was clear to him, his own plane plunged into obscurity. It was choking, smothering, impenetrable. He could not see the tips of the wings on his own machine, the brightly illuminated dials on the dashboard had only an uncertain phosphorescent glow. The lens of the search-light glowed dull-white like a candle behind a frosted glass.

It was an ocean fog. Where was Ngami, he wondered. His own plane fought on blindly minute after minute. He felt certain that the machines would be separated in this fog. He regretted his former discontent when Fate had privileged him to see the plane that held Elise. Now he had not even that privilege.

As suddenly as the machine had entered the fog bank it came out. It was a great starlit vault over the sea that the plane emerged into; by contrast the visibility was astounding. Sharply Hamilton peered ahead to starboard, then quickly to port and astern—nowhere was the plane that bore Elise to be seen.

To make a search for it was worse than useless. At the speed in which the planes were traveling they could be separated as much as five miles in less than a minute, while in the night he could not hope to make out the machine at a distance of more than five hundred yards.

Yet Hamilton found it impossible to admit defeat. He was assailed by a series of counter propositions. Should he continue straight ahead, should he swing to port, or to starboard, or should he return and search in the fog bank? Perhaps Ngami had not yet emerged from the bank. The best thing to do depended on the direction Ngami had taken when he struck the fog. This he had no way of knowing. Frightened by the sudden change of condition, Ngami might have turned the plane in any direction—might even have gone back, or lost control and fallen into the sea.

With all that hanging in the balance, Hamilton could not make a decision. While he debated he continued to fly ahead in the course he had followed before striking the fog. As there were as many reasons for one as for the other, he continued on this course. Minute after minute passed with no sign of the missing plane. He kept up a relentless search with the light and his night glasses, but he had little hope of success.

Two hours passed. He had given Elise up for lost twice before, but she *was* lost. It was more than possible that the lost plane had fallen down out of control while in the fog bank.

Ahead the sky was glowing with the breaking day. He had flown through the night and was meeting the morning. For miles in every direction the sea was shining in an awful but impressive sight. At Hamilton's altitude the space open to his vision was bewildering.

Gazing disconsolately over this splendor, Hamilton's eyes were arrested by a fleeting glimpse of something that slipped from view under his machine. Swinging aside to get a clean sweep of vision, he studied the space. There, fully four thousand feet below him to the starboard bow, was the Bullet III flying dead ahead.

Nothing could have been more astounding, and nothing more welcome. With an exuberant shout, "Elise," foolish though it was, he plunged into a practically vertical

nose-dive until he reached the level of the III. In the finest spirit he was now content to follow the plane that held Elise to the end of the world. Ngami, he concluded, must have dived while in the fog bank, and when he emerged had been too far away to be seen at night.

Two hours later the end was in sight. Ngami's plane showed signs of faltering. Hamilton looked at the dashboard clock. They had been in the air fourteen hours. They had flown between three thousand and three thousand two hundred miles, according to the odometer, and his former computation before the gale had fallen off. He had gasoline for perhaps a half-hour's flight; Ngami's fuel most likely was exhausted.

Slowly and uncertainly Ngami's plane settled to the water. The moment that Hamilton had more than once thought would never come, was at hand. The strain and fatigue of the long pursuit fell from him as a coat. He was aquiver with excitement as he had never been before. With a long glide he struck the water and came abreast of the III. Now the pursuit was ended, his anxiety was at its highest point. What would he find in the cockpit?

Had Ngami thrown the girl overboard at night to hide the evidence of his guilt? Had she succumbed to the exposure? He was unstrapped, his helmet off; in a moment he would know. If only he could hear her voice.

"Elise, Elise!" he cried, and in spite of the numbness of his limbs, sprang upon the rudder of the III and clambered up the fusilage. At the sound of his voice Ngami raised from the cockpit and confronted him. The hour of reckoning was at hand. In Hamilton's eyes the ape seemed to read that he had done the unforgivable; the thing that could not be forgotten. And when the eyes of his master fell upon Elise, colorless still, Ngami fled to the extreme tip of the port wing.

Hamilton lifted the silent form of his betrothed and pressed his hand upon her bosom to see if the pulse of life still beat. During that moment of waiting he ceased to breathe. All the world he would give if the spark of life was there. Faintly but persistently steady he began to feel the throbbing of her heart. In this moment of joy he could forgive anything.

But as he looked up he saw Ngami stand upright like a man. In his eyes was a look of longing and despair. He had thrown away his only chance; he had staked all and lost the opportunity his tribe and kind had struggled untold ages for; his treachery had forever forfeited friendship. His goggles were again drawn down and he deliberately pressed closer his tan leather helmet, and with a last look jumped into the sea.

Never before was he so near human. Too late, Hamilton divined his intention and shouted reprieve. The green breeches mingled color for a moment with the emerald of the waves and then disappeared forever.

Hamilton cautiously returned to the Gray Bullet IV and once more looked at his charts and instruments. To return to New York was impossible. According to the charts he was already on the Sole Banks off the coast of Wales. Turning the machine once more toward the east, he took the air.

With Elise clasped to his breast he could feel the throbbing of her heart and the rise and fall of her bosom growing stronger every moment. Before him, spattered on the glistening surface of the sea, were Scilly Islands, and beyond them the purple shores of Wales—life, hope, people, earth!

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TO PRISCILLA

I KNOW, since you my dreams are haunting—
So purely fair, so winsome faced—
Though Love the gift of sight is wanting,
He hasn't lost the sense of taste.

Stephen Decatur Smith, Jr.

The Night Horseman

by Max Brand

Author of "Chung," "Trailin'," "Children of the Night," etc.

A Sequel to "The Untamed"

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

AT the solicitation of Kate Cumberland, Dr. Randall Byrne who was himself something of an invalid, had ridden out to her father's ranch where he found Joe Cumberland slowly wasting away.

Buck Daniels, the ranchman in love with Kate, explained to Byrne that the dying man, as well as his daughter, were waiting for the return of a man of mystery, who rode a black charger and was known as Whistling Dan.

The doctor ordered Buck to find Dan and bring him to the ranch. Then the silence of the house was rent by the honk of the wild geese as Byrne heard Buck ride into the night to find Dan.

CHAPTER VII.

JERRY STRANN.

THE wrath of the Lord seems less terrible when it is localized, and the world at large gave thanks daily that the range of Jerry Strann was limited to the Three B's. The Three B's are Bender, Buckskin, and Brownsville; they make the points of a loose triangle that is cut with cañons and tumbled with mountains. This triangle was the chosen stamping ground of Jerry Strann. Jerry was not born in the region of the Three B's and why it should have been chosen specially by him was matter which the inhabitants could not puzzle out; but they felt that for their sins the Lord had probably put his wrath among them in the form of Jerry Strann.

He was only twenty-four, this Jerry, but he was already grown into a proverb. If a storm hung over the mountains someone might remark: "It looks like Jerry Strann is coming," and such a remark was always received in gloomy silence; mothers had been known to hush their children by chanting: "Jerry Strann will get you if you don't watch out." Yet he was not an ogre with a red knife between his teeth. He stood at exactly the perfect romantic height—six feet tall; he was as graceful as a young cottonwood in a windstorm and he was as strong and tough as the roots of the mesquite. He was one of those rare men who are beautiful without being unmanly. His brown hair was thick and dark and every touch of wind stirred it, and his hazel eyes were brilliant with an enduring light—the unextinguishable joy of life.

Consider that there was no malice in Jerry Strann. But he loved strife as the young Apollo loved strife—or a pure-blooded bull terrier. He fought with distinction and grace and abandon and was

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perfectly willing to use fists or knives or guns at the pleasure of the other contracting party. In another age, with armor and a golden chain and spurs, Jerry Strann would have been—but why think of that? Swords are not forty-fives, and the twentieth century is not the thirteenth. He was, in fact, born just six hundred years too late. From his childhood he had thirsted for battle as other children thirst for milk; and now he rode anything on hoofs and threw a knife like a Mexican—with either hand—and at short range he did snap shooting with two revolvers that made rifle experts sick at heart.

However, the men of the Three B's, as everyone understands, are not gentle or long-enduring, and you will wonder why this young destroyer was allowed to range at large so long. There was a vital reason. Up in the mountains lived Mac Strann, the hermit trapper, who hated everything in the wide world except his young brother, the beautiful, wild, and sunny Jerry Strann. And Mac Strann loved his brother as much as he hated everything else; it is impossible to state it more strongly. It was not long before the men of the Three B's discovered how Mac Strann felt about his brother.

After Jerry's famous Hallowe'en party in Buckskin, for instance, Williamson, McKenna, and Rath started out to rid the country of the disturber. They went out to hunt him as men go out to hunt a wild mustang. And they caught him and beat him down—and he lay in bed for a month; but before the month was over Mac Strann came down from his mountain and went to Buckskin and gathered Williamson and McKenna and Rath had left this vale of tears and Mac Strann was back on his mountain. He was not even arrested. For there was a devilish cunning about the fellow and he made his victims, without exception, attack him first; then he destroyed them, suddenly and surely, and retreated to his lair. Things like this happened once or twice and then the men of the Three B's understood that it was not wise to lay plots for Jerry Strann.

Let it not be thought that Jerry Strann was a solitary like his brother. When he went out for a frolic the young men of the community gathered around him, for Jerry paid all scores and the redeye flowed in his path like wine before the coming of Bacchus; where Jerry went there was never a dull moment, and young men love action.

So it happened that when he rode into Brownsville this day he was the leader of a cavalcade. Rumor rode before them, and doors were locked and windows were darkened, and men sat in the darkness within with their guns across their knees. For Brownsville lay at the extreme northern tip of the triangle and it was rarely visited by Jerry; and it is well established that men fear the unfamiliar more than the known.

As has been said, Jerry headed the train of revelers, partially because it was most unwise to cut in ahead of Jerry and partially because there was not a piece of horseflesh in the Three B's which could outfoot his chestnut. It was a gelding out of the loins of the north wind and sired by the devil himself, and its spirit was one with the spirit of Jerry Strann—perhaps, because they both served one master. The cavalcade came with a crash of racing hoofs in a cloud of dust. But in the middle of the street Jerry raised his right arm stiffly overhead with a whoop and brought his chestnut to a sliding stop; the cloud of dust rolled lazily on ahead. The young men gathered quickly around the leader, and there was silence as they waited for him to speak—a silence broken only by the wheezing of the horses, and the stench of sweating horseflesh was in every man's nostrils.

"Who owns that hoss?" asked Jerry Strann, and pointed.

He had stopped just opposite O'Brien's hotel, store, blacksmith shop and saloon, and by the hitching rack was a black stallion. Now, there are some men who carry tidings of their inward strength stamped on their foreheads and written in their eyes. In times of crises crowds will turn to such men and follow them as soldiers follow a captain. It is likewise true that there are horses which stand out among their fellows, and this was such a horse.

There were points in which some critics would find fault; most of the men of the mountain-desert, for instance, would have said that the animal was too lightly and delicately limbed for long endurance; but as the man of men bears the stamp of his greatness in his forehead and his eyes, so it was with the black stallion. When the thunder of the cavalcade had rushed upon him down the street he had turned with catlike grace and raised his head to see; and his forehead and his eyes arrested Jerry Strann like a leveled rifle. Looking at that proud head one forgot the body of the horse, the symmetry of curves exquisite beyond the sculptor's dream, the arching neck and the steel muscles; one was only conscious of the great spirit. In human beings we refer to it as "personality."

After a little pause, seeing that no one offered a suggestion as to the identity of the owner, Strann said, softly: "That hoss is mine."

It caused a stir in the crowd of his followers. In the mountain-desert one may deal lightly with a man's wife and lift a random cow or two and settle the score, at need, with a snug "forty-five" chunk of lead. But with horses it is different. A horse in the mountain-desert lies outside of all laws—and above all laws. It is greater than honor and dearer than love, and when a man's horse is taken from him the men of the desert gather together and hunt the thief whether it be a day or whether it be a month, and when they have reached him they shoot him like a dog and leave his flesh to the buzzards and his bones to the merciless stars.

For all of this there is a reason. But Jerry Strann swung from his mount, tossed the reins over the head of the chestnut, and walked towards the black with hungry eyes. The black whirled with his sudden, catlike agility, and two black hoofs lashed within a hair's breadth of the man's shoulder. There was a shout from the crowd, but Jerry Strann stepped back and smiled so that his teeth showed.

"Boys," he said, but he was really speaking to himself, "there's nothing in the world I want as bad as I want that hoss. Nothing! I'm going to buy him; where's the owner?"

"Don't look like a hoss a man would want to sell, Jerry," came a suggestion from the cavalcade, who had dismounted and now pressed behind their leader.

Jerry favored the speaker with another of his enigmatic smiles. "Oh," he chuckled, "he'll sell, all right! Maybe he's inside. You gents stick out here and watch for him; I'll step inside."

And he strode through the swinging doors of the saloon.

It was a dull time of day for O'Brien, so he sat with his feet on the edge of the bar and sipped a tall glass of beer; he looked up at the welcome click of the doors, however, and then was instantly on his feet. The good red went out of his face and the freckles over his nose stood out like ink marks.

"There's a black hoss outside," said Jerry, "that I'm going to buy. Where's the owner?"

"Have a drink," said the bartender, and he forced an amiable smile.

"I got business on my hands, not drinking," said Jerry Strann.

"Lost your chestnut?" queried O'Brien in concern.

"The chestnut was all right until I seen the black. And now he ain't a hoss at all. Where's the gent I want?"

The bartender had fenced for time as long as possible.

"Over there," he said, and pointed.

It was a slender fellow sitting at a table in a corner of the long room, his sombrero pushed back on his head. He was playing solitaire and his back was toward Jerry Strann, who now made a brief survey, hitched his cartridge belt, and approached the stranger with a grin. The man did not turn; he continued to lay down his cards with monotonous regularity, and while he was doing it he said in the gentlest voice that had ever reached the ear of Jerry Strann: "Better stay where you are, stranger. My dog don't like you."

And Jerry Strann perceived, under the shadow of the table, a blacker shadow, huge and formless in the gloom, and two spots of incandescent green twinkling

toward him. He stopped; he even made a step back; and then he heard a stifled chuckle from the bartender.

If it had not been for that untimely mirth of O'Brien's probably nothing of what followed would have passed into the history of the Three B's.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE GIFT-HORSE.

"YOUR dog is your own dog," remarked Jerry Strann, still to the back of the card-laying stranger, "but this ain't your back-yard. Keep your eye on him, or I'll fix him so he won't need watching!"

So saying he made another step forward, and it brought a snarl from the dog; a deep guttural that sounded like indrawn breath. The gun of Jerry Strann leaped into his hand.

"Bart," said the gentle-voiced stranger, "lie down and don't talk." And he turned in his chair, pulled his hat straight and looked mildly upon the gunman. An artist would have made much of that picture, for there was in this man, as in Strann, a singular portion of beauty. It was not, however, free from objection, for he had not the open manliness of the larger of the two. Indeed, a feminine grace and softness marked him; his wrists were as round as a girl's, and his hands as slender and as delicately finished. Whether it be the white-hot sun of summer or the hurricane snows of winter, the climate of the mountain-desert roughens the skin, and it cuts away spare flesh, hewing out the face in angles; but with this man there were no rough edges, but all was smoothed over and rounded with painful care; as if nature had concentrated in that birth to show what she could do.

He sat watching Strann with the utmost gravity. He had very large brown eyes of a puzzling quality; perhaps that was because there seemed to be no thought behind them and one caught from a glance at him the mystery and the wistfulness of certain animals.

The effect of that glance on Strann was to make him grin again, and he at once banished the frown from his forehead and put away his gun; the big dog had slunk deeper into the shadow and closer to his master.

"I'm Strann. Maybe you've heard of me."

"My name is Barry," said the other. "I'm sorry that I haven't heard of you before."

And the sound of his voice made Jerry Strann grin again; it was such a low, soft voice with the velvet of a young girl's tone in it; moreover, the brown eyes seemed to apologize for the ignorance concerning Strann's name.

"You got a hoss out in front."

A nod of agreement.

"What's your price?"

"None."

"No price? Look here," argued Strann, "everything's got a price, and I got to have that hoss, understand? *Got* to! I ain't bargaining. I won't try to beat you down. You just set a figger and I'll cover it. I guess that's square!"

"He ain't a gentle hoss," said Barry. "Maybe you wouldn't like him."

"Oh, that's all right about being gentle," chuckled Strann. Then he checked his mirth and stared piercingly at the other to make out if there were a secret mockery. It could not, however, be possible. The eyes were as gravely apologetic as ever. He continued: "I seen the hell-fire in him. That's what stopped me like a bullet. I like 'em that way. Much rather have 'em with a fight. Well, let's have your price. Hey, O'Brien, trot out your redeye; I'm going to do some business here!"

O'Brien came hastily with drinks, and while they waited Strann queried politely: "Belong around these parts?"

"No," answered the other softly.

"No? Where you come from?"

"Over there," said Barry, and waved a graceful hand toward half the points of the compass.

"H-m-m!" muttered Strann, and once more he bent a keen gaze upon his companion. The drinks were now placed be-

fore them. "Here," he concluded, "is to the black devil outside!" And he swallowed the liquor at a gulp, but as he replaced the empty glass on the table he observed, with breathless amazement, that the whiskey glass of the stranger was still full; he had drunk his chaser!

"Now, by God!" said Strann in a ringing voice, and struck a heavy hand upon the top of the table. He regained his control, however, instantly. "Now about that price!"

"I don't know what horses are worth," replied Barry.

"To start, then—five hundred bucks in cold cash—gold!—for your—what's his name?"

"Satan."

"Eh?"

"Satan."

"H-m-m!" murmured Strann again. "Five hundred for Satan, then. How about it?"

"If you can ride him," began the stranger.

"Oh, hell," smiled Strann with a large and careless gesture, "I'll *ride* him, all right."

"Then I would let you take him for nothing," concluded Barry.

"You'd—what?" said Strann. Then he rose slowly from his chair and shouted; instantly the swinging doors broke open and a throng of faces appeared at the gap. "Boys, this gent here is going to give me the black—ha, ha, ha!—if I can ride him!" He turned back on Barry. "They've heard it," he concluded, "and this bargain is going to stick just this way. If your hoss can throw me the deal's off. Eh?"

"Oh, yes," nodded the brown-eyed man.

"What's the idea?" asked one of Jerry's followers as the latter stepped through the doors of the saloon onto the street.

"I dunno," said Jerry. "That gent looks kind of simple; but it ain't my fault if he made a rotten bargain. Here, you!"

And he seized the bridle-reins of the black stallion. Speed, lightning speed, was what saved him, for the instant his fingers touched the leather Satan twisted his head and snapped like an angry dog. The teeth clicked beside Strann's shoulder as he leaped back. He laughed savagely.

"That'll be took out of him," he announced, "and damned quick!"

Here the voice of Barry was heard, saying: "I'll help you mount, Mr. Strann." And he edged his way through the little crowd until he stood at the head of the stallion.

"Look out," warned Strann in real alarm, "or he'll take your head off!"

But Barry was already beside his horse, and, with his back towards those vicious teeth, he drew the reins over its head. As for the stallion, it pricked one ear forward and then the other, and muzzled the man's shoulder confidingly. There was a liberal chorus of astonished oaths from the gathering.

"I'll hold his head while you get on," suggested Barry, turning his mild eyes upon Strann again.

"Well," muttered the big man, "may I be eternally damned!" He added: "All right. Hold his head, and I'll ride him without pulling leather. Is that square?"

Barry nodded absently. His slender fingers were patting the velvet nose of the stallion and he was talking to it in an affectionate undertone—meaningless words, perhaps, such as a mother uses to soothe a child. When Strann set his foot in the stirrup and gathered up the reins the black horse cringed and shuddered; it was not a pleasant thing to see; it was like a dog crouching under the suspended whip. It was worse than that; it was almost the horror of a man who shivers at the touch of an unclean animal. There was not a sound from the crowd; and every grin was wiped out. Jerry Strann swung into the saddle lightly.

There he sat, testing the stirrups. They were too short by inches, but he refused to have them lengthened. He poised his quirt and tugged his hat lower over his eyes.

"Turn him loose!" he shouted. "Hei!"

And his shrill yell went down the street and the echoes sent it barking back from wall to wall; Barry stepped back from the head of the black. But for an instant the horse did not stir. He was trembling vio-

lently, but his blazing eyes were fixed upon the face of his owner. Barry raised his hand.

And then it happened. It was like the release of a coiled watch-spring; the black whirled as a top spins and Strann sagged far to the left; before he could recover the stallion was away in a flash, like a racer leaving the barrier and reaching full speed in almost a stride. Not far—hardly the breadth of the street—before he pitched up in a long leap as if to clear a barrier, landed stiff-legged with a sickening jar, whirled again like a spinning top, and darted straight back. And Jerry Strann pulled leather—with might and main—but the short stirrups were against him, and above all the suddenness of the start had taken him off guard for all his readiness. When the stallion dropped stiff-legged Jerry was thrown forward and an unlucky left foot jarred loose from the stirrup; and when the horse whirled Strann was flung from the saddle. It was a clean fall. He twisted over in the air as he fell and landed in deep dust. The black stallion had reached his master and now he turned, in that same catlike manner, and watched with pricking ears as Strann dragged himself up from the dust.

There was no shout of laughter—no cheer for that fall, and without a smile they watched Strann returning. Big O'Brien had seen from his open door and now he laid a hand on the shoulder of one of the men and whispered at his ear: "There's going to be trouble; bad trouble, Billy. Go for Fatty Matthews—he's a deputy marshal now—and get him here as quick as you can. Run!"

The other spared time for a last glance at Strann and then hurried down the street.

Now, a man who can lose and smile is generally considered the most graceful of failures, but the smile of Jerry Strann as he walked slowly back worried his followers.

"We all hit dust some time," he philosophized. "But one try don't prove nothin'. I ain't near through with that hoss!"

Barry turned to Strann. If there had been mockery in his eyes or a smile on his lips as he faced Jerry there would have been a gun play on the spot; but, instead, the brown eyes were as dumbly apologetic as ever.

"We didn't talk about two tries," he observed.

"We talk about it now," said Strann.

There was one man in the crowd a little too old to be dangerous and therefore there was one man who was in a position to speak openly to Strann. It was big O'Brien.

"Jerry, you named your game and made your play and lost. I guess you ain't going to turn up a hard loser. Nobody plays twice for the same pot."

The hazel eye of Strann was grey with anguish of the spirit as he looked from O'Brien to the crowd and from the crowd to Satan, and from Satan to his meek-eyed owner. Nowhere was there a defiant eye or a glint of scorn on which he could wreak his wrath. He stood poised in his anger for the space of a breath; then, in the sharp struggle, his better nature conquered.

"Come on in, all of you," he called. "We'll liquor, and forget this."

CHAPTER IX.

BATTLE LIGHT.

O'BRIEN pressed close to Barry.

"Partner," he said rapidly, "you're clear now—you're clear of more hell than you ever dream. Now climb that hoss of yours and feed him leather till you get clear of Brownsville—and if I was you I'd never come within a day's ride of the Three B's again."

The mild, brown eyes widened.

"I don't like crowds," murmured Barry.

"You're wise, kid," grinned the bartender—"a hell of a lot wiser than you know right now. On your way!"

And he turned to follow the crowd into the saloon. But Jerry Strann stood at the swinging doors, watching, and he saw Barry linger behind.

"Are you coming?" he called.

"I got an engagement," answered the meek voice.

"You got another engagement here," mocked Strann. "Understand?"

The other hesitated for an instant, and then sighed deeply. "I suppose I'll stay," he murmured, and walked into the bar. Jerry Strann was smiling in a way that showed his teeth. As Barry passed he said softly: "I see we ain't going to have no trouble, you and me!" and he moved to clap his strong hand on the shoulder of the smaller man. Oddly enough, the hand missed, for Barry swerved from beneath it as a wolf swerves from the shadow of a falling branch. No perceptible effort—no sudden start of tensed muscles, but a movement so smooth that it was almost unnoticeable. But the hand of Strann fell through thin air.

"You're quick," he said. "If you was *as* quick with your hands as you are with your feet—"

Barry paused and the melancholy brown eyes dwelt on the face of Strann.

"Oh, hell!" snorted the other, and turned on his heel to the bar. "Drink up!" he commanded.

A shout and a snarl from the further end of the room.

"A wolf, by God!" yelled one of the men.

The owner of the animal made his way with unobtrusive swiftness the length of the room and stood between the dog and a man who fingered the butt of his gun nervously.

"He won't hurt you none," murmured that softly assuring voice.

"The hell he won't!" responded the other. "He took a pass at my leg just now and dam' near took it off. Got teeth like the blades of a pocket-knife!"

"You're on a cold trail, Sam," broke in one of the others. "That ain't any wolf. Look at him now!"

The big, shaggy animal had slunk to the feet of his master and with head abased stared furtively up into Barry's face. A gesture served as sufficient command, and he slipped shadow-like into the corner and crouched with his head on his paws and the incandescent green of his eyes glimmering; Barry sat down in a chair near by.

O'Brien was happily spinning bottles and glasses the length of the bar; there was the chiming of glass and the rumble of contented voices.

"Red-eye all 'round," said the loud voice of Jerry Strann, "but there's one out. Who's out? Oh, it's *him*. Hey, O'Brien, lemonade for the lady."

It brought a laugh, a deep, good-natured laugh, and then a chorus of mockery; but Barry stepped unconfused to the bar, accepted the glass of lemonade, and when the others downed their fire-water, he sipped his drink thoughtfully. Outside, the wind had risen, and it shook the hotel and carried a score of faint voices as it whirred around corners and through cracks. Perhaps it was one of those voices which made the big dog lift its head from its paws and whine softly. Surely it was something he heard which caused Barry to straighten at the bar and cant his head slightly to one side—but, as certainly, no one else in the barroom heard it. Barry set down his glass.

"Mr. Strann?" he called.

And the gentle voice carried faintly down through the uproar of the bar.

"Sister wants to speak to you," suggested O'Brien to Strann.

"Well," roared the latter, "what d'you want?"

The others were silent to listen, and they smiled in anticipation.

"If you don't mind, much," said the musical voice, "I think I'll be moving along."

There is an obscure little devil living in all of us. It makes the child break his own toys; it makes the husband strike the helpless wife; it makes the man beat the cringing, whining dog. The greatest of American writers has called it the Imp of the Perverse. And that devil came in Jerry Strann and made his heart small and cold. If he had been by nature the bully and the ruffian there would have been no point in all that followed, but the heart of Jerry Strann was ordinarily as warm as the yellow sunshine itself; and it was a common saying in the Three B's that Jerry Strann would take from a child what he would not endure from a mountain-

lion. Women loved Jerry Strann, and children would crowd about his knees, but this day the small demon was in him.

"You want to be moving along," mimicked the devil in Jerry Strann. "Well, you wait a while. I ain't through with you yet. Maybe—" He paused and searched his mind. "You've given me a fall, and maybe you can give the rest of us—a laugh!"

The chuckle of appreciation went up the bar and down it again.

"I want to ask you," went on the devil in Jerry Strann, "where you got your hoss?"

"He was running wild," came the gentle answer. "So I took a walk one day and brought him in."

A pause.

"Maybe," grinned the big man, "you creased him?"

For it is one of the most difficult things in the world to capture a wild horse, and some hunters, in their desperation at seeing the wonderful animals escape, have tried to "crease" them. That is, they strive to shoot so that the bullet will barely graze the top of the animal's vertebræ, just behind the ears, stunning the horse and making it helpless for the capture. But necessarily such shots are made from a distance, and little short of a miracle is needed to make the bullet strike true—for a fraction of an inch too low means death. So another laugh of appreciation ran around the barroom at the mention of creasing.

"No," answered Barry, "I went out with a halter and after a while Satan got used to me and followed me home."

They waited only long enough to draw deep breath; then came a long yell of delight. But the obscure devil was growing stronger and stronger in Strann. He beat on the bar until he got silence. Then he leaned over to meet the eyes of Barry.

"That," he remarked through his teeth, "is a damned—lie!"

There is only one way of answering that word in the mountain-desert, and Barry did not take it. The melancholy brown eyes widened; he sighed, and raising his glass of lemonade, sipped it slowly. There followed a sick silence in the barroom. Men turned their eyes towards each other and then flashed them away again. It is not good that one who has the eyes and the tongue of a man should take water from another—even from a Jerry Strann. And even Jerry Strann withdrew his eyes slowly from his prey, and shuddered; the sight of the most grisly death is not so horrible as cowardice.

And the devil which was still strong in Strann made him look about for a new target; Barry was removed from all danger by an incredible barrier. He found that new target at once, for his glance reached to the corner of the room and found there the greenish, glimmering eyes of the dog. He smote upon the bar.

"Is this a damned kennel?" he shouted. "Do I got to drink in a barnyard? What's the dog doin' here?"

And he caught up the heavy little whiskey glass and hurled it at the crouching dog. It thudded heavily, but it brought no yelp of pain; instead, a black thunderbolt leaped from the corner and lunged down the room. It was the silence of the attack that made it terrible, and Strann cursed and pulled his gun. He could never have used it. He was a whole half second too late, but before the dog sprang a voice cut in: "Bart!"

It checked the animal in its very leap; it landed on the floor and slid on stiffly extended legs to the feet of Strann.

"Bart!" rang the voice again.

And the beast, flattening to the floor, crawled backwards, inch by inch; it was slavering, and there was a ravening madness in its eyes.

"Look at it!" cried Strann. "By God, it's mad!"

And he raised his gun to draw the bead.

"Wait!" called the same voice which had checked the spring of the dog. Surely it could not have come from the lips of Barry. It held a resonance of chiming metal; it was not loud, but it carried like a brazen bell. "Don't do it, Strann!"

And it came to every man in the barroom that it was unhealthy to stand between the two men at that instant; a sudden path opened from Barry to Strann.

"Bart!" came the command again. "Heel!"

The dog obeyed with a slinking swiftness; Jerry Strann put up his gun and smiled.

"I don't take a start on no man," he announced quite pleasantly. "I don't need to. But—you yaller hearted houn'—get out from between. When I make my draw I'm goin' to kill that damn wolf."

Now, the fighting face of Jerry Strann was well known in the Three B's, and it was something for men to remember until they died in a peaceful bed. Yet there was not a glance, from the bystanders, for Strann. They stood back against the wall, flattening themselves, and they stared, fascinated, at the slender stranger. Not that his face had grown ugly by a sudden metamorphosis. It was more beautiful than ever, for the man was smiling. It was his eyes which held them. Behind the brown a light was growing, a yellow and unearthly glimmer which one felt might be seen on the darkest night.

There was none of the coward in Jerry Strann. He looked full into that yellow, glimmering, changing light—he looked steadily—and a strange feeling swept over him. No, it was not fear. Long experience had taught him that there was not another man in the Three B's, with the exception of his own terrible brother, who could get a gun out of the leather faster than he, but now it seemed to Jerry Strann that he was facing something more than mortal speed and human strength and surety. He could not tell in what the feeling was based. But it sent a train of chilly weakness through his blood.

"It's a habit of mine," said Jerry Strann, "to kill mad dogs when I see 'em."

They stood for another long instant, facing each other. It was plain that every muscle in Strann's body was growing tense; the very smile was frozen on his lips. When he moved, at last, it was a convulsive jerk of his arm, and it was said, afterward, that his gun was all clear of the leather before the calm stranger stirred. No eye followed what happened. Can the eye follow such speed as the clacking lash of a whip?

There was only one report. The forefinger of Strann did not touch his trigger, but the gun slipped down and dangled loosely from his hand. He made a pace forward with his smile grown to an idiotic thing and a patch of red sprang out in the center of his breast. Then he lurched headlong to the floor.

CHAPTER X.

"SWEET ADELINE."

FATTY MATTHEWS came panting through the doors. He was one of those men who have a leisurely build and a purely American desire for action; so that he was always hurrying and always puffing. If he mounted a horse, sweat started out from every pore; if he swallowed a glass of red-eye he breathed hard thereafter. Yet he was capable of great and sustained exertions, as many and many a man in the Three B's could testify.

He was ashamed of his fat. Imagine the soul of a Bald Eagle in the body of a Poland China sow and you begin to have some idea of Fatty Matthews. Fat filled his boots as with water and he made a "squnching" sound when he walked; fat rolled along his jowls; fat made his very forehead flabby; fat almost buried his eyes. But nothing could conceal the hawk-line of his nose or the gleam of those half-buried eyes. His hair was short-cropped, grey, and stood on end like bristles, and he was in the habit of using his panting breath in humming—for that concealed the puffing. So Fatty Matthews came through the doors and his little, concealed eyes darted from face to face. Then he knelt beside Strann.

He was humming as he opened Jerry's shirt; he was humming as he pulled from his bag—for Fatty was almost as much doctor as he was marshal, cowpuncher, miner, and gambler—a roll of cotton and another roll of bandages. The crowd grouped around him, fascinated, and at his directions some of them brought water and others raised and turned the body while the marshal made the bandages;

Jerry Strann was unconscious. Fatty Matthews began to intersperse talk in his humming.

"You was plugged from in front—my beauty—was you?" grunted Fatty, and then running the roll of bandage around the wounded man's chest he hummed a bar of:

Sweet Adeline, my Adeline,
At night, dear heart, for you I pine.

"Was Jerry lookin' the other way when he was potted?" asked Fatty of the bystanders. "O'Brien, you seen it?"

"I didn't see nothin'," said O'Brien, and began to mop his bar, which was already polished beyond belief.

"Well," muttered Fatty Matthews, "all these birds get it. And Jerry was some overdue. Lew, you seen it?"

"Yep."

"Some drunken bum do it?"

Lew leaned to the ear of the kneeling marshal and whispered briefly. Fatty opened his eyes and cursed until his panting forced him to break off and hum.

"Beat him to the draw?" he gasped at length.

"Jerry's gun was clean out before the stranger made a move," asserted Lew.

"It ain't possible," murmured the deputy, and hummed softly:

In all my dreams, your fair face beams.

He added sharply, as he finished the bandaging: "Where'd he head for?"

"No place," answered Lew. "He just now went out the door."

The deputy swore again, but he added, enlightened: "Going to plead self-defense, eh?"

Big O'Brien leaned over the bar.

"Listen, Fatty," he said earnestly. "There ain't no doubt of it. Jerry had his war-paint on. He tried to kill this feller Barry's wolf."

"Wolf?" cut in the deputy marshal.

"Dog, I guess," qualified the bartender. "I dunno. Anyway, Jerry made all the leads; this Barry simply done the finishing. *I* say, don't put this Barry under arrest. You want to keep him here for Mac Strann."

"That's *my* business," growled Fatty.

"Hey, half a dozen of you gents. Hook on to Jerry and take him up to a room. I'll be with you in a minute."

And while his directions were being obeyed he trotted heavily up the length of the barroom and out the swinging doors. Outside, he found only one man, and in the act of mounting a black horse; the deputy marshal made straight for that man until a huge black dog appeared from nowhere blocking his path. It was a silent dog, but its teeth and eyes said enough to stop Fatty in full career.

"Are you Barry?" he asked.

"That's me. Come here, Bart."

The big dog backed to the other side of the horse without shifting his eyes from the marshal. The latter gingerly approached the rider, who sat perfectly at ease in the saddle; most apparently he was in no haste to leave.

"Barry," said the deputy, "don't make no play when I tell you who I am; I don't mean you no harm, but my name's Matthews, and—" He drew back the flap of his vest enough to show the glitter of his badge of office. All the time his little beady eyes watched Barry with bird-like intentness. The rider made not a move. And now Matthews noted more in detail the feminine slenderness of the man and the large, placid eyes. He stepped closer and dropped a confidential hand on the pommel of the saddle.

"Son," he muttered, "I hear you made a clean play inside. Now, I know Strann and his way. He was in wrong. There ain't a doubt of it, and if I held you, you'd get clear on self-defense. So I ain't going to lay a hand on you. You're free—but one thing more. You cut off there—see?—and bear away north from the Three B's. You got a hoss that *is*, and believe me, you'll need him before you're through." He lowered his voice and his eyes bulged with the terror of his tidings: "Feed him the leather; ride to beat hell; never stop while your hoss can raise a trot; and then slide off your hoss and get another. Son, in three days Mac Strann'll be on your trail!"

He stepped back and waved his arms.

"Now, vamose!"

The black stallion flicked back its ears and winced from the outflung hands, but the rider remained unperturbed.

"I never heard of Mac Strann," said Barry.

"You never heard of Mac Strann?" echoed the other.

"But I'd like to meet him," said Barry.

The deputy marshal blinked his eyes rapidly, as though he needed to clear his vision.

"Son," he said hoarsely. "I c'n see you're game. But don't make a fall play. If Mac Strann gets you, he'll California you like a yearling. You won't have no chance. You've done for Jerry, there ain't a doubt of that, but Jerry to Mac is like a tame cat to a mountain lion. Lad, I c'n see you're a stranger to these parts, but ask me your question and I'll tell you the best way to go."

Barry slipped from the saddle.

He said: "I'd like to know the best place to put up my hoss."

The deputy marshal was speechless.

"But I s'posed," went on Barry, "I can stable him over there behind the hotel."

Matthews pushed off his sombrero and rubbed his short fingers through his hair. Anger and amazement still choked him, but he controlled himself by a praiseworthy effort.

"Barry," he said, "I don't make you out. Maybe you figure to wait till Mac Strann gets to town before you leave; maybe you think your hoss can outrun anything on four feet. And maybe it can. But listen to me: Mac Strann ain't fast on a trail, but the point about him is that he never leaves it! You can go through rain and over rocks, but you can't never shake Mac Strann—not once he gets the wind of you."

"Thanks," returned the gentle-voiced stranger. "I guess maybe he'll be worth meeting."

And so saying he turned on his heel and walked calmly toward the big stables behind the hotel and at his heels followed the black dog and the black horse. As for Deputy Marshal Matthews, he moistened his lips to whistle, but when he pursed them not a sound came. He turned at length into the barroom and as he walked his eyes were vacant. He was humming brokenly:

"Sweet Adeline, my Adeline,
At night, dear heart, for you I pine."

Inside, he took firm hold upon the bar with both pudgy hands.

"O'Brien," he said, "red-eye."

He pushed away the small glass which the bartender spun toward him and seized in its place a mighty water tumbler.

"O'Brien," he explained, "I need strength, not encouragement." And filling the glass nearly to the brim he downed the huge potion at a single draught.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BUZZARD.

MOST animals have their human counterparts, and in that room where Jerry Strann had fallen a whimsical observer might have termed Jerry, with his tawny head, the lion, and O'Brien behind the bar, a shaggy bear, and the deputy marshal a wolverine, fat but dangerous, and here stood a man as ugly and hardened as a desert cayuse, and there was Dan Barry, sleek and supple as a panther; but among the rest this whimsical observer must have noticed a fellow of prodigious height and negligible breadth, a structure of sinews and bones that promised to rattle in the wind, a long, narrow head, a nose like a beak, tiny eyes set close together and shining like polished buttons, and a vast Adam's apple that rolled up and down the scraggy throat.

He might have done for the spirit of Famine in an old play; but every dweller of the mountain-desert would have found an apter expression by calling him the buzzard of the scene. Through his prodigious ugliness he was known far and wide as "Haw-Haw" Langley; for on occasion Langley laughed, and his laughter was an indescribable sound that lay somewhere between the braying of a mule and the cawing of a crow. But Haw-Haw Langley was usually silent, and he would sit for

hours without words, twisting his head and making little pecking motions as his eyes fastened on face after face. All the bitterness of the mountain-desert was in him; if his body looked like a buzzard, his soul was the soul of the vulture itself and therefore he had followed the courses of Jerry Strann up and down the range. He stuffed his gorge with the fragments of his leader's food; he fed his soul with the dangers which Jerry Strann met and conquered.

In the barroom Langley had stood turning his sharp little eyes from Jerry Strann to Dan Barry, and from Dan Barry back to Strann; and when the shot was fired something like a grin twisted his thin lips; and when the spot of red glowed on the breast of the staggering man, the eyes of Haw-Haw blazed as if with the reflection of a devouring fire. Afterward he lingered for a few minutes, making no effort to aid the fallen man, but when he had satisfied himself as to the extent of the injury, and when he had noted the froth of bloody bubbles which stained the lips of Strann, he turned and stalked from the room. His eyes were points of light and his soul was crammed to repletion with ill-tidings. At the hitching-rack he stepped into the saddle of a diminutive horse, whirled it into the street with a staggering jerk of the reins, and buried the spurs deep in the cow-pony's flanks. The poor brute snorted and flirted its heels in the air, but Langley wrapped his long legs around the barrel of his mount and goaded it again.

His smile, which began with the crack of Barry's gun in O'Brien's place, did not die out until he was many a mile away, headed far up through the mountains; but as he put peak after peak behind him, and as the white light of the day diminished and puffs of blue shadow drowned the valleys, the grin disappeared from Haw-Haw's face. He became keenly intent on his course until, having reached the very summit of a tall hill, he halted and peered down before him.

It was nearly dusk by this time, and the eyes of an ordinary man could not distinguish a tree from a rock at any great distance; but it seemed that he was gifted with eyes extraordinary—the buzzard at the top of its sky-towering circles does not see the brown carcass far below with more certainty than Haw-Haw sensed his direction. He waited only a few seconds before he rolled the rowel once more along the scored flanks of his mustang and then plunged down the slope at a reckless gallop.

His destination was a hut, or rather a lean-to, that pressed against the side of the mountain, a crazy structure with a single length of stovepipe leaning awry from the roof. And at the door of this house he drew rein and stepped to the ground. The interior of the hut was dark, but he stole with the caution of a wild Indian to the entrance and reconnoitered the interior, probing every shadowy corner with his glittering eyes.

For several long moments he continued this examination, and even when he was satisfied that there was no one in the place he did not enter, but moved back several paces from the door and swept the sides of the mountains with an uneasy eye. He made out, a short distance from the door, a picketed horse which now reared up its head from the miserable scattering of grass on which it fed and stared at the stranger. The animal must have bulked at least twice as large as the mount which had brought Langley to the mountainside. And it was muscled even out of proportion to its bulk. The head was so tremendously broad that it gave an almost square appearance, the neck, short and thick, the forelegs disproportionately small but very sturdy; and the whole animal was built on a slope toward the hind quarters which seemed to equal in massiveness all the rest of the body.

One would have said that the horse was a freak meant by nature for the climbing of hills. And to glance at it no man could suppose that those ponderous limbs might be moved to a gallop. However, he well knew the powers of the ugly beast, and he even made a détour and walked about the horse to view it more closely.

Now he again surveyed the darkening landscape and then turned once more to the house. This time he entered with the boldness of a possessor approaching his hearth. He lighted a match and with this ignited a lantern hanging from the wall to

the right of the door. The furnishings of the dwelling were primitive beyond compare. There was no sign of a chair; a huddle of blankets on the bare boards of the floor made the bed; a saddle hung by one stirrup on one side, and on the other side leaned the skins of bobcats, lynx, and coyotes on their stretching and drying boards. He took down the lantern and examined the pelts. The animals had been skinned with the utmost dexterity. As far as he could see, the hides had not been marred in a single place by slips of the knife, nor were there any blood-stains to attest hurried work, or careless shooting in the first place. The inner surfaces shone with the pure white of old parchment.

But Haw-Haw gave his chief attention to the legs and the heads of the skins, for these were the places where carelessness or stupidity with the knife were sure to show; but the work was perfect in every respect. Until even the critical Haw-Haw Langley was forced to step back and shake his head in admiration. He continued his survey of the room.

In one corner stood a rifle and a shotgun; in another was a pile of provisions—bacon, flour, salt, meal, and little else. Spices and condiments were apparently unknown to this hermit; nor was there even the inevitable coffee, nor any of the molasses or other sweets which the tongue of the desert-mountaineer cannot resist. Flour, meat, and water, it seemed, made up the entire fare of the trapper. For cookery there was an unboarded space in the very center of the floor with a number of rocks grouped around in the hole and blackened with soot. The smoke must rise, therefore, and escape through the small hole in the center of the roof.

The length of stovepipe which showed on the roof must have been simply the inhabitant's idea of giving the last delicate touch of civilization; it was like a tassel to the cap of the Turk.

As Haw-Haw's observations reached this point his sharp ear caught the faint whinney of the big horse outside. He started like one caught in a guilty act, and sprang to the lantern. However, with his hands upon it he thought better of it, and he placed the light against the wall; then he turned to the entrance and looked anxiously up the hillside.

What he saw was a form grotesque beyond belief. It seemed to be some gigantic wild beast which slowly sprawled down the slope walking erect upon its hind feet with its forelegs stretched out horizontal, as if it were warning away all who might behold it. Haw-Haw grew pale, and involuntarily reached for his gun as he first beheld this apparition, but instantly he saw the truth. It was a man who carried a burden down the mountainside. The burden was the carcass of a bear; the man had drawn the forelegs over his shoulders —his jutting elbows making what had seemed the outstretched arms—and above the head of the burden-bearer rose the great head of the bear. As the man came closer the animal's head flopped to one side and a red tongue lolled from its mouth.

Langley moved back step by step through the cabin until his shoulders struck the opposite wall, and at the same time Mac Strann entered the room. He had no ear for his visitor's hail, but cast his burden to the floor. It dropped with a shock that shook the house from the rattling stovepipe to the crackling boards. For a moment Mac Strann regarded his prey. Then he stooped and drew open the great jaws. The mouth within was not so red as the bloody hands of Mac Strann; and the big, white fangs, for some reason, did not seem terrible in comparison with the hunter. Having completed his survey, he turned slowly upon Langley and lowered his eyebrows to stare.

So doing, the light for the first time struck full upon his face. Langley bit his thin lips and his eyes widened.

For the ugliness of Mac Strann was that most terrible species of ugliness—not disfigured features, but a discord which pervaded the man and came from within him —like a sound. Feature by feature his face was not ugly. The mouth was very large, to be sure, and the jaw too heavily square, and the nose needed somewhat greater length and less width for real comeliness. The eyes were truly fine, being very large and black, though when Mac Strann low-

ered his bush of brows his eyes were practically reduced to gleams of light in the consequent shadow. There was a sharp angle in his forehead, the lines of it meeting in the center and shelving up and down. One felt, unpleasantly, that there were heavy muscles overlaying that forehead. One felt that to the touch it would be a pad of flesh, and it gave to Mac Strann, more than any other feature, a peculiar impression of resistless physical power.

In the catalogue of his features, indeed, there was nothing severely objectionable; but out of it came a feeling of *too much strength!* A glance at his body reinsured the first thought. It was not normal. His shirt bulged tightly at the shoulders with muscles. He was not tall—inches shorter than his brother Jerry, for instance—but the bulk of his body was incredible. His torso was a veritable barrel that bulged out both in the chest and the back. And even the tremendous thighs of Mac Strann were perceptibly bowed out by the weight which they had to carry. And there was about his management of his arms a peculiar awkwardness which only the very strongest of men exhibit—as if they were burdened by the weight of their mere dangling hands.

The giant peered for a long moment at Langley, but very soon his glance began to waver. It flashed toward the wall—it came back and rested upon Langley again. He was like a dog, restless under a steady stare. And as Langley noted this a glitter of joy came in his beady eyes.

"You're Jerry's man," said Mac Strann at length.

There was about his voice the same fleshy quality that was in his face; it came literally from his stomach, and it made a peculiar rustling sound such as comes after one has eaten sticky sweet things. People could listen to the voice of Mac Strann and forget that he was speaking words. The articulation ran together confusedly.

"I'm a friend of Jerry's," said the other. "I'm Langley."

The big man stretched out his hand. The hair grew black down to the knuckles; the blood of the bear still streaked it; it was large enough to be an organism with independent life. But when Langley, with some misgiving, trusted his own bony fingers within that grasp, it was only as if something fleshy, soft and bloodless had closed over them. When his hand was released he rubbed it covertly against his trouser leg—to remove dirt—restore the circulation. He did not know why.

"Who's bothering Jerry?" asked Mac Strann. "And where is he?"

He went to the wall without waiting for an answer and took down the saddle. Now the cow-puncher's saddle is a heavy mass of leather and steel, and the saddle of Mac Strann was far larger than the ordinary. Yet he took down the saddle as one might remove a card from a rack. Langley moved toward the door, to give himself a free space for exit.

"Jerry's hurt," he said, and he watched.

There was a ripple of pain on the face of Mac Strann.

"Hoss kicked him—fall on him?" he asked.

"It weren't a hoss."

"Huh? A cow?"

"It weren't no cow. It weren't no animal."

Mac Strann faced full upon Langley. When he spoke it seemed as if it were difficult for him to manage his lips. They lifted an appreciable space before there was any sound.

"What was it?"

"A man."

Langley edged back toward the door.

"What with?"

"A gun."

And Langley saw the danger that was coming even before Mac Strann moved. He gave a shrill yelp of terror and whirled and sprang for the open. But Mac Strann sprang after him and reached. His whole body seemed to stretch like an elastic thing, and his arms grew longer. The hand fastened on the back of Langley, plucked him up, and jammed him against the wall. Haw-Haw crumpled to the floor. He gasped:

"It weren't me, Mac. For God's sake, it weren't me!"

His face was a study. There was abject terror in it, and yet there was also a sort

of grisly joy, and his eyes feasted on the silent agony of Mac Strann.

"Where?" asked Mac Strann.

"Mac," pleaded the vulture who cringed on the floor, "gimme your word you ain't goin' to hold it ag'in' me."

"Tell me," said the other, and he framed the face of the vulture between his large hands. If he pressed the heels of those hands together bones would snap, and Langley knew it. And yet nothing but a wild delight could have set that glitter in his little eyes, just as nothing but a palsy of terror could have set his limbs twitching so.

"Who shot him from behind?" demanded the giant.

"It wasn't from behind," croaked the bearer of ill-tidings. "It was from the front."

"While he wasn't looking?"

"No. He was beat to the draw."

"You're *lyin'* to me," said Mac Strann.

"So help me God!" cried Langley.

"Who done it?"

"A little feller. He ain't half as big as me. He's got a voice like Kitty Jackson, the schoolmarm; and he's got eyes like a starved pup. It was him that done it."

The eyes of Mac Strann grew vaguely meditative.

"Nope," he mused, in answer to his own thoughts, "I won't use no rope. I'll use my hands. Where'd the bullet land?"

A fresh agony of trembling shook Langley, and a fresh sparkle came in his glance.

"Betwixt his ribs, Mac. And right on through. And it come out his back!"

But there was not an answering tremor in Mac Strann. He let his hands fall away from the face of the vulture, and he caught up the saddle. Langley straightened himself. He peered anxiously at Strann, as if he feared to miss something.

"I dunno whether he's livin' right now, or not," suggested Haw-Haw.

But Mac Strann was already striding through the door.

Sweat was pouring from the lather-flecked bodies of their horses when they drew rein at last at the goal of their long, fierce ride; and Haw-Haw slunk behind the broad form of Mac Strann when the latter strode into the hotel. Then the two started for the room in which, they were told, lay Jerry Strann.

"There it is," whispered Haw-Haw, as they reached the head of the stairs. "The door's open. If he was dead the door would be closed, most like."

They stood in the hall and looked in upon a strange picture, for flat in the bed lay Jerry Strann, his face very white and oddly thin, and over him leaned the man who had shot him down.

They heard Dan Barry's soft voice query: "How you feelin' now, partner?"

He leaned close beside the other, his fingers upon the wrist of Jerry.

"A pile better," muttered Jerry Strann, "Seems like I got more'n a fightin' chance to pull through now."

"Jest you keep lyin' here quiet," advised Dan Barry, "and don't stir around none. Don't start no worryin'. You're goin' to live 's long as you don't lose no more blood. Keep your thoughts quiet. They ain't no cause for you to do nothin' but jest keep your eyes closed, and breathe, and think of yaller sunshine, and green grass in the spring, and the wind lazyin' the clouds along across the sky. That's all you got to do. Jest keep quiet, partner."

"It's easy to do it now you're with me. Seems like they's a pile of strength runnin' into me from the tips of your fingers, my frien'. And—I was *some* fool to start that fight with you, Barry."

"Jest forget all that," murmured the other. "And keep your voice down. I've forgot it; you forget it. It ain't never happened."

"What's it mean?" frowned Mac Strann, whispering to Haw-Haw.

The eyes of the latter glittered like beads.

"That's him that shot Jerry," said Haw-Haw. "Him!"

"Hell!" snarled Mac Strann, and went through the door.

At the first sound of his heavy footfall, the head of Barry raised and turned in a light, swift movement. The next instant he was on his feet. A moment before his face had been as gentle as that of a mother lean-

ing over a sick child; but one glimpse of the threat in the contorted brows of Mac Strann set a gleam in his own eyes, an answer as distinct as the click of metal against metal. Not a word had been said, but Jerry, who had lain with his eyes closed, seemed to sense a change in the atmosphere of peace which had enwrapped him the moment before. His eyes flashed open, and he saw his burly brother.

But Mac Strann had no eye for any one save Dan Barry.

"Are you the creepin', sneakin' snake that done—this?"

"You got me figured right," answered Dan coldly.

"Then, by God—" began the roaring voice of Mac; but Jerry Strann stirred wildly on the bed.

"Mac!" he called. "Mac!" His voice went suddenly horribly thick, a bubbling, liquid sound. "For God's sake, Mac!"

He had reared himself up on one elbow, his arm stretched out to his brother. And a foam of crimson stood on his lips.

"Mac, don't pull no gun! It was me that was in wrong!"

And then he fell back in the bed, and into the arms of Mac, who was beside him, moaning: "Buck up, Jerry. Talk to me, boy!"

"Mac, you've finished the job," came the husky whisper.

Mac Strann raised his head, and his terrible eyes fixed upon Dan Barry. And there was no pity in the face of the other. The first threat had wiped every vestige of human tenderness out of his eyes, and now, with something like a sneer on his lips, and with a glimmer of yellow light in his eyes, he was backing toward the door, and noiselessly as a shadow he slipped out and was gone.

CHAPTER XII.

FINESSE.

"A MAN talks because he's drunk or lonesome; a girl talks because that's her way of takin' exercise." This was a maxim of Buck Daniels, and Buck Daniels knew a great deal about women, as many a schoolmarm and many a rancher's daughter of the mountain-desert could testify.

Also, Buck Daniels said of women: "It ain't what you say to 'em so much as the tune you put it to."

Now he sat this day in O'Brien's hotel dining-room. It was the lazy and idle hour between three and four in the afternoon, and since the men of the mountain-desert eat promptly at six, twelve, and six, there was not a soul in the room when he entered. Nor was there a hint of eating utensils on the tables. Nevertheless, Buck Daniels was not dismayed. He selected a corner table by instinct and smote upon the surface with a flat of his hand. It made a report like the spat of a forty-five; heavy footsteps approached, a door flung open, and a cross-eyed slattern stood in the opening. At the sight of Buck Daniels sitting with his hands on his hips and his sombrero pushed back to a good-natured distance on his head the lady puffed with rage.

"What in hell d'you think this is?" bellowed the gentle creature, and the tone echoed heavily back from all four walls. "You're three hours late, and you get no chuck here. On your way, stranger!"

Buck Daniels elevated himself slowly from the chair and stood at his full height. With a motion fully as deliberate he removed his sombrero and bowed to such a depth that the brim of the hat brushed the floor.

"Lady," he said humbly, "I was thinkin' that some gent run this here eatin' place. Which if you'll excuse me half a minute I'll ramble outside and sluice off some of the dust. If I'd known you was here I wouldn't of thought of comin' in here like this."

The lady with the defective eyes glared fiercely at him. Her judgment wavered two ways. Her first inclination was to hold that the fellow was jibbering at her covertly, and she followed her original impulse far enough to clasp a neighboring sugar-bowl in a large, capable hand. A second and more merciful thought entered her brain and stole slowly through it, like a faint echo in a great cave.

"You don't have to make yourself pret-

ty to talk to me," she said. "But if you're here for chow, you're too late."

"Ma'am," said Buck Daniels instantly, "when I come in here I was hungry enough to eat nails; but I'll forget about chuck if you'll sit down an' chin with me a while."

The large hand of the cross-eyed lady stole out once more and rested upon the sugar-bowl.

"D'you mind sayin' that over agin?" she queried.

"Lonesomeness is worse 'n hunger," said Buck Daniels, and he met her gaze steadily with his black eyes.

The hand released the sugar-bowl once more; something resembling color stole into the brown cheeks of the maiden.

She said, relentingly: "Maybe you been off by yourse'f, mining, stranger?"

Buck Daniels drew a long breath.

"Mines?" he said, and then laughed bitterly. "If that was all I been doin'—" he began darkly, and then stopped.

The waitress started.

"Maybe this here is my last chance to get chuck for days an' days. Well, let it go. If I stayed here with you I'd be talkin' too much."

He turned slowly toward the door. His step was very slow indeed.

"Wait a minute," called the maiden. "There ain't any call for that play. If you're in wrong somewhere—well, stranger, just take that chair and I'll have some ham and in front of you inside of a minute."

She had slammed through the door before Buck turned, and he sat down, smiling to himself. Half of a mirror decorated the wall beside his table, and into this Buck peered. His black locks were sadly disarrayed, and he combed them into some semblance of order with his fingers. He had hardly finished this task when the door was kicked open with such force that it whacked against the wall, and the waitress appeared with an armful of steaming food. Yearning seized upon Buck Daniels, but policy was stronger than hunger in his subtle mind. He rose again; he drew forth the chair opposite his own.

"Ma'am," said Buck Daniels, "ain't you going to favor me by sittin' down?"

The lady blinked her unfocused eyes.

"Ain't I what?" she was finally able to ask.

"I know," said Buck Daniels swiftly, "that you're terrible busy; which you ain't got time to waste on a stranger like me."

She turned upon Buck those uncertain and wistful eyes. It was a generous face. Mouth, cheekbones, and jaw were of vast proportions, while the forehead, eyes, and nose were as remarkably diminutive. Her glance lowered to the floor; she shrugged her wide shoulders and began to wipe the vestiges of dish-water from her freckled hands.

"You men are terribly foolish," she said. "There ain't no tellin' what you mean by what you say."

And she sank slowly into the chair. It gave voice in sharp protest at her weight. Buck Daniels retreated to the opposite side of the table and took his place.

"Ma'am," he began, "don't I look honest?" So saying, he slid half a dozen eggs and a section of bacon from the platter to his plate.

"I dunno," said the maiden, with one eye upon him and the other plunging into the future. "There ain't no trusting men. Take 'em by the lot and they're awful forgetful."

"If you knowed me better," said Buck sadly, disposing of a slab of bread spread thick with pale butter and following this with a pile of fried potatoes astutely balanced on his knife. "If you knowed me better, ma'am, you wouldn't have no suspicions."

"What might it be that you been doin'?" asked the girl.

Buck Daniels paused in his attack on the food and stared at her.

He quoted deftly from a magazine which had once fallen in his way: "'Some day, maybe, I can tell you. There's something about your eyes that tells me you'd understand.'"

At the mention of her eyes the waitress blinked and stiffened in her chair, while a huge, red fist balled itself in readiness for action. But the expression of Buck Daniels was as blandly open as the smile of infancy. The lady relaxed and a blush tinged even her nose with color.

"It ain't after my nature to be askin' questions," she announced. "You don't have to tell me no more 'n you want to."

"Thanks," said Buck instantly. "I knew you was that kind. It ain't hard," he went on smoothly, "to tell a lady when you see one. I can tell you this much to start with. I'm lookin' for a quiet town where I can settle down permanent. And as far as I can see, Brownsville looks sort of quiet to me."

So saying, he disposed of the rest of his food by an act akin to legerdemain, and then fastened a keen eye upon the lady.

"Take it by and large," she said at length, "Brownsville is as peaceable as most; but just now, stranger, it's all set for a big bust." She turned heavily in her chair and glanced about the room. Then she faced Daniels once more and cupped her hands about her mouth. "Stranger," she said in a stage whisper, "Mac Strann is in town!"

The eyes of Buck Daniels wandered.

"Don't you know him?" she asked.

"Nope."

"Never heard of him?"

"Nope."

"Well," sighed the waitress, "you've had *some* luck in your life. Take a cross between a bulldog and a mustang and a mountain-lion—that's Mac Strann. He's in town, and he's here for killin'."

"You don't say, ma'am. And why don't they lock him up?"

"Because he ain't done nothin' yet to be locked up about. That's the way with him. And when he does a thing he always makes the man he's after pull his gun first. Smart? I'll say he's just like an Indian, that Mac Strann."

"But who's he after?"

"The feller that plugged his brother, Jerry."

"Kind of looks like he had reason for a killing, then."

"Nope. Jerry had it comin' to him. He was always raising trouble, Jerry was. And this time, he pulled his gun first. Everybody seen him."

"He run into a gunman?"

"Gunman?" The woman laughed heartily. "Partner, if it wasn't for something funny about his eyes, I wouldn't be no more afraid of that gunman than I am of a tabby cat. And me a weak woman. The quietest-lookin' sort that ever come to Brownsville. But there's something queer about him. He knows that Mac Strann is here in town. He knows that Mac Strann is waiting for Jerry to die. He knows that when Jerry dies Mac will be out for a killin'. And this here stranger is just sittin' around and waitin' to be killed! Can you beat that?"

But Buck Daniels had grown strangely excited.

"What did you say there was about his eyes?" he asked sharply.

She grew suddenly suspicious.

"D'you know him?"

"No. But you was talkin' about his eyes?"

"I dunno what it is. I ain't the only one that seen it. There ain't no word you can put to it. It's just there. That's all."

The voice of Buck Daniels fell to a whisper.

"It's sort of fire," he suggested. "Ain't it a kind of light *behind* his eyes?"

But the waitress stared at him in amazement.

"Fire?" she gasped. "A light *behind* his eyes? M' frien', are you tryin' to string me?"

"What's his name?"

"I dunno."

"Ma'am," said Daniels, rising hastily, "here's a dollar if you'll take me to him."

"You don't need no guide," she replied. "Listen to that, will you?"

And as he harkened obediently Buck Daniels heard a strain of whistling, needle sharp with distance.

"That's him," nodded the woman. "He's always goin' about whistling to himself. Kind of a nut, he is."

"It's him!" cried Buck Daniels. "It's him!"

And with this ungrammatical burst of joy he bolted from the room.

This story will be continued in next week's issue of the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY, the consolidated title under which both magazines will appear hereafter as one.

Father Comes First

by Olin Lyman

ZEBULON FALLON, after a resounding cold bath, cavorted within his bedroom. He shadow-boxed; he bent, rolled, shifted; he performed after the fashion of all youngsters working to keep fit.

A placid feminine voice floated up the staircase.

"Oh, pa!"

"Yes, ma!"

"Breakfast! Leave that monkey business and get dressed!"

"The last floor exercise, ma—*whoof!*—Got to keep the—*whoof!*—old belly down, ma! *Whoof!*"

Maria Fallon smiled indulgently as she turned back toward the kitchen to ask the cook to hold off a little with the breakfast.

Bless pa's heart, let him perform in his old age, if he thought it did him any good!

As Zebulon took his seat in the oak-paneled dining-room, he looked anywhere but in his "old age." Nor did Mrs. Fallon, with her soft brown hair, deep blue eyes, and smooth pink cheeks, look her forty-seven years.

Zeb consulted his grapefruit with zest born of his cold bath and matutinal exercise. Mrs. Fallon's appetite was equally keen, though she took *warm* baths at night and did not exercise at all, according to her husband's idea. Zebulon, like the usual zealot, could not understand why ways so unlike his own should lead to equal health.

"Please hand me the morning paper, ma," asked Fallon, seasoning his eggs. Eagerly he glanced at the front page.

His wife's smile assumed a maternal quality as her "elder boy's" glance fell upon the black head-line of the Pleasanton *Morning Herald's* leading local story:

LEM FALLON HOME TO-DAY.

Sensational "Find" of National League to Spend Winter in Old Home Town.

Bush Leaguer, "To Fortune and to Fame Unknown," Jumps Into Limelight in Single Season. "Runner-up" in League Batting and is Second Tyrus Cobb on Bases—Former High-School Boy Arrives for Visit With Parents.

While Zeb read the column and a half under the head-line, Mrs. Zeb watched him poring over the paper laid flat upon his plate. She gazed at him with prideful proprietorship.

His cheeks were smooth and pink, the thick chestnut hair just touched with gray, the hazel eyes sparkling. He was natty, trim-waisted, alert, in his neat gray business suit.

Again she decided that she had the best-looking husband in hill-girt Tomkins County, and the youngest for his fifty years.

Twenty-seven years of marriage had made that clean-shaven, bold-featured face an open book to her. His gaze lingered over the account, the sparkle in his eyes had died.

Something was wrong.

"Why aren't you eating, pa?" she asked suddenly. "Your toast will be cold. Aren't you well?"

He flashed her a quick glance, furtively shoving aside the paper. He spoke with forced cheerfulness: "Well, ma? I was never better. I must finish breakfast and get to the store."

Soon he blew her a kiss and rose. "By-by, ma. You'll be at the station at three, in the car, for Lem, and I'll see you both there. I'll get a bite of lunch down-town; it will be a busy day."

When he had gone Maria read the account, which she had previously merely glanced over, more carefully. She knew Zebulon better than did Zeb himself. She found the "joker." It was a certain omission in the account that had disturbed him. There swept a memory of years when her husband had been in the athletic lime-light of the county.

"Probably some young man, like Lemuel, wrote the story," she mused. "And he didn't know, or forgot. Poor pa!".

Meanwhile Zebulon was striding down-town toward his hardware store. His classic Roman nose was a little out of joint.

"Young Higbee wrote that account," ran his thoughts. "Fine for Lem. But why couldn't Higbee remember I used to be something myself? Not a word in the headline, and down at the bottom of the story just a line: 'He is the son of Zebulon Fallon, the well-known hardware man.' Well-known ash-can! Not a word about my sweeping the county in athletics before Lem was born and for some years afterward! Nothing to indicate how Lem came by it! Yow! I must be getting ancient! Don't I count for anything but the father of a son?"

That balmy Indian-summer evening the three Fallons sat in the veranda of their picturesque home in Elm Street. Mrs. Fallon, in a rocker, listened to her two men, sprawled in easy chairs. The porch light shone directly over Lemuel Fallon. He was singularly like his dad. Maria was thinking that Zeb did not look old enough to be Lem's father.

The thick chestnut fell, that his son's thatch resembled, was lightly sprinkled with gray. "Young Chestnut" was his old sporting nickname. Nor was he yet a very old chestnut! Time had sharpened his features a little, but now he seemed as spontaneously young as his boy.

Lem was telling of how he had been called from the Pacific Coast League, early in its spring season, to join the Panthers.

"I remembered, during those three years away from home, of asking you if I could leave the store and accept that bush offer in Illinois. You said: 'Lem, I don't want you to be a bum ball-player.' And I thought the crape was tied to my ambish. Then you added: 'But if you think you can make a *good* one, go to it!' Remember?"

"Yeah," assented father. "So have you!"

"I hope so," gravely agreed son. "Well, in that game, I didn't know that Dorgan, the old Panther scout, was in the stand. Neither did anybody else. That's the way he has, of creeping around unseen. So I wasn't thinking of anything in that game but just fighting. I didn't know of any future glory. The team had tail-ended since the first of the season.

"The papers claimed my fielding and hitting won the game. Maybe; luck was with me. Point is, nothing much depended: start of the season, and teams hardly warmed up. Just all in a day's work. I learned afterward old Dorgan gumshoes around, looking for just that: pep for its own sake. He slipped away as still as he came. Next I knew, the Panthers had bought me outright, tried me out, and here I am."

"Yes," ratified father, "and a darned good job!"

Lem slapped father's knee. "I lay it all to you! There was never a better grounded athlete than you were, and you passed it all to me."

He stared, surprised. His father's smile had become a scowl.

"'Were'?" he echoed in an aggrieved tone. "Why the past tense, Lemmie? Sounds like I ought to be buried eventually! Why not now?"

Lemuel caught a warning gleam in his

mother's eye. It heliographed to him to remove from his father's mind the impression that he regarded him as a relic. That idea had been in father's mind; not in son's.

"Why, dad," he soothed, "you haven't changed any. I was just thinking back when I was a kid, and you taught me. See?"

Zebulon, realizing his hastiness, flushed boyishly. He grinned an abashed grin. He turned the talk elsewhere.

Soon the elder Fallon retired. Lemuel sat smoking. His thoughtful gaze swept the moonlit hills. The governor was unexpectedly sensitive about tenses, he reflected.

It was three years since he and his father had met. The youth had become a young man. As a young man he thought now, soberly, looking ahead. His eyes were upon the moonlit hills. His thought was of another hill—that of life, with its westering slope. And—

The thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts.

The following day, Tuesday, saw continuance of unusual din in the little city. Temporary arches were in building, merchants and citizens were busy with decorations. For the following week Pleasanton was to have a real "function." A "harvest festival" or "street fair" was to be combined with an "old home week." There would be many visitors.

Zebulon Fallon's nose was even more out of joint that day. Before breakfast he slyly looked over the *Morning Herald*. There was another long story about Lem, but not a word about his father, who was just twice his age and also had a stirring local athletic record of his own.

So Zebulon went to business feeling piqued. He knew well enough that Oliver Higbee, the *Morning Herald's* sporting editor, and former chum of Lemuel, had typed that first "welcome home" story and its successor. Well, why hadn't the freckled cub recalled the athletic traditions of Tomkins County? Why hadn't he written down Lemuel as the son of a noted athlete of former days? Instead of that—"the well-known hardware dealer!"

Why hadn't he remembered that a proved effect presupposes a cause?

Zeb saw crowds of small boys worshipfully tagging his son that day. He saw many persons greet Lem enthusiastically. Many folk, too, stopped in the store to congratulate him upon having fathered Lemuel.

But nobody remembered that he had been "some hound" himself in athletics! Nobody recalled that Lem was a chip of the old block! It was enough to make a veteran, who still felt wholly young, feel forlorn!

That afternoon he stood in the doorway of his store. Along came Lem with Higbee. The reporter's snub nose was twitching with excitement.

"Oh! Mr. Fallon, it's good to see Lem around Pleasanton, huh? I've been telling him he ought to go in for those sports the last day of the powwow next week, at the fair-ground. They're open to every one, you know, amateur or profesh. I tell Lem it 'd be a big card; I want to run a story the day before that he'll do it, and speculate on his chances of sweeping the field. Great dope! But he's too darned modest; he's holding off. Tell him to get off that stuff, Mr. Fallon."

Zebulon's look shifted from the young man who remembered him only as a present-day hardware dealer. It sought Lemuel's face inquiringly. The father's eyes kindled.

"Oh," protested Lem good-naturedly, "I feel stale after the season, and I don't want to butt into the lime-light—"

"Forget it!" urged his father, slapping him upon the shoulder. "It's only for the fun of it, for little prizes of merchandise. Get in! You'll have the time of your young life, and we'll all be there to see!"

As he spoke Lemuel had watched him with eyes, in this odd moment of life's mysterious alchemy, that reverted to days of boyhood—when they had questioned his father's face, awaiting his decision in some juvenile matter.

"Oh, all right, dad," he acquiesced. "Run your story when you get to it, Ollie. I'll do just a little work, to keep limbered up."

"Fine!" beamed Higbee, and the two young men walked on.

Zebulon stood and stared after them.

It was that night that a vague idea, born while he had talked with them, assumed concrete shape. He was walking home at the moment from some overtime in his office. He stopped short for an instant, his eyes narrowed as he debated, "Why not?" Grinning broadly, he decided affirmatively and walked on.

"Anyway, it won't hurt me any," he reflected. "And I'm a bit stale. This indoor stuff isn't enough. I need a little waking up. And maybe—perhaps—"

Thereafter, while Pleasanton made the most of its young lion for the few hectic days preceding the street fair, the old lion ceased to worry that the town and county had forgotten his former gambols.

Business cares appeared to require his attention every night at his office. The window shade was drawn, as was his custom, and an electric light burned behind it. But, had anybody troubled to observe, he would have noticed that the shadow of a human figure appeared from behind that shade only once each night. That was when Zeb Fallon turned off the light a little before midnight, before going home. For the office was being employed merely as a dressing-room!

Every night Zeb disappeared within it, to emerge shortly through the rear door of the store clad in nondescript cap, gray sweater, old trousers, and running shoes. Through alleys and dim byways he sneaked—for that is the word—till he gained the river road, frequented hardly at all since the new automobile highway was opened.

Then, for a couple of hours by the lonely stream which murmured placid astonishment, loped and trotted Old Chestnut in revival of the workouts of younger days.

Came Saturday afternoon of Pleasanton's gala week. The booths, bandstand, and blare of the city's business streets had given place to the flying-machine exhibition and the track-and-field sports at the fair-ground. The grand stand was crowded; motor-cars and a few carriages lined the rails; popcorn and lemonade vendors cried their wares. The sun, westering in a clear sky, illumined the brown grass, interspersed with patches still green, within the inner rail hedging the half-mile track, and shone upon the orange-and-crimson crowns of the elms at the end of the enclosure.

The attention of the crowd was riveted upon a half-dozen men upon the track, before the judge's stand. They were awaiting the final event, the half-mile run.

This was to close a varied program that had included, besides the farcical features of potato races and the like for public amusement, many serious events. A number of the best young athletes in the county, and some veterans, had competed.

Mrs. Fallon, seated in a box at the front of the grand stand, had proudly watched her son win each of the five events he had entered. The high and broad jumps, the pole vault, the quarter-mile run, and the hundred yard dash had been won by Lemuel. The first three he had won as he pleased, but the quarter-mile run and the dash had been closely fought to the finish.

Young Oliver Higbee had been narrowly watching Lemuel, who was the hero of the hour. The snub-nosed sporting editor of *The Herald,* whose pencil had been busily filling a notebook for the big story of Monday morning, was troubled. He had drawn Lem aside, at the starting line, and was speaking anxiously in a low tone:

"Say, Lem, you and I had merry war in the old days, and I know you pretty well. I guess you *did* go stale in the let-down after the baseball season, eh?"

"Oh!" returned Fallon, in a tone equally cautious, "you're on, are you?"

"How could I help it? I know you pretty well. If you weren't pretty nearly all in, after the jumps and pole vault, you'd have left the others standing still in the quarter and the dash. They're not in your class, ordinarily. But you just managed to inch in ahead, each time, and you were blowing pretty hard."

"Well," returned the hero doggedly, "you *would* have it. There's just one more event, and I've just got to do the best I can."

"If you can just hold your wind you're all right," assured Ollie, glancing over the field. Dygert, that towhead from Orlean, will be the hardest nut for you to crack. Tag him to the stretch, he'll lead to there, but he quits with a sharp challenge.

"I wanted to feature you for a clean slate, and I'm hoping to yet. But I guess you took on too many events, old pal. Wish this was another dash. You were always better on them than in the distance events. Wonder where's that late entry they're waiting for?

"What's the crowd yelling about? Lot of old timers romping this way. Must be the late entry." He peered sharply at a group of "yester-years" approaching the fence, with excited yells. The gate opened.

Higbee's eyes dilated. He clutched Lemuel's arm.

"Great Scott, Lem, here comes your father—"

A great roar from the crowd drowned his further words. The stand and the abutting vehicles were peppered with "old-timers," folk who remembered "Young Chestnut" Fallon, who had grown old only in years.

Mrs. Fallon gasped and leaned forward in her chair as she recognized the alert, well-knit figure, in his old-time running suit and low shoes, striding toward the line, where her son, even more scantily attired, stiffened and stared in evident astonishment.

She laughed, amid the uproar, in nervous divining, as she suddenly realized the real reason for her husband's absence from home these recent evenings. She remembered his habit of years before, his solitary workouts, of moonlit nights, along the river road, in preparation for some running event. She visioned what had been occupying his mind lately, and why he had left the box a half hour previously, after rejoicing with her over their son's prowess.

She knew what had prompted him to this course. The sure maternal instinct, with which women probe the souls of their husbands as of their sons, told her as certainly as if Zebulon's intent had been put in words days before. His fleeting look of chagrin, when he had looked in vain through *The Herald's* columns for some reference to his own athletic record in the first story dealing with his son's, revealed to her now why he was here.

It was to demonstrate to son's admirers that father was still alive!

Her pulses leaped as about her welled sounds; good-natured laughter, excited comments, bits of reminiscence. Public memory had leaped suddenly alive, recalling a Fallon of former days.

"Family fight, eh?"—"Kid's got to go some; old man's good yet, I guess, huh?"—"Half-mile run used to be his long suit; strong in the finish"—"I remember when he—"

The clamor dwindled, died; there was a hush as the runners lined up. Dygert, the towhead against whom Higbee had warned Lemuel, was on the inside. Next him was Lemuel. Zebulon Fallon, the seventh entry, was the outside man. He and Lem looked singularly alike.

The starter's pistol cracked; they were off. From the throng broke wild yells. They were subtly conscious of a dramatic essence in the air.

It was the spectacle of age, defying youth, that thrilled them. The only trained athletes among the seven were the Fallons, for Dygert could hardly qualify in that class. He had everything—but nerve.

But Zeb Fallon, who was trying another romp at his old-time favorite distance, was older by eleven years than his nearest "runner-up" in that mixed company.

The half-mile run is an event to test the muscles and nerves of a man—and his soul. His fibers must stretch without breaking; his will, even while bending, must not snap: deep within him must close and hold a bulldog grip, whether he wins or merely finishes with honor.

From the beginning it was evident to the crowd that victory in that race lay between three men: Dygert—and the two Fallons.

The towhead from Orlean set the pace, and it was a stiff one. Lemuel Fallon was a length behind his heels at the quarter. He remembered what Ollie Higbee had said about Dygert. "Tag him to the

stretch; he'll lead you there, but he quits with a sharp challenge."

Lemuel, who had worked in behind Dygert before the racers rounded the upper turn, found his pace stiffer than he had anticipated. He looked a little anxious, but kept stubbornly with him, stride for stride. Back of him came a confused shuffling; his trained ear told him that most of the other men were dropping well to the rear.

He watched Dygert narrowly. The Orlean towhead was fresh, having participated in but one other event. His long, easy stride showed natural form of a high order. He had the physique and the muscle for a distance runner of class. But Higbee's comment had suggested a fatal weakness in his equipment. He would quit under the whip of rivalry.

Lem Fallon, winner of five events, the last two apparently under strain, instinctively gathered his forces to apply that whip when the moment was come.

Sweeping around the lower turn, Dygert slowed a mere trifle, in readiness for the sprint down the stretch to the tape. It is then that a man's muscles cringe in revolt; when the blood drums in the head; when laboring lungs recoil from the impending demand upon them in the rush to the line.

With a warning thrill, as he gathered himself like Dygert for the imminent test, Lemuel heard, close behind him, the rhythmic thud of another pair of feet. Some man, among the remaining five had managed to follow the killing pace set by the Orlean man; three rather than two would apparently fight it out down the stretch.

Rounding into the stretch, Lem's face set in grim lines. Sweat coursed his cheeks through the gray dust, his eyes narrowed, he leaped forward in challenge to the towhead. At the instant he was sensible that the pace behind had quickened.

With young Fallon's challenge, the towhead youth in the lead proved that he was equipped in flesh and muscle for victory, but not in spirit. As Lem's shoulder drew on even terms with his own, he sprang forward for a few strides. Then, as Fallon, with a final savage spurt, inched ahead of him, he faltered and fell back.

On went Lem Fallon into a lane of frenzied sound, of rising human excitement which no hollow victory, no procession, could have summoned. To his ear, attuned to outcries of crowd hysteria, was audible the rising note that told of suspense. Welled that wild something that peals from the throats of humankind when is waged a problematical struggle—and the issue is in the balance.

So he knew that, though he had forged to the front, his was to be no easy victory. There was still a race—between two men. In the rising din of lungs, of motor-car horns, while pennants, handkerchiefs and hats waved along the double line of spectators, to where the crowd in the grandstand rose like a wave, he could hear the rush of feet behind him, challenging him who had challenged Dygert. But he could *feel* them coming, thudding nearer in a glorious dash—at his heels—

He knew they were not Dygert's feet. Dygert was a crack pace-maker. In the test of the finish he had taken his measure. As if he had seen him, Lemuel, who knew men, visualized the towhead, beaten and discouraged, dropping farther back, being overtaken by the men who had trailed from the start.

What racer was now challenging him? In response to the menace at his heels he lengthened his stride, bent lower his stubborn head. His dusty face set in lines summoned by herculean effort. His eyes glared, his lips curled upward from the gleaming grin of locked teeth, he tore toward the line now a hundred yards away.

Into the arc of noise from the thronged stand he rushed, into a roar redoubled, punctuated with frenzied shrieks, with bawling incoherencies. Cleft the bedlam one coherent phrase from some mad throat, shrieked in encouragement of that adversary behind, who had been drawing nearer —nearer—

"Go to it, Chestnut—ah-hhhh—!"

In that instant a figure drew relentlessly alongside his shoulder, clung there. It was a figure clad in an old-time running-suit; the face gray and grim and hawklike; the tumbled chestnut hair, sprayed with gray, waving in the wind.

Two men, young and old, raced strain-

ing, gasping, sweating toward the line. Hands of officials, trembling with excitement, held the stretched tape. At one side, gaping with amazement, notebook clutched in rigid fingers, stood Ollie Higbee, the reporter.

A flash of time, while the crowd's roar broke like surf upon the shore, then—

One of the men, with a habit which veterans in the crowd remembered, hurled himself ahead in a final convulsive effort.

Zebulon Fallon, "Young Chestnut" of old, had once more tried his favorite event—and had beaten by inches Lemuel, his son!

Lemuel Fallon, victor in five events that day, had been defeated in the sixth. Beaten, he was not disgraced. What could be expected of a gallant young man, stale after a rigorous baseball season, who had been working all the afternoon to oblige his admirers of the city of Pleasanton and the county of Tomkins? Particularly when dashes rather than distance runs had intrigued him in his high-school days?

Particularly, too, when unexpectedly challenged by a dad whose facility at the half-mile run had been a tradition, and who had not forgotten how?

For the moment forgotten, as is the public's way with beaten heroes, Lemuel stood in the backwash in the circling human eddy upon the track. There was tumult and shouting. Upon Lem's lips was a smile in which was no malice—the smile of his knickerbocker days, when he had watched father perform and had admired him.

His eyes smiled, seeking the tawny, gray-flecked crown about myriad bobbing heads. Zebulon Fallon, heaving but happy, was enjoying an impromptu ride upon the shoulders of his friends.

The county recalled Zeb as a runner. It realized he could run yet.

It was evident Lem's engrossed thought was none of self, all for dad! Another pair of eyes had noted this fact from the moment after the race. A figure pushed through the crowd to Lem.

"*Father comes first, huh?*" The words were spoken stealthily

Lemuel, starting, glanced around at a freckled face. Often had he raced with this amiable pal in the old days.

"Good thing the crowd's busy with your dad!" chuckled the reporter.

"Wha-what the merry—" stammered Lemuel guiltily, yanking away.

"You fooled *me*, all right!" guardedly acknowledged Ollie Higbee. "You played 'dying' on the dashes; you 'hippoed' the half-mile finish! Fooled 'em all! Dad probably working out; son gets next! 'Stale,' uh? Huh!"

"Shut up! I—"

"Only trouble, while you're viewing dad with pride, you forget to keep up your bluff. Half-minute after that finish, *and you breathing easy as a baby!* Hard work—and you hand dad the race on a platter, and he doesn't know it, you cuss! What an inside story I can't use!

"I'll plaster 'Old Chestnut' all over the sport page Monday; he'll crow over you for the rest of his life, you poor mutt—"

He had been leering in Lem's dismayed face. Now, with a swift glance around, he clutched his arm, then circled his waist.

"Breathe, damn you!" he muttered savagely. "Breathe *hard!* Sweat, blow! They're comin' this way, with your ma, to comfort you! Play up; fool 'em!"

So mother and the crowd found Lemuel Fallon, a puffing sporting derelict, draped over the right arm of his resourceful friend.

HUMAN NATURE

MEN'S discontent most often comes
From their imaginings;
It is not that they want to fly,
But that they want the wings.

William Samuel

The Sky Woman

by Charles B. Stilson

Author of "A Man Named Jones," "Little Crooked Master," etc.

A "DIFFERENT" NOVELETTE

CHAPTER I.

FIRE.

I AM twenty-four years old, and—I may as well say it at the start—quite good to look at; that is, I have black hair, brown eyes, even white teeth, and a clear complexion, and they match up passably well. Also I am sure that I know how to wear my clothes to the best advantage, and am neither overgrown nor too tiny. I don't know why I mention these things, for they haven't much to do with what is to follow, though they are quite important to me.

It isn't necessary to tell that I know little about writing. Old Miss Dyver at Wellesley, it is true, used to compliment me upon my descriptive ability when I had her in English. But in the same breath she would waggle her flopsy pomp and deplore my lack of imagination. I believe that it was her opinion that it was a sin to possess so much and not the little more requisite to make a gifted writer—I mean imagination.

Miss Dyver was right. I can tell only what I have seen and felt. Nor am I the least bit scientific. I've had a course in domestic science—you needn't sniff at that—but of the things which terminate in "ology" I know next to nothing—and thank Heaven for it!

Yet, here am I, Ruth Chasper, as I have introduced myself in three paragraphs, plunging in recklessly to tell of what, viewed merely from its scientific side, is without doubt the most wonderful thing which has happened to the world since thinking, sometimes reasoning, women and men were set upon it to wonder why.

"Yee-mah! Yee-mah! Alla ferma nâ somma!"

The words will ring in my ears forever until I die! What do they mean? Who uttered them? What was she, and whence, and why? Will science in five thousand years more of groping and striving be able to answer? What cosmic secret might the interpretation of that wild, sweet cry lay bare? Or was it but a dying woman's wail of despair?

"Yee-mah! Yee-mah! Alla ferma nâ somma!

No, it could not have been despair. The creature was too utterly splendid and daring to have given way to it. She would not have yielded to despair, even when she realized that she had failed, and death was before her. It was not despair. It was an undelivered message—a broken link between two worlds.

So much I allow to my lame imagination. Now I will describe what has happened, though I cannot explain it.

Rickey Moyer is my distant cousin, fourth or fifth. Rickey's father, D. B. Moyer, as a coal baron, turned a fearful lot of carbon into currency in the Pennsylvania Alleghanies, and then died and left Rickey alone to spend it.

Coal-grubbing never appealed to Rickey. He finished a course at Amherst, sold out the mines, and traveled. He seemed to have a consuming desire to know the world he was living in, and I guess that he has a speaking acquaintance with most of it. He should have; for he started out when he was twenty-one years old, and spent ten years globe-galloping.

Quite suddenly he came home again, two years ago, built him a bungalow in the forest on Black Bear Mountain above the old Moyer homestead in Center County, and settled down.

With him—and this is where I come in—he brought Count Giuseppe Natali, of Florence. They had met somewhere in Borneo. Both were cosmopolites, both fearless. They had been through dangers together in the Dyak country, and had formed a friendship which stuck.

I met the count for the first time last summer at Palm Beach. Not to go into tiresome details, we soon became engaged. Count Natali is a thoroughly delightful fellow, a gentleman to his slender fingertips, and no fortune-hunter—else he would not have picked me; for I've none to mention, unless Aunt Caroline—but that has nothing to do with it.

In January of this year Count Natali sailed to Italy to look after business connected with his ancestral estate—I understand that it is immense, and boasts, among other attractions, an ancient feudal castle which makes one think of that creepy old romance, "The Mysteries of Udolpho." On his return in early April, Rickey kidnaped him away from me in New York and took him off to the Pennsylvania wilds.

Soon afterward came an invitation to me to come out for a fortnight, bringing my chum, Carrie Andrews, with Aunt Caroline for chaperone. Carrie was of my class at college. We were both staying with Aunt Caroline at Bayonne.

All three of us thought that it would be a fine little outing—a sort of rest before the strenuosities of the summer season; so I at once wired Rickey that he was on. Naturally I wasn't sorrowful at the prospect of seeing Count Natali again so soon, I had felt that I had rather of a bone to pick with Rickey for sequestrating my intended as he had.

Rickey's haunt on Black Bear is no end of a quiet roost; and yet there are plenty of possibilities to while away a couple of weeks, if one cares for them. There is excellent trout-fishing in Forge Run, if one doesn't mind wading in hip-boots and meeting an occasional rattlesnake. And there are a number of pleasant motor trips one can take, if one doesn't mind the rough roads and the hills.

I don't mind these things. I was born in Pennsylvania. So was Aunt Caroline, who isn't a bit fussy about such matters. As for Carrie: she is one of those big, slow-moving, non-excitable blond creatures, whom nothing ever seems to disturb, and who would encounter an earthquake or a boa-constrictor with the same casual interest she would bestow upon a new dance. Very like Rickey himself Carrie is.

In the late afternoon of April 17 we were deposited from the up-train of the Beech Creek division of the New York Central at Viaduct, and saw the wooded spine of old Black Bear looming above us across the valley to the left of the tracks.

Viaduct is a signal-tower, a tank, a row of laborers' shanty-shacks, and ten houses—personally I don't believe there are ten; but I am a Pennsylvanian, and I give Viaduct the benefit of a doubt.

Count Natali met us with Rickey's roadster; but Rickey was not with him. Aunt Caroline and Carrie were comfortably discreet while the count greeted me—much more so than a thin-faced girl telegraph-operator, whom I saw watching us with avid interest from the height of her tower. Poor thing! How her eyes would have popped had she known that it was an honest-to-goodness Italian count who was kissing me—or perhaps she did know. Anyhow, she watched, and the proceeding seemed to have her approval.

My first reflection was that Count Natali both looked and felt much better without his mustache. The coating of tan which the spring sun was overlaying on his olive cheeks gave to his thin features the aspect of an Indian chieftain or a Bedouin sheik.

"A-hem!" said Aunt Caroline, after she and Carrie had swept the skyline of Black Bear for what she deemed a proper interval. "A-hem! And where is Richard?"

"You nephew asked me to make his amends, Mme. Allison," replied Count Natali. "He was unavoidably denied the pleasure of meeting you this evening. We have had a trifle of excitement."

"Fire!" remarked Aunt Caroline, wrink-

ling her nose and sniffing. "I hope it destroyed nothing valuable."

"Not the bungalow!" I cried dismayedly. I, too, had noticed an acrid, woodsmoky odor about the count's clothing.

"No," he answered our two queries; "only a few trees. I believe that it is now entirely under control. The railroad authorities sent a force of workmen up the mountain to help us. I believe that is their custom—to protect their property."

"*Umph!* I suppose a spark from one of their engines started it, as usual," commented Aunt Caroline.

"Not so; nothing so prosaic." Count Natali shook his handsome head. "It was a very unusual fire; in fact, quite an extraordinary occurrence."

He turned to lead the way to the car.

This began to smack of a mystery. I could see that the count was covertly excited, and I began to feel the thrill of an adventure. Aunt Caroline stared hard at his back; but as he volunteered nothing further, she did not question. Aunt Caroline doesn't encourage mysteries.

"I think that I should like to see a forest fire," said Carrie reflectively, as though weighing the question. She glanced up at the crest of the mountain, where a thin haze drifted above the tree-tops. "I am sure that I should enjoy seeing one at night."

"I am sorry that you are too late, Miss Andrews," rejoined Count Natali. "Had you arrived yesterday afternoon instead of this, your wish would have been gratified. Our fire burned all through the night, and I can assure you that it was quite spectacular."

By that time we were in the roadster, and discussion of the fire for the time was ended. The count manages a car prettily. He whirled us up the zigzag road to the summit of Black Bear at a pace which must have set Aunt Caroline's bridge-work on edge; though she never will admit that fast driving annoys her.

Rickey and the count had been roughing it; but in deference to our coming Rickey had imported servants up from the big house below, including Mrs. Sanders, a cook whom Aunt Caroline had tried vainly to bribe from his service; so we found everything that three famished and train-weary wights could desire.

CHAPTER II.

THE MYSTERY-STONE.

NO Rickey was waiting for us at the bungalow. He did not come in until we were taking our places at table. When he did put in an appearance he was in such a scandalous condition that I positively was ashamed for him. His tawny hair was all topsyturvy and dark with dust, and his khakis and puttees were smeared with soot and mud, not to mention a black streak across the bridge of his short nose, and numerous holes which flying embers had scorched through his shirt and trousers.

He did not contrast at all favorably with Count Natali, who is always perfection in his get-up; though, in spite of the dirt and disarray, Rickey still contrived to look cool and efficient.

"Hello, Aunt Caroline and folkses all," was his welcome. He slipped into a chair, and as soon as decency would permit began to eat like a hungry and hurried man.

Have I said that Rickey is a big fellow? No? He is—big and blond and ruddy, with small blue eyes above high cheek-bones—not piggish eyes, but friendly and twinkly, and not a little shrewd, seeing that he inherited them from the coal baron.

"Glad you came, Ruth," he said to me presently. "Joe—so he always referred to Count Giuseppe—" has been pining. I had to send for you or the blue devils would have got him sure. He's been as disconsolate as a bushman who's lost his fetish."

Naturally I had nothing to say to this. Aunt Caroline charged to the rescue. She had been studying Rickey sharply.

"Please don't talk nonsense, Richard," she cut in. "Tell us about the fire. You look as though you had been rolled in it."

"Oh, yes, the fire," responded Rickey, who had been talking off the top of his mind and thinking hard about something else deeper down.

He glanced at Count Natali, and I think that the count shook his head.

"Well?" from Aunt Caroline.

"Well," echoed Rickey, "we had one, aunty. It was some fire, too, I'll inform the universe, while it lasted, and now it's out."

A prodigious bite of Mrs. Sanders's home-made biscuit interrupted communication. I could hear Aunt Caroline's toe tapping a nervous tattoo on the floor.

Count Natali bridged the gap with questions about our trip. But Aunt Caroline, like an elephant, refused to take the bridge.

"What started it?" she pursued, wading in.

"That's what twoscore men have been laboring all day to discover, aunty," said Rickey tantalizingly. Just then I think that he became aware of Aunt Caroline's foot; for he muttered a hasty word to his biscuit, and at the same time hitched in his chair.

"We thought it was a falling star," he went on, freeing his utterance. "We've been grubbing an amateur coal-mine in the mountain on the strength of finding it and seeing what it's made of."

"I'm *sure* that is nothing to be so secretive about," declared Aunt Caroline.

"And did you find the star at the bottom of your mine?" asked Carrie.

"Yes," Rickey answered; "only it isn't a star." He turned his voice on Count Natali. "That section boss is interested, Joe," he said. "He has sent for an armful of dynamite. He wants to blast it."

"You surely will not allow that?" Anxiety, if not consternation, was in the count's tones.

"Not all in a chunk, anyway."

Aunt Caroline set down her teacup with firmness.

"Richard, will you have the goodness to inform us just what it is that you have found in the hole, which you will or will not blast, and why?" she demanded categorically.

"A meteorite, aunty," replied Rickey, reduced to terms. "At least, by all the rules of the game, it should be a meteorite. It's a large one. The heat engendered by the friction of its hurried transit through our mundane atmosphere was what started the fire and led to its discovery."

"But why not blast it?" I asked, coming to Aunt Caroline's aid, as she had to mine. "Is it dangerous? Is it still too hot?"

"Why blast it at all?" queried Carrie.

Rickey appeared somewhat embarrassed, which in itself was unnatural.

"Joe and I may be a pair of blithering idiots," he returned; "but we are agreed that this star or meteorite or mystery—mystery, whether star or meteorite—is a very extraordinary proposition. It has—well, it has an uncanny sort of a hand-made appearance."

Aunt Caroline drained her third cup of tea and set it down with a decision that threatened the china.

"Richard," she said, "your explanations are as clear as a Moshannon fog. The only portion of them which is understandable is your hint at your mental condition. How far from here is this phenomenon? I propose to see it before I close my eyes."

It was evident that this declaration relieved Rickey. He brightened up.

"Not more than a mile, aunty," he answered. "We can go the best part of the way in the car, and there will be a fine moon to see by. After you folks have looked the thing over will be time enough to diagnose my mental symptoms. It's either what it ought to be, and Joe and I are jack-donkeyed, or else it's one of the marvels of the ages."

"How intensely interesting you make it sound, Mr. Moyer," volunteered Carrie; and that ended the table conversation so far as concerned the meteorite.

I couldn't help being impressed by Rickey's manner. The mere fact that he was excited—and excitement fairly oozed from his pores—was impressive to one who knew him. But what was he driving at? How on earth could a meteorite be hand-made? What were we about to see up yonder on Black Bear by the light of the moon? If I had possessed a little more imagination, I am sure that I should have shivered.

Soon after our meal Rickey led the way to his touring-car, and the five of us piled in. We three women sat in the tonneau, which was already occupied by Frisky, Rickey's Skye terrier. Frisk, too, had been digging in the burned ground, to judge by

appearances, and in his exuberance at seeing so many old acquaintances he insisted upon making a mess of our skirts.

Before we started Rickey fetched out from the bungalow an armful of blankets, which he hung over the robe-rail. As the night was quite warm, I wondered what he wanted of them.

We rolled off northwestward along the crest of Black Bear ridge behind the bungalow clearing, following a narrow, rutty old lumber trail which I remembered from having explored it as a child in search of arbutus, honeysuckle, and tea-berries.

After twenty minutes' driving, which the difficulties of the road made very slow, we reached the edge of the burned area. A grand moon had risen, and cast a peculiar light on the carpet of ashes which the fire had left, and against which the jagged stumps of broken trees and the scorched, distorted bodies of those still standing were limned in sharply defined silhouettes. At intervals a light breeze set this arboreal cemetery to creaking and groaning lugubriously, and fanned our faces with an acrid warmth that was not of the night. Somewhere in the dusky distance a bird was clamoring for the immediate castigation of poor Will. Nearer at hand an owl hooted dolefully—doubtless mourning over having been burned out of her house and home in a hollow log.

"Isn't this delightfully spooky?" whispered Carrie, who would hobnob with a ghost with animation were the opportunity offered, and consider herself in luck. Aunt Caroline sniffed. Frisky yapped at the owl. I kept still and stared. I may be deficient in imagination, but I really did shiver a little. The picture was compelling.

Rickey halted the car.

"We'd better walk the rest of the way," he announced. "I'm afraid the ground is still too warm for the good of my tires. You won't mind it on your feet, if you keep stepping," he added hastily, hearing Aunt Caroline take breath. "A little further on it's cooled off, anyway. Right here is where we stopped it."

He jumped out and shouldered his blankets.

We followed him across the soft, crisp flooring of ashes, stepping hastily and high, and thankful for the fashion of short skirts. Count Natali gave his arm to Aunt Caroline.

Occasionally we passed smoking heaps where the breeze would stir the embers so that little spurts of flame leaped up and danced like elves of mischief over the destruction they had done. These were too far isolated from the main forest, Rickey said, to be accounted dangerous. Besides, watch was being kept.

In the center of this desolation we found the cause of it, Rickey's mystery-stone.

Where it had fallen, in the slope of a little dip, or valley, was an ash-strewn pit, some twelve feet across, resembling those shell-craters which one sees in the war movies. Through the lower rim of it workmen with picks and spades had dug a deep trench-like passage to the stone itself, and then had undermined it so that it had toppled from its first position and lay along the trench.

At the bottom of the dip the ashes had been cleared away, and a brisk wood fire was burning, around which a number of men sat upon logs. These were part of the section gang which the railroad had sent up to help Rickey fight the fire. A strong aroma of coffee was grateful to our noses after their long struggle with smoke and soot.

A stockily built man of middle age detached himself from the group at the fire as we came over the edge of the dip. He approached Rickey, an Irish brogue issuing from his broad and exceedingly grimy countenance.

"The dinnymite will be here dirictly, Misther Moyer," he said, removing his hat. "Shall we be afther crackin' her to-night, sor?"

His voice was eager. His men around the fire strained forward to catch the reply.

"Not to-night, Conoway; we'll do the job by daylight," responded Rickey. "The old Central can spare a few of you for another day, can't it?"

"Yis—I suppose," assented Mr. Conoway, evidently disappointed.

"You told your man to fetch drills?" pursued Rickey.

"Oh, yis, sor. Ye're sthill daycided to bust her open wid pops, sor?"

"Yes. If there should happen to be anything inside worth looking at, we want to injure it as little as possible. Fetch up a torch or two, will you, Conoway? I want to exhibit our find to the ladies."

We stepped around to the mouth of the passage and looked at the mystery; and I am afraid were not, at first sight, particularly impressed—at least, I was not, save by its size.

It was a monster of a stone, all of fifteen feet long, and at its middle, where its girth was greatest, as thick through as the height of a tall man. I didn't wonder at the great hole it had torn in the earth when it struck, or the depth to which it had penetrated; the bottom of the socket from which it had been tipped was nearly on a level with the floor of the dip. The impact, I thought, must have jarred a considerable portion of the mountain.

Against the newly turned earth of the excavation it contrasted darkly. Its surface must recently have been molten. I touched it with my fingers, and it still was warm. Small stones, gravel, and clods of scorched earth were encrusted in it like gipsy settings. The upper end of it as it lay, which had struck first, was splayed out and blunted.

Three of Mr. Conoway's men fetched pine-knot torches and flashed their light into the passage and the pit. I found the glamour of the thing grow upon me. Even a weak imagination was stirred to ponderings.

It lay in the trough of the trench with the wavering torchlight flickering over it, a dull-brown, somber, sullen, inert mass of stone. Yet it was not of our world. It was material evidence of other worlds beyond our ken. To me astronomy and kindred sciences had appealed as largely guess work. Here was evidence that the stars were more than mere watchlights set to brighten our dark ways. Whence had it come, this unearthly visitant? Next to our awe of time is our awe of distance. How many millions of miles had it fallen? The thought dizzied me.

"Isn't it fortunate that it did not strike upon rock instead of earth?" said Carrie, pointing to its jammed and misshapen tip.

"Would have been one grand smash, and nothing left but flinders," remarked Rickey. "I shouldn't have cared to have been riding in it at the time."

"Nonsense!" ejaculated Aunt Caroline, prodding at it with her toes. "What is there about it to give you such ideas? Why do you suppose that something may be inside of it?"

Count Natali took a torch from a laborer's hand.

"But see, *madame,*" he urged, stepping into the trench to the head of the stone. "And do you come hither, too, *carissima*" —this to me—"and Mlle. Andrews, and see."

I followed until I could peer over his stooping shoulder. Aunt Caroline and Carrie squeezed in on the other side. We stared where he pointed.

"I see nothing, except that it has been broken," said Aunt Caroline, readjusting her slipping spectacles.

"Yes, *madame;* a fragment has been chipped away by a hammer-blow. Now watch closely."

He moved one of his slender fingers along the fresh scar, tracing a zigzag pattern. Looking closely, we could then see a darker line in the substance of the rock.

"It looks like an irregular seam—a suture," remarked Carrie, who won honors in physiology.

"Justification!" shouted Rickey, who was kneeling at the edge of the trench, and he clapped Carrie on the shoulder and left finger-marks on her fawn coat. "One of 'em sees it, Joe!"

"I think that I do, too," I protested.

"It may be only a vein in the rock," suggested Aunt Caroline; but her skepticism was shaky.

"Too regular, aunty," countered Rickey. "It's a joint, and a devilish clever one, and it's closed with some kind of cement that is harder than adamant. What do you say, Conoway?"

"The same as I did at first, sor," the Irishman answered. "There's something inside of that there that somewan put there for to sthay, sor—unless the bodies

up yon are gunnin' for us down here, an' their projacktul didn't go off." Conoway pointed toward the stars.

"No, I don't think it's a heavenly 'dud'," laughed Rickey, and added soberly, "but just the same someone up there may have fired it."

"I am going home and going to bed," announced Aunt Caroline, backing out of the trench.

"Joe will drive you girls back," said Rickey.

"What are you going to do?" asked aunt.

"Sleep by it." Rickey tumbled his blankets into the trench. "Some of these chaps here have it in their heads that this stone is a kind of wandering treasure chest full of diamonds and gold, and that they've only to crack it to see 'em come pouring out. I'm going to guard against anything premature."

"All right," Aunt Caroline assented. "Don't you dare to open that thing, Richard, until I am here in the morning. I shall get up at half-past eight."

"Right-o, aunty. If any one tries to dynamite it before you get on the job he'll have to blow me to glory along with it."

"In which case you might find out where it came from and why," said Carrie. On the way back to the bungalow she asked, "What did Mr. Conoway mean by 'pops,' I wonder?"

"It is that they will drill the stone full of small holes, *mademoiselle*," explained Count Natali, "and explode the dynamite in light charges, chipping away the stone a fraction at a time."

CHAPTER III.

WHAT THE STONE CONTAINED.

LESS prepossessing, but more mystery-laden, was the big stone by the light of next morning's sun. We arrived at the scene of operations shortly after nine o'clock, Aunt Caroline having made the concession of rising earlier than she had promised. The preparations for blasting were in full swing.

Three power-drills had been lugged up the mountainside in the night, and six swarthy workmen were busy along the trench, attacking the surface of the stone with an uproar which must have resembled a continuous volley of machine guns. A dozen others were waiting to spell them. The balance of the fire-fighting force, much against their inclinations, had been herded down the mountain by Mr. Conoway to less interesting employment.

I noticed that all of the laborers, with the exception of the Irishman, treated Count Natali with an obsequious deference, rather strange to an American, until one reflected that most of them probably were Italians, and the others from lands where counts count for more than they do here.

Viewed by daylight, the irregular line in the substance of the stone which had been disclosed by the hammer-blow, and which Carrie had dubbed a suture, was even more noticeable than it had been under the torches.

Count Natali found us a position near the rim of the little amphitheater, from where we could watch the proceedings safely, and where we could talk undisturbed by the clattering, popping drills, which made conversation in their immediate vicinity an impossibility.

Presently came Rickey, dirtier and more elated than ever, to announce:

"We'll be blasting in another half hour. We've been at her since sun-up."

Aunt Caroline, who had once more inspected the odd, jointlike appearance of the stone, was disposed to be argumentative.

"Isn't it quite possible, Richard, that it is something let fall from an airplane?" she asked. "These aviators are becoming as careless as motorists."

From the corners of her eyes she glanced in the direction of Count Natali.

"Considering that it must weigh all of twenty tons, I'm afraid that your suggestion is hardly tenable, aunty," replied Rickey, his eyes twinkling. "Aviators don't carry such pebbles around for ballast."

"Some time ago I read in the newspapers that attempts were to be made to

signal to Mars at about this time. Mightn't it be that this is some sort of a Jules Verne projectile, which has been fired from the earth, and fallen back?"

This was from Carrie. Aunt Caroline gave her an approving look, and then brought her spectacles to bear challengingly on Rickey.

"Yes; so did I, come to think of it," she observed. "Professor Something-or-other declared that Mars and the earth were going to come nearer together than they had been in a long time."

Rickey, who had been arranging the blankets on which he had slept to make a seat for us, looked up and nodded.

"That's true. But the professor was going up in a balloon and hang out a light," he said. "His plans didn't comprehend any such thing as this. The gun to fire this old boy would have to be a whopper, and a continent would almost feel the kick of it. All the world would have known of any such attempt."

"Just what, then, *do* you think it is?" demanded Aunt Caroline.

"Why, aunt, it rather staggers the imagination; but in the light of what has just been said, I admit that I have entertained a wild hope that it may be some sort of a message from the other end of the line."

"From Mars?" I gasped.

This angle disturbed Aunt Caroline. She opened and closed her mouth two or three times without words.

"I sincerely hope that it is not," she managed at last, and with emphasis.

"And why not?"

"Because it's—it's so disconcerting. Such a thing would turn one's ideas so upside down. It isn't provided for—"

She stopped short; but I knew that she meant the Bible. Until she should go to heaven, Aunt Caroline never intended to stray very far from earth and the evangelists.

We were all against her. Even Carrie's placid countenance showed a pink shade of excitement. We watched the drills incessantly.

Rickey left us and went down among the workmen. What a big, capable fellow he was! Mr. Conoway, who cared nothing for counts, was, in his Irish way, as deferential to Rickey as were the others to the nobleman.

Soon after the expiration of the half hour the clamor of the drills ceased. They had pecked a neat double row of holes along the upper side of the stone. One by one the holes were charged with dynamite, and the explosive set off from a hand battery. They cracked like big firecrackers. At each explosion a shower of fragments flew up from the surface of the stone and fell around the lower part of the dip.

When the first row of holes had been blown out, Count Natali went down to inspect the work. From where we sat we could see that the stone was beginning to present a gnawed and ill-used appearance.

"Nothing at all," was the count's report as he came back, flicking the dust from his dark trousers. "The stone is very unyielding. They will use heavier charges now."

"But they will find nothing," said Aunt Caroline with conviction. "If Richard had his father's business acumen he would have preserved the meteorite intact and sold it to some college. I believe they purchase them."

An explosion of greater violence than any of the others followed her remark. On the echo of the crash sounded a hissing like that of escaping steam. The laborers below ran toward the trench shouting.

"A vacuum," muttered Count Natali. He excused himself and hastened down the slope again. I saw his dark head and Rickey's fair one almost in collision over what seemed to be a fissure in the stone. The hissing noise had ceased.

Rickey thrust an arm recklessly into the opening. Then he called for a drill-rod, which Mr. Conoway handed to him, and I saw its slender length disappear in the stone, and heard the clink of it as he groped around in the inside.

"Does he expect to find a rabbit?" Aunt Caroline murmured.

"It is that there is a cavity, and another stone is within," reported Count Natali. "It is very strange. It has the appearance of a sarcophagus." His fingers

trembled as he stroked the place where his mustache had been. "I believe that it is a find."

"A mummy! That's not so bad!" exclaimed Aunt Caroline triumphantly. She had caught at the word sarcophagus. "I knew someone must have dropped the thing. They must have been hurrying it to some museum. Probably it will be advertised."

"How interesting if it is the mummy of a Martian," put in Carrie, not without malice, and drew a quick "Nonsense!" from aunt.

A number of blasts followed in rapid succession. The great stone seemed to leap and crumble in its bed. I shrieked; for several objects like coiled serpents flew into the air whirling, and one of them nearly fell on my foot.

Count Natali stooped down and picked it up.

It was a powerful metal spring!

Only a glance we bestowed upon it, and then stared down the hillside.

Where had been the long brown mass of stone was a heap of débris and earth fallen from the trench. Partly buried in the pile was a cylinder, more slender and shapely than its husk had been. Its surface was polished, and it reflected the light of the sun in a greenish sheen.

By common consent we arose and went down to it.

It was like a great coffin hewn for a giant. Whether it was of stone or of metal we could not tell. In one spot a fragment had been chipped away by the blasts, and the fracture was scintillant with tiny particles which refracted the light vividly. At intervals the entire surface was pitted with sockets, for the springs which had maintained it centered in the interior vacuum of its shell. There had been many springs, nearly two hundred.

Mr. Conoway's workmen gathered about the trench, shouting, chattering and gesticulating. They were inclined to crowd us, until at a stern word from Count Natali they drew to one side.

I laid a hand upon the cylinder and shivered. It was chill as ice with an unearthly cold.

Aunt Caroline stared down at it and shuddered from other motives.

"What a godlike way to be buried," soliloquized Carrie. "To be hurled out through uncounted millions of miles of space and rest at last upon an unknown world!"

Aunt Caroline's "Nonsense!" was notably weak.

"Why do you folkses all take it so for granted that there's a dead one in here?" asked Rickey, clapping a hand on the cylinder and drawing it hastily away.

"Rickey!" I cried. "You don't mean to suggest that there may be something *alive* in there!"

"Well, and why not? The chaps who were clever enough to shoot it across should know some way to preserve life for the few months necessary for the transit. I shall not be surprised to find the traveler in good condition and famously ready for his breakfast."

Months! Yes, Rickey was right about that. I hadn't reflected that it might take nearly a year for an object to fall from Mars to the earth, if this thing *was* from Mars.

"When is the opening scheduled to be?" Carrie inquired. "I am anxious to meet the gentleman; and he can't be very comfortable in that box."

"I should think that he, or it—if anything living was sealed in there—would be frozen," I said, thinking of the intense cold I had felt.

Count Natali in turn stooped and laid a hand on the sarcophagus.

"But that was the purpose of the vacuum space, *carissima mia*," he explained, oblivious of the stares which this endearment drew from his countrymen; "to provide an intervening coldness, so that what was within might not be destroyed by the heat which fused the surface of the stone. It is like a monster thermos bottle."

Aunt Caroline glanced from one to another of us in bewilderment.

"Isn't there a way to open the thing, Richard, and so put an end to all this heathenish conjecture?" she asked.

"We will try to do so at once, aunty!

Now you folkses just stand back, please, and make way for picks and spades."

CHAPTER IV.

THE CRYSTAL CASKET.

OUR dark-skinned laborers were waiting with unconcealed impatience to attack the job. Not for them were fanciful speculations as to where the strange object might have come from. To them it was a treasure trove, in which they possibly might share. At an order from Mr. Conoway they swarmed into the trench, and loose earth and stones began to fly. Rickey seized an extra spade, and his two great bronzed arms did double the work of the best of them.

Count Natali fetched the blankets down the slope and fixed another seat for us.

Before the trench was more than partially cleared we could see that a clearly marked line of junction extended lengthwise around the sarcophagus. Cover had been joined to body with great exactness, and only the thinnest of red lines indicated the presence of a cement. At intervals along the sides of the sarcophagus some manner of sockets, larger than those in which the spring had been fitted, had been sunk on the juncture line, and these too were filled with the reddish substance.

Rickey dug at one of them with the nail-file in his penknife.

"Hello; this stuff isn't so hard," he said. "Fetch some chisels, somebody, and we'll clear these places out."

Buried in the cement in each socket was a bent metal bar, or L-shaped handle, similar to those upon kitchen water-taps. Some of them were turned upward and others down, but all were at right angles to the cement-filled line.

As the sarcophagus lay somewhat askew in the trench, crowbars were applied until it rested squarely upon its bottom. Then Rickey tightened a wrench upon one of the sunken handles and held it while Mr. Conoway struck it a smart tap with a hammer. It turned, slowly at first, and then more easily, until it stopped on a line with the cemented joint of the sarcophagus.

One after another all the handles were turned. Still the joint was firm. Under Rickey's direction an octette of workers set the blades of chisels and the points of their crowbars at intervals along the line, and as many more men with hammers or pieces of stone struck upon them simultaneously.

A shout went up as the stubborn lid was seen to be yielding and rising. At just the right instant Rickey thrust a crowbar into the widening interstice, and pried with all his broad-shouldered might.

Lubricated by the soft cement, the huge lid moved almost without noise, balanced, swayed, toppled, and subsided with a *thunk* on the earth of the trench.

We three sprang up and rubbed elbows with the crowding men. But this, as was remarked by Mr. Conoway, was a particularly well-packed parcel. Nothing of its contents was to be seen save a mass of grayish, woolly-appearing stuff, so tightly wadded and compressed that it retained the imprint of the inside of the lid as though it had been modeling clay.

Only Mr. Conoway's bellows of restraint prevented the laborers from stampeding and making short work of this, to such pitch had risen their eagerness to lay bare the treasure.

"This is your package, boss," he said to Rickey.

Rickey nodded, stuck his hands into the stuff and pulled out no great amount.

"Gee, it's rammed in tight enough!" he grunted, and attacked it again.

Curiosity moved Count Natali to take a wisp of the wadding, step back a few paces, and touch a lighted match to it. It refused to burn, or so much as scorch.

"*Huh!* the beggars know asbestos," commented Rickey, who had watched the operation. "Let your gang tackle this stuff, Conoway, if they're so blamed anxious."

"Aye, sor."

But they had understood, and did not wait for the Irishman's order. A score of muscular brown hands, reaching from both sides of the sarcophagus, seized the asbestos packing and tore it out. Among them was one pair of slender woman's

hands, wrinkled and tremulous. Aunt Caroline, her habitual dignity for the moment in abeyance, was laboring to vindicate her theory, and took her pound of asbestos with the rest of them. The stuff came out in wads and layers. There seemed to be no end of it. Dust flew from it and choked us.

Count Natali pressed my arm and smiled down at me.

"How excited we all are; is it not so, *carissima?*" he said.

His soft clasp hardened to a grip of iron, and I gasped with the pain of it.

"*Por Dio!*" he whispered, and again, "*Por Dio!*"

Then for many seconds all our group was silent, and a quarter of a mile down the slope of Black Bear I heard plainly the plash and tinkle of Forge Run flinging itself endlessly over a ten-foot fall.

For a great layer of the asbestos had come away in the workers' hands, and disclosed the contents of the sarcophagus.

As a newly-fallen icicle might lie embedded in a bank of rain-soiled snow, a crystal casket lay glittering against the bed of dull-gray asbestos which surrounded it, and within the caskets' gleaming panels lay neither mummy nor man, but a woman with sun-gold hair.

Many authors have written that we of womankind are prone to see our sisters through cats' eyes and to judge them with prejudice and jealousy. That may be true; I won't argue it. But I, another woman, shall think always of the being who lay in that scintillant crystal casket as the most beautiful thing that ever came to earth. So poignant was the beauty of her that mere memory of it hurts.

No language which has yet been written can make one see the perfections of her—perfections of every line and contour of face and figure—and I am not going to make myself ridiculous by attempting to put the burden upon my English.

But she was a blond of a blondness which made poor Carrie's type look dingy and scrubby by contrast. She lay easily upon a long cushion affair of soft, white material, which had been crinkled and padded around her until it fitted her as the satin of a jewel-case fits the brooch of pearls for which it was made.

It was difficult to believe that such a radiant thing could die; though I suppose that all of us who were staring into that crystal casket had no other thought than that she must be dead. The casket itself and all its trappings suggested death. But its inmate, by her easy posture, the bloom of her cheeks and the carmine of her lips, suggested slumber only.

Her costume is hardly worth mentioning. It was—well, what a fastidious woman might have chosen for a nap, and scant. Her hair flowed loose. She wore no jewels of any kind, not so much as a single finger-ring. But had she come to us bedizened with gems and arrayed like Balkis, she could never have impressed us as she did lying there in simple white in the white purity of her glittering crystal casket.

We stared, and were as still as she.

Oddly enough, it was Mr. Conoway who first broke our startled silence.

"Raymarkably well prayserved, isn't she, sor?" he said to Rickey, and removed his hat.

Count Natali's grip of my arm—the flesh bore blue finger-marks for days—relaxed, and with something very like an oath he caught up one of the blankets and threw it across the sarcophagus, hiding the casket from profaning eyes.

"Thank you, Joe," acknowledged Rickey, shaking himself as though coming out of a dream. He had not heard Mr. Conoway's first banality. The Irishman committed a second.

"Beloike wan of us had betther be afther notifyin' the coroner, sor," he remarked solemnly, and put on his hat again.

"I will attend to it, Conoway," answered Rickey, "depend upon it. Now, if I may impose upon you a bit more, I'll have your gang here give us a lift with that casket, and we'll take it over to the bungalow. We can sling it in the blankets over a couple of poles."

All this while not a word from Aunt Caroline or Carrie. I stole a peep at them. Aunt was weeping softly into her handkerchief. Carrie was lost in thought.

Mr. Conoway's laborers made a difficulty about complying with Rickey's request. When it turned out that there was no treasure in the sarcophagus, they, after their first surprise, experienced a rapid loss of interest, replaced by a superstitious fear of its contents. They refused to touch the crystal case, until Count Natali, exerting an influence superior to Mr. Conoway's threats, virtually compelled them to do it.

The count drove us slowly back to the bungalow. Behind us Rickey followed, directing ten of the laborers, who, walking two and two, carried the casket in a blanket sling.

"Poor thing! Poor thing!" said Aunt Caroline, recovering speech. "I shall see her face to the day of my death. Don't talk to me about her, please. I'm very much upset, really."

We ate a subdued dinner, while the casket, swathed in blankets, lay upon the floor in Rickey's hunting-room, which looks north. Out of deference to Aunt Caroline's state of mind, we forbore reference to it during the meal.

Various as I suppose our views concerning it were, it exercised a fascination upon us all, and we were soon gathered around it again.

"I hope you will have her decently buried as soon as possible, Richard," said aunt, as, after another long look at the unworldly beauty of the occupant of the crystal case, she turned away, shaking her head sadly.

"Buried!" he echoed. "Not until I am sure that she is really dead."

Aunt's jaw fell.

"Richard!" she ejaculated, "you're not —you're not going to—"

"I'm going to take the means necessary to be certain," he replied firmly. He knelt down and began to inspect the casket.

Count Natali made a pretense of assisting him—a pretense, I say; for it was patent that he could not keep his eyes from the woman.

Aunt Caroline seated herself on a divan and gazed fixedly out the window, her toes keeping up a ceaseless tattoo on the floor.

Moved by I do not know what impulse, Carrie went to Rickey's baby-grand in the corner, and began to strum mournfully in a slow minor key. I continued to stand by the head of the casket.

"Airtight, and perhaps soundproof," said Rickey at the end of ten minutes. "Here's some kind of a lever, which seems to connect through to a sort of tank arrangement inside, and there's apparently another lever inside here, near her shoulder. Shall I chance it, Joe?" He laid a hand on the outer lever.

The count nodded abstractedly, though I am sure that he had not sensed the question.

Rickey pressed the lever. His sleeve was turned back, and I saw the cords of his forearm bulge under the skin. The lever yielded noiselessly for an inch or more.

"There," he said, "now let's see what happens."

Nothing apparently, not immediately. We waited for I suppose five minutes, though it seemed fifteen; Rickey squatted on his haunches, Count Natali kneeling, and I standing.

I cried out sharply. I was first to see it—the flutter of a pulse in the neck.

Before I could point out my discovery to the others, the woman's bosom heaved softly, and at once a tide of rich color swept into her cheeks.

She *was* alive!

CHAPTER V.

THE VISITOR FROM THE SKY.

CARRIE and aunt had come at my cry. We stared down at this miracle in silence, and with swirling senses. Then Rickey swore softly to himself, and I think we were all grateful to him, even aunt.

"She is not dead, but sleeping," murmured Aunt Caroline.

"I'm going to waken her," said Rickey.

With the handle of his pocket-knife he struck upon the side of the casket, near the woman's head. The crystal rang like a bell under the blow. Aunt started violently.

"Richard! Stop that instantly!" she commanded. Really it did seem a fearful thing to do, but Rickey struck three times.

Mrs. Sanders, who could not have been far from the door, thrust her gray head through and asked if anything was wanted.

"You may bring tea, Sanders," replied Aunt Caroline weakly. Mrs. Sanders cast a horrified glance at the casket and withdrew.

The crystal had not ceased to vibrate under Rickey's last blow when the woman within stirred; a change of expression passed across her features, and she opened her eyes. They were black as night, when I had thought that they would have been blue.

For only an instant her face retained the bewilderment of the newly-wakened; then the brain took command, and she looked up into Count Natali's face and smiled. I heard him catch his breath with a gasp, and he bent nearer the casket. She seemed to see only him of all of us, and as if in response to his involuntary movement, her hands crept up until they came in contact with the crystal lid of her prison.

The feel of it touched the spring of memory. She flashed a glance at the rest of us, and her wonderful eyes widened. Groping at her shoulder with one hand, she pressed the lever which Rickey had discovered there. It released hidden springs, or else there was a pressure of gas within the narrow chamber. The lid rose swiftly, discovering that it was hinged at one side, and fell over on the heap of blankets.

A puff of cool, choking atmosphere struck me in the face. I inhaled some of it, and it dizzied me. I reeled back and took hold of a chair for support.

The strange woman arose from her cushioned rest, and extending a hand to Count Natali for his aid, stepped out upon the floor.

One glimpse of her face I had before the catastrophe.

Asleep, she had been of supernal beauty; awake, her black eyes flashing, and her cheeks aglow, her face presented such a combination of intellect and passion as I have never seen or expect to see upon any other mortal countenance, fleshly or painted. Queenly is too weak an adjective to describe it, but it is the only one I can think of.

For an instant I saw her so, smiling as Count Natali bowed low before her. Then came a change, a terrible change. She had taken a step forward. Her mouth was open for speech, when I saw her glorious eyes go wide. She swayed, one hand clutching at her bosom, and the ripe color faded in her cheeks.

Whatever weakness had come upon her, I thought at the moment she had overcome. She moved on toward the north door with a regal carriage, still holding Natali's hand, but she did not speak, and her face was like death.

At the doorway she paused and looked down the sunlighted slopes of Black Bear and up at the cloudless sky. A supreme triumph conquered the shadow of disaster in her face. Half turning, she let fall Count Natali's fingers, raised her white arms above her head, and cried in a voice like a silver bell:

"Yee-mah! Yee-mah! Alla ferma na somme!"

It was her swan song. Before the echoes of the marvelous voice had ceased to thrill us, she had collapsed choking into the Italian's arms.

We ran toward them and helped him to carry her to the divan, but all we could do was useless. In three minutes she was dead.

When that fact was sure we stood and stared stupidly. Natali hung over her, his face like that of a carven statue, the statue of a red Indian or a Bedouin sheik. From the instant when she had smiled into his eyes, for him, the rest of us had ceased to exist.

Our spell of sorrow and horror was broken by Mrs. Sanders, who bustled in with an armful of tea-things, sized up the situation, and fainted in a terrific clatter.

I recall hearing Carrie say, "I wish I could do that; I do really," and then my nerves would stand no more. Instead of turning to and helping them resuscitate Mrs. Sanders, I escaped to my room, and for more than an hour did battle with a round of hysterics.

When I was once more presentable, I found that Aunt Caroline had retired with a headache—I suspect that it was another name for what had ailed me—and Carrie had gone out for a walk in the woods.

Rickey and Count Natali were in the hunting room, my cousin sitting dejectedly upon the divan, and the count standing at the north doorway and looking down the mountainside. The crystal casket had again received its burden, and the blankets were over it.

"Well, I suppose there is only one thing to be done, Joe," I heard Rickey say as I came down the stairs, "and that is to do as the Irishman said, and call in the coroner. Then we will bury her."

"No; I beg of you to let me dispose of those arrangements," interposed the count earnestly, without turning from his stand. "I know that you will not gainsay me, my friend. I will go down at once to the station. I have messages to dispatch." He stepped out without seeing me, and a couple of minutes later we heard him leaving in one of Rickey's cars.

Rickey caught sight of me and jumped up. I suppose that I must have looked wo-begone, for he shook his head over me, and then managed a grin.

"I say, Ruth, old girl, let's you and I go out and walk it off," he proposed.

At the edge of the clearing we met Carrie coming in. Her eyelids were swollen, and she gave us a decidedly moist smile.

Rickey explained to me what he thought had happened. It was our air which had killed the strange visitor. The atmosphere of earth must be of a different quality from that at Mars.

"But I don't see how we could have helped it," he said. "She attempted a splendid thing, and failed. I feel like crying like a baby every time I think of the sheer pluck of her."

I did too. It was as if a goddess had died, as Carrie said afterward.

I saw the sky woman only once more. It was in the night, that same night. I could sleep only in nervous cat-naps, and when I did I dreamed such fantasies that it was a relief to wake from them. Finally I gave it up, and put on a dressing-gown and sat at the window. There was a white moon and a silence, and I thought and thought.

At first my musings were disjointed and silly, evidenced by the persistent running through my mind of two lines of a rather vulgar old college ditty:

> Sing ho for the great Semiramis!
> Her like we shall ne'er see again—

which came to me, as such things sometimes will insist in our human brains upon intruding themselves among the sacrosanct and the sublime.

Truth to tell, contemplation of the events of the day gave me a touch of vertigo. The stupendous hardihood and daring of the sky woman overawed me. She could not have known that she would find human beings to release her, nor had she means to release herself; yet she had taken the thousandth chance, and had herself flung out through the spaces toward our world, gambling her life with magnificent recklessness.

Had she missed her mark, she might have fallen through infinity and eternity; perhaps been sucked into the vortex of some blazing sun, to perish like a moth in a candle-flame. All these things she had weighed, and still her splendid spirit had been undaunted.

Surely this was the supreme test of mortal courage, confidence and fortitude; or it was fatalism to its *n*th power. To die is less than she had offered. She had made the cast, and failed; and before the sheer splendor of her failure the most glorious human achievements that I could think of were dimmed. Columbus launching himself westward across unknown waters in his leaky caravels, was a puny comparison.

And no glory had offered, not as we rate glory; she could not have returned to tell her own people that she had succeeded.

An impulse grew strong upon me to go down to the hunting-room. I fought it, for I was afraid; but it conquered, and I stole down the stairs to take another look at the wondrous stranger. How glad I have always been that I did so!

The blankets had been thrown back

from the crystal case, and the moonlight shone in through a window and gleamed and glittered frostily upon its translucent fabric and upon the beauty, now pallid and awful, of its occupant.

I paused upon the rug without the doorway; for the sky woman was not alone.

At the head of the casket sat, or rather crouched, Count Natali. His face was toward me, but he did not see me; his eyes were upon the dead. One by one, great, slow tears were trickling down his cheeks.

As I stood there, almost afraid to breathe, Rickey stepped in through the outer door. He too had been moved to night-wandering from his bed it seemed, for he was in his bathrobe. He saw Count Natali, and went to him and laid a hand upon his shoulder.

"Come, Joe, old man, best go to bed," he said.

"I cannot, my friend," Natali answered. "I must watch. Something has come to me that is tearing my heart to shreds. How shall I say it? I—" His voice broke, and he pointed to the casket and covered his face.

"I think that I can understand, Joe," said Rickey very gently. "I am sorry."

I crept back upstairs and to bed. I too understood. I suppose that I ought to have felt jealous and horrid, but I didn't. I just felt very small and insignificant and lost.

Poor sky woman! Living or dead, I would not have fought you. Anyway, I couldn't have competed with a princess of the blood royal of Mars—and she must have been all of that.

In the morning Rickey took me for another walk in the woods.

"Joe has asked me to tell you something, little one," he began, facing me squarely, but speaking in a I'd-rather-be-hung-than-do-it manner.

"Then you needn't," I interrupted, "for I know what it is. I was at the door of the hunting-room last night, and I couldn't help overhearing part of it. And you needn't be compassionate, Rickey Moyer, for somehow I can't seem to care as perhaps I should—and I'm glad—"

Maybe I leaned just the least bit toward him—he looked so big and strong and leanable. Anyway, his hand crept under my chin. I don't know what he saw in my tilted face; but next instant I was crying against his breast-pocket, and he was holding me comfortingly tight in his great arms and telling me that he had cared for me since we were small, "only somehow Joe seemed to have beat me to it."

So, you see, I have found compensation for what the sky woman cost me. Rickey and I are to be married soon.

And the sky woman? Count Natali had her embalmed in some marvelous Italian fashion and took her back to Italy with him. I often have a vision of him sitting in a moonlighted hall of his old Udolpho castle with his dead but imperishable bride, while the slow tears glisten upon his cheeks and fall upon her crystal casket.

(The end.)

THE WELCOME

NO thing is ever lost that once hath lived in truth—
Would this indeed were true that I again might hear
The cherished voices of those loved ones of my youth
Now gone into the silences of yesteryear.
How fair that dream of bliss! How radiantly sweet
That vision of a golden realm where at the last
The earth-worn pilgrim finds, his weary soul to greet,
A choral welcome from those voices of the past!

Blakeney Gray.

Sheriff of Shallow Gulch

by Dean L. Heffernan

A FUSILLADE of shots, a jangle of glass, the drumming of hoofs, and a rollicking shout sounded above the buzz of conversation and clatter of glasses in the Rising Moon.

Instantly the noise subsided. The ranchers and miners waited expectantly.

"Damn!" Joe, the proprietor, exploded into sulfurous wrath. "That's the Kokomo Kid, sure as hell's a poppin'! Know his yell! Hope the fool decides to throw away his cash in some other place! Glass is gettin' too expensive!"

"Tell it to 'im! Tell it to 'im, why don't cha?" a miner jeered.

"Got a wife an' two kids," Joe answered evenly. "Besides, I ain't figurin' on leavin' my dust to no undertaker!"

A horse came to a thudding halt outside. A moment later the figure of a young man framed itself in the doorway.

"Hello, folks!"

There was a silence. He answered it with a smile at once amused and contemptuous.

"Didn't see no brass band waitin' to usher me in with glad music, so had to put on the celebration myself. Hope I didn't spoil none of them purty new lamps, boys, but human natur' wasn't rigged to resist sech temptation!"

The Kid was tall, curly headed, handsome, well-knit. He carried one "gun" only, but it was sufficient. Few ever questioned the fact that he had the fastest moving right arm and the surest eye in the State; and none to his face! Nobody knew his real name. He had suddenly appeared several months ago as a cloud on the horizon of the would-be peaceful town of Shallow Gulch. He lived somewhere in the hills, by methods that everybody suspected but nobody cared to verify. After one of the Kid's especially glaring exploits, a sheriff and his deputy had once gone in search of him. Later they returned, and resigned — as soon as they were able to leave the hospital. Periodically the Kid swooped down and galloped into Shallow Gulch—for a little relaxation from his labors, as he once confided. The inhabitants promptly closed their mouths and shutters, and figured on new window glass, new street lamps, and a new sheriff.

The Kid advanced to the bar.

"How's the old acid, Cemetery?" he asked. "Got anything with a kick?"

Silently the bartender selected a bottle, poured out a glass, and dropped the dollar into the till. The Kid filled the glass and drained it three times in rapid succession. Then he looked around. The crowd in the barroom had diminished. Quite a few of the men had quietly drifted out, but a number of hardier spirits still remained. One man alone remained at the bar. The rest had edged gradually to the rear of the saloon. They would not run from trouble,

nay, verily; but discretion hinted that it was good policy to give the Kid plenty of breathing space, in case something might happen. Something usually happened when the Kid came to town!

The Kid's lip curled as he noted this gathering in the rear. "Sociable as a flock o' tombstones! What a glowin' welcome you boys extend to the thirsty traveler sojernin' in your midst! I'd be inclined to recommend an alleviation o' your vocal apparatus in the interests of jubilation and refreshment, only a sort o' idea animates my think organ as how that ain't no way to throw away good corn juice!"

He noticed his lone companion, a tall, powerful man, with strong, kindly face and slightly graying hair. The stranger was eying him keenly.

The Kid smiled. "Oh, hello Atlas! Think you'll know me when you see me next time? Kind o' lonely there, ain'tcha? Have a gulp or two o' this carbolic acid with me?"

"Thanks," the big man answered pleasantly, coming nearer. "Believe I will."

While they drank, the Kid studied his guest closely.

"Never saw you before," he said. "What might your name be?"

"They call me Bill Brown, here."

"Bill Brown! Don't give no inklin' about your past life an' accomplishments, does it? And what might be your business?"

"Ord'narily," the other answered quietly, "I punch cattle, and sometimes pick around a bit. But just now I'm actin' in the capacity of sheriff for the growin' and prosperous town of Shallow Gulch." He pushed aside his bandana and disclosed a star.

The Kid's face froze.

"So you're the new all-wool, fourteen-karat sheriff I been hearin' about, eh—the guy that gets 'em all sooner or later!" His eyes rapidly took in each detail of the big man's face and figure.

"And you're the Kokomo Kid," the other answered thoughtfully.

"You guessed it the fust time," the Kid answered coolly. "Any elocution you cares to emit on the subject?"

There was a little pause, charged with an electrical current of uncertainty. Then the big man calmly drained his glass, watched the Kid a moment, and spoke:

"Kid, them was purty nice little lamps you shot up to-night."

"Can't deny it," the Kid replied evenly, "They got it all over Shindy Pete's shootin' gallery!"

"And them glass store-windows don't grow on trees."

"Now, ain't that irritatin'. But shucks, sheriff, what's a few hundred bucks to the growin' and influential town o' Shallow Gulch? Keeps it from stagnatin' when I throws a little lead around, generous like!"

There was another moment of silence. "Kid," the older man remarked quietly, "some one has give you a heapo' disinformation as to the pertic'lar status o' this here metropolis. This town is a workin' toward law and order. It's aimin' for to conglomerate its affairs so's it can tumble into its hay at night and figur' on findin' itself there in the mornin' without no sudden and unexpected transition into celestial spheres! Somehow you don't seem to fit in with the general layout o' the plan. This burg ain't hankerin' none for your society, Kid. It disrespectfully invites you to shut the door from the outside and forget the combination! Maybe you gets my meanin'."

The Kid's lips curled into an ugly smile. "Thought I understood you to intimidate you was the sheriff! My mistake! Preacher, you said, didn'tcha?" The smile dropped from his lips like a discarded mask. "Who in hell's a goin' for to keep me out o' here?"

"I been figurin' on doin' that little job myself."

The sheriff's calm glance and the Kid's cold, sneering one met squarely like two finely tempered rapiers, and like rapiers struck fire! For a moment the Kid held his own. But there was a quiet power in the older man's gaze which finally beat his to the floor.

"Maybe," he remarked sweetly, to cover his confusion, "you been figurin' on comin' out to call on me!"

"I been figurin' on that, too."

"You're good at figurin'," the Kid sneered. "When you come you better figur' out beforehand if you got enough dust to pay the funeral expenses. Might save them tenderfeet there," pointing at the group in the rear, "a tidy heap o' trouble."

"Don't think there's a goin' to be no funeral—in the Brown family," the sheriff answered coolly. "Look for me some time next week, Kid!".

"I'm here now," the Kid jeered. "Why inconvenience yourself by ridin' so far out o' your way? It 'd be a good idea to keep me here, wouldn't it?"

"So 'twould. So 'twould. But they's a little matter I got to talk over with you in quiet—friendly little chat just between ourselves!"

"Now, ain't that nice! Always offers my visitors a warm welcome!"

The Kid turned and finished the remainder of the bottle. "Well, got t' be goin'. Got t' pay a visit to Buckboard to-night. No spirit o' hospitality here, nohow! Sorry I ain't got time to stay awhile an' alleviate the monotony o' existence in this here adolescent metropolis by demonstratin' the meanin' o' life, liberty, and the pursoot o' happiness! But 'pleasure before business' is my motter! An' now, sheriff," he turned to the man beside him, and drew off one of his riding gauntlets, "so's you won't ferget me, I bid you a fond ajoo—thusly." He slashed the heavy glove across the sheriff's face.

The hands of both men flashed to their holsters, but there the sheriff's paused. The big man's face was suffused, and for a moment death glared redly from his eyes. Then, with a visible effort, he controlled himself. His face slowly assumed an expression nearly normal.

With an oath the Kid jammed his weapon back. He strode to the door. There he turned, and suddenly burst into laughter loud and prolonged.

"Boys," he managed to articulate between his shouts, "I asks—your pardon! I was too rough—with your—little pet! Should o' slapped the poor little feller on the wrist!" The Kid finally regained his gravity. "But confidential, now, when you gets time to put on another election, figur' on somebody that totes more spine and less blubber, and hasn't got no yeller highway down the middle o' his back! An' tell him that me and Sudden Jim, here"—the Kid's hand dropped to his revolver with the accuracy and quickness of a cat—"is always willin' to welcome him"—the revolver spat three times, and, simultaneously with the shots, the three big oil lamps jangled into pieces, leaving the saloon in utter darkness—"like that!"

A moment later the muffled thud of a horse's hoofs in the heavy dust of the road, accompanied by an intermittent staccato of shots, to which the tinkle of breaking glass added a musical and diminishing obligato, announced the Kid's departure.

When Joe, divided between perspiration and profanity, had managed to partially repair one of the shattered lamps, the light showed the sheriff leaning with drooping head against the bar.

There was a moment of whispered consultation among the men in the rear. Then one, equally as big as the dejected officer of the law, advanced.

"The boys is unanimous they made a mistake, Brown. Figured as how they was electin' a man, not a cold-footed, chicken-hearted heap o' four-flush! Don't suppose you'll need that star no longer! The boys reckon you better turn it over to me till the next election."

The sheriff aroused himself with an effort and looked steadily at the man before him. Then he smiled. But there was a light in the eyes that would have warned the cautious to beware of shoals ahead.

"I'm figurin' on retainin' this little trinket for some time to come!" he said at last. However, if you got t'have it right bad, Buck, why just come and get it."

"Maybe I will," Buck answered. "An' don't try no gun-play here, Brown! Might get me an' you might not; but somebody 'll damn sure get you! Now let's have the star!"

"No need o' worryin' none about gun-play, Buck. Ain't necessary, as I sees it! You'll find the star right here on my vest any time you get to feelin' unhappy without it!"

Without further argument, Buck rolled back his cuffs. Then he rushed. Easily and skilfully the sheriff side-stepped, and, as the other's heavy fist shot futilely past his face, landed a stunning blow behind Buck's ear. Buck stumbled and landed, dizzy and gasping, against the bar. In that moment the sheriff could have smashed his opponent into oblivion with pleasant attention to detail—and he knew it! Instead, he stood quietly watching him, the same little smile playing around his lips.

After a minute of heavy breathing, Buck straightened, recovered comprehension of the four points of the compass, and, with a vicious oath, sprang in again. Followed a flailing of powerful arms, a thudding of powerful fists against flesh and bone, a gasp or two! Then a crack, clear and distinct! Buck shot to the floor and remained there, sleeping unpeacefully with his head under the footrail of the bar. A thunderbolt had been unkind enough to land squarely on the point of his jaw, and that useful member was now cleanly split into two equal sections!

For a moment the sheriff, breathing deeply but evenly, stood over the fallen man. Then he turned to the others.

"Anybody else got a hankerin' after this piece of jewelry? I'm kind o' feelin' in the humor to discuss the matter with any chap who feels as how he ought to have it!"

There was no answer.

"Glad you feel that way about it, boys! You remember I never asked for this star: you sort o' wished it on me! But since I got to wearin' it, I reckon I must o' got attached to it. Anyhow, gimme your unkind attention for a moment, an' then I'll be movin'. I'm goin' out o' town next week, and when I get back I'll either lay a certain six-gun you-all had a look at to-night on that counter there, or I'll put the star there—one or the other! Till then I reckon I can take good care of it!"

The sheriff paused. His eyes roved the walls of the saloon. They stopped on a picture of Falstaff smiling in smug anticipation at a generous tankard of beer prominently displayed before him.

"Some o' you boys may have gathered the idea that I didn't hanker none to see the Kid in action with his shootin' irons! So I didn't—never was fond of shootin' irons! But they's another reason I can't exactly publish, for certain reasons, just now! Will later on, maybe. However, some folks has claimed as how I was tolerable handy with shootin' instruments myself. Never have used one much since I been in this town. But thought you might like to know that I can still push one around a bit, too!"

With a movement that was almost too fast for the eye to follow, the sheriff's hand moved. His revolver leaped like a live thing from its holster, flashed twice, and darted back again. The sheriff turned and walked out of the building.

Joe climbed up on the bar to investigate the damage. "Don't seem to be nothin' wrong here, but maybe—well, shades of shif'less Belshazzar! If he ain't shot out both the eyes o' this old guzzler—False-stuff, I think they calls 'im—clean as a whistle!"

Later on that evening, the sheriff, by dint of much scratching of head and laborious research, scrawled out a letter, and mailed it. It was addressed to Miss Mary Smith, and directed to a small town a hundred miles from Shallow Gulch.

Something moved and rustled the dead leaves in the shrubbery behind the Kid. In an instant he had sprung from beside his camp-fire and was pouring a stream of bullets into the spot. An instant later two powerful arms closed around him from the rear. Sinewy fingers tightened about his pistol-hand at the wrist and began to twist it. The Kid struggled like a wild thing; but it was no use. Slowly, remorselessly, his hand was being crushed and his wrist wrenched to the breaking point. After a moment of agony, the weapon slipped from his nerveless fingers. A strong shove immediately sent him staggering away from it. Furious, he wheeled to find himself facing a persuasive pacifier in the form of the muzzle of a very large and very businesslike revolver. Behind it stood the sheriff of Shallow Gulch.

"Afternoon, Kid," he said pleasantly.

The Kid was silent for a moment, white and sneering. Suddenly he laughed. "Guess we better call a truce while we buries your possie! How about it, Atlas?"

"No need of a funeral, Kid. That swishin' you seemed to git a bit excited about was caused by a pebble I throwed in there. Figured it might sort o' distract your attention."

The Kid's face sobered, and he flushed at having been so easily taken in. Then he smiled again, carelessly defiant.

"Got t'hand it to you, Atlas; you sure got the drop of me that time! Now, what's on the program?"

"Sit down on that there rock. First number is that nice little chat I told you last week we was a goin' to have. Can't tell you what the second number will be. Depends on you!"

"Now that everybody's com'table," the big man remarked when the Kid had grudgingly seated himself, "s'pose you just let me lapse into language for awhile and try to keep off o' the stage until you gets your cue! Then you can talk all you wants to."

The sheriff paused, as though collecting his thoughts. Then he began to speak.

"About a year ago, I was livin' in a little burg about a hundred miles or so from here. Got acquainted with a girl there. Got t' like her considerable. Finally, Dan Cupid gets his sights set on me right! After that I couldn't figur' where the future held no attractions without we butted into it together. Kind o' worked her around to the same idea!

"Then I went on a little pilgrimage to see if rumors, which was floatin' around tumultuous about some new gold-fields, was made up of anything else but hot air. They wasn't! Got back six months later. Expected a warm welcome. 'Stead o' that, I discovers that my girl has been disthoughtful enough to fall in love with another chap who comes to town while I was gone. I might just as well o' stuck out in the big rocks!

"Worst of it was they had went an' got infatuated like with each other, and then ups and stages a double-barrelled, breech-loadin' word-fuss! This chap, they tells me, stuck around grumpy for a while after that, and then drifts out again. The girl didn't hear no more from him. Kind o' rotten way to treat a woman just 'cause she gets a little talkative!"

The sheriff paused and looked keenly at the young outlaw across from him. The Kid flushed and looked away.

"Woman," he said, "never did nothin' but incarnate commotion ever since the fust one got mixed up in Adam's apple orchard! Ain't no good for nothin'!"

"Don't go headin' in now till you gets that cue! I ain't finished yet! Well, anyhow, I hasn't lost none of my feelin' for this female person, and I finally offers to go out and round up this here human and hold concourse with him. She ain't fond o' the idea none, but don't offer no obstacles."

The Kid smiled cynically but held his peace.

"I ambulates around promiscuous like, and finally lands here in Shallow Gulch. Heard o' you. Thought you sort o' connected up with the description. Figured you might drop in some night for a little liquid relaxation an' I could tell for sure. When you percolates into the Risin' Moon last week, I figures as how you an' me is scheduled to engage in some quiet conversation relative to the female person entitled Mary Smith! That's why I didn't desire no gun-play just at that time. Maybe you gets my meanin'!"

"I don't get you," the Kid answered coldly, "an' I don't hanker for no verbiage in regards to the aforementioned person!"

"Listen, Kid," the sheriff remarked pleasantly, though his eyes began to take on the blue glint of steel. "I still feels kind o' longin' like for that girl. I wanted her purty strenuous, and just when things is runnin' as per specifications, you rushes in an' spoils it all. Then you ups and bundles off again. You sure made holy hash o' my chances, and you ain't added no happiness to the life o' that girl! Now I figur' it's time for you to quit spoilin' the pleasure o' existence any longer—for her anyhow! I figur's as how there's a goin' to be a marriage in your family, and you're a goin' to be the bridegroom!"

"An' I figur's as how they must o' passed you up when they began distributin' the gray matter!"

"Now, the question up for dissertation is: are you goin' to go back o' your own voluntary volition, or do I gotta exercise persuasion?"

"Some little persuader, ain't you," the Kid snarled, "with all the artillery hemmin' you in?"

For answer, the big man raised the revolvers, and, to the Kid's astonishment, fired the cartridges one after another into the earth. He tossed the empty weapons into the bushes.

"Now," he said, rising, "how about it?"

For answer the Kid uncourteously requested him to betake himself to regions generally conceded to be nether, warm, and unhealthy!

The sheriff threw off his hat and belt and loosened his shirt. "Git ready, Kid," he replied, "for by Gawd I'm sure a goin' to convince you o' the wisdom o' my conclusions!"

The Kid paled. He was no coward, but this was a new game to him. He preferred the handier method of the gun. Perforce, he prepared for the inevitable, and waited, white and silent. He was no whit afraid, but he had already felt the might of the big man's arms.

The fight that followed was certainly no demonstration of the Queensberry rules, but it was fought fairly. The Kid was faster, more versatile, and displayed a natural cunning that was catlike, baffling. He landed more blows on the big man than he received. But, though he was powerful himself, his efforts scarcely seemed to disturb the sheriff, while that individual's crushing drives landed on the framework of the Kid's anatomy with a force that stunned and sickened! The Kid fought gamely, gallantly, tearing in with the reckless ferocity of the tiger, fighting with the fury of the cornered wildcat, resisting the sheriff's repeated and fast-strengthening attacks with a grim courage born of the knowledge that the big man could not be beaten down and the cold determination to hold his ground as long as he had strength to keep his hands before him. There was something fine in the way, with set mouth and pale, blood-spattered face, he struggled to resist what his strength was inadequate to conquer. But the end was inevitable. The sheriff, fighting with a cool relentlessness, forced the Kid back and still back, rocking his whole body with terrific, well-placed blows. Finally the younger man, feeling his power ebbing away, made a last despairing effort to rush his opponent off his feet. Simultaneously, the piston like arm of the big man shot out and upward, and his knotted fist crashed against the Kid's chin. The blow lifted that unfortunate from his feet and hurled him senseless to the grass.

Ten minutes later the Kid awoke to find his erstwhile opponent splashing water on his face.

"Kid," the sheriff remarked, "I got a sneakin' suspicion that I'm a goin' t' git fond o' you!"

"Sheriff," the Kid replied, smiling weakly and struggling to collect the scattered atoms of his intelligence from the rocking firmaments, "I ain't annexin' no alibis, but that there right appendage of your'n never was meant for no arm. Batterin'-ram they musta had in mind when they rigged it! You sure carries a convincin' argument with you!"

"An' now about that there little disagreement o' ours," the sheriff resumed; "guess we'll consider it settled, eh? They ain't no good reasons now for you not to take my advice!"

"Sheriff, I'm vastly afeared they musta put in all their time constructin' your lower parts to the great detriment o' your upper anatomy! They's the best reason in the world why I don't never intend to take your advice—can't take it!

"Shoot it, then. I'm allus inclined to listen, unbiased, to the other side o' any debates!"

"'Cause Mary Smith likes me just the same way she likes a six-ringed rattlesnake! 'Cause she took pains to alleviate my ignorance as how she hated me wus 'n any man she knew, and didn't feel no further inclinations to be infested with my society! That ought to be a sufficient plentifulness for any he-man! That's why I

took to these damn mountains and been perambulatin' around here ever since, livin' like a grasshopper! My only relaxation's been occasionally tryin' to prevent them sap-heads down in the Gulch from dyin' o' sheer stagnation!"

"Well, by the seven sins of Shilaly! Kid, its evident you ain't ever had no elucidation in the fantastics o' femininity! Why, Mary ain't never been the same girl since you left! She's so damn crazy over you that she don't figur' no other male human necessary to the scheme o' the universe! Speakin' in simple volubility, Kid, so's not to strain them unused intellectual functions o' your'n, you're a damn fool!"

The Kid rose unsteadily to his feet.

"I ain't quite figured out yet which way is north," he said grimly; "but if you're lyin' to me, Brown, I'm a goin' to reopen that little manual argumentation o' ours if I never wakes up after it's over!"

"Listen, Kid," the sheriff replied, also rising; "when that little talk o' ours in the Risin' Moon was over last week, I writ a letter to Mary tellin' her as how I had found you." He raised his arm and pointed down the mountain to where, several miles away, the lights of Shallow Gulch could be seen springing up in the gathering twilight. One light gleamed apart from the others.

"See that light there on the road into the Gulch! Well, Mary Smith is just about three feet from that light; and I got a powerful hunch that she's kind o' hopin' and prayin' you'll be the same distance from it before the evenin's over!"

The Kid looked long and steadily at the light. Then he silently picked up his belt and hat. "They's a brook about a hundred feet from here," he said. "Reckon I got t' make use of it for a while."

The sheriff groped around in the bushes and finally came forth with the Kid's revolver, just as the Kid came back from his ablutions. The Kid reached for his weapon, then stopped and grinned. "Reckon you better keep that there toy, Atlas! Ain't figurin' to need it none now."

"Thanks," the sheriff replied, "got to use it durin' a short session at the Risin' Moon this evenin'. Plannin' to give the boys back this little star they asked me to wear for them, and ain't figurin' on needin' artillery much after that myself."

He was silent a moment, while he watched the Kid rolling down his sleeves and readjusting his clothes. Then he spoke quietly: "Kid, take a friend's advice and make tracks for a different State after you been down there." He nodded down the mountain. "Some o' them pretty pranks o' your'n might bob up sudden like; and just before a weddin' ain't no time for trouble. An'—an'—kind o' look sort o' careful after that—that little lady. I'm powerful anxious for her to be happy. Now," extending his hand, "I'm ready to feel that there paw o' your'n, if you ain't got no immediate use for it."

"Sheriff," the Kid muttered huskily as his hand crushed into the other's, "damn if they didn't git the colors a helluva lot mixed when they named you Brown! White, they should o' called you! White!"

As the last glow of the sunset faded behind him, a lone horseman, drooping and weary, trotted slowly toward the lights of the little town. In his world of happiness the sun had also set.

It was the sheriff of Shallow Gulch!

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PETITION

I SEEK not fame adorned with laurel-wreath,
Nor wealth to put a Midas-touch on all,
Nor intellect to rise all-dominant,
Nor all-surpassing beauty to enthrall;
A home—of loving hand and loyal heart,
Young lives to train, love's tender, faithful kiss,
Strength to be worth such happiness—God grant me this.

Gladys Hall.

The Ghost Road

by George Washington Ogden

Author of "The Bondboy," "The Holy Scare," "The Duke of Chimney Butte," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

FOR fifty years the County of Clearwater had been at feud with the United States government, refusing to discharge a bonded indebtedness of a hundred thousand dollars, now grown to half a million which it had contracted at the representations of certain promoters who had promised them a railroad, now known as "The Ghost Road," of which only an embankment remained. Under this incubus the county had gone to seed; judges could not accept office without the practical certainty of jail terms, and the very name of "deputy marshal" was anathema. So when Thomas Calvert, heir of the original bondholders who had purchased the bonds in good faith from the original sharpers, arrived in Clearwater he was met by suspicion and hostility, including an attack by a half-man, half-beast known as Rex. Susie Richardson, however, believed in him, together with Dan Grinnell, Confederate veteran. At the annual Confederate reunion, Calvert laid down a fifty-dollar bill to buy votes for Susie in a beauty contest. It was contemptuously tossed aside by Judge Hunter, who defied Calvert by look and bearing, whereupon Calvert ripped the judge's coat and ordered him to pick the bill up. The judge clapped hand to his boot and "Look out!" warned Grinnell, springing aside.

CHAPTER XI.

THE PEACEMAKER.

HUNTER had his pistol out, standing crouching as a runner bends at the line, elbow close to his side, the hand that had stopped his fall still on the ground.

"I'll make you lick dirt, you spy!" he threatened.

Calvert was not more than two yards in front of Hunter, Grinnell a little at one side. Before this little group of three the crowd drawn by the altercation parted like smoke in the wind. Calvert turned a hasty glance behind him to see that no onlooker stood in the way of a bullet, then leaped upon Hunter, who was lifting himself to an upright position, slowly, watchfully, pistol-arm pressed close against his ribs.

Hunter fired as Calvert clutched his wrist, deflecting downward the pistol-barrel. The bullet tore the sole of Calvert's shoe, the smoke of the discharge black on the grass near his foot. Calvert wrenched the weapon away, leaping back to escape his attempt to clinch and fight.

"Take off your hat and pick it up!" Calvert commanded, presenting the pistol at its owner's heart.

Hunter hesitated, backing off, looking round, as if in appeal for some friend to bring him a gun. Calvert's hat had fallen off in the struggle; the sun was on his face.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for September 11.

Hunter read something in it that he understood, angry and defiant as he was, face to face with disgrace as he stood. He took off his hat, stooped, watching Calvert warily, recovered the money, and placed it on the counter, where it had lain.

Dan Grinnell picked up Calvert's hat and stood by with it in his hand, running his eyes around the crowd. It seemed strangely significant that there was not a woman or child in it now. It was as if the wind had blown the petals away from the grain. These men came crowding forward now, leaving a space of only a few yards between them and Calvert, the advancing margin of the crowd enveloping Judge Hunter, merging him in its walls of safety.

Calvert read the intention of violence in every face of that muttering throng as he backed against the little stand from which even the gentle old ladies had fled. A little breeze lifted the fifty-dollar bill like the breath of contempt from the crowd, threatening to carry it away. Dan Grinnell put Calvert's hat over it.

"I'm afraid hell's a goin' to pop in about a minute, Calvert," he said, speaking casually, his words too low to be heard two yards away.

"Don't stay here—don't put yourself in danger on my account," Calvert begged him earnestly.

"I was just a-thinkin'," said Grinnell, rolling his eyes to watch the symptoms of the crowd.

Hunter was out among them, demanding a gun, his white shirt showing through the long rip in his coat. Now he turned and came pushing his way back, the crowd falling apart before him, a revolver lifted high, as if he looked for an opening to fire.

Even before the last man was clear of his path he pulled trigger. The bullet struck the counter close to Dan Grinnell's arm. The old fellow did not flinch, although he stopped chewing a moment to turn his head and look curiously at the splintered wood not four inches from his elbow.

Hunter stopped, ordering Grinnell away with blasting curses. A little way behind him the crowd was closing up again, making a wall where Calvert's shot must surely find a mark if he should miss the blasphemous ruffian who sought his life. It appeared as if they closed up in that way with the design of giving Hunter all the advantage.

"About time you was comin'!" said Grinnell, in a voice of accusation, but eased by a mighty relief.

A man stepped from the crowd as he spoke, confronted Hunter, took him by the shoulders, turned him about in spite of his heated protestation, and struggled with him to take away his gun. Others sprang to the peacemaker's help, against all of whom Hunter fought and pleaded to be allowed to fight it out.

"I'll kill him, Judge Richardson; I'll kill that man!" Hunter swore, his collar torn open, his necktie falling over the wide bosom of his shirt.

Whatever Judge Richardson said to pacify his heated colleague Calvert could not hear, for the attention of the entire public, with the exception of Dan Grinnell, appeared bent now on drawing Hunter away. Grinnell stood with his back to the counter, elbows where he had placed them at the start of this armed interlude, as calm as a cow, proclaiming by his action that he had chosen sides and intended to stand by his choice.

When Judge Richardson at last turned Hunter over to his friends, who led him away, and came back toward where Calvert waited, there came a press of nowise pacified citizens with him.

"I'll answer for this gentleman," said Judge Richardson, stepping off a little way, waving them back.

"I guess if you can answer for him, Judge Richardson, he's all right," somebody said.

"He nearly beat Kindred's eediot boy to death with a club!" another declared, with sullen animosity.

"You've heard only one side of that," Judge Richardson told him, rather curtly, waving them back and clearing the ground before the stand.

The little old lady who had thrilled at sight of Calvert's liberality, assured by Judge Richardson's arrival, came back to her place.

"It was Tru Hunter's own fault, Judge Richardson!" she said with indignation.

"Now, gentlemen, go back to your celebration and cool down," Judge Richardson advised.

"It's a disgrace the way this gentleman's been treated here to-day, Judge Richardson!" the old lady said.

"It's a da—a dag-*goned* shame!" Dan Grinnell declared, cutting the fire out of his speech in consideration of the ladies, several of whom had come up by now.

Judge Richardson turned to Calvert, who stood by, feeling very much as a man must feel when he comes down in a parachute for the first time, or falls from a great height in a burning airplane. His very security was bewildering; the sudden withdrawal of peril seemed to leave him small, among small things which had been towering in overwhelming threat but a few moments before.

"I'm sorry this happened, Mr. Calvert," said the judge, putting out his hand.

Judge Richardson was a frail and slender man, tall, a stoop in his shoulders, much gray splashing his brown beard. He was such a kind and gentle man in every feature, in every movement, in every intonation of his slow, soft voice, that confidence and trust went out to meet him with Calvert's extended hand.

"I'm sorry for my part in it, Judge Richardson," Calvert confessed.

"Well, put up your gun," said the judge.

"It's Tru Hunter's gun," Grinnell explained; "he's the feller that went jerkin' out a gun."

A shadow seemed to lift from Judge Richardson's face; he quickened in his manner, as from relief.

"That's another matter," he said. "Here, Dan"—taking the pistol from Calvert's hand—"you'd better hunt him up and give it to him. Tell him Mr. Calvert is my guest, and any man that pulls a gun on him pulls it on me."

Dan Grinnell took the pistol, thrust it into the leg of his boot, and went off on his mission, which was a rather tasteful one, judging by his strut. The little old lady had taken possession of the fifty-dollar bill. As Calvert and Judge Richardson went away she was excitedly adding five hundred votes to Susie Richardson's total, placing that young lady far in the lead in the contest for queen of love and beauty.

CHAPTER XII.

THE MESSENGER OF HOPE.

"MEN would go ahead in this country with new hope, some of them with the first hope they ever had, if we could clear this thing up," Judge Richardson said.

He seemed coming into the light of a new hope himself, its warmth and cheer over him, as he walked beside Calvert in the woods, withdrawn far from the scene of celebration.

They had struck out across the little stream, passing near the spring where Calvert had rescued Mrs. Smith from the barrel, to be alone for the discussion of the important matter between them. Calvert himself was in a glow of enthusiasm after putting his proposal for a settlement out of court before the judge.

"God knows they stand in need of a breath of hope!" he said.

"But I don't know how we're to get at it, Mr. Calvert—truly I don't know. The county hasn't the funds to take up the bonds out of hand on any kind of discount; you might not be willing to accept a refunding issue, even if the voters would agree to it."

"I'd rather compound on some kind of a cash basis, and have done with the trouble forever. Couldn't you get your bankers to handle it?"

"It might be done."

"What do you suppose the people would consider fair—what would they expect?"

"Mr. Calvert, they don't expect anything at all but continued defiance and ultimate defeat. After that, extinction—complete obliteration, and loss of everything that is dear to them—of every door-post and rooftree, every rod of land. They've been expecting these things so long that it would wrench their natures with a new pain to take their thoughts from this outlook and center them on another."

"But there must be some way of making them understand."

"Yes, there must be some way," Judge Richardson agreed, walking slowly, head bent.

"I'll consult our counsel," said he presently, brisking up again, setting forward with quick stride. "I'll take it up with him and the other two members of the county court. You know there are three of us, Mr. Calvert; I am the chairman of the body. I have spent nearly half of the best years of my life in jail in defense of this destructive cause."

"It's a terrible penalty to pay for a principle so poorly grounded as Clearwater County's, Judge Richardson."

"So it is, so it is," Judge Richardson agreed, sadly; "but somebody must stand between these poor people and the judgment that eventually waits to swallow their homes."

"It must come to an end," said Calvert decisively. "I came here with the thought of offering a settlement on the basis of half the original sum, interest and ill-feeling and all the rest forgotten. But I'll do better than that—I'll go even further, Judge Richardson, to help these depressed and debt-haunted people out into the sunlight of a new day."

"You are a generous and honest-spoken man, sir!" Judge Richardson paused in his slow walking to look the stranger in the face.

"If your bankers will take the old bonds, if the people will vote them an issue to take care of their outlay, I'll take twenty-five thousand dollars cash and end it all."

"Surely, there could not be a more liberal offer made, Mr. Calvert—it is next to nothing for your claim. But what the voters of the county would say to your proposal, I cannot even guess."

"Surely there are enough intelligent men in this county to work with you and effect a settlement," Calvert suggested.

"One would think so, Mr. Calvert," Judge Richardson replied, rather wearily, in the way of one who has argued long against an immovable prejudice. "But we're a long way off the main road of the world here in Clearwater County; some of us don't reason with as much clarity and precision as we might."

"That's evident all the way along the road," Calvert nodded.

"But the fact that the bondholder has come here to deal with us, man to man, with an offer that cannot be questioned for fairness or generosity by any honest person, will go a long way toward waking them up. It will be big news, Mr. Calvert—the biggest news this county has had in fifty years."

"I leave it in your hands, Judge Richardson."

"Stay quietly here at the hotel while I take the matter up with our attorneys and the other judges."

"I'll await your report with impatience, sir."

"And keep pretty close around," Judge Richardson cautioned, looking up sharply. "Hunter is a vindictive and revengeful man—you may have trouble with Hunter."

"I'll do all in my power to avoid it, outside of running away from him, judge."

"I believe you. But that isn't the gravest thing you'll have to guard against, Mr. Calvert. The news of your proposal will get to going around in a little while, and the old prejudice against the bondholder may outweigh any consideration of good to come through you with some of our ignorant and hasty people."

"Miss Richardson cautioned me on the matter in almost the same words, sir."

"She knows them, poor child, as well as I do. This has been a gloomy environment for her."

"Still, she doesn't appear to have been clouded by it."

"She has been my staff and my comforter through many a bitter day," said Judge Richardson, his voice low in great tenderness.

They turned back toward the town, walking slowly. Then Calvert said:

"I'm beginning to believe I was foolish to come here when negotiations might have been opened just as well, better, in fact, from a distance. I've set Judge Hunter against me, and made a bad public impression by that unlucky occurrence to-day."

"You were blameless in the matter—any

honorable man would have resented Hunter's insult. We must make the best of it, Mr. Calvert."

"It was a poor introduction to a people already poisoned with prejudice. Some of them hold it against me because I defended myself when that monstrous creature of Kindred's attacked me. Do you know whether it was hurt much?"

"He wasn't hurt at all—I saw him down there in Kindred's wagon in the edge of the woods as I came into town."

"Has he got that beast here among all these women and children?" Calvert was shocked by the mere thought of it.

"He's got a cage for him, safe enough, I suppose, made of hickory poles. He slides it into the wagon when they're going anywhere, and takes the poor, brainless thing along."

"It ought to be confined in some public institution; it's got the strength of five men," Calvert said.

"I have tried to induce another member of the county court to see it that way with me, Calvert, for a long time, but I've failed. The mother of the creature seems to have a tenderness for him that moves the sympathies of people. Besides that, they're accustomed to Rex around here—he was born and raised among them."

"He'll kill somebody yet."

"I'm afraid he will."

"A lion would be a safe and comfortable inmate of a house compared to that debased human gorilla, Judge Richardson."

"I don't know how they came to let him loose the night you stopped there," the judge remarked; "I'm going to ask Kindred about it. But there isn't much use; he's as slippery as wet leather."

Judge Richardson accompanied Calvert to the hotel, where he cautioned him again to be watchful and forbearing.

"You'll be openly insulted, more than likely," he said, "when you show yourself here in town, but you'll have to swallow it, Calvert, and pass on like a deaf man. They'll do it to try to goad you into something that will give them an excuse for violence, and they'll always arrange it so there'll be several against one. I'll do what I can to quiet this feeling against you, but you can understand how unwise it would be to tell them the truth. If they knew you were the bondholder I couldn't save you—somebody would shoot you down in the dark."

Calvert promised to keep as close by the hotel as he could comfortably manage until the celebration was over and the town back in its normal state of somnolence. It might be several days, Judge Richardson said, before a decision could be reached on his business, their chief counsel being at that time out of the county. Meantime, Miss Richardson would be at the Springs for a week or two after the encampment.

"You may leave any word that you want conveyed to me with her—I'll be here and there on this business for three or four days, I expect," said the judge.

"I'm sure you're leaving a competent representative behind you," Calvert told him, and if there was more warmth in his tone than could have been reasonably expected out of mere politeness in a stranger, Judge Richardson did not appear to take note of it.

"Her mother is here with her," said the judge; "we brought her down to try the waters again for the hundredth time, I expect, in the past twenty years. She suffers from rheumatism, which this water seems to help, temporarily—fancy, I think it is, more than real relief. They're staying with a relative here. Dan Grinnell can arrange for you to confer with my daughter if necessity for it arises."

Bill Sawyer, currently known as Uncle Bill, proprietor of the hotel, was seated on the long veranda watching the sports of the celebration. He gave Judge Richardson a hearty greeting, accepting Calvert as from his hands on what appeared an entirely new and cordial footing. Judge Richardson went on his way; Calvert drew a chair to the end of the porch at Sawyer's invitation.

He was a huge man, so swaddled in rolls of fat that he could hardly carry his weight. His garments, made of some coarse gray material such as Calvert never had seen before, were cut to envelop loosely his immense body, increasing to the eye his bulk. He spoke in a thick, asthmatic voice, as if

the sound must force its way out through blubber.

He was too heavy to venture forth upon the grounds—indeed, he had not been down his own steps in several years, he told Calvert. He sat in a great chair fashioned out of hickory saplings, a palm-leaf fan in one hand, a towel in the other.

"I never saw such a mess of people in the springs before," he said.

"There is quite a bunch of them," Calvert agreed, ready to make talk to the best of his ability, seeing himself thus accepted as an equal, and a desirable person to have around.

"Yes; and I've been here a long time, too. I built this house when I come home from the army. I was with Joe Shelby's brigade."

"Is it possible? I've heard a great deal about General Joe Shelby—some of your old comrades are here to-day."

"Yes," Sawyer sighed, "and I wish I could go down and mingle with 'em, but I can't. I ain't got no right to kick about my fat, though; I'd rather be a fat livin' man than a lean dead one."

Calvert admitted the comfort of such a situation, and ventured a suggestion that some of the overweight might be worked off. Sawyer shook his head, his lips pursed in puffing to restock his breath.

"I'm too old to work it off, my heart wouldn't stand it," he said. "The trouble with me was I stayed on one spring too long."

Calvert ventured a polite inquiry, not exactly understanding what he meant.

"I was on the liver spring," Sawyer explained; "gall-stones and bile. If I'd 'a' dropped that spring and took up the acid water when I was cured I'd 'a' been all right. But I was afraid I might have a relapse, and I stuck on that water till the first thing I knew I was fattenin' up so fast nothing 'd stop me. When I did begin on the acid spring it was too late.

"Have you begun on the waters yet, Mr. Calvert?"

No; Mr. Calvert had not begun on the waters yet. He was not sure that he would begin on them, speaking off-hand, having no ills of which he was aware.

"Did you hear General Treadmill's speech?" Sawyer inquired next.

"No, I wasn't there when the general spoke."

"I guess you and Judge Richardson was off together. Well, you didn't miss much, I guess—I could repeat it for you word for word if you wanted to hear it—the general's been makin' that speech at Fourth of Julys and annual encampments for thirty years. But they was tellin' me he come back in the Union to-day."

Here Sawyer was obliged to give fairway to his deep, agitating chuckle again. There must have been more pain than pleasure in his laugh, considering the alarming purple of his face, the heaving of his waistband, the shaking of his great shoulders. It would have been merciful indeed, thought Calvert, to discuss only the gravest and most melancholy subjects with this prodigious man. But the spasm passed without a vent being torn in the fat tissue, as Calvert feared might be the result of his host's deep agitation.

"They thought you was a deputy," said he, "but I knew you wasn't when you come here last night. I don't know how I knew, but I seem to be able to smell them fellers like a water moccasin on a hot day. Of course this house is a public house. I can't refuse to take 'em in as long as I've got room when they come along here lookin' for the judges. I've put a lot of them fellers up in the last twenty years. But I knew you wasn't connected with the gover'ment, and if you was, when Judge Richardson vouches for you I'd pass you any day."

"I surely appreciate your confidence, Mr. Sawyer—I was afraid I'd got in bad with nearly everybody here."

"I heard about it," Sawyer said, nodding ponderously; "it wasn't your fault—they're beginnin' to own up it was Tru Hunter that was to blame. They'll be so ashamed of themselves by night they couldn't look a dog in the face."

"I hope so," said Calvert gravely.

"They will," Sawyer declared decisively; "they're the fairest-minded and most generous folks on earth when you get to know them."

"I believe you, Mr. Sawyer," Calvert returned, thinking of a shower of sun-bright hair.

"Here comes that slap-foot nigger of mine with some of that barbecued meat," Sawyer announced, getting up like a hippopotamus rising out of a tank. "I put off dinner till it was done—nobody here to eat it but you and me. If you'll come on in we'll see what kind of a job old Henry Hadley done on his barbecu'n' he brags so much about."

Calvert was quick to accept the invitation, following his host into the darkened parlor. Here Sawyer paused, looking around him with cautious eye, listening with suspicious ear.

"We've got funny kind of trees in the woods in this country," said he, giving Calvert a significant glance. "Sometimes they hear what ain't meant for 'em to hear."

Calvert thanked him, understanding at once the friendly intention of his host, as he must have been both deaf and blind, indeed, not to have understood. A quick fear rose in him for the safety of the bonds which he had left in his room with no greater protection than the locked closet door. As if to carry his warning and caution farther, Sawyer said:

"When you straighten your necktie, come on down and we'll eat."

Calvert almost leaped to the stairs, a chill of apprehension prickling his skin. The door of his room stood ajar; he opened it cautiously, to see a man lying across the bed, sprawling loose-limbed, feet upon the floor, as one in the stupor of drunkenness might stagger in and fall.

Calvert closed and locked the door; went close to the intruder, who seemed to be asleep, and bent over him. There was no odor of liquor, although he lay as if in the very paralysis of drink. He was a young man, coatless, wearing a gaudy silk shirt and shoes ornamented with perforated and stitched design. He lay face down, arms flung out, relaxed, breathing heavily, to all appearances insensible in heavy sleep.

Calvert opened his closet door, stepping partly within the large recess, made a quick examination of his little black bag, breathed in relief to find its contents undisturbed, and came out again, closing the door noisily. The man on the bed did not stir. Only after much shaking and sharp commanding to look about his business was Calvert able to bring the fellow out of his drowse. He staggered up, weaving on legs which simulated well an advanced stage of inebriet, the irresponsible stage, as those who excuse and condone the vice call it.

"'Scuse me, pardner," he apologized, blinking stupidly, his mouth hanging open, blankness in his face; "got in wrong room, guess—wrong room."

"No doubt about it," Calvert told him, watching him with close eye.

He picked up the fellow's hat, jammed it on his head, and opened the door to his groping hands. As the intruder staggered out Calvert pressed close to him, not convinced that this was pretense. But the young fellow's breath was untainted by the vapor of strong drink; he was as sober as Calvert himself.

The latter hesitated between laying hold of the intruder and turning him over to Sawyer, and applying some vigorous measures of his own as the fellow went reeling along the hall, pushing on doors with bewildered seeking for his own quarters, as it appeared. Still, the incident might be thought a little thing in that place to make a disturbance over, and doubtless was nothing unusual there. Perhaps he was some fuddled guest; Calvert thought it well to watch him and find out.

Already the man had gone weaving on his limber legs around the angle in the hall; Calvert followed quickly to watch his further movements. The hall was empty—the man was gone. Calvert hurried to the farther end, two rooms only, on either side of the hall, the doors of both standing open. No sight of the intruder on the stairs running down to the kitchen, no sound of his feet on the uncarpeted boards.

Calvert stood puzzling over it a moment, in no doubt now that this fellow's purpose in his room had been robbery. He had thrown himself across the bed at the sound of Calvert's feet in the hall, and cleverly carried out this simulation of drunkenness, a too common excuse in reality to be questioned. Doubtless the fellow had been set

on the job because of his cunning in this respect. But where had he gone?

Calvert looked along the hall again. A window was open in the first room around the angle from his own, the distance to the ground being not above fifteen feet. The intruder had swung out and dropped, lithe and light as he was, and by this time was laughing over his deceit among his friends.

The trees in the forest had overheard, indeed, what had passed between him and Judge Richardson, Calvert now knew. Somebody had skulked and listened; they knew now that he was not only the bondholder, but that he carried with him the bonds. How simple, indeed, to rob him, destroy the hated securities, and then defy him before the world to bring forward proof that he ever had them!

"No, my safe don't amount to shucks, Mr. Calvert," Sawyer said; "it ain't been no good since some fellers blowed it up four or five years ago. Nobody ever has come along that could fix that lock."

Calvert had asked him to take charge of certain valuables and lock them up when he joined the landlord in the dining-room with the black bag in his hand. The landlord had raised his eyes with troubled look when he explained about the safe. Calvert passed it as lightly as his disturbed mind would permit.

"The safest place for you to leave your valuables would be the bank in Vinland," Sawyer said. "But of course a man might get held up on the road over there."

"I was thinking he might," rejoined Calvert, but with a rather easy indifference, as if he considered the case of another than his own.

CHAPTER XIII.

AUNT NANCY GRINNELL.

"I'VE been weavin' that cloth for Bill Sawyer's clothes for twenty-three years, yes, and cardin' and spinnin' the wool, too."

"I wondered where it came from," Calvert said, watching the old lady throw her shuttle with the admirable dexterity of lifelong practice.

Calvert was at Grinnell's house, it being evening of his first day in Indian Springs, awaiting the return of Dan. The dryly active little Mrs. Grinnell was doing her best to entertain the visitor without neglecting what appeared to be her pressing work.

"I fooled around all day at the 'campment," she explained, accounting for her late hours of toil, "wastin' my time like I didn't have a thing to do. Winter's comin' purty soon, and Bill Sawyer he'll be needin' a heavy suit, and I've got to git this here piece off so I can put in the warp for a carpet in the mornin', anyhow. Seems to me like folks wants more carpets these days than ever. Maybe it's because they're gittin' poorer all the time, and comin' down to more rags."

Mrs. Grinnell pitched her voice rather high to overcome the rattle of the loom. She was a small, straight-backed, scant-haired woman, dark, pinched of features, alert of eyes, long in the nose; quick as a hornet, an indestructible milestone of the generations of men.

She plied the shuttle a while with great vigor, as if to retrieve the few pauses she had made. Calvert sat by, watching her with admiration for her proficiency, wondering how old she might be, and what tales she could tell of the bitter feud of that dark land against the overshadowing hand of the law.

"You goin' to the dance to-night?" she inquired with such sudden sharpness that seemed she expected to trap him into a dangerous admission.

"I hadn't heard about it," he replied.

"It's goin' to be in the ice-house," she said.

"That ought to be a cool place for a dance this hot night," he remarked.

"This ain't no hot night, man!" she discounted. "Laws, you ought to be here along in the middle of July, when it's so hot the t'backer leaves hang down like dishrags."

"If you'll excuse me, I'd just as soon not, Mrs. Grinnell."

"As soon not what?"

"Be here in the middle of July."

"Oh, I thought you meant you'd as

soon not go to the dance. You ain't used to dancin' in no ice-house, I reckon, but there ain't no ice in that one—ain't been for five or six years. They got so onery here they quit cuttin' it; ruther haul the made ice over from Vinland and let half of it melt on the road. It's all fixed up, anyways, so you wouldn't hardly know it ever was a ice-house," she ran on, her words as endless as her thread, it seemed. "Susie Richardson and them other girls—it's a maids' of honor ball, you know."

"Oh, is that so?" Calvert came up suddenly with a keen and relishing interest.

Mrs. Grinnell glanced at him sharply, nodded, looked pleased in a moment, and turned to her weaving again.

"Woke you up, did I? Well, I reckon you want to go now, don't you?"

"Why, I don't know but I do," he confessed, grinning rather sheepishly.

"You could, well enough, without Tru Hunter kickin' up a fuss, I reckon. It's one of them parties where they all fix up and put on masks, and I could rig you out so nobody 'd ever know you—but one—and I'll bet a purty there's one 'd know you if you was hid amongst a million."

"Why, who in the world?"

She looked at him slantwise across her long, sharp nose, and nodded in her sagacious fashion.

"You mean—" said he, making a pretense of being greatly puzzled.

"Me to know and you to find out," she answered.

"I thought maybe you meant Dan," he said, feeling his face grow hot.

"Dan—and Beersheeby!" she replied with infinite soorn.

Oh, little secret, little secret, growing so fast that soon his bosom could not hide it, was it possible that it had flamed forth in his eyes already so that the wisdom of age could see?

But no; she had not read it in his face. He had voted for Susie Richardson with a liberality which minds like Mrs. Grinnell's could attribute to but one cause. That's all there was to it; she had made a shrewd and impertinent conclusion. Impertinent, certainly; very impertinent. He glanced at her severely, considering whether he should censure her for such foolish liberties.

"Dan's mighty slow," she said, stopping her weaving to go to the door and listen. "He just stepped out after his supper to git a twist of t'backer, and said he'd be right back. I hope he ain't been gittin' in a fight."

"He's met some of his old comrades," Calvert suggested.

"I guess he must 'a', but I told him to come back and put on a clean shirt—they're goin' to have a campfire to-night, them old soldiers, while the young ones is kickin' up."

"I'd sure like to go to that dance," said Calvert, apart in his manner, as if he mused aloud.

"If I was you I'd up and go," she encouraged. "I could fix you up so you'd be the grandest man amongst 'em, and I don't care who the next one was."

"Could you now, really, granny?"

"Could I? I said I could, didn't I?"

"I beg your pardon, granny—" quite humbly, in conciliating tone.

"Don't you go grannyin' me!" she reproved him. "I'm none so old!"

"Of course you're not. I'm always putting my foot in it that way. I doubt if you're old enough to be my mother."

"Yes, I am, and your granny, too. But I don't like to have it throwed up to me."

"I'm sorry I said it; I am very sorry."

She went back to her loom, where she flashed her shuttle like a darting fish, back and forth through the maze of threads, Calvert watching her in silence. Suddenly she turned, the shuttle in her hand.

"If you don't go to the dance there'll be one disappointed heart," she said. "There'll be somebody wonderin' and lookin' and standin' by the door. Now, don't you ask me any more!"

Calvert got up, such an unaccountable feeling of happiness over him that he felt drawn to give the old lady a kiss. He held back on that impulse, doubtful how she would receive such a caress, wondering with a breaking smile how many years it had been since a man was moved toward her with a similar one.

Dan appeared in the door at that moment, bearing no evidence of conflict, but plainly disturbed in mind and excited beyond his usual placidity. He came in hurriedly, stopping abruptly when he saw Calvert under the lamp.

"Well, where's your manners?" Mrs. Grinnell addressed him sharply.

Dan put out his hand behind him cautiously, like a man feeling in the dark, and softly closed the door. Then he nodded to Calvert.

"I've been lookin' all over town for you, Tom," he said.

"And I've been here waiting for you to come. What's up?"

For it was plain by the old man's face that something was afoot, and something of unusually disturbing nature. He turned to the little window and pulled down the shade.

"Laws!" said Mrs. Grinnell, watching him with astonished eyes, "a person 'd think you was goin' to murder us, Dan Grinnell!"

"Tom," said Grinnell, speaking Calvert's name as if he had been on familiar terms with him all his life, "they've found out about it—they're layin' for you."

Mrs. Grinnell swung round on her bench to face her husband; Calvert nodded, neither shocked nor disturbed by the news.

"I was pretty sure they'd found out everything, Dan," he said.

"Cass Oglethorpe sneaked along in the brush and heard enough of what you and Judge Richardson was talkin' about to know who you are and what you come here for."

"Cass Oglethorpe—" Calvert repeated the name reflectively, as if studying to recall where he had heard it before. "Is he—" describing the man who had invaded his room.

"That's him," said Dan.

"Them hell-fired bonds!" said Mrs. Grinnell. "There'll be more shootin' and killin' over them now, with one of them Oglethorpe boys mixed up in it."

At the mention of the bonds, of which she was thought to know nothing, Calvert started. But a glance told him that husband and wife had no secrets between them, and that one was to be trusted with the other.

"It was about the unlucky bonds that I came to see you, Dan. I wanted to ask you to keep them for me a while. Some one tried to steal them to-day."

"They're bound to git 'em, Tom. Tru Hunter swears he'll burn 'em at the 'campment to-morrow."

"Maybe he will," said Calvert, grimly, "but he'll have to catch me asleep if he gets them."

"They'll gang you. They'll never let you live to make a settlement with the county on them bonds—that's what Tru Hunter swears."

"Are you sure about their intention to take a shot at me?"

"What I know, I know," Dan replied rather loftily.

"I'm sure you do," Calvert hastened to conciliate, "but I thought it might be their bluff to scare me off."

"These fellers here in this neck of the woods don't go in for bluffin', Tom," the old man returned. "Cass Oglethorpe's daddy was killed over them cussid bonds when Cass was a baby; they brought them boys up to snap at the name of bonds, dedicated to revenge, you might say. Tru Hunter's a cousin of theirn—he always has gone braggin' around he'll kill a deputy before he's forty."

"He knows I'm not a deputy."

"Yes, but he knows *what* you are."

"I suppose they'd make a hero of the man that cracked me over," remarked Calvert gloomily.

"The whole United States couldn't convict him," the old man declared. "Did you fetch them papers over here with you?"

"Yes, I've got them here."

"Well, you leave 'em here to-night, and in the morning we'll try and figger out some way to git 'em over to the safe deposit vault at Vinland."

"But if they suspected—"

"They do, Tom; they suspicion every step I take. Let 'em—me and the old woman we'll take the resk for to-night, anyhow."

"No, I'll not throw you into trouble over this thing, Dan. I'm afraid Hunter and his gang have got enough laid up against you already for standing by me this morning. That's enough. If you can get me a horse I'll try to make it to Vinland to-night."

"They're watchin' the road; you couldn't do it."

"Then I guess I'll have to. Did you give Hunter back that gun?"

"I give it to him, Tom," Grinnell answered regretfully, "but"—brightening as he read Calvert's determined face—"I've got one just as good you can have."

Mrs. Grinnell got down from her bench at the loom and stood confronting them, hands on her hips, her bony sharp elbows as hard and brown as part of her machine.

"You ain't goin' to have no gun out of this house!" she said.

"Now, look a-here, Nance," Dan protested, turning on her with his whiskers pointing most determinedly, "I reckon—"

"One man can't fight the whole county, and that's what you'll have to do if you begin shootin'," she declared, speaking to Calvert with her wise and sharp directness. "If it'll do Tru Hunter any good to burn them hell-fired bonds that's caused so much misery and trouble, let him have 'em, and rack out of here to where you come from with a whole hide—it's worth more 'n any bonds that ever was made."

"You're right about it in a way, Aunt Nancy," Calvert told her, risking another endearment of consanguinity quite unconsciously in his sympathy with her feeling in the case. "If it was somebody else, I might do it."

"There ain't a right-minded man in this county 'd ask you to hand them papers over to Tru Hunter, Tom," Dan declared. "Any man that's got a fair streak in him 'll go half way to meet you, like Judge Richardson went."

"Them bonds wouldn't be safe in this house," proclaimed Nancy, with such stress that Calvert understood she would destroy them herself.

"Them fellers might be out there layin' their ears to a crack right now," said Dan. "I felt like somebody was follerin' me."

"The whole town 'd git out of bed and come after 'em if they knowed we had 'em," Nancy declared. "You can't fly up in the face of your neighbors that way; I don't care how Judge Richardson feels about it."

"I'll take my chances with them." Calvert picked up the bag as if to go. "But I would like to go to that dance, Aunt Nancy," he added.

"You'd be puttin' your foot in the fire," said Dan.

"I don't know as he would so much," Nancy considered. "How many of them hell-fired bonds have you got, Tom?"

"There are twenty of them, Aunt Nancy."

"Do they make a very big bundle?"

"Not so very big."

"Could you carry them in your pocket without bulgin' much?"

"They'd never be noticed."

"Then the best thing you can do is go to the dance and take 'em with you," she said decisively.

"Hell's pickles!" exclaimed Dan, in astonished protest.

"And give 'em to Susie Richardson to keep for you. That's the one safe place in this county you could put 'em."

"By Henry, that's right!" said Dan.

"Come on in and git ready," and Nancy reached up to take the lamp from the bracket. "When you're ready to leave Dan 'll go out the front way to draw off any of them fellers that may be watchin'. They'll trail after him, thinkin' he's goin' to you; then you can step out the back door in the dark."

"They'll see through him," Dan declared; "they'll see through any kind of a rig you can put on him."

Nancy ignored this gloomy forecast, leading the way into an adjoining room.

"I wish they *was* burnt," said she, bitterly, back to the bonds, "burnt to ashes, and their trouble blowed away on the fourteen winds of heaven!"

"Burnin' 'em wouldn't—" Dan began.

"Nobody asked you if you was a lawyer," she broke in, shutting him up like a door.

On the threshold of the other room she

stood a moment, her hand between the lamp chimney and her eyes.

"Susie 'll be dressed up like a cowboy girl," she said, "with a red switch to hide her hair."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE OFFICER IN GRAY.

MYRTA Smith stood over in a corner where the wind reached her, talking volubly with an ear of corn. Myrta herself was a cucumber, and a rather stubby and juicy one, more like a full-grown dill pickle, indeed. There was not much art in either the husk of the ear of corn or the rind of the cucumber to disguise the identity of the human flesh beneath them, and no pretense at all to mask their voices as they stood apart from the whirl of dancers on the ice-house floor.

"I don't know who he *can* be," said Myrta; "that uniform don't belong in the Springs. Maybe he's from Vinland, but he don't dance like a Vinland man."

"Susie Richardson must know him, the way she hangs to him," observed the corn.

"If she don't she's sure gettin' acquainted," Myrta returned, with considerable asperity.

"Why, I believe you're jealous of her, Myrt!" the corn charged, nudging the cucumber with bony elbow.

"I'm a married woman!" said Myrta, with the cold dignity of unassailable virtue.

"Well, so am I," giggled the corn, "but I'd like to dance with him once. If I could make him talk I'll bet I'd know him—if he's anybody I've ever met."

"Susie Richardson thinks she's some eggs in that Wild West outfit," Myrta scoffed.

"I wasn't sure it was Susie till you told me, but I knew that switch of Lucy Porterfield's the minute I saw it. I wonder what made her want to cover up that lovely hair?"

"Lovely, huh! It looks like evaporated peaches!"

"Oh, Myrt, you're jealous! I do believe"—seriously, with growing excitement—"I do really believe he's—"

"Who?" demanded Myrta, snapping it off in a breath.

"The man that got you out of the barrel!" said the corn, with something like maliciousness in her panting disclosure.

Myrta turned from her coldly. "If you wasn't my friend, Winnie Biggs, I'd slap your mouth!" she said.

"Oh, Myrt, *can't* you take a joke?" The corn stroked the cucumber's back pleadingly.

"I'm not mad," said Myrta, "but I'm hurt. I didn't expect that of you."

Myrta drew away with that declaration, to stand a little nearer the door for a closer look at the mystery as he passed out to take the air with Susie Richardson on his arm. She was not a yard from him as he passed, but peer as she might she could not identify the stranger by line of his body or vibration of his voice. Not willing to give it up, she followed them into the open.

The stranger, who had excited speculation in more hearts than those of the cucumber and the corn, was dressed as a Confederate officer. He was a tall man of strong figure, who carried his military dress with the ease and grace of shoulders accustomed to a uniform, and who strode with the military tread unmistakable to those versed in such things. Shortly after his appearance at the dance he had sought Susie Richardson, and from that time they had been almost inseparable.

But there was a newness about the dress that suggested a costume for such occasions rather than a treasured relic of long-past days, such as the faded gray of the veterans who sat round their camp-fire that night. The buttons were bright, the color of the cloth was fresh, the broad-brimmed hat unworn. The officer was masked with a strip of black silk that came almost to the end of his nose, concealing his features effectively. Myrta Smith followed as closely as she might without seeming impertinent, listening with all her ears.

Many couples had come out after the dance, to walk up and down in the moonlight under the sugar maples which lined the little street. Where there would have been a sidewalk in a more modern town,

there stretched a bluegrass sward. Here the young people walked without the sound of footfall or the rasp of heel to break upon their whispers and low laughter, the moonlight sprinkling them through the thick foliage.

But sharp as her ears were, and eagerly as she suppressed her breath to hear, Myrta Smith could not catch more than the low hum of their voices as the Confederate officer and the cow-girl walked a rod ahead of her. They seemed to be talking earnestly, for there was no laughter between them. Myrta took this to mean that both of them were already steeped in love.

They strolled on down the street somewhat past the point where the promenaders usually turned back, and sat on a bench only a little way from the spring with the barrel where Myrta had met her adventure the night before.

There Myrta gave it up, going on to the drug-store where her thin and acidulous, sad and scissory husband Homer was up to the eyes in ice-cream. She felt the need of a dish of that stimulating refreshment, and went on thinking of its delights with a moistening of the mouth, casting her round eyes back now and then, deciding that they were sitting pretty close together.

She determined on returning that way presently and lingering just around the corner of the fence in the shadow of Mrs. Humphrey's bridal wreath. But if her ears had been sharper at that moment she would have heard the hero of her life's one adventure say:

"He was as nearly my size as another bean."

"It's strange how the uniform kept so bright and fresh all that time," said Susie, marveling, looking at the twinkling buttons on his breast.

"Didn't she ever tell you about him?" he asked, surprised.

"I know he was a captain in Stonewall Jackson's army—Aunt Nancy tells everybody that—but I didn't know she had his uniform put away, as fresh as if it came from the tailor only yesterday."

"She wove it with her own hands, every thread of it, and sent it to a dyer in Boston—it was a work of pure devotion and love."

"She never told me." Susie's voice was soft in sympathy with the poetic devotion so little suspected of poor old Aunt Nancy.

"Aunt Nancy wove it a good while after the war; her captain brother never wore the uniform except in dress parades and at reunions such as this. She said he had it tailored and silk-lined and all, and was treasuring it to be buried in. But—these were her own words—he never lived to be buried in it, poor boy!"

"Never lived to be buried in it! What a ridiculous thing to say."

"She meant he didn't fulfil his years, I suppose, but died suddenly in California, a long way from the Kentucky home where she and Dan were living then. You must have stepped right into his place in her affections, poor, kind old soul, for her to let you have his uniform to wear to a dance."

"I think it was concern for my situation, rather than any sudden attachment."

"Your situation, Mr. Calvert?"

"I think maybe Dan and Aunt Nancy—you do call her Aunt Nancy?"

"Everybody does."

"I just guessed it—I called her granny first—I thought she'd box my ears."

"It's a wonder she didn't," said Susie, appreciative of the joke. But, immediately grave, touching his arm as if to recall him to his subject: "What were you going to say about Dan and Aunt Nancy?"

"I think they may magnify the—the—peril of the situation a little."

"Peril?" she repeated, her eyes growing large with an increeping of fright as she looked at him earnestly.

"I didn't see Judge Hunter at the dance," said he, in what appeared to be irrelevancy or evasion.

"No, he hasn't been there to-night."

"Maybe he doesn't care about dancing."

"Yes, he's always been one of the leaders."

A little silence, as if he were considering something.

"Cass Oglethorpe wasn't there, either," he said then.

"Cass Oglethorpe?" she repeated in alarm.

"I think I'd know his walk—I didn't notice him."

"He *wasn't* there—several who always go to dances weren't there. I thought they'd come later, but it's—"

"Half past eleven now, Miss Richardson."

"Mr. Calvert"—grave and steady, her hand on his arm in her earnestly appealing way—"have they found out something?"

"About all there is to know," he said, giving the reply a lightness which his conscience did not justify.

"They're looking for you; they don't know where you are!" she exclaimed.

"I don't know whether I was helping matters much by coming to the dance, but I wanted to come, and Aunt Nancy found a way."

"How much did Dan find out?" she whispered.

"Judge Hunter swears he'll burn the bonds in public to-morrow, if he has to take a shot or two at me to get them."

"The coward!" she cried softly. "Father told them he counted you his guest—they all heard it. And now this traitor defies him!"

"I'm a troublesome guest, and one better out of the house." Calvert took her hand and held it in both his own as he might have taken a child's to comfort and assure her. So he held it as he told her, briefly, of the attmept to rob him that day, and his desire to leave for Vinland and put his papers in a bank vault there, and how this intention was cut off by the vigilance of Hunter and his men.

"The coward!" she said again; "to take advantage of a man who came here trusting to our honor and justice!"

"Well, he'll not have his bonfire to-morrow, if I have to stay awake all night to beat him out of it," said he.

"Where are the bonds?" she asked.

"Here." He lifted her hand and pressed it against his breast.

"There must be some way—there *must* be some way! Give them to me!"

"Aunt Nancy thought she was sending me here to do that," he told her, "but I hold the sanctity of your house too high to have those rascals plundering through it."

"They wouldn't dare! Give them to me," she urged. "They'll be as safe as in a bank."

"I'm sure they would," he answered; "but that wouldn't help matters much—they'd go right on shooting at me, not knowing you were my banker."

"I don't know what to do!" said she despairingly.

"Just let the thing go its way and come out as it will," he rejoined.

"Come out as it will!" she shuddered, as though she saw the end pictured in the calm moonlight.

"It's coming to me, all they hand out to me is coming, right enough, for being such a dunce as to blunder in here the way I did. But it's all right; it was worth it all. I'm glad I came."

So he sat holding her hand, as if he had a right. And the music of the dance began again and ended, and strollers came out to the greensward to walk under the moon-pierced leaves.

"I must be back for the unmasking at midnight," she said presently.

"That will be after the next dance—it's a quarter of twelve."

"Here comes Judge Hunter!" and she hastily withdrew her hand from his.

Judge Hunter was approaching from the town, walking rapidly, his broad white shirt bosom bright as a lesser moon. He paused a moment a little way beyond where Calvert and Susie sat, looking about with quick caution before entering the shadowed avenue of trees. He passed without seeming to notice them apart from several others who came laughing and chattering up from the dance.

"I must be there at midnight; I'm one of the patronesses," said Susie, rising in almost a panic of despair. "What are you going to do?"

"I'm going with you," he answered calmly, drawing her hand through his arm. "Judge Hunter is looking for me; I wouldn't disappoint him."

"You—you can't unmask!" she gasped.

"Of course."

She restrained him as he started toward the dance hall, lagging back a sweet incumbrance upon his arm. Then she yielded, and started forward eagerly.

"That will be the best way, after all," she agreed, talking fast as her nimble feet carried her on. "Everybody is to stand just where he is when the dance ends, and unmask at the signal. The minute we unmask, hand those papers to me. Nobody but Judge Hunter will know what they are, and I want him to know."

"Miss Richardson, I can't allow—" He started to protest.

"There's no time for argument," she stopped him. "There they go!"

She started running at the sound of the music, arriving panting and laughing at the door as if she had made a harum-scarum race, light-headed as any, and with no more care. At once she whirled him into the dance, a sort of higglede-piggledy waltz played in devil-go-it time by the rustic fiddlers. As Susie and Calvert came dodging and colliding round to the door, saving their toes as they might, Calvert saw Judge Hunter standing just outside in a group of loutish gapers.

Hunter's big black hat was pulled down over his eyes, half his thin, sharp face was obscured in shadow, but Calvert knew he was studying the gait and movement of the dancers, separating out those whom he knew, sifting them down for strangers, and one stranger apart from all the rest.

On the next circuit of the hall Calvert noted that Hunter had come inside, where he stood in front of those who watched the dance and waited for the sensation of the unmasking.

From the look of Hunter's face, from the pose of his body—which seemed that of high-tensioned preparation, readiness to spring like a crouching cat—Calvert knew he had been sifted out of the crowd and marked. Around the room once more, the fiddlers seeming to delight in the haggling they gave that tune, and suddenly the waltz ended, Calvert and Susie not more than a dozen feet from the door.

One of the matrons of the ball, a chubby, round, red woman, mounted the little stage where the fiddlers sat, her hand raised for silence and attention. So for a moment, eyes on her wrist-watch, waiting for the last second of the enchanted hour. At the very last second of the hour the matron clapped her hands.

"Now!" she cried, and masks came off with little shrieks and loud laughter, and some resoundings of bold kisses as lucky swains collected the forfeits of bets with fair partners wagered before the dance.

Calvert was a second or two ahead of his partner, who found difficulty, or made it on clever pretense, with the strings of her mask around the strands of her borrowed hair. He bowed to her, sweeping off his hat and bending low as if in recognition of unexpected charms, presenting at the same time the packet of papers in the manner of a beau who has carried something for his lady through the dance.

Susie took them with a little bobbing, mock curtsy, wound her black mask around them, and her handkerchief over that, just as if she had taken from his keeping something entrusted to him for the hour.

There was no escaping those who came pressing round her, exclaiming over her masquerade which few had penetrated, curious to look closer at her handsome gallant, anxious to be presented, hoping for a dance with one who moved with such unaccustomed lightness and grace.

But no; there was to be no more dancing for Susie that night, consequently no hope for the ladies of footing it with her partner. Susie had promised her invalid mother to come home at midnight, and so must go. They saw her take the light-heeled stranger away with sighs, even to the poor cucumber, who looked now as if she stood surmounted by a strawberry at the stem end, so red was her face.

As Calvert and Susie left the dance Judge Hunter turned his back on them, seeming to express in this way that his least purpose in coming had been to find either of them, and that he was entirely indifferent whether they went or remained. But there was something in the mere insolent turning of his back that was more to Calvert than a threat. It was the easy indifference of a man who has his plans made and knows they will not fall through.

This story will be continued in next week's issue of the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY, the consolidated title under which both magazines will appear hereafter as one.

Jungle Love

by Raymond Lester

Author of "Dust to Dust," "Walls of Clay," the *Nan Russell* series, etc.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

SIXTH AVENUE AND THE SEVENTH HEAVEN.

"OH!" This exclamation was involuntary, and it may not be considered as a polite way of greeting a young man, but it was given and must stand.

Following the salutation, Julie blushed, she did more; she became very pink indeed; her ears burned.

Both the maestro and David Stern were mystified. There was an embarrassment about the girl's manner that they considered unaccountable, which of course was not the case. There is a reason, even if it be only a woman's reason, for everything that is done by old girls or young.

The maestro knew he knew a great many things; David Stern thought he knew a few others; but neither of them could say what exactly was the matter with Julie. She knew, but did not tell. Not just now.

"Pleased—glad to meet you," said David, and took no time at all in making up his mind that it had been a worth while infliction to remember Julie's eyes; and a much more worth while test of patience to wait the period of the maestro's experiment.

"Oh!" and "Pleased—glad to meet you!"

David Stern had only ten days to spare for his visit and for one precious hour this was all that was said by *him* to *her*. Salgado did the talking; Julie sat stealing glances, and David tried to say, yes, no, indeed, in the right places and show how interested he was in what his host was saying.

When the maestro went out of the room, did David hint at what was in his heart? Did he look languishing and make wild gestures? He did not. He smoked a cigarette and answered Julie's questions about—Sixth Avenue! Although he did not talk a great deal, David Stern could not help but wonder how a nice, refined girl like Julie could ever have given a second glance at a flashy up-start and degenerate like Artie. For the moment, David forgot that this was not the same girl he had seen in Para. This Julie was the one who had been brought to the surface by Salgado.

"Do you often come up to the mountains?" asked the girl after she had satisfied herself that the Sixth Avenue L was still a-rattling, and the same old bunch were crowding on the trolleys at Fourteenth Street.

"I have not been here before," replied David. "I came to see you."

"To see me! Why—how could you be interested in me? I have never—met you before."

"Not exactly. I passed you in the street in Para and—oh, I took an interest in you right away. I remembered you from the very first time I saw you."

"And I—I thought you were rather—nice."

"You did! I wasn't aware that you had ever noticed me."

"Oh, yes. I watched you for quite a long time."

"Watched me? How, when, where?"

"Through the keyhole."

David Stern realized the reason for slight awkwardness that had been Julie's when the maestro had introduced them.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for August 21.

Following her frank statement, Julie turned her head away. She liked the look of this clear-eyed young man; but there were shameful, unpleasant memories connected with the keyhole episode.

"Miss Somers," said David Stern after a long pause, "I admire and appreciate your candidness. It's good of you. I, too, must tell you something: my old friend Salgado gave me a brief outline of the circumstances that surrounded you, and since you are aware of the small part I played in your affairs in Para, will you please credit me with entire belief in you?"

"I was foolish and very wicked."

"No, only very young and inexperienced. We are all liable to make mistakes and get carried away by our what-you-may-call-its. When I was a kid I wanted to do—oh, all kinds of fool things—"

"But you didn't do them."

"Not all, but old Dame Experience stuck her claws into me two or three times."

After this David talked of matters less relative to affairs suggestive of the past, and somehow the conversation swung round to a discussion of the respective merits of North and South America.

"I think it a fine place," said Julie.

"Better than the old country?"

"Oh—I don't know about that."

"Would you like to live here all your life?"

A wistful expression settled in Julie's blue eyes. She was thinking of the maestro; of the quietude and security that had been hers since she had been taken under his wing and treated as a loved daughter. Yes, she owed Salgado quite a lot. It seemed unloyal to express any feeling of unrest. Yet—home is home, and she felt the call of the old, familiar scenes.

Most of us are built this way. We like to go around, to travel; but sooner or later the old place back home begins to pull. Strange fruits lose their savor; new, odd-looking flowers no longer allure.

Something of what was passing through Julie's mind was divined by David, and when she did not reply he forbore to press his question. At some future time he would ask her again—more definitely.

Salgado stood at his library window when, that evening, Julie and David walked through the garden.

"That young man," thought the maestro, "is something besides being well up in business deals. If nothing untoward occurs I have an idea I shall lose my adopted daughter. Yet, in a sense, she will always be mine. I helped her to find—herself, and she has a loving, affectionate nature. She will never forget the maestro. The Falwell knot will be cut and the course of true love will flow smoothly on. That wretch will never come into her life again."

The maestro was not alone in this belief, but not always does the shadow of evil march before the event.

Even as Salgado went back to his desk, a vicious rat was getting nearer to scenting a trail that he thought would lead him to rich returns. The rodent of the Artie type can never be relied upon to remain harmless for long.

In the garden, David Stern stood beside the girl he had fixed his mind and heart upon. He was thinking, wondering at the strange power that had linked him with Julie. And she—was marveling at the sadness and sweetness of the emotion that was stirring her and holding her silent and waiting. For what? Julie did not quite know.

As for the maestro, his thoughts had gone far away; to that place in France where lay the body of a white-souled girl. He sat misted by memories, and for a little while the past claimed him.

"I shall see her again," he said softly, and the miracle of faith calmed and renewed his strength. He took an envelope from the stationery rack, and addressed it: Mrs. Ruth Gordon. He wrote:

> In my last letter I mentioned that I was going to try an experiment; and now, without further preamble, I hasten to tell you that it has turned out to be a complete and unqualified success. The Julie I found and ventured to try and shape to some better expression of herself, is a different girl. She has developed amazingly, and flowered to a refinement of character that one would have declared impossible. But, with my own eyes have I seen the act, and lest you think I flatter myself overmuch for the small part I have taken in the rebirth of this child, I emphasize the statement, that all I did was

to give her the opportunity to emerge from the chrysalis wound about her by early environment. We know that where gold is not, it cannot be mined. The good qualities that, I am happy to say, have claimed ascendancy in Julie, were there all the time, weakened by long quiescence, and in danger of being extinguished by mal nutrition of mind and body; but the Father of us all placed her in my path, and at his bidding I tapped at the door. Her dormant soul is stirred and is now marching to captaincy.

Dear lady, I am thrilled by the experience, and thankful that you were moved to write me after that unfortunate woman Leila came to you. Is not the metamorphasis of Julie proof that, as we have so often agreed, that there are hundreds and thousands of other boys and girls only lacking the means to find themselves, in order to grow to better and nobler maturity? Does it not seem possible that we who have so much, could get together and give a portion of our time and money to groping youth? You, in your city of bustling activity, of concentrated commerce and not always harmless pleasures, are doing a great work, and—there are others. Should we not cooperate, as our churches are now doing, and so disintegrate the isolated masses of young people who, *faute de meiux*, make obeisance to false gods, chase jack-o'-lanterns and pledge themselves by unhappy habits to a low conception of life?

We have seen the starved babies, the undernourished, canned school children; the tinselly souled girls, and the sallow, unpleasant youths who lounge idly at the street corners of the world's villages and towns. All nations are now busy reorganizing disrupted trade. The old world is trying to renew itself. Is not this the moment to stop preaching and demonstrate our personal, individual interest, and guarantee to youth, its period of spring-time?

In a few weeks I shall be in New York, and shall be glad to know how you, with your more intensive experience, view these questions.

Before he closed his letter, the maestro sat pondering over the contents, including his successful experiment. Other experiments were on his mind. While he was thinking, his pen formed these words on the blotter: *The Spring-Time Guild.*

"It looks good on paper," he thought. "We must see if we cannot make it a reality. In friendless boys and girls, like Julie was, there is too much good material going to waste. We won't preach to them; but we'll fight old Nick with sunshine by day, and bright lights by night; music, freedom, and fun. That's the answer to the lure of the Mogs."

CHAPTER XXXV.

PLUS FOUR MINUS FOUR HUNDRED.

"TELL me where she is located, and we'll go halves, fifty-fifty—savvy, on what I can squeeze out of her. How's that? Fair 'nough, ain't it?"

Artie clawed at the sleeve of the bearded man who sat facing him; his unclean fingers shook with the nerve-rotting influence of cachaça, and his eyes were avid with greed and lust to go forth and collect hush-money.

The bearded man had told a surprising tale, and Artie saw therein a chance of great profit for himself. He would rise again to the distinction of being able to buy imported whisky, instead of drinking cachaça; he would clothe his body in white as befits a prince of sports. He would do all this, and more—by threat and by blackmail.

"She's my legal wife, I tell you. I've got her and that old guy, whoever he is, tied up so's they can't budge an inch. Where is she? Gee, I've been through a helluva time! I got broke an' stowed away at Buenos Aires, an' the swine found me and threw me off the boat at Pernambuco. Wouldn't take me t' the next port. First bit of luck I've had f'r months was meetin' you. Ain't I glad we got talkin'. I'm near done in. Hoofed it more 'n three hundred miles, I guess. I was on my way, any rate, to find out what my lawful wife was up to. Where 'd you say she is? Is it far from here?"

"You got cash?"

"Not a cent. That is, not to spare. I've got less than five milreis."

"But you get plenty more, eh?"

"Sure."

"Then you give me all you got, an' I tell you. You come back and we go halves."

Artie cursed with dismay.

"Why should I trust y'u?" he snarled. "For all I know y'u might be stringin' me."

"No, I not string. I truthful man. I see her in hut on the beach, after that man

come. Talk with her. She go 'way by train. She have nize blue eyes. I know where she be. One of my fr'ends see her only las' week. He sell somesings at the house she be at. I know. Oh, yes." The bearded pedler leered knowingly. "But, I say nothing before you pay me now four milreis."

Artie pleaded and sniveled, but at last he paid over the money. It is possible that the pedler was as sure, as Artie was certain, that he had no intention of coming back to share the spoils.

When the pedler had pocketed his price and given Artie detailed directions to the mountain home of Don Salgado, a little accident happened: a red beetle dropped from the rafters and scuttled across the liquor-stained table. It fell off the table onto the bearded one's knee and ran up his leg. He jumped up and shook himself frantically. Even for a pedler of none-too-clean habits of body and mind baratas are rather large insects to have crawling about one's person.

Artie assisted in the search.

"I got it!" he cried presently and squashed the barata right where he found it. He left the pedler swearing and reviling so energetic a beetle-hunter.

A few hundred yards from the hovel where he had been holding his conference, Artie found a horse hitched to a tree. He was in a hurry, a great hurry, so he borrowed the horse. He was miles away when the pedler discovered that, although he had no beetle on him, Artie's slick, helpful fingers had been a trifle too helping. His wallet was gone!

The pedler had held up Artie to the petty tune of four milreis. Artie had gone off with over four hundred. We leave the bearded one dancing with rage, and now absolutely positive that Artie would not come back to share up.

About the only thing that Artie had ever ridden with any success had been a hunch concerning some pieces of villainy. On horseback he was a poor second to Julie, and when he came to the dried-out watercourse, his troubles multiplied. He rolled about in the saddle like a drunken man on a floating log. The pockets of his thin cotton pants and coat were nothing but shallow slits, and for greater safety, he placed the wallet in one of the leather saddle-pockets and buttoned the flap.

After that, Artie felt better and urged the plunging horse to greater effort.

"That bug," he thought, chuckling, "sure did give me a fine chance t' frisk that ole doormat. Giddap!"

For a time all went well, Artie reached the plateau, and without stopping to give the sweating animal breathing space, jabbed his heels into the horse's flanks and commenced the descent. The horse put the tip of a hind hoof on a round stone. Artie see-sawed on the reins and yelled shrilly. His mount slewed round, and Artie's shoulder collided with the jutting edge of a rock. He was knocked from his seat, and rolled down the gully. Freed from the clutching hands that had hampered his movements, the horse recovered his footing; sparks and pebbles flew from his plunging hoofs.

"S-stop!" yelled Artie, but the horse knew better. An hour later, he trotted back to the place where he had been awaiting his master, and when, after some days, the owner of that horse bought a much-desired piece of pasture land, his neighbors wondered where he had obtained the money.

There is always a humorous side to these tricks of fate; but Artie, least of all, was appreciative. Bruised and venomously sore in mind and spirit, he limped on his way.

"I'll take it out of that Julie," he told himself. "She's my wife, and she'll pay me. I'll show her she can't play the fool with me any more. I oughter have come back before."

"Only three more days, Julie. What will you do? Remain here and let me return alone, or come with me and—and stay at my mother's house until we can get the law to set you free?"

"Why should I go back with you?"

Julie asked the question softly and gently enough, but it had a curious effect on David Stern. He sat a trifle stiffer, and being very much in love, was naturally not as clear-headed as usual. Had he not made

his intentions perfectly plain? Had he not in tone of voice and glance of eye told this girl he loved her? Had she not been continuously in his thoughts for months? Had they not talked of a hundred different things during the past week, and had he not given way to her on several points under discussion? What more could a fellow do? Now, she asked him *why* he expected her to go back with him!

"What is the matter with you?" asked David with nervous abruptness. "Why shouldn't you go back with me? The maestro is willing. He told me that the choice was entirely in your hands. You could stay with him or—"

"What?"

"Go back with me and—"

"And—what then?"

"Why, get married, of course, after we have the other marriage ceremony annulled."

"Oh! I think you're awfully dense."

"How's that?" asked David huffily, because he was puzzled.

"Because you haven't told me why I should marry you."

"Good Lord!" The young man sighed with relief. "Is that all? Must I really say it? I thought I had fairly shouted it at you."

"Please," whispered Julie. "I'd like to hear you say those three words. You see," she went on as David leaned nearer, "no one has ever said them to me or—*what was that?*"

"It sounded like some one moving in those bushes," cried David, starting up angrily. "Wait, I'll see."

For a few minutes the young man floundered and poked about in the tangled mass behind the bench where Julie and he had been sitting, but he found no one.

"Must have been our fancy," he stated when he came back. "Probably a branch fell off a tree, or it was one of those big lizards. There's nothing that I can see. You seem upset, though. Come, Julie—don't let a little thing like that worry you. It was nothing."

"It's—it's getting dark," faltered the girl, "and if you won't be angry with me, I'd rather go in now. I—don't feel well."

Avoiding David's outstretched hand, Julie ran to the house. A bird's clear notes made farewell song to the setting sun, and the troupial's unfinished melody again found echo in the girl's heart. Saddened and filled with a foreboding that she dare not put into clear thought, she stayed in her room for the rest of the evening. Reluctant to go to bed, and yet unwilling to return to David while she was so depressed and fearful of what she assured herself could only be caused by fancy, Julie sat in a low rocking-chair, and presently went off into a drowsy dreamland. She saw vague, delightful pictures of the home she would have. They would furnish one room just like the maestro's library, and always have the spare room ready for him when he visited them. They would have a car, and she would drive it to the station to meet David, and they would have wonderful times planning all kinds of things and—

A shrill, angry, piercing shriek drove all these dreams away. Julie's eyes flew wide open and she sat staring up at the little green parrot the maestro had given her.

"S-s-sh, Jackie. Be quiet! What's the matter with you?"

Again and again the bird screamed and scolded. He stood quite still with one bright, beady eye fixed on—what? It suddenly dawned on Julie that the parrot was watching something—something behind her. She looked round the edge of her chair. The first thing she saw was a hand clenched over the window-sill. It was dirty, and the finger-nails were broken and chewed to the quick. Horror-stricken as she was, she caught the odor of crushed jasmine-blossoms. There was some one trying to climb into her window. Was it—could it be—Julie sprang to her feet.

"You! I knew it! You spy! You evil, vile thing. You dare to come here. Get down from that window at once or I will call for help!"

Artie scowled vindictively. He had expected to find a timid, easy prey. This girl with the brilliant, flashing blue eyes and firm lips did not seem to be scared. He felt conscious he was being defied. Was it bluff, or was it that the girl felt sure of her ground?

"You," he grunted. "I watched you in the garden. Playing off a young 'un against th' old fool that's taken you on, eh? I know all about it, an' if you don't come across with a good slice of the dough you're gettin' I'm goin' to have my rights, get me? I ain't no spoil sport, but I gotta have my whack. 'S that plain?"

It was. So horribly, revoltingly so, that for a moment, Julie felt herself giving way to weakness caused by her fear.

Artie hoisted himself higher and gave his favorite cackle.

"Guess I'll come in," he said. "No reason at all why I shouldn't sit in my wife's boo-dwar."

Julie stooped swiftly. At all costs this creature had to be prevented from setting foot in her room. As she rose, her arm swung round and the heel of her slipper caught Artie full on the mouth. In an endeavor to ward off the blow, he released his hold on the window-sill. The vine creaked and snapped beneath his weight and vanished. His descent was quicker and much noisier than his ascent, and when the girl looked out of her window she saw him scrambling to his feet. He was unhurt and stuttering with threatful rage.

Julie closed the window and now the strain was over, sank, sobbing, into her chair. Every moment she expected to hear her persecutor clambering up again, or some sound of disturbance below, and when, after some time, nothing happened, she opened her window and peeped out.

"He's gone!" she murmured, and added miserably: "But he'll come back."

In this Julie was mistaken, for Artie had not gone. At that moment he was cringing in front of the maestro. David had heard the noise of his fall, and pounced silently upon him as Julie closed her window.

"You pollute the air," said Salgado coldly after Artie had been speedily reduced to begging for mercy. "Open those windows, David, so that we may breathe with less chance of contamination. For a man who has committed a crime in hot blood I have some consideration and pity. For this slimy wretch I have none."

For the maestro, these were strange words, but his actions were stranger. He took from his desk-drawer a folded bank-note. It might have been for five or ten dollars. It was not.

Artie licked his dry lips and slyly eyed the money. With apparent carelessness, the maestro dropped the bill on his blotter and got up from his chair.

"I want to have a confidential word with you," he said loudly and, taking David's arm, led him away. "We must decide whether we will hand this—this man over to the authorities, or—ah, I thought so!"

David turned round. He stared blankly at the place where Artie had stood. Then he pointed to the desk. The blotter was bare.

"What else could you expect!" cried the young man. "He's gone and the money's gone with him."

"That is another reason why I asked you to open the windows," said the maestro quietly. "I wanted to get rid of him, so I set the trap and baited it. If he is anywhere to be seen about the town to-morrow, I will have him arrested for theft. I have now a definite charge against him and he can be imprisoned without dragging Julie into the affair. It is peculiar; but the bank-note he has taken is one of several he stole from Julie. I kept it, in case he should ever come back. It is indeed fortunate that things have turned out so well."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

SILENCED.

BELIEVING that he would be pursued, Artie ran as fast and as far as he could.

At last he saw the faint, yellow glimmer of a light through the trees. Creeping nearer, he stopped to listen.

"A bodega," he thought. "I'll have a drink. No one ain't chasing me. Kinda soft, that white-haired old fool leaving that bill there like that an' th' window open an' all. How much is it?"

When he came within radius of the light, Artie examined the crumpled bank-note.

"Only two bucks!"

Artie cursed his luck again, but two dollars changed into Brazilian copper coins is a pocketful of money, and will buy more

cachaça than ten drinkers could dispose of in an evening. About the third drink, Artie saw all rosy ahead of him, and in rollicksome mood he leaned across the counter and put his arm round the neck of the bodega proprietor's wife. His action was seen, and a sudden deathly silence fell over the crowd of chattering natives.

"Rymundo!"

The woman's call to her husband rang out with fierce intensity. She wrenched herself free, and as Artie staggered back, Rymundo leaped over the counter. Artie flung up his arm as he saw a flash of steel.

The first slash of the knife laid open Artie's cheek, the second swept diagonally across his pale, fear-drwn, livid lips. He felt the steel rasp against his teeth. Then, as he reeled blindly, futilely back, that pursuing knife bit again and again. Behind the flickering steel, flamed the blood-mad eyes of the native. Over the man's shoulder glared the unpitying gaze of the woman Artie had thought to make free with.

Shrieking with searing pain and dazed by panic-terror, Artie made not the smallest effort to defend himself. He fell to his knees and with stiff, outstretched arms grovelled for mercy. His attitude impeded the attack of his assailant. The flaying, flesh-ripping knife ceased to dart at him. For a breathing space his wounds bled, but did not increase in number. It seemed that he might be allowed to crawl away in peace; that he would escape mortal injury and, though scarred beyond recognition and hideously disfigured, he might still cling to life.

Artie dreaded to relinquish the thing he had so misused. He feared to die. He longed to live, to get away from this country of swift vengeance, to return to his old haunts, to sit again in some Mog. Even in that crisis of dread danger, repentance was not in him. Fear brought no change of heart, no revelation that he was unclean. Shuffling with sidelong, crablike motion, he crawled nearer to the door. On the bare, trodden earth floor his knees made no sound, but he moved with strained supercaution and kept his head turned in the direction of the man and woman who now stood whispering together.

The three of them were alone. At the first glint of Rymundo's knife, the crowd had withdrawn and scuttled away into the night. Whatever the outcome, the law perchance might reach the principal; but it would not be able to call witnesses to the affair. Beyond the clearing facing the door was a dense thicket of rubber saplings, and creeper and vine-looped trees. Not a leaf stirred, not a sound could be heard; but a score of eyes watched the fan of yellow light streaming from the bodega.

Into that patch of light slowly crept a gray, distorted form. Was the stranger to be allowed to escape? Was he to be allowed to leave the mountains, tell his story in his own way to the authorities and bring the police hunting and disturbing the peace of every one with their questioning? A muffled, guttural snarl of disgust came from the dense shadows at the edge of the mountainside forest.

The logic of the two-thirds savage is simple: dead men tell no tales. The grunt of the unseen watcher beneath the foliage was proof that there was at least one who considered Rymundo was inviting trouble in allowing Artie to leave the bodega of his own volition.

Quick as they are to resent injury or insult, these men of the hills are not seekers of quarrels, chip-bearers or blood-lustful if fairly treated; but once they are roused, it is generally speaking, a case of slow music for one member of the misunderstanding.

Artie had attempted to loosely flirt with one of their women, therefore—why was he still alive? In the minds of the watchers in the undergrowth, the query was urgent and dominant. Neither Rymundo or the woman could be seen from the forest. Had the stranger contrived to wound to helplessness or kill both of them? A stealthy rustling progressed along the fringe of trees.

Artie was now at the threshold of the door and as he put one hand over the wooden step, the semicircle of waiting sentinels imperceptibly closed in on him. No word had passed along the scattered curve of watchers, but the action was concerted as simultaneous as though a command had been given. Long before this night had Artie sown the seed that was now bursting

to rampant, life-strangling growth, and on the indestructible scroll of fate it was graven that he should forfeit the ill-omened penalty of his mean thievery. The two-dollar bill he had stolen from Julie's bag in the Mog had come back to him, and one by one the threads of Artie's puny control over destiny were withering to strands of dust.

Into the flickering, yellow-lighted doorway, sprang two figures; two arms rose and fell. For a second the three silhouettes merged, coalesced into a gray blob. Then Rymundo and the woman sprang clear of the door opening and ran alongside the bodega. Followed a faint crackling of branches and they were seen no more. Prone across the sill lay a body that neither stirred or breathed. Leila, and those others Artie had brought to the ranks of smiling sisters, previous to his attempt to exploit and sacrifice Julie, were all avenged.

Toward dawn a beautifully marked, sinuous and sinister creature of the jungle circled warily around the lifeless, wilted thing so oddly sprawled on the ground. It raised a threatening, vicious-eyed, arrow-shaped head, it poised ready to strike at the least movement, then scenting it was but a wasting time over lifeless clay, it glided off.

In the morning the body of Arthur Falwell was laid on a stretcher of boughs and hurried away. The expression on the dark-skinned faces of the bearers was placid, and they moved with care. Artie had roused their dislike, but now he was dead and therefore to be treated with respect. Only among men themselves lost in unforgiveness does rancor go beyond the grave. Over the shallow grave the leader muttered prayer while others made a cross of rough hewn branches to mark the end of the trail of another rash stranger. It was whispered among the natives that not Rymundo's hand, but a woman's, had dealt Artie the fatal blow. In life he had played the part of a wandering, beggarly Faust; it was poetically fitting that his end should be robbed of all dignity; that he should pass out as a cringing, yellow dog. But no one really knew if it was the woman who had dealt him his quietus.

Was he the last?

There was one other who had played a small but far-reaching part in the affairs of Julie.

The primary impulses that set in motion the events that for a time swept Julie off her insecure footing, originated in the remark made by a certain ill-experienced and jingle-brained blond. As easily as she tapped the keys of her machine, the phrase "When you're dead, you're dead" had popped out of her mouth and left its impress on Julie's mind. Her tongue it was that dripped the words of poison that influenced Julie to her acquaintanship with Artie. Ordinarily and frequently enough, these unthinking, more or less chance remarks have no great influence, and it is equally trite that few loose talkers are held accountable for their ignorant misuse of the powers of speech. For the most part, these gabblers say the first thing that comes into their heads, and have no malicious intent. But we know that Miss Blonde had overstepped the bounds of discretion in her behavior, and if the truth be told, she was spitefully jealous of all girls who were unhampered by taining episodes. So—Miss Blonde dropped her remark with deliberate malevolence. Her laugh was self-satisfied when the newspapers containing the brief account of Julie's disappearance was handed round the office.

"Julie was one of those quiet, foxy ones," she remarked, "but I knew all the time that she was no better than she had to be. Serve her right. Them sly one's always pay."

But—it was Miss Blonde who paid.

During the months Julie was in South America the young lady who had so unkindly spoken of her went to many gay supper parties, and rode impartially in speedster and limousine. She took one joy ride too many. When Miss Blonde and her gentleman friend were disentangled from the débris of the wrecked car and a stone wall, the doctors and surgeons only succeeded in saving one life.

Miss Blonde lived, but her ornamental career was over. When she returned to work, her erstwhile admirers looked once and—turned away. In time her scarred cheek became less noticeable, and it was remarked that she seemed nicer and better

disposed. But when the girls gathered near her desk for a snack of gossip, Miss Blonde never made any remark. She had no longer the power or desire to influence younger girls to risk adventures or the cultivation of the acquaintanship of chance-met sports. The splinter of glass that had pierced her cheek had also done an irreparable damage which did not show. *She was dumb!*

CHAPTER XXXVII.

LA LUNE DE MIEL.

THERE were dark shadows under Julie's eyes when she came down the next morning and sought the maestro in his library.

"'That man' came back last night," she said. "I did not want to tell you, but—"

"I know, but he will trouble you no more. News was carried to the servants this morning, and Iracema has just told me. There is another cross on the mountainside, and so far as you are concerned, the name Falwell is buried forever."

"So I am free—*free!*"

"Free to be happy for always," said a voice deep with feeling, and Julie rested unashamed of her tears in David's arms.

"I think," said the maestro with a smile, "I'll go and see if breakfast is ready."

It was then that David said the three words Julie so wanted to hear.

Not far from the maestro's home stands a white and blue, quaint little church. It was there that David and Julie were married, and it was there, too, that Mrs. David Stern met a stranger who was an old acquaintance grown ten years younger. In broad Scotch he blessed her bonnie blue eyes.

"Yes," he said, replying to Julie's questioning look of surprise. "'Tis Angus, the mon o' the pipe, ye are looking at; but a different mon. Ye said never a word, but frae the day ye sat by me I ha'e quit the r-rum. I dinna ken how nor for why, but the bogies ha'e gone awa'."

Salgado's parting words removed all regrets from Julie's mind when they went aboard the ship that was to carry them home.

"I shall be with you in less than a month," he promised. "Meanwhile, look after my adopted daughter, David, or be prepared to reckon with the ire of the maestro!"

And so commenced Julie's and David's *lune de miel.*

Certain it is that the English language fits all the needs of plain speaking and business directness. There are opinions that cannot be so well put in any other language, and in perhaps in no other tongue has a word for the place we call home, so deep and full of meaning.

Honeymoon, too, has a charming significance, yet may it not be more lingeringly dwelt upon in the French. The moon of honey is less terse and telegraphic, less hasty and of more fitting, poetic flavor.

After all, the honeymoon of two young people who have found each other, and mean to keep on looking for the treasure trove of loving kindness is the jeweled keystone in the bridge of days they will pass together. The sweetness of *la lune de miel* is to be spread over the long years. It is to glow softly in times of passing troubles and to make radiantly more precious and enduring the moments of joy.

Sweethearts married should for all time be wedded lovers. If they are not, then their moon of honey is but a yellow cheese. For David and for Julie their was no fear of so deplorable a fiasco.

With no less fervor than he had said it in the maestro's library, David can still say: "I love you!" And that goes far toward insuring all the happiness that any woman desires.

It was no vacation that the maestro sought when he arrived in New York. He came to buy, to destroy, and to construct; and that means work. The Mog was torn down and a new, magnificent building was put up. It was the headquarters of the *Spring-Time Guild,* and if on the opening night, some of the young guests wondered who was the foreign-looking man with the white hair they, none of them, knew that they owed him any gratitude.

The maestro saw his reward in the glowing eyes of the happy girls and the open laughter and grinning faces of the boys.

"It is as it should be," he said to Julie, "the ball has been started rolling and others will keep it going."

"And will you try any more 'experiments'?" asked the girl as she slipped her hand under the maestro's arm and looked up at him.

Salgado's eyes twinkled.

"Not," he replied with much graveness, "unless Mr. and Mrs. David Stern require a godfather's counsel and help. How is the heir?"

"I left him yelling and kicking in Iracema's arms."

"That, also," said the maestro, "is as it should be."

(The end.)

by Inez Barclay Kirby

WHEN Frank Whiting told his wife that he was going into business for himself, that he had his eye on an A-1 proposition in a first-rate town up-state, and that if the deal went through he would soon be at nobody's beck and call, Mrs. Whiting's lips did not cease to smile, but her heart became as lead.

In her opinion it was well that Frank should be at some one's beck and call, but not for worlds would it be her dissenting voice that should banish the light of enthusiasm from her husband's face. If his success depended on the making of friends, she told herself, Frank would be a colossus in the mercantile realm.

No other salesman for Passavant & Company brought in larger orders than he, and the secret of it lay in no tricks of manner acquired through courses in salesmanship. His warm friendliness kindled hearts. But good managers, Mrs. Whiting vaguely believed, should be of a different type. "Frank will give away anything in his store if people ask for it," she said to herself, "or tell him they're out of work or hard up."

"Will Mr. Passavant let you have your position again, if things don't turn out well in New Holland?" she ventured.

"See here, dear! Things are bound to turn out well. I'm taking no risks, you understand. I see money in the thing from the start.

"It's a first-class town with good farming country all around. There's no competition worth mentioning—no dry-gods store in the place that sells more than notions. Farmers drive clear to Schenectady for stuff. I mean to carry a good line of coats, dress goods, linens, underwear—"

"Oh, Frank, not a whole department store to start with! Wouldn't it be safer to add one thing at a time—sort of feel your way?"

"Nonsense, Esther; you don't grasp the situation at all. It's one of the biggest openings if it's handled just right. If I

go in there cautiously, it's going to make the people cautious about buying. Can't you see that?"

Esther couldn't, but she replied: "Maybe you're right, Frank."

So it came about that Mrs. Whiting with her little daughters followed her husband to New Holland several months later. To her, the place appeared to be a town of hills and mills and mud, but it was to be home, and she entered it chin up and shoulders squared. Frank Whiting joyously met them at the station and insisted on taking his family to the store at once.

"It wouldn't do for you not to meet the clerks right away," he explained to his wife. "They're a first-rate crowd; I've been very fortunate."

They walked a little way along Main Street from the station. "Here we are!" he exclaimed. "You can see for yourself what a fine location we have here; all the out-of-town trade has to pass this corner.

"Hello! Here's Steve! Steve, come and meet my wife; and these are the daughters." He laid a proud hand on the shoulder of each little girl.

Inside the store, as the introductions proceeded, Mrs. Whiting realized with a thrill of tenderness, how completely her husband had won the affection of his little staff of helpers. Brief as the time had been, they seemed like a happy family.

Bright little Kathleen Reilly added luster and attractiveness to the ribbons and notions over which she presided. Tall, quiet Joel Wilkins, pale of eye and blond of pompadour, measured ginghams, serge, and silk at the opposite counter. Knit underwear and hosiery were dispensed by a fiery little man on whose shoulder Whiting laid a kindly hand as he introduced him as Boyd Haythe. Little Mr. Haythe wrung Mrs. Whiting's hand until she flinched with pain while his eyes rested with passionate devotion on her husband's face.

"Poor Boyd," Whiting explained later, "he's the best fellow that ever lived, but drinks like a fish. He's the greatest problem we have. Customers don't like him, smelling of rum. Boyd sees that; we've talked the thing over time and again.

"I'm giving him another chance. Poor fellow, it would make your heart ache to see how cut up he is after one of his drunks."

At the rear of the store behind a high desk sat Lulu Birch, the gentle cashier, who deftly split open the money-balls that came rolling up along their wire tracks. Lulu's capable mother was patron goddess of coats and wraps on the second floor.

"But haven't you more of a force than you really need to begin with, Frank?" asked Mrs. Whiting that night when they had talked shop till a late hour. "Who is this Steve we met outside? What does he do?"

"Oh, Steve does everything; handles stock, runs errands, sweeps. He'll make his mark yet, that fellow will. He's Scotch—just been over a few months, and shy—ashamed of his brogue. Lord, it is a caution. Sometimes I can hardly keep a straight face listening to him.

"But Steve has ideas, more brains than all the rest of the crowd put together. Some of his suggestions have been capital. Seems to have a natural gift for the business."

"I liked his face," said Mrs. Whiting.

As time passed Esther Whiting began to feel ashamed that she had entertained doubts of her husband's efficiency. Business was good and steadily increasing. The farm trade was gradually turning to the new store, and the country people were won by Frank Whiting's simple cordiality.

On bright Saturday afternoons dozens of shoppers' turnouts would be lined up on Main Street near the store. Rainy Saturdays, though still distressing in their effect on the day's receipts, were less calamitous as the margin of safety widened.

Consequently, Sunday mornings, the little Whiting girls were less frequently spanked by a night-shirted parent whose late slumbers had been disturbed by their noisy frolics among the bed-clothes. Obviously, children have no right to waken and be hungry on Sunday as early as on other days.

In those days Frank Whiting was confident and happy, but generously refrained from reminding anyone of his prediction of success. He enjoyed his business and

worked hard. He was the idol of his employees; they confided in him, sought his advice, and bestowed on him photographs of themselves and of their families.

Whiting accorded these treasures places of honor about his home, and his wife smiled as she dusted them, and thought with a glow in her heart that if Frank never succeeded at anything else, he was succeeding at living.

The Whitings had been living in New Holland for three years, when one evening the *Daily Sentinel* contained a startling full-page advertisement. The public was informed that the Flint Building had been rented by M. Levi & Sons, who would open, September first, the largest and finest dry-goods store in Montgomery County.

It was a blow amidships. Steve saw the paper first and showed it to Boyd Haythe. They laid it where Whiting would see it when he locked the desk at closing time, watched him as he read it, and burned with wrath at the intruders as they saw the light die out of his face. He glanced up and saw them.

"You've seen this, boys?"

They nodded.

"Levi—Levi—you know what that name means, I suppose? Fight is what it means—fight to a finish."

"Fight it *is!*" Boyd's fist banged down on the counter. "Oh, we'll fight 'em, Mr. Whiting!"

"That's the idea, Boyd. Good night, boys." But as he left the store little worry-wrinkles quickly followed his smile.

Thenceforth the town became a battle-ground on which contending business forces clashed silently; where the most strategic moves were known only to the chiefs of staff and a few chosen officers. Prominent among the weapons employed by the new firm were high-sounding advertisements in the *Daily Sentinel* and broadsides of handbills announcing stupendous sales at which fine merchandise might be procured at negilgible prices.

"They have lots of capital behind them," Whiting told his wife. "That's where we've always fallen down. If I could have put five or six thousand more into our concern to start with, we'd be able to stand up against the splash they're making."

"Is it—hurting us much, Frank?"

"Well, receipts are falling a little below last year's. This is a dull season, of course. Oh, things will right themselves somewhat when the novelty wears off—just how much I can't say. We have good friends among the farmers; their heads won't be so easily turned, and they're the substantial buyers, after all."

Hope sprang eternal in Frank Whiting's breast, but in time he came to feel the futility of striving against foes not only supplied with the ammunition of unlimited dollars, but whose tactics did not always tally with codes of honorable warfare. Rumor reached him that Levi had offered Kathleen Reilly a job which that spirited young woman had declined, routing him completely by inquiring whether he had had Mr. Whiting's consent to the proposition.

When Whiting stopped at the ribbon counter to thank Kathleen for her loyalty, her eyes filled with tears.

"What do you take me for, Mr. Whiting?" she said. "After what you've done for pa and me. What do I care for their filthy lucre? But—" she lowered her voice and glanced significantly across the aisle—"they're after Joel Wilkins now and he hasn't made up his mind."

Whiting crossed the aisle and stood in front of the counter behind which Joel had disappeared and was intently burrowing. When the burrowing could no longer be carried on with plausibility, Joel emerged and faced his employer, but did not meet his eyes.

"Joel, I hear the Levi crowd has offered you a job."

"Yes, sir."

"Going, Joel?"

A flush spread to the roots of the blond pompadour. "I—I haven't given them a final answer, sir."

Frank Whiting's brown eyes looked steadily for a moment into Joel's pale ones. "All right, Joel. Let me know your decision." Whiting turned and passed on down the aisle.

"Mr. Whiting!" At the sound of Joel's voice, Whiting faced about again. "I won't accept their offer, Mr. Whiting."

Whiting caught Joel's hand and wrung it. "You don't know what that means to me, Joel."

A few days later Steve reported an encounter with a spy from the other camp. "I'd noticed the little skunk hangin' around on our corner," said Steve. "Then I saw him writin' in a book. He'd look at our windows and then write. So out I marched and grabbed the book out of his hand.

"He'd been making' a list of our prices on the stuff in the windows. He got pretty hot, but he wasn't half my size. 'Go back and tell that boss of yours that we'll arrest the next fellow he sends here on this kind of job,' I told him. 'Course we couldn't do it, but Great Scott!" Steve's fists clenched.

"But what harm would that do, Steve, just copying our prices?" asked Lulu Birch mildly.

Steve looked at her pityingly. "Harm?" he explained. "Why, ten minutes after he gets back with our prices, Levi has all same stuff marked a cent or two less in his window. Idea gets around that Whiting charges high—that it pays to trade with Levi."

"Oh," said Lulu, "I see. Isn't that mean?"

In spite of the loyalty of the Whiting force, the clouds continued to gather and the enemy to flourish. Whiting's face wore an abstracted expression and he seemed always to be making figures on the backs of envelopes. Mrs. Whiting sang fewer hymns as she did her work, and the little girls looked in vain for the columns of pennies that had been wont to appear on the end of the mantelpiece.

"Even the country trade is falling off, dear," said Whiting to his wife.

"Yes," she replied indignantly. "Yesterday, as I came out of Conrow's, I saw Mrs. Schuyler putting a huge Levi package into her buggy. She looked so mortified when she saw me, and tried to pull the laprobe over it. And we thought the Schuylers were sure!"

"I know, I know. It's human nature. Well, the holidays are my last gamble. We'll run a big Christmas sale. *Good* stuff. I'm going to New York early and load up.

"This fight has wiped out everything we'd saved, but if I can pull out and pay every creditor one hundred cents on the dollar, I'll go back with Passavant. Begin all over."

"Oh, Frank, I'll be so happy to have this nightmare off your mind."

"It's the clerks I think about. How they've stuck right through it all. What's to become of them?"

"Frank, no, they'll understand. They'll always love you." She stood behind his chair and drew his tired head back against her breast. "If it wasn't for Boyd," she went on, "you needn't worry; the rest can easily find other positions, but you've always been Boyd's conscience. We must try to think what to do for him if we go away."

"Think! I've thought till my mind aches. Now Steve, I'd take with me; he ought to have his chance in the city. I'd give a good deal if I had Steve's brains. He's as smart as a whip. It's a marvel how he's pruned the heather out of his talk in three years. Speaks good plain English now; hardly ever slips up."

Plans for the holiday sale absorbed the time and thought of everyone in the store. A week after Whiting's trip to New York great packing cases began to arrive in the alley at the rear of the building. The clerks worked day and night marking and stowing away the new goods. That they were staking all on a last hope was the idea that prevailed among them, and the work was sped with a sort of inspired earnestness.

The reserve stockroom was on the second floor, a large loft over the adjoining drug store. Before Christmas the room was stacked to the ceiling with heavy clothing, blankets and long cloaks. The store itself became resplendent with holiday novelties—"Christmas rubbish," as the owner called it.

Just before the opening of the sale Whiting was obliged to come home earlier

than usual one evening. He was worn out and had caught a heavy cold. As his wife hovered anxiously over him administering Dutch Doctor and camphorated oil, the conversation turned to the inevitable topic.

"Of course," said Whiting, "Levi will draw the majority of the strictly Christmas trade—all this flashy, trashy stuff. I saw how that would be and didn't load up with much, but lots of thrifty people give useful gifts, coats, flannels and such things—" He stopped and coughed.

A look of pity and tenderness with just a trace of bitterness mingled in Esther Whiting's gray eyes, but her husband did not see it.

"Yes," she managed to say pluckily, "and people who receive Christmas gifts of money will be coming in afterward to supply themselves."

"Exactly—hark!" He sprang up.

Heavy steps thudded on the porch and violent knocks shook the front door. "Mr. Whiting, Mr. Whiting!" called a frenzied voice. In a second they had opened to the wild-eyed Steve who gasped: "Come quick! The store is on fire!"

Whiting seized his hat and the two men plunged down the steps.

"Oh, Frank—with your cold," groaned his wife. "Oh, *put* on your coat!"

The sky was serene and starry and moonlight lay pure on the snow as the men rushed down the long hill, past the mills toward the scene of disaster.

"Had it much of a start when you left, Steve? What! The *stockroom?*" The clang of fire-bells drowned his voice.

They turned a corner and the burning building flared into view. The engine was already at work. A glare lighted the stockroom windows, and firemen on ladders were directing powerful streams of water in on the flames.

Too stunned to realize the full significance of the calamity, Whiting edged his way through the crowd with Steve. Everyone readily made way for them and looked at Whiting with curiosity and pity.

It began to seem as though the fire might be confined to that single room, but presently a shout from the onlookers announced its spread to the adjoining loft, the cloak department of the store.

"Can't anything be saved?" Whiting shouted to the fire chief. "The stuff downstairs?"

"Fool, if you open that door, the draught will finish building and all! Stand back. You'd die like a rat in the smoke in there."

At that moment a man dashed shouting down Main Street, hatless and coatless, with watery, bloodshot eyes, smashed his way through the crowd into the cleared space directly in front of the blazing building.

"Get back, you! Back!" roared a fireman from a ladder overhead.

"Must get out my stock, y' know," yelled the new arrival. "Chris'mus goods, stockings, socks—Mr. Whiting won't like this."

Like a flash he had snatched an ax from the sidewalk, shattered the glass in one of the doors, and, stepping in through the opening, was swallowed up in clouds of eddying smoke.

"My God, it's Boyd, drunk as a lord," roared Whiting, and even as the crowd sought to lay restraining hands on him, he had flung them off and followed Boyd through the belching doorway.

A cry of agony broke from the throats of the beholders.

In a back bedroom that looked down over the hill, Esther Whiting watched a spot where the sky flamed red and angry. She was as cold as ice, but did not know it. Her lips were of marble, but her heart was at prayer.

At the sound of sleigh-bells in the street, she turned to listen. The jingling ceased and voices sounded at the door. Steve and two doctors carried Frank Whiting into the little hall.

"Not dead," said Dr. Purdy with curt kindliness, answering the appeal of the wife's terrified eyes.

They laid him on the sitting-room couch, and while the doctors carefully stripped away the charred clothing, Steve followed Mrs. Whiting into the kitchen.

"Tell me about it," she commanded,

and Steve's face kindled with a look of exaltation as he sketched the brief story. "But Boyd was dead," he ended huskily. "Poor little fool."

"Oh, *Steve!*"

Steve turned away to hide his face. "I'll go down the hill again now," he said. "Maybe I can do something when the fire is out, board up the place if there's anything left. Not that there's a mother's son in this town would touch anything that belonged to Frank Whiting—not if it was lying in the street."

And Mrs. Whiting understood that his voice sounded fierce only because he sought to keep it steady. "In the morning, I'll come back to see how he is," added Steve.

But it was not until dusk of the following day that he returned. Leaving the nurse in charge, Mrs. Whiting stole out of the sickroom to admit him.

"Oh, Steve, it's pneumonia and those terrible burns besides. He's still unconscious, and, in a way, I'm thankful; he will suffer so. And when he knows about Boyd—" She broke off, weeping. "But he can't die," she resumed. "God wouldn't let him—after a deed like that!"

Steve gravely shook his head, thinking with pity that experience often failed to bear out the philosophy of life which her words implied.

"Mr. Whiting has a fine constitution," he offered, bringing the matter down from the metaphysical.

"Yes, but he was so tired—all this worry about the sale—and now—" Her sobs stopped her.

"Mrs. Whiting, I want to talk about that. It's one thing I came for. We've been going through the stock all morning. A lot has been saved, more than you'd think, and a lot more only damaged by water and smoke. They got the water in so quick that the fire just licked along the edges of all that stuff in the stockroom; it takes time to burn through heavy stuff like that."

"But it's no good, Steve."

"Yes, yes, it *is*, but we can't touch a thing till the insurance is adjusted. I got the policies out of the safe—heat cooked it open—but the papers were O. K. I've wired the companies,"

"Oh, Steve, how can we ever thank you for your interest and kindness?"

"Mrs. Whiting"—there was a thrill in Steve's voice—"will you let me take charge of things at the store till Mr. Whiting gets round again? We ought not to wait; the town is all worked up over what he did! If we have a sale of the burned stuff now, right away—don't you see?"

"Oh, you mustn't trade on their sympathy, Steve. Mr. Whiting wouldn't like that. But if there's anything any one would care to buy—"

"Care to buy! They'll fight to buy it! Don't worry a minute, Mrs. Whiting. We'll get back every cent."

Steve's enthusiasm was so contagious that Mrs. Whiting felt a momentary stirring of hope in her heart, but as soon as he was gone, anxiety and grief closed in about her once more.

During the days that followed, she lived a life of complete isolation, absorbed in the care of her husband. She seldom thought of Steve and of the affairs of the store except to wonder that none of the clerks came to inquire for their employer. Others who came with offers of help or sympathy knew from her face that the battle was not yet won, and no one tarried for gossip. The life of business seemed remote and apart, not to be considered while clouds of pain and death hung low.

So it came about that Esther Whiting heard nothing of the magical fulfilment of Steve's hopes. His psychology had proved sound at every point. Steve saw no reason why the town's hero-worship should not be turned to good account. If his advertising was crude, it was vital, and the hearts of the townsfolk were just then too tender to be critical.

A great strip of sheeting reaching the width of the store, bore in huge letters of scarlet paint the words:

FIRE SALE!

Opens at 8 a. m., December 18th.

Meanwhile, behind barred doors, a transfigured and commanding Steve di-

rected preparations for the sale. "Don't clean up any more than you must," was one of his inspired orders to his assistants. "Let 'em have all the scenery of this thing. Again: "All this muslin is perfectly clean; take it down cellar, Joel, and roll it around." And to Joel's amazed protest: "Fool, we can sell it for *more!*"

At the opening hour, December 18th, the crowd at the doors exceeded Steve's fondest dreams.

"Gee! The whole county's out there," said Joel excitedly. "I bet Levi looks sick."

To avert anarchy, it was necessary to admit them in detachments, and the buying began with reckless fervor. Whatever had been touched by fire and smoke possessed an irresistible charm. The upper halves of the long cloaks were eagerly bought as jackets; the severed tails went, at Steve's suggestion, for little girls' skirts or little boys' trousers.

Once started, the women vied with each other in inventing uses for all sorts of fantastic remnants. Day after day, the sale continued until shelves were emptied of new stock and old. Steve's joy knew no bounds.

On a day in January, Whiting's temperature dropped to normal, and the expression of his emaciated face told his wife that memory was struggling to reassert itself. She sat beside him, darning a little stocking.

"Esther—" she started at the intensity of his voice—"was Boyd dead?" For answer, she took his hand in hers and laid her cheek beside his.

After that, although his strength returned slowly, both his wife and the doctor were disturbed at Whiting's listlessness. For hours he would sit wrapped in blankets, his far-away gaze resting on the snow-clad hills along the river-valley. He talked little, and never about the store.

"What's worrying him?" asked Dr. Purdy, when even the expedient of admitting the little daughters for the first time to their father's sick-room had failed to rouse him to more than transitory interest.

"I suppose, Doctor," confessed Mrs. Whiting, "that he doesn't feel strong enough yet to face the—ruin of his business."

"Ruin! Do you mean to say that you're not making anything out of that fire sale? I'd have thought you were millionaires by this time!"

"Fire sale?" she said in bewilderment, and then with reviving recollection of Steve's plan: "Tell me, doctor. What do you mean?"

"Well, this is rich," said the doctor. "So you didn't know that Steve was selling out every cinder in the place? And Frank doesn't know?"

"Certainly not; and you think the sale has been—successful?"

"Looks so, to *me*," said the doctor, suddenly conservative. "I'll send Steve up from the store to give an account of himself."

The next day Steve came. In his hand he carried a great sheaf of papers. Regarding the papers with concern, Mrs. Whiting led the way to the sick-room.

"He's weak, Steve. Don't go into much detail," she whispered before she opened the door.

"Hello, Steve," said Whiting, striving to make his tone cordial. But Steve noticed how he squared his drooping shoulders, as if to fortify himself for an ordeal.

"I'm glad you're so much better, sir. We've missed you at the store."

Whiting winced. "Store?" He looked at Steve keenly, a shade reproachfully.

"Yes, sir." Steve's voice vibrated with suppressed excitement. "We been having a wee bit fire sale. But, first, I'll show what the insurance companies did for us. From the—"

"Do you mean to tell me the place wasn't burned to the ground?" Whiting sat bolt upright. From the doorway his wife watched and listened.

"Oh, no, sir." Steve handed him a paper.

"And they allowed us *this?*" Color was creeping into his white face. His tone was eager.

"And we cleaned up this on the sale. The list gives the daily totals for the last three weeks." Steve's hand trembled as

he handed over to his employer another paper.

Frank Whiting sprang to his feet. His face twitched convulsively. He gave Steve's shoulder a resounding whack.

"Steve, you old scoundrel! You old—" he began with abusive tenderness. "Why, man, we're two thousand dollars to the good." His voice was husky.

"I thought so, just about that," said Steve joyously.

Whiting sank into his chair again and covered his face with his hands. "And there was Boyd," he muttered. "God! No man ever had such friends."

Esther Whiting, unnoticed, slipped away into her little daughters' room and knelt beside the bed.

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THE FROLIC WIND

THE wind laughed down the valley,
And sang to the whispering trees;
It kissed the flowers rudely,
And tumbled the laden bees.

It played with a maiden's ringlets,
It startled a drowsy fire,
And wrought by a dreaming river
The reeds in a low-tuned lyre.

It stole from a flowery garden
A burden of sweet perfume,
And scattered the scent of the roses
About in a dark sick-room.

It paused on a city corner,
And tugged at the passers-by;
It crept in a chimney corner,
And moaned as a ghost would sigh.

With joyous hands it pummeled
A noisy window-pane,
And shook a swinging shutter
With all its might and main.

It bent o'er a weary workman
Where he toiled in a sultry place,
And, pursing its lips with coolness,
Blew soft on his heated face.

It stopped where a bird was singing,
And, catching the lilt of the song,
Bore it to one in anguish,
Who smiled and listened long.

At last, when the day was dying,
It fled down the golden West,
And far beyond the mountains
Sank to its evening rest.

Arthur W. Peach

The Metal Monster

by A. Merritt

Author of "The Moon Pool," "Conquest of the The Moon Pool," etc.

(In collaboration with Dr. Walter T. Goodwin, Ph.D., I. A. S., F. R. G. S., etc.)

LIKE Mr. Merritt's narrative of "The Moon Pool" (published in *All-Story Weekly*, June 22, 1918), and "The Conquest of the Moon Pool" (*All-Story Weekly*, February 15 to March 22, 1919), "The Metal Monster" is published with the consent and authority of the International Association of Science. After the expeditions described in the earlier narratives, Dr. Walter T. Goodwin was placed at the head of a special bureau of the association and supplied with unlimited means to prosecute his investigations. Upon his recent return from Central Asia he gave Mr. Merritt the manuscript of his report, to be prepared for popular presentation. In its popularized form it is presented herewith.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE FRENZY OF RUTH.

FOR many minutes we stood silent, in the shadowy chamber, listening, each absorbed in his own thoughts. The thunderous drumming was continuous; sometimes it faded into a background for clattering storms as of thousands of machine guns, thousands of riveters at work at once upon a thousand metal frameworks; sometimes it was nearly submerged beneath splitting crashes as of meeting meteors of hollow steel.

But always the drumming persisted, rhythmic, thunderous—as Drake had said, a true drumfire of a dozen Marnes, a dozen Verduns. Through it all Ruth slept, undisturbed, cheek pillowed on one rounded arm, the two great pyramids erect behind her, watchful; a globe at her feet, a globe at her head, the third sphere poised between her and us, and, like the pyramids—watchful.

What was happening out there—over the edge of the cañon, beyond the portal of the cliffs, behind the veils, in the Pit of the Metal Monster? What was the message of the roaring drums? What the rede of their clamorous runes?

Ventnor stepped by the sentinel globe, bent over the tranced girl. Sphere nor pointed pair stirred; only they watched him—like a palpable thing one felt their watchfulness. He listened to her heart, caught up a wrist, took note of her pulse of life. He drew a deep breath, stood upright, nodded reassuringly.

Abruptly Drake turned, walked out through the open portal, his strain and a very deep anxiety written plain in deep lines that ran from nostrils to firm young mouth.

"Just went out to look for the pony," he muttered when he returned. "It's safe. I was afraid it had been stepped on. It's getting dusk. There's a big light down the cañon—over in the valley."

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for August 7.

Ventnor drew back past the globe; rejoined us.

The blue bower trembled under a gust of sound. Ruth stirred; her brows knitted; her hands clenched. The sphere that stood before her spun on its axis, swept up to the globe at her head, glided from it to the globe at her feet—as though whispering. Ruth moaned—her body bent upright, swayed rigidly. Her eyes opened; they stared through us as though upon some dreadful vision; and strangely was it as though she were seeing with another's eyes, were reflecting another's suffering. The globes at her feet and at her head swirled out, clustered against the third sphere—three weird shapes in silent consultation. On Ventnor's face I saw pity—and a vast relief! With shocked amaze I realized that Ruth's agony—for in agony she clearly was—was calling forth in him elation! He spoke—and I knew why.

"Norhala!" he whispered. "She is seeing with Norhala's eyes—feeling what Norhala feels! It's not going well with—That—out there! If we dared leave Ruth—could only see—"

Ruth leaped to her feet; cried out—a golden bugling that might have been Norhala's own wrathful trumpet notes! Instantly the two pyramids flamed open, became two gleaming stars that bathed her in violet radiance. Beneath their upper tips I saw the blasting ovals glitter—menacingly!

The girl glared at us—more brilliant grew the glittering ovals as though their lightnings trembled on their lips.

"Ruth!" called Ventnor in an appealing tone.

A shadow softened the intolerable, hard brilliancy of the brown eyes. In them something struggled to arise, fighting its way to the surface like some drowning human thing.

It sank back—upon her face dropped a cloud of heartbreak, appalling woe; the despair of a soul that, having withdrawn all faith in its own kind to rest all faith, as it thought, on angels—sees that faith betrayed.

There stared upon us a stripped spirit, naked and hopeless and terrible!

Despairing, raging, she screamed once more. The central globe swam to her; it raised her upon its back; glided to the doorway. Upon it she stood poised like some youthful, anguished Victory—a Victory who faced and knew she faced destroying defeat; poised upon that enigmatic orb on bare slender feet, one sweet breast bare, hands upraised, virginally archaic, nothing about her of the Ruth we knew.

"Ruth!" cried Drake; despair as great as that upon her face was in his voice. He sprang before the globe that held her; barred its way.

For an instant the Thing paused—and in that instant the human soul of the girl rushed back.

"No!" she cried. "No!"

A weird call issued from the white lips—stumbling, uncertain, as though she who sent it forth herself wondered whence it sprang. Abruptly the angry stars closed. The three globes spun—doubting, puzzled! Again she called—now a tremulous, halting cadence. She was lifted; dropped gently to her feet.

For an instant globes and pyramids whirled and danced before her—then sped away through the portal. Panting, torn by two clashing spirits, Ruth swayed, sobbing. As though drawn, she ran to the doorway, fled through it. As one we sprang after her. Rods ahead her white body flashed, speeding toward the Pit. Like fleet-footed Atalanta she fled—and far, far behind us was the blue bower, the misty barrier of the veils close, when Drake with a last desperate burst reached her side, gripped her. Down the two fell, rolling upon the smooth roadway. Silently she fought, biting, tearing at Drake, struggling to escape.

"Quick!" gasped Ventnor, stretching out to me an arm. "Cut off the sleeve. Quick!"

Unquestioning, I drew my knife, ripped the garment at the shoulder. He snatched the sleeve, knelt at Ruth's head; rapidly he crumpled an end, thrust it roughly into her mouth; tied it fast, gagging her.

"Hold her!" he ordered Drake; and with a sob of relief sprang up. The girl's eyes blazed at him, filled with an intense hate!

"Cut that other sleeve," he said; and when I had done so, knelt again, pinned Ruth down with a knee at her throat, turned her over and knotted her hands behind her. She ceased struggling; gently now he drew up the curly head, swung her upon her back.

"Hold her feet!" He nodded to Drake, who caught the slender bare ankles in his hands.

She lay there, helpless, being unable to use hands or feet.

"Too little Ruth, and too much Norhala!" said Ventnor, looking up at me. "If she'd only thought to cry out! She could have brought a regiment of those Things down to blast us. And would—if she *had* thought! That's why I gagged her. We don't dare trust to Ruth coming back—and you don't think *that* is Ruth, do you?"

He pointed to the pallid face glaring at him, the eyes from which cold fires flamed.

"No, you don't!" He thrust out a foot, caught Drake by the shoulder, sent him spinning a dozen feet away. "Damn it, Drake—don't you understand!"

For suddenly Ruth's eyes had softened; she had turned them on Dick pitifully, appealingly—and he had loosed her ankles, had leaned forward as though to draw away the band that covered the lips!

"Your gun," whispered Ventnor to me; before I could move he had snatched the automatic from my holster; had covered Drake with it.

"Dick," he said, "stand where you are. If you take another step toward this girl I'll shoot you—by God, I will!"

Drake halted, shocked amazement in his face; I myself felt resentful, wondering at his outburst.

"But it's hurting her," he muttered, staggering to his feet; Ruth's eyes, soft and pleading, still dwelt upon him.

"Hurting her!" exclaimed Ventnor. "Man—she's my sister! I know what I'm doing. Can't you see? Can't you see how little of Ruth is in that body there—how little of the girl you love? How or why I don't know—but that it is so I *do* know. Drake—have you forgotten how Norhala beguiled Cherkis? I want my sister back. I'm helping her to get back. Now let be! *I* know what I'm doing. Look at her."

We looked. In the face that glared up at Ventnor was nothing of Ruth—even as he had said. There was the same cold, awesome wrath that had rested upon Norhala as she watched Cherkis weep over the eating up of his city. Swiftly came a change—like the sudden smoothing out of the rushing waves of a hill-locked, wind-lashed lake.

The face was again Ruth's face—and Ruth's alone; the eyes were Ruth's eyes—supplicating, adjuring.

"Ruth!" Ventnor cried. "While you can hear—am I not right?"

She nodded vigorously, sternly; she was lost, hidden once more.

"You see!" He turned to us grimly. We had seen; we bowed our heads.

A shattering shaft of light flashed upon the veils; almost pierced them. An avalanche of sound passed high above us. Yet now I noted that where we stood the clamor was lessened, muffled. Of course, it came to me, it was the veils; I wondered why—for whatever the quality of the radiant mists, their purpose certainly had to do with concentration of the magnetic flux.

The deadening of noise must be accidental, could have nothing to do with their actual use; for sound is an air vibration solely. No—it must be a secondary effect. The Metal Monster was as heedless of clamor as it was of heat or cold or—

"We've got to see!" Ventnor broke the chain of thought. "We've got to get through and see what's happening. Win or lose—we've got to *know!*"

"Cut off your sleeve, as I did," he motioned to Drake. "Tie her ankles. We'll carry her."

Quickly it was done. Ruth's light body swinging between brother and lover, we moved forward toward the mists. We passed into them; we crept cautiously through their dead silences.

Passed out and fell back into them from a searing chaos of light, a chaotic tumult. From the slackened grip of Ventnor and Drake the body of Ruth dropped while we three stood blinded, deafened, fighting for recovery. Ruth twisted, rolled toward the

brink; Ventnor threw himself upon her, held her fast.

CHAPTER XLIII.

ARMAGEDDON METALLIQUE.

DRAGGING her, crawling on our knees, we crept forward; we stopped when the thinning of the mists permitted us to see through them yet still interposed a curtaining which, though tenuous, dimmed the intolerable brilliancy that filled the Pit, muffled its din to a degree we could bear.

I peered through them—and nerve and muscle were locked in the grip of paralyzing awe. I felt then as one would feel set close to warring regiments of stars, made witness to the death-throes of a universe, or swept through space and held above the whirling coils of Andromeda's nebula to watch its birth agonies of nascent suns.

These are no figures of speech, no hyperboles—speck as our whole planet would be in Andromeda's vast loom, pin-prick as was the Pit to the craters of our own sun, within the cliff-cupped walls of the valley was a tangible, struggling living force akin to that which dwells within the nebula and the star; a cosmic spirit transcending all dimensions and thrusting its confines out into the infinite; a sentient emanation of the infinite itself.

Nor was its voice less unearthly. It used the shell of the earth valley for its trumpetings, its clangors—but as one hears in the murmurings of the fluted conch the great voice of ocean, its whispering and its roarings, so here in the clamorous shell of the Pit echoed the tremendous voices of that illimitable sea which laps the shores of the countless suns.

I looked upon a mighty whirlpool miles upon miles wide. It whirled with surges whose racing crests were smiting incandescences; it was threaded with a spindrift of lightnings; it was trodden by dervish mists of molten flame thrust through with forests of lances of living light. It cast a cadent spray high to the heavens.

Over it the heavens glittered as though they were a shield held by fearful gods. Through the maelstrom staggered a mountainous bulk; a gleaming leviathan of pale blue metal caught in the swirling tide of some incredible volcano; a huge ark of metal breasting a deluge of flame.

And the drumming we had heard as of hollow beaten metal worlds, the shouting tempests of cannonading stars, was the breaking of these incandescent crests, the falling of the lightning spindrift, the rhythmic impact of the lanced rays upon the glimmering mountain that reeled and trembled as they struck it.

The reeling mountain, the struggling leviathan, was—the City!

It was the mass of the Metal Monster itself, guarded by, stormed by, its own legions that though separate from it were still as much of it as were the cells that formed the skin of its walls, its carapace! It was the Metal Monster tearing, rending, fighting for, battling against—itself!

Mile high as when I had first beheld it was the inexplicable body that held the great heart of the cones into which had been drawn the magnetic cataracts from our sun; that held too the smaller hearts of the lesser cones, the workshops, the birth chamber and manifold other mysteries unguessed and unseen. By a full fourth had its base been shrunken.

Ranged in double line along the side turned toward us were hundreds of dread forms—Shapes that in their immensity bore down upon, oppressed with a nightmare weight, the consciousness.

Rectangular, upon their outlines no spike of pyramid, no curve of globe showing, uncompromisingly ponderous, they upthrust. Upon the tops of the first rank were enormous masses, sledge shaped—like those metal fists that had battered down the walls of Cherkis's city, but to them as the human hand is to the paw of the dinosaur.

They were as though the great tower of the Woolworth Building in New York should be drawn up to twice its height, be widened by a half, be multiplied by hundreds, and then upon their tops be impaled horizontally as hammer heads armies of towers tall as the Singer Building!

Conceive this—conceive these Shapes as animate and flexible; beating down with

their prodigious mallets, smashing from side to side as though the tremendous pillars that held them were thousand jointed upright pistons; that as closely as I can present it in images of things we know is the picture of the Hammering Things!

Behind them stood a second row, high as they and as angular. From them extended scores of girdered arms. These were thickly studded with the flaming cruciform shapes, the opened cubes gleaming with their angry flares of reds and smoky yellows. From the tentacles of many swung immense shields like those which ringed the hall of the great cones.

And as the sledges beat, ever over their bent heads poured from the crosses a flood of crimson lightnings. Out of the concave depths of the shields whipped lashes of blinding flame. With ropes of fire they knouted the Things the sledges struck, the sullen crimson levins blasted.

Now I could see the Shapes that attacked. Grotesque; spined and tusked, spiked and antlered, wenned and breasted; as chimerically angled, cusped and cornute as though they were the superangled, supercornute Gods of the cusped and angled Gods of the Javanese, they strove against the sledge-headed and smiting, the multiarmed and blasting square towers.

High as them, as huge as they, incomparably fantastic, in dozens of shifting forms they battled.

More than a mile from the stumbling City stood ranged like sharpshooters a host of solid, bristling legged Eiffel Towers. Upon their tops spun scintillant gigantic wheels. Out of the centers of these wheels shot the radiant lances, hosts of spears of intensest violet light. The radiance they volleyed was not continuous; it was broken, so that the javelined rays shot out in rhythmic flights, each flying fast upon the shafts of the others.

It was their impact that sent forth the thunderous drumming. They struck and splintered against the walls, dropping from them in great gouts of molten flame. It was as though before they broke they pierced and the wall, the Monster's side, bled fire!

With the crashing of broadsides of massed batteries the sledges smashed down upon the bristling attackers. Under the awful impact globes and pyramids were shattered into hundreds of coruscating fragments, rocket bursts of blue and azure and violet flame, flames rainbowed and irised.

The hammer ends split, flew apart, were scattered, were falling showers of sulphurous yellow and scarlet meteors. But ever other cubes swarmed out and repaired the broken smiting tips. And always where a tusked and cornute shape had been battered down, disintegrated, another arose as huge and as formidable, pouring forth upon the squared tower it fought its lightnings, tearing at it with colossal spiked and hooked claws, beating it with incredible spiked and globular fists that were like the clenched hands of some metal Atlas.

As the striving Shapes swayed and wrestled, gave way or thrust forward, staggered or fell, the bulk of the Monster stumbled and swayed, advanced and retreated—an unearthly motion wedded to an amorphous immensity that flooded the watching consciousness with a deathly nausea.

Unceasingly the hail of radiant lances poured from the spinning wheels, falling upon Towered Shapes and City's wall alike. There arose a prodigious wailing, an unearthly thin screaming. About the bases of the defenders flashed blinding bursts of incandescence—like those which had heralded the flight of the Flying Thing dropping before Norhala's house.

Unlike them they held no dazzling sapphire brilliancies; they were ochreous, suffused with raging vermillion. Nevertheless they were factors of that same inexplicable action—for from the fountains of gushing light leaped thousands of gigantic square pillars; unimaginable projectiles hurled from the flaming mouths of earth-hidden, titanic mortars!

They soared high, swerved and swooped upon the lance-throwers! Beneath their onslaught those chimerae tottered. I saw living projectiles and living target fuse where they met—melt and weld in jets of lightnings.

But not all. There were those that tore great gaps in the horned giants—wounds

that instantly were healed with globes and pyramids seething out from the Cyclopean trunk. Ever the incredible projectiles flashed and flew as though from some inexhaustible store; ever uprose that prodigious barrage against the smiting rays!

Now to check them soared from the ranks of the besiegers clouds of countless horned dragons, immense cylinders of clustered cubes studded with the clinging tetrahedrons. They struck the cubed projectiles head on; aimed themselves to meet them!

Bristling dragon and hurtling pillar struck and fused or burst with an intolerable blazing. They fell—cube and sphere and pyramid—some half opened, some fully, in a rain of disks, of stars, huge flaming crosses; a storm of unimaginable pyrotechnics!

Now I became conscious that within the City—within the body of the Metal Monster—there raged a strife colossal as this without. From it came a vast volcanic roaring. Up from its top shot tortured flames, cascades and fountains of frenzied Things that looped and struggled, writhed over its edge, hurled themselves back; battling chimerae which against the glittering heavens traced luminous symbols of agony.

Shrilled a stronger wailing. Up from behind the ray hurling Towers shot hosts of globes. Thousands of palely azure, metal moons they soared; warrior moons charging in meteor rush and streaming with fluttering battle pennons of violet flame. High they flew; they curved over the mile high back of the Monster; they dropped upon it.

Arose to meet them immense columns of the cubes; battered against the spheres; swept them over and down into the depths. Hundreds fell, broken—but thousands held their place. I saw them twine about the pillars—writhing columns of interlaced cubes and globes straining like monstrous serpents while all along their coils the open disks and crosses smote with the similtars of their lightnings!

In the wall of the City appeared a shining crack; from top to bottom it ran; it widened into a rift from which a flood of radiance gushed. Out of this rift poured a thousand-foot-high torrent of horned globes.

Only for an instant they flowed. The rift closed upon them, catching those still emerging in a colossal vise. It *cruncked* them! Plain through the turmoil came a dreadful—*bursting*—roar.

Down from the closing jaws of the vise dripped a stream of nitid fragments that flashed and flickered—and died! And now in the wall was no trace of breach!

A hurricane of radiant lances swept it. Under them a mile wide section of the living scarp split away; dropped like an avalanche. Its fall revealed great spaces, huge vaults and chambers filled with warring lightnings—out from them came roaring, bellowing thunders. Swiftly from each side of the gap a metal curtaining of the cubes joined. Again the wall was whole!

I turned my stunned gaze from the City—swept it over the valley. Everywhere, in towers, in writhing coils, in whipping flails, in waves that smote and crashed, in countless forms and combinations the Metal Hordes battled. Here were pillars against which metal billows rushed and were broken; there were metal comets that crashed high above the mad turmoil.

From streaming silent veil to veil—north and south, east and west the Monster slew itself beneath its racing, flaming banners, the tempests of its lightnings!

The tortured hulk of the City lurched; it swept toward us. Before it blotted out from our eyes the Pit I noted that the crystal spans upon the river of jade were gone; that the wondrous jeweled ribbons of its banks were broken.

Closer came the reeling City! With trembling hands I fumbled for my lenses, focused them upon it. Now I saw that where the radiant lances struck they—killed! The blocks blackened under them, became lusterless; the sparkling of the tiny eyes—went out; the metal carapaces crumbled!

Closer came the City—the Monster; shuddering I lowered the glasses that it might not seem so near.

Down dropped the bristling Shapes that wrestled with the squared Towers. They rose again in a single monstrous wave that rushed to overwhelm them. Before they could strike the City had swept closer; had hidden them from me.

Again I raised the glasses. They brought the metal scarp not fifty feet away—within it the hosts of tiny eyes glittered, no longer mocking nor malicious, but insane!

Nearer drew the Monster—nearer.

A thousand feet away it checked its movement, seemed to draw itself together. Then like the roar of a falling world that whole side facing us slid down to the valley's floor!

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE PASSING OF NORHALA.

HUNDREDS of feet through must have been the fallen mass—within it who knows what chambers filled with mysteries? Yes, thousands of feet thick it must have been, for the débris of it splintered and splashed to the very edge of the ledge on which we crouched; heaped it with dimming fragments of the bodies that had formed it.

We looked into a thousand vaults, a thousand spaces. There came another avalanche roaring—

Before us opened the crater of the cones!

Through the torn gap I saw them, clustering undisturbed about the base of that one slender, coroneted and star pointing spire, rising serene and unshaken from a hell of lightnings. But the shields that had rimmed the crater were gone.

From my hand Ventnor snatched the glasses, leveled and held them long to his eyes.

"God!" He thrust them back to me. "Look!"

Through the lenses the great hall leaped into full view apparently only a few yards away. It was a caldron of chameleon flame. It seethed with the Hordes battling over the remaining walls and the floor. But around the crystal base of the cones was an open zone into which none broke.

In that wide ring, girdling the shimmering fantasy like a circled sanctuary, were but three forms. One was the wondrous Disk of jeweled fires I have called the Metal Emperor; the second was the sullen fired cruciform of the Keeper.

The third was Norhala!

She stood at the side of that weird master of hers—or was it after all the servant? Between them and the Keeper's planes gleamed the gigantic T-shaped tablet of countless rods which controlled the activities of the cones; that had controlled the shifting of the vanished shields; that manipulated too, perhaps, the energies of whatever similar but smaller cornate ganglia were scattered throughout the City and one of which we had beheld when the Emperor's guards had blasted Ventnor.

Plain was Norhala in the lenses—so close that almost, it seemed, I could reach out and touch her. The flaming hair streamed and billowed above her glorious head like a banner of molten floss of coppery gold; her face of more than human beauty was a mask of wrath and despair; her great eyes blazed upon the Keeper; her exquisite body was bare, stripped of every shred of silken covering.

From streaming tresses to white feet an oval of pulsing golden light nimbused her. Maiden Isis, virgin Astarte she stood there, held in the grip of the Disk—like a goddess betrayed and hopeless yet thirsting for vengeance!

For all their stillness, their immobility, it came to me that Emperor and Keeper were at grapple, locked in death grip; the realization was as definite as though, like Ruth, I thought with Norhala's mind, saw with her eyes. Clearly too it came to me that in this contest between the two was epitomized all the vast conflict that raged around them; that in it was fast ripening that fruit of destiny of which Ventnor had spoken, and that here in the Hall of the Cones would be settled—and soon—the fate not only of Disk and Cross, but of humanity.

But with what unknown powers was that duel being fought? They cast no lightnings; they battled with no visible weapons. Only the great planes of the inverted cruciform Shape smoked and smoldered with their sullen flares of ochres and of scarlets; while over all the face of the Disk its cold and irised fires raced and shone, beating with a rhythm incredibly rapid; its core of incandescent ruby blazed, its sapphire ovals were cabochoned pools of living, lucent radiance!

There was a splitting roar that arose above all the clamor, deafening us even in the shelter of the silent veils. On each side of the crater whole masses of the City dropped away. Fleetingly I was aware of scores of smaller pits in which uprose lesser replicas of the Coned Mount, lesser reservoirs of the Monster's force.

Neither the Emperor nor the Keeper moved, both seemingly indifferent to the catastrophe fast developing around them.

Now I strained forward, to the very thinnest edge of the curtainings. For between the Disk and Cross began to form a fine black mist. It was transparent; seemed spun of minute translucent ebon corpuscles. It hung like a black shroud suspended by unseen hands. It shook and wavered now toward the Disk, now toward the Cross. I sensed a keying up of force within the two; knew that each was striving to cast like a net that hanging mist upon the other.

Abruptly the Emperor flashed forth, blindingly. As though caught upon a blast, the black shroud flew toward the Keeper—enveloped it! And as the mist covered and clung I saw the sulphurous and crimson flares dim. They were snuffed out! The Keeper fell!

Upon Norhala's face flamed wild triumph, banishing the despair. The outstretched planes of the Cross swept up as though in torment. For an instant its fires flared and licked through the clinging blackness; it writhed half upright, threw itself forward, crashed down prostrate upon the enigmatic tablet which only its tentacles could manipulate.

From Norhala's face the triumph fled. On its heels rushed stark, incredulous horror.

The Mount of the Cones shuddered. From it came a single mighty throb of force—like a prodigious heart-beat. Under that pulse of power the Emperor staggered, spun—and, spinning, swept Norhala from her feet, swung her close to its flashing rose!

Pulsed a second throb from the cones, and mightier.

A spasm shook the Disk—a paroxysm. Its fires faded; they flared out again, bathing the floating, unearthly figure of Norhala with their iridescences. I saw her body writhe—as though it shared the agony of the Shape that held her. Her head twisted; the great eyes, pools of uncomprehending, unbelieving horror, stared into mine—

With a spasmodic, infinitely dreadful movement the Disk closed—and closed upon her!

Norhala was gone—was shut within it! Crushed to the pent fires of its crystal heart!

I heard a sobbing, agonized choking—knew it was I who sobbed. Against me I felt Ruth's body strike, bend in a convulsive arc, drop inert.

The slender steeple of the cones drooped, sending its faceted coronet shattering to the floor. The Mount melted! Beneath the flooding radiance sprawled Keeper and the great inert Globe that was the Goddess woman's sepulcher.

The crater filled with the pallid luminescence. Faster and ever faster it poured down into the Pit. And from all the lesser craters of the smaller cones swept silent cataracts of the same pale radiance.

The City began to crumble—the Monster to fall!

Like pent-up waters rushing through a broken dam the gleaming deluge swept over the valley; gushing in steady torrents from the breaking mass. Over the valley fell a vast silence. The lightnings ceased. The Metal Hordes stood rigid, the shining flood lapping at their bases, rising swiftly ever higher.

Now from the sinking City swarmed multitudes of its weird luminaries. Out they trooped, swirling from every rent and gap—orbs scarlet and sapphire, ruby orbs, orbs tuliped and irised—the jocund suns of the birth chamber and side by side with them hosts of the frozen, pale gilt, stiff rayed suns! Thousands upon thousands they marched forth and poised themselves solemnly over all the Pit that now was a fast-rising lake of yellow froth of sun flame!

Yes, they swept forth in squadrons, in companies, in regiments, those mysterious orbs. They floated over all the valley; they separated and swung motionless above it as though they were mysterious multiple souls

of fire brooding over the dying shell that had held them! Beneath, thrusting up from the lambent lake like grotesque towers of some drowned fantastic metropolis, the great Shapes stood, black against its glowing.

What had been the City—that which had been the bulk of the Monster—was now only a vast and shapeless hill from which streamed the silent torrents of that released, unknown force which, concentrate and bound, had been the cones. As though it was the Monster's shining life-blood it poured, raising ever higher in its swift flooding the level of radiant lake. Lower and lower sank the immense bulk; squattered and spread, ever lowering—about its helpless, patient crouching something ineffably piteous, something indescribably, *cosmically* tragic!

Abruptly the watching orbs shook under a hail of sparkling atoms streaming down from the glittering sky; raining upon the lambent lake. So thick they fell that now the brooding luminaries were dim aureoles within them. The veils in which we lay shook; began to pulsate.

From the pit came a blinding, insupportable brilliancy. From every rigid tower gleamed out jeweled fires; their clinging units opening into blazing star and disk and cross. The City was a hill of living gems over which flowed torrents of pale molten gold. The Pit blazed.

There followed an appalling tensity; a prodigious gathering of force; a panic stirring concentration of energy. Thicker fell the clouds of sparkling atoms—higher arose the yellow flood!

Ventnor cried out. I could not hear him, but I read his purpose—and so did Drake. Up on his broad shoulders he swung Ruth as though she had been a child. Back through the throbbing veils we ran; passed out of them.

"Back!" shouted Ventnor. "Back as far as you can!"

On we raced; we reached the gateway of the cliffs; we dashed on and on—up the shining roadway toward the blue globe now a scant mile before us; ran sobbing, panting—ran, we knew, for our lives.

Out of the Pit came a sound—I cannot describe it! An unutterably desolate, dreadful wail of despair. It shuddered past us like the groaning of a broken-hearted star—anguished and awesome.

It died. There rushed upon us a sea of that incredible loneliness, that longing for extinction that had assailed us in the haunted hollow where first we had seen Norhala. But its billows were resistless, invincible!

Beneath them we fell; were torn by avid desire for swift death!

Dimly, through fainting eyes, I saw a dazzling brilliancy fill the sky; heard with dying ears a chaotic, blasting roar. A wave of air thicker than water caught us up, hurled us hundreds of yards forward. It dropped us; in its wake rushed another wave, withering, scorching.

It raced over us. Scorching though it was, within its heat was energizing, revivifying force; something that slew the deadly despair and fed the fading fires of life.

I staggered to my feet; looked back. The veils were gone! The precipice walled gateway they had curtained was filled with a Plutonic glare as though it opened into the incandescent heart of a volcano!

A hand clutched my shoulder, spun me around. It was Ventnor. He pointed to the sapphire house, started to run to it. Far ahead I saw Drake, the body of the girl clasped to his breast. The heat became blasting, insupportable; my laboring lungs shriveled in the air they breathed.

Over the sky above the cañon streaked a serpentine chain of lightnings. A sudden cyclonic gust swept the cleft, whirling us like leaves toward the Pit.

I threw myself upon my face, clutching at the smooth rock. A volley of thunder burst—but not the thunder of the Metal Monster or its Hordes; no, the bellowing of the levins of our own earth! And the wind was cold; it bathed the burning skin; laved the fevered lungs.

Again the sky was split by the lightnings. And roaring down from it in solid sheets came the rain!

From the Pit arose a hissing as though within it raged Babylonian Tiamat, Mother of Chaos, serpent dweller in the void; Midgard snake of the ancient Norse holding in her coils the world!

Buffeted by wind, beaten down by rain, clinging to each other like drowning men, Ventnor and I pushed on to the elfin globe. The light was dying fast. By it we saw Drake pass within the portal with his burden. The light became embers; it went out; blackness clasped us. Guided by the lightnings, we beat our way to the door; passed through it.

In the electric glare we saw Drake bending over Ruth. In it I saw a slide draw over the open portal through which shrieked the wind, streamed the rain! As though its crystal panel was moved by unseen, gentle hands, the portal was closed; the tempest shut out!

We dropped beside Ruth upon a pile of silken stuffs—awed, marveling, trembling with a mingled agony of pity and—thanksgiving!

For we knew—each of us knew with an absolute definiteness as we crouched there among the racing, dancing black and silver shadows with which the lightnings filled the blue globe—that the Metal Monster was dead!

With all its pomp and power, all its beauty and its terror, its colossal indifference to man and its colossal menace to him, its arts and sciences and unhuman wisdom, its mysteries and its grandeurs—the Thing was dead! Slain by itself!

CHAPTER XLV.

BURNED OUT.

RUTH sighed and stirred. By the glare of the lightnings, now almost continuous, we saw that her rigidity, and in fact all the puzzling cataleptic symptoms, had disappeared. Her limbs relaxed, her skin faintly flushed, she lay in deepest but natural slumber undisturbed by the incessant cannonading of the thunder under which the walls of the blue globe shuddered. Ventnor passed through the curtains of the central hall; he returned with one of Norhala's cloaks; covered the girl with it.

An overwhelming sleepiness took possession of me, a weariness ineffable. Nerve and brain and muscle suddenly relaxed, went slack and numb. Without a struggle I surrendered to an overpowering stupor and cradled deep in its heart ceased consciously to be.

When my eyes unclosed the chamber of the moon-stone walls was filled with a silvery, crepuscular light. I heard the murmuring and laughing of running water, the play, I lazily realized, of the fountained pool.

I lay for whole minutes unthinking, luxuriating in the sense of tension gone and of security; lay steeped in the aftermath of complete rest. Memory flooded me. Quietly I sat up; Ruth still slept, breathing peacefully beneath the cloak, one white arm stretched over the shoulder of Drake—as though in her sleep she had drawn close to him.

At her feet lay Ventnor, as deep in slumber as they. I arose and tiptoed over to the closed door. Searching, I found its key; a cupped indentation upon which I pressed.

The crystalline panel slipped back; it was moved, I suppose, by some mechanism of counterbalances responding to the weight of the hand. It must have been some vibration of the thunder which had loosed that mechanism and had closed the panel upon the heels of our entrance—so I thought—then seeing again in memory that uncanny, deliberate shutting was not all convinced that it had been the thunder!

I looked out. How many hours the sun had been up there was no means of knowing. The sky was low and slaty gray; a fine rain was falling. I stepped out. The garden of Norhala was a wreckage of uprooted and splintered trees and torn masses of what had been blossoming verdure.

The gateway of the precipices beyond which lay the Pit was hidden in the webs of the rain. Long I gazed down the cañon—and longingly; striving to picture what the Pit now held; eager to read the riddles of the night.

There came from the valley no sound, no movement, no light.

I reentered the blue globe and paused on the threshold—staring into the wide and wondering eyes of Ruth bolt upright in her

silken bed with Norhala's cloak clutched to her chin like a suddenly awakened and startled child. As she glimpsed me she stretched out her hand. Drake, wide awake on the instant, leaped to his feet, his hand jumping to his pistol.

"Dick!" cried Ruth, her voice tremulous, sweet.

He swung about, looked deep into the clear and fearless brown eyes in which—with leaping heart I realized it—was throned only that spirit which was Ruth's and Ruth's alone; Ruth's clear unshadowed eyes glad and shy and soft with—love!

"Dick!" she whispered, and held soft arms out to him. The cloak fell from her. He swung her up. Their lips met.

Upon them, embraced, the wakening eyes of Ventnor dwelt; they filled with relief and joy, nor was there lacking in them a certain amusement.

She drew from Drake's arms, pushed him from her, stood for a moment shakily, with covered eyes.

"Ruth!" called Ventnor softly.

"Oh!" she cried. "Oh, Martin—I forgot—" She ran to him, held him tight, face hidden in his breast. His hand rested on the clustering brown curls, tenderly.

"Martin." She raised her face to him. "Martin, it's *gone!* The taint, I mean. I'm—*me* again! All *me!* What happened? Where's Norhala?"

I started. Did she not know? Of course, lying bound as she had in the vanished veils, she could have seen nothing of the stupendous tragedy enacted beyond them—but had not Ventnor said that possessed by the inexplicable obsession evoked by the weird woman Ruth had seen with her eyes, thought with her mind?

And had there not been evidence that in her body had been echoed the torments of Norhala's? Had she forgotten? I started to speak—was checked by Ventnor's swift, warning glance.

"She's—over in the Pit," he answered her quietly. "But do you remember nothing, little sister?"

"There's something in my mind that's been rubbed out," she replied quaintly. "I remember the City of Cherkis—and your torture, Martin—and mine—"

Her face whitened; Ventnor's brow contracted anxiously. I knew for what he watched—but Ruth's shamed face was all human; on it was no shadow nor trace of that alien soul which so few hours since had threatened us.

"Yes," she nodded, "I remember that. And I remember how Norhala repaid them. I remember that I was glad, wickedly, fiercely glad, and then I was tired—so tired! And then—I come to the rubbed-out place," she ended perplexedly.

Deliberately, almost banal had I not realized his purpose, he changed the subject. He held her from him at arm's length.

"Ruth!" he exclaimed half mockingly, half reprovingly. "Don't you think your morning negligee is just a little scanty even for this God-forsaken corner of earth?"

Lips parted in sheer astonishment, she looked at him. Then her eyes dropped to her bare feet, her dimpled knees. She clasped her arms across her breasts; rosy red turned all her fair skin.

"Oh!" she gasped. "Oh!" And hid from Drake and me behind the tall figure of her brother.

Laughing, I walked over to the pile of silken stuffs, took the cloak and tossed it to her. Ventnor pointed to the saddle-bags.

"You've another outfit there, Ruth," he said. "We'll take a turn through the place. Call us when you're ready. We'll get something to eat and go see what's happening—out there."

She nodded. We passed through the curtains and out of the hall into the chamber that had been Norhala's. There we halted, Drake eying Martin with a certain embarrassment. The older man thrust out his hand to him.

"I knew it, Drake," he said. "Ruth told me all about it when Cherkis had us. And I'm glad, boy. I'm very glad. It's time she was having a home of her own and not running around the lost places with me. This has taught me that. I'll miss her—miss her damnably, of course. But I'm glad, boy—glad!"

There was a little silence while each looked deep into each other's hearts. Then Ventnor dropped Dick's hand.

"And that's all of *that*," he said. "The

problem before us is—how are we going to get back home?"

"The—*Thing*—is dead!" I spoke from an absolute conviction that surprised me, based as it was upon no really tangible, known evidence.

"I think so," he said. "No—I *know* so, even as do you, Goodwin. Yet even if we can pass over its body, how can we climb out of its lair? That slide down which we rode with Norhala is unclimbable. The walls are unscalable. And there is that chasm—she—spanned for us. How can we cross *that?* And do you forget that the tunnel to the ruins was sealed? There remains of possible roads the way through the forest to what was the City of Cherkis. Frankly I am loath to take it.

"I am not at all sure that all the armored men were slain—that some few may not have escaped and be lurking there. It would be short shrift for us if we fell into their hands now, Goodwin."

"And I'm not sure of *that*," objected Drake. "I think their pep and push must be pretty thoroughly knocked out—if any do remain. I think if they saw us coming they'd beat it so fast that they'd smoke with the friction."

"There's something to that." Ventnor smiled. "Still I'm not keen on taking the chance. At any rate, the first thing to do is to see what happened down there in the Pit. Perhaps we'll have some other idea after that."

"*I* know what happened there," announced Drake surprisingly. "It was a short circuit!"

We gaped at him, mystified.

"A short circuit?" hazarded Ventnor at last.

"Burned out!" said Drake. "Every damned one of them—burned out. What were they, after all? A lot of living dynamos! Dynamotors—rather! And all of a sudden they had too much juice turned on. Bang went their insulations—whatever they were.

"Bang went they. Burned out—short circuited! I don't pretend to know why or how. Nonsense! I do know. The cones were some kind of immensely concentrated force—electric, magnetic; either or both and more. I myself believe that they were probably solid—in a way of speaking—coronium!

"If about twenty of the greatest scientists the world has ever known are right, coronium is—well, call it curdled energy! The electric potentiality of Niagara in a pin point of dust of yellow fire. All right—they or *It*, lost control. Every pin point swelled out into a Niagara! And as it did so, it expanded from a controlled dust dot to an uncontrolled cataract—in other words, its energy was unleashed and undammed.

"Very well—what followed? What *had* to follow? Every living battery of block and globe and spike was supercharged; went—blooey! That valley must have been some sweet little volcano while that short circuiting was going on! All right—let's go down and see what it did to your unclimbable slide and unscalable walls, Ventnor. I'm not so sure we won't be able to get out that way."

"Come on; everything's ready," Ruth was calling; her summoning blocked any objection we might have raised to Drake's argument.

It was no dryad, no distressed pagan clad maid we saw as we passed back into the room of the pool. In knickerbockers and short skirt, prim and self-possessed, rebellious curls held severely in place by close-fitting cap and slender feet stoutly shod, Ruth hovered over the steaming kettle swung above the spirit lamp.

And she was very silent as we hastily broke fast. Nor when we had finished did she go to Drake. She clung close to her brother and beside him, as, Dick striding at my elbow, we set forth at last down the roadway, through the rain, toward the ledge between the cliffs where the veils had shimmered.

Hotter and hotter it grew as we advanced; the air steamed like a Turkish bath. The mists clustered so thickly that at last we groped forward step by step, holding to each other. The wet heat became suffocating.

"No use," gasped Ventnor. "We couldn't see. We'll have to turn back."

"Burned out!" said Dick. "Didn't I

tell you? The whole valley must have been a volcano. And with that deluge of rain falling in it—why wouldn't there be a fog? It's why there *is* a fog. We'll have to wait until it clears."

We turned; stumbled back to visibility; trudged in retreat to the blue globe.

All that day the rain fell. Throughout the few remaining hours of daylight we wandered over the house of Norhala, examining its most interesting contents, or sat theorizing, discussing all phases of the phenomena we had witnessed; held back from definite conclusions as to their end, of course, by our uncertainty of what it was actually that lay within the Pit.

We told Ruth what had occurred between that time she had thrown in her lot with Norhala until with her in the arms of Drake we had fled from the fiery opening of the Monster and its Hordes—that sun burst of jeweled incandescence between the downthrust of the flood of radiant corpuscles, the upthrust of the shining lake.

We told her of the enigmatic struggle between the glorious Disk and the sullenly flaming Thing I have called the Keeper.

We told her of the entombment of Norhala!

When she heard that she dropped her head upon her arms and wept.

"She was sweet," she sobbed; "she was lovely; and she was beautiful. And dearly she loved me. I *know* she loved me! Oh, I know that we and ours and that which was hers could not share the world together. But it comes to me that Earth field would have been a garden more beautiful and far, far less poisonous with those that were Norhala's than it is with us and ours!"

Weeping, she withdrew from us, passed through the curtainings, going we knew to Norhala's chamber.

It was a strange thing indeed that she had said, I thought, watching her go. That the garden of the world would be far less poisonous blossoming with the Things of wedded crystal and metal and magnetic fires than fertile as now with us of flesh and blood and bone! To me came appreciations of the harmonies of the Things, their order—involuntarily, like a black shadow, darkened realization of struggling humanity; drifted over my mind heterogeneous apperceptions of the geometric energies, the miraculous coordination whether united within the bulk of the Metal Monster or activating apart from it either in units or in aggregations—and whether unit or aggregation still as much a part of the whole as those clustering to form the major mass.

Mingled with those perceptions were others of humanity—disharmonious, incoördinate, ever struggling, ever striving to destroy itself, unit against unit and government against government; humanity whose whites and blacks, browns and yellows and reds were less unlike than were pyramids to spheres, or spheres to cubes.

There was a plaintive whinnying at the open door. A long and hairy face, a pair of patient, inquiring eyes looked in. It was a pony! For a moment it regarded us—and then trotted trustfully through; ambled up to us; poked its head against my side.

It had been ridden by one of the Persians whom Ruth had killed, for under it, slipped from the girths, a saddle dangled. And its owner had been kind to it—we knew that from its lack of fear for us. Driven by the tempest of the night before, it had been led back by instinct to the protection of man.

"Some luck!" breathed Drake.

He busied himself with the pony, stripping away the hanging saddle, grooming it.

CHAPTER XLVI.

SLAG.

THAT night we slept well. Awakening, we found that the storm had grown violent again; the wind roaring and the rain falling in such volume that it was impossible to make our way to the Pit. Twice, as a matter of fact, we tried; but the smooth roadway was a torrent, and, drenched even through our oils to the skin, we at last abandoned the attempt. Ruth and Drake drifted away together among the other chambers of the globe; they were absorbed in themselves, and, understanding, we did not thrust ourselves upon them. All the day the torrents fell.

We sat down that night to what was wellnigh the last of Ventnor's stores. Ruth's

eyes were sparkling, she herself pulsing with life. Seemingly she had forgotten Norhala; she spoke no more of her, at least.

"Martin," she said, "can't we start home to-morrow? I want to get away. I want to get back to our own world."

"As soon as the storm ceases, Ruth," he answered, "we start. Little sister—I too want you to get back quickly."

The next morning the storm had gone. We wakened soon after dawn into clear and brilliant light. We had a silent and hurried breakfast. The saddle-bags were packed and strapped upon the pony. Within them were what we could carry of souvenirs, exhibits, from Norhala's home—a suit of the lacquered armor, a pair of cloaks and sandals, the jeweled combs. Ruth and Drake at the side of the pony, Martin and I leading, we set forth toward the Pit.

"We'll probably have to come back, Walter," he said. "I don't believe the place is passable."

I pointed—we were then just over the threshold of the elfin globe. Where the veils had stretched between the perpendicular pillars of the cliffs was now a wide and regged-edged opening.

The roadway which had run so smoothly through the scarps was blocked by a thousand foot barrier! Over it, beyond it, I could see through the crystalline clarity of the air the opposing walls.

"We can climb it!" said Ventnor. We passed on. We reached the base of the barrier. An avalanche had dropped there; the barricade was the débris of the torn cliffs; their dust, their pebbles, their boulders. We toiled up; we reached the crest; we looked down upon the valley.

When first we had seen it we had gazed upon a sea of radiance pierced with lanced forests, swept with gigantic gonfalons of mists of flame; we had seen it emptied of its fiery mists—a vast slate covered with the chirography of a mathematical God; we had seen it filled with the symboling of the Metal Hordes and dominated by the colossal integrate heiroglyph of the City—the Metal Monster; we had seen it as a radiant lake over which brooded weird suns; a lake of yellow flame froth upon which a sparkling hail fell, within which reared islanded towers and a drowning mount running with cataracts of sun fires; here we had watched a Goddess woman, a being half of earth, half of the unknown immured within a living tomb—a dying tomb—of flaming mysteries; had seen a cross-shaped metal Satan, a sullen flaming crystal Judas betray—itself!

Where we had peered into the unfathomable, had glimpsed the infinite, had heard and had seen the inexplicable, was—

Slag!

The amethystine ring from which had streamed the circling veils was cracked and blackened; like a seam of coal it stretched around the Pit—a crown of mourning! The veils were gone! The floor of the valley was fissured and blackened; its patterns, its writings burned away. As far as we could see stretched a sea of slag—coal black, vitrified and dead!

Here and there black hillocks sprawled; huge pillars arose, bent and twisted as though they had been jettings of lava cooled into rigidity before they could sink back or break. These shapes clustered most thickly around an immense calcified mound. They were what were left of the battling Hordes and the mound was what had been the living City, the Metal Monster!

Somewhere there rested the ashes of Norhala. sealed by fire in the urn of the Emperor!

From side to side of the Pit in broken beaches, in waves and hummocks, in blackened, distorted tusks and warped towerings, reaching with a hideous pathos in thousands of forms toward the charred mound, was naught but—slag!

From rifts and hollows still filled with water little wreaths of steam drifted. In those futile wraiths of vapor was all that remained of the might of the Metal Thing.

Catastrophe I had expected, tragedy I knew we would find—but I had looked for nothing so repellent, so filled with the abomination of desolation, so frightful as was this.

"Norhala!" sobbed Ruth.

"Burned out!" muttered Drake. "Short-circuited and burned out! Like a dynamo—like an electric light!"

"Destiny!" said Ventnor. "Destiny! Not yet was the hour struck for man to relinquish his sovereignty over this world. Destiny!"

We began to pick our way down the heaped débris and out upon the plain. For all that day and part of another we searched for an opening out of the Pit.

Everywhere was the incredible calcification. The surfaces that had been the smooth metallic carapaces with the tiny eyes deep within them, crumbled beneath the lightest blow. Not long would it be, I knew, until under wind and rain they dissolved into dust and mud.

And it grew increasingly obvious that Drake's theory of the destruction was correct. The Monster had been one prodigious magnet—or, rather, a prodigious dynamo. By magnetism, by electricity, it had lived and had been activated. Whatever the force of which the cones were built and that I have likened to energy-made material, it was certainly akin to the electromagnetic energies.

When, in the cataclysm, that force was diffused, it drew to itself those floods of atmospheric electricity that we had seen as the storm of sparkling corpuscles. There had been created—and the scientific proofs of this would take up far more space than I can here afford to give it—there had been created, I say, a magnetic field of incredible intensity; had been concentrated an electric charge of inconceivable magnitude.

Discharging, it had blasted the Monster—short-circuited it, burned it out, even as Drake had said.

But what was it that had led up to the cataclysm? What was it that had turned the Metal Thing upon itself? What disharmony had crept into that supernal order to set in motion the machinery of disintegration?

We could only conjecture. The cruciform Shape I have named the Keeper was the agent of the destruction—of that there could be no doubt. In the enigmatic organism which when many still was one and which retaining its integrity as a whole could dissociate manifold parts and still as a whole maintain an unseen contact and direction over them through miles of space, the Keeper had its place, its work, its duties.

So too had that wondrous Disk whose visible and concentrate power, whose manifest leadership, had made me name it—Emperor. And had not Norhala called the Disk—Ruler?

What were the responsibilities of this twain to the mass of the organism of which they were such important units? What were the laws they administered, the laws they must obey? Something certainly of that mysterious law which Maeterlinck has called the Spirit of the Hive—and something infinitely greater, like that which governs the swarming sun bees of Hercule's clustered orbs.

Had there evolved within the Keeper of the Cones—guardian and engineer as it was of the mechanisms—ambition? Had there risen within it a determination to wrest power from the Disk, to take its place as Dictator, as Ruler?

How else explain that conflict I had sensed when the Emperor had plucked Drake and me from the Keeper's grip the night following the orgy of the feeding? How else explain that duel in the shattered Hall of the Cones whose end had been the signal for the final cataclysm? How else explain the alinement of the cubes behind the Keeper against the globes and pyramids remaining loyal to the will of the Disk?

We discussed this long, Ventnor and I.

"This world," he mused, "is a place of struggle. Air and sea and land and all things that dwell within and on them must battle for life. Earth not Mars is the planet of war. I have a theory"—he hesitated—"call it fanciful, metaphysical if you will; but the magnetic currents which are the nerve force of this globe of ours were what fed—the Things.

"Within those currents is the spirit of earth. And for five years they have been supercharged with strife, with hatreds, massed ambitions, warfare. Were these disharmonies drawn in by—the Things as they fed? Did it happen that the Keeper was—*tuned*—to them; that it absorbed and responded to them, growing ever more sensitive to these forces—that it reflected humanity!"

"Who knows, Goodwin—who can tell? Was it that or was it the sprouting of seeds long dormant—ripening as do those of babyhood into the thoughts and actions of maturity?"

Enigma, unless the explanations I have hazarded be accepted, must remain the impelling cause of that monstrous suicide. Complete enigma, save for inconclusive theories, must remain the question of the Monster's origin. Whether it had come from the ordered star of Ventnor's vision; whether it was, as his second vision seemed to hint, a child of a secret caverned womb of earth; when it had come forth if the latter, how boarding this planet if from the star; why long ere this it had not swung out to conquer and to level to its will of metal and of crystal and of living fires this world of ours—to all these we could find no answers. If answers there were, they were lost forever in the slag we trod.

It was afternoon of the second day that we found a rift in the blasted wall of the valley. We decided to try it. We had not dared to take the road by which Norhala had led us into the City.

The giant slide was broken and climbable. But even if we could have passed safely through the tunnel of the abyss there still was left the chasm over which we could have thrown no bridge. If we could have bridged it still at that road's end was the cliff whose shaft Norhala had sealed with her lightnings!

So we entered the rift. And it was within it that there materialized the last of the inexplicable phenomena from which, we thought, we had escaped; a phenomenon peculiarly distressing to me, singled out through, I suppose, some idiosyncrasy of my bodily chemistry to bear its brunt. We had gone with great difficulty perhaps six miles along the bed of the cleft which was littered with boulders and extremely dangerous. For the last hour I had been experiencing a mystifying, a steadily increasing and handicapping drag.

It was exactly as though I walked against the flow of an invisible current that strove to carry me back toward the Pit. The cañon ran roughly south by east. The unseen torrent ran up it. I had dropped back behind the others and I noted that nothing seemed to be amiss with them; they went on picking their way along the rift's strewn floor.

A nightmare terror began to grip me. The force became stronger; I breasted myself against it; I strained, arms outstretched against it, struggling to keep my feet. And at last, panic overcoming me, I cried out to them for help. The three turned, came running to me.

Before they reached me I felt the pushing force lessen; within me was curious tingling concentration—electric. The tingling drew up to my arms, through them to my hands. Then with an audible crackling a tiny globe of green fire melted from my finger-tips, hovered a moment, and with lightning swiftness darted back through the cañon toward the dead Monster's blackened lair!

Wondering, amazed, Ventnor and Ruth and Drake gazed upon me. Appalled I stared at them. I dropped my arms; all tension, all resistance, was gone.

I walked forward. There was now no torrent, no unseen, terrifying clog upon the least of my movements.

And till now this phenomenon has persisted, although steadily lessening. Day by day, in the late afternoon, I begin to feel the pull of the streaming current, dragging me toward the northwest straight as a compass needle points to the magnetic pole.

But I understand what it is now, and I am no longer afraid. Dwelling in that prodigious field of force that surrounded the Metal Things, we were all of us, of course, magnetized to an incredible degree.

Through, as I have said, some peculiar idiosyncrasy I must have become supersensitive to the magnetic flux.

We know that in late afternoon—though *why* none knows—there is an abrupt increase in force of the magnetic streams between Earth's magnetic poles. When that increase occurs I respond to it as a nail does to a magnet.

I store, it seems, static electricity; become in a way of speaking a Leyden jar of flesh and blood. The tension changes and the force I have stored appears as the corpuscles of electric fire.

Why they do not instantly leap forth and disappear as in the usual discharge of static I do not know. I only know that the mark of the Metal Thing is on me and that happens *does* happen.

It imposes certain limitations upon me not at all pleasant. I can carry no watch; I can go close to no delicate instruments; I am barred while it lasts from my laboratory.

It will pass, I know. But it is not—pleasant; no!

Of our wanderings thereafter I need not write. From the rift we emerged into a maze of valleys, and after a month in that wilderness, living upon what game we could shoot, we found a road that led us into Gyantse.

In another six weeks we were home in America.

My story is finished.

There in the Trans-Himalayan wilderness is the wondrous blue globe that was the weird home of the lightning witch—and looking back I know now she could not have been all woman. There is the vast pit with its coronet of fantastic peaks; its symboled, calcined floor and the crumbling body of the inexplicable, the incredible Thing which, alive, was the very shadow of extinction, annihilation, hovering to hurl itself upon humanity!

That shadow is gone; that pall withdrawn!

But to me—to each of us four who saw those phenomena—their lesson remains, ineradicable; giving a new strength and purpose to us, teaching us a new humility.

For in that vast crucible of life of which we are so small a part what other Shapes may even now be rising from its ferment to submerge us?

In that vast reservoir of force that is the mystery-filled infinite through which we roll what other shadows may be speeding upon us?

Who knows?

By a hair's breadth, and through no wisdom of man, humanity this time has escaped.

Can humanity escape again?

Who knows?

(The end.)

Once, Twice, Thrice

by L. Patrick Greene

WHEN Shamwari, son of Jonte, was dismissed in disgrace from the mission school at Pakwe he had several assets. He could speak a certain brand of English, wrote a fairly good hand, and was able to read at sight passages from "Lives of the Saints."

The following were the circumstances which led to his casting out by the good mission fathers. Because of his quickness and superior intelligence Shamwari had been appointed assistant to Father Sykes, who was the mission doctor. Perhaps Father Sykes should have held a rigid investigation when he noticed that the brandy—kept for medicinal purposes only

—was diminishing at an alarming rate. Certainly he deserved censure in that he took no steps when he detected the strong odor of spirits on Shamwari's breath.

But Father Sykes was somewhat of a dreamer and prone to believe only good of the most confirmed backslider from grace. "No doubt," he thought, "the poor boy was feeling faint—he is not overstrong—and needed a stimulant. But he should have come to me for permission. I must speak to him about it." And then, characteristically, Father Sykes forgot all about it.

So it was that Shamwari, confident that his sippings had not been detected, one day finished off the entire bottle, and then boisterously burst into the chapel where the good fathers were at their evening devotions.

And that was the beginning of the end. Dismissed from his post as assistant to Father Sykes, Shamwari was sentenced to work on the farm. The study of agriculture was too arduous for a native of Shamwari's makeup. Delinquency and insubordination finally reached a climax when he attempted to organize a group of malcontents to rebell against the constituted authority of the mission fathers. Their objective was the store house wherein were many bottles of the "wonderful medicine."

And that was the end of Shamwari's mission experiences. Shamwari—christened James by the good fathers—one time pride of the mission, and destined to become a lay-reader among his people, was cast out in ignominy.

At this time he was nearly twenty years of age. He was small, and of poor physique. His face was deeply pitted with smallpox scars, and that same disease had affected his eyes so that he squinted. Crafty, he could assume an innocence that was as guileless as a child's.

His first step, on shaking the dust of the mission off his feet, was to hie himself to the nearest Pass Officer.

"Well! What do you want?" curtly queried that official.

"A pass, if you please, sir," simpered Shamwari in English.

"Au-a! Tula dog! Speak not in English when ye address me," snapped the pass officer. He had no use for the missionary educated negro. He was no doubt biased, for his is a thankless task. It is not possible, was his contention, to civilize a native in one generation. The result of such an experiment will be a man containing the vices of both races, the virtues of neither.

"Where would ye go?"

"To my father's kraal, Inkosi." Shamwari was very humble.

"To thy kraal? And what will such an one as thou do at the kraal of thy father? Thou art learned in the ways of the white man, speaking his language, knowing his customs. Art thou desirous to wear again the moocha and tend goats?"

The Pass Officer spoke sarcastically. He knew too well that the half civilized native delights in nothing better than to return to his kraal—there to display his newly acquired knowledge, his gaudy shirt, and pointed tan shoes. Impervious to the sneers and taunts of the older generation the young dandy flaunts his way for a time, greatly desired by the young maidens, envied by the young men.

Then, gradually, force of circumstance, the ancient instincts of his race, overpower him. The pointed shoes are discarded. The white man's clothes are put aside for the more practical, and infinitely more comfortable native dress. Yet his knowledge of other things lingers with him, and he is ever set somewhat apart from his people, tolerated by them, and treated with contempt by the white officials with whom he may come in contact.

Such was the career that the Pass Officer visualized for Shamwari. Such was the fate that Shamwari knew was in store for him should he return. The prospect did not please him, and he then and there reached a decision that surprised the pass officer no more than it surprised himself.

"Ikona, Chief, I spake too hastily. It is a pass to seek work that I require."

Wonderingly the official made out the required pass, and handed it to Shamwari, who taking it hastened quickly away—rather fearing the biting tongue of the white man.

To trace the progress of Shamwari during the next five years would be a difficult task. He never had any trouble securing employment, for as has been said, he was an exceedingly smart negro. Yet certainly there was a fly in the ointment somewhere, for he never stayed in one position longer than three months.

His unhappy little knack of picking up unconsidered trifles belonging to his master was disastrous—making it essential for him to keep continually moving on. He never waited to be found out—neither did he present his certificate to his "boss" in order to be signed off. Had any of his employers taken the trouble to examine his certificate they would undoubtedly have expressed astonishment that so many men wrote the same hand, as indicated by the writing in the columns headed respectively, "Signed off," and "Remarks." The mission fathers would have commented on the resemblance of this writing and that of Shamwari's.

Shamwari also discovered that he could get plenty of whiskey by forging his master's signature. (No bartender or storekeeper in South Africa will deliver liquor to a native, unless the latter bears a note from his *Baas* signifying that the liquor is for his own consumption. The penalty for infringement of the law is severe.) This practice earned Shamwari a six months' rest in jail.

Over confidence was once again the cause of his downfall. One day he started to drink his unlawfully procured "medicine"—he still called it that—as soon as he was outside the store. A native policeman arrested him gleefully. Shamwari had mocked him many times, calling him "the white man's vulture." It was only that the storekeeper had carelessly destroyed the note that saved Shamwari from the heavier punishment for forgery.

And so, gradually, Shamwari drifted away from his own country and his own people, always learning; never, sad to relate, anything that would have met with the approval of the mission fathers. He assimilated only the bad.

He reached Durban on or about his twenty-fourth birthday, and at once applied for work to the proprietor of a fleet of rickshaws; he had learned that rickshaw boys earned much money. It was in the height of the season, and the proprietor engaged him.

But Shamwari was not a success as a rickshaw boy. He could not compete with the other "boys." Even when he had a fare he was oftentimes obliged to ask his passenger to get out and walk, finding it impossible to draw the loaded vehicle through the heavy sand.

In despair, Shamwari applied to the proprietor for an easier job, and the proprietor seeing that he was able to write, and could keep accurate tally, made him "boss" boy. His office was similar to that of a taxi starter, and he had a stand before the big hotel on the sea front.

Forty rickshaw boys were under his charge, and then and there he conceived a plan to acquire easy riches. His authority, you understand, was absolute. Should a guest come out of the hotel seeking to engage a rickshaw, the whole line of waiting boys started to jump up and down, displaying their powers of wind and limb. But not one dared to leave the line until Shamwari called him by name.

This was where the graft came in. Only a boy who stood in well with Shamwari stood a chance of getting a full day's work.

"Yes, sar," Shamwari would greet the guest. "You want a rickshaw? Ver' good, sar."

"I think that one will do," says the guest, pointing to an exceptionally powerful looking boy.

"Oh, no, sar. He no good boy—he schelm. You take boy I say. Hi, Tikkey!"

And Tikkey comes prancing proudly up from back of the line, a good fare assured.

Shamwari had a good memory and had, moreover, an uncanny instinct for picking out liberal patrons. Thus his bank roll grew, and his fame waxed great.

It was his delight to load Sixpense, one of the feeblest of the rickshaw boys, with the heaviest and meanest patrons. Oh, he had a keen sense of humor—besides Sixpense had once complained about Shamwari to the police.

Shamwari had not lived in Durban long before he learned of the curfew law which forbids natives to be out on the streets after nine o'clock. Here his fertile brain saw another means of revenue. He wrote passes for the "boys" at a "tikkey" each.

About this time he fell into the hands of an unscrupulous white man named Harris—he called himself 'Arris.

Harris had become cognisant—no matter how—of Shamwari's infringement of the pass laws, and using the threat of arrest as a weapon, forced Shamwari to join him in his plan to fleece the natives.

Harris was wanted in England on several counts—petty crimes, all of them. Even in his wickedness he was small. A one-time frequenter of horse races—bookmaker's clerk, tout, tipster, and confidence man—Harris was an adept at that sport for suckers, "The Pea and Thimble," an adaption of three-card monte.

Harris had tried the game among the natives, working alone, but with small success. He needed a "comer on," a fake winner, a confederate, in other words, who of course must be a native.

He looked on Shamwari therefore as a godsend. Here was a native who could speak English, crafty, over whom he had a hold. Why, Shamwari was made for him.

"See 'ere, mate. You'll do as I bloomin' well say, or you go to quod. See? 'H'on the other 'and if yer does as I says you'll get a bob for every five 'h'i makes. When I comes up to the location and sets 'h'up my stand, you'll—"

Several nights later the natives in one of the big locations were surprised to see a white man enter, flashily dressed—handsomely dressed, they thought. He carried a portable tip-up table, which he placed beneath a large arc light. On the table he gravely placed three small shells and rolled a pea on to the table beside them.

They gathered round, silently intent on the white man's every action. The stranger waited until a goodly crowd had formed, then he addressed them in English.

"Walk 'h'up, lydies and gents. Walk hup an' back yer fancy. Before yer 'h'eyes I plices the little pea 'h'under one of the shells, which I moves, once, twice, thrice— Now tell me where the little pea is. The quickness of the 'and deceives the 'h'eye. There she goes again. Once, twice, thrice."

One or two of the natives understood a word here and there, but that was all. They gazed amazedly at the white man, and then at each other. The appearance of Shamwari was hailed with shouts of joy.

"O'he, Shamwari! Tell us what the white man says. We think him a little mad. There, he is talking again."

"Walk 'h'up, lydies and gents, though to be sure, there 'hain't any lydies present—gawd bless 'em. Walk 'h'up. Don't be backwards a'coming forward. It's bold 'eart that wins fair lydy.

"Plice a bob on the shell where yer fancies the pea is, 'h'and 'h'if you're right 'h'i gives yer three bob back. That's fair, ain't it? Three to one, my cullies, yer cawn't spot the little pea. Come on nah! 'H'if yer don't speculate, yer cawn't 'ope to accumulate."

Shamwari laughed scornfully.

"Ye are right. The man is indeed mad. He says that to the one who guesses under what shell he places the pea, he will give three shillings. Only ye must first give him one shilling."

"He is mad. Shamwari says he is mad," called out those within hearing to ones less fortunate.

"Judge not too hastily," warned Kiwiti. "Mayhap, the white man intends to trick us."

"How can that be?" scoffed Shamwari. "Ye see him place the pea under the shell; there can be no trick there. As to the money, will a white man, think ye, lie and cheat for thy paltry shillings? Nay, he is mad—that is all. I will play his game."

Shamwari sauntered nonchalantly up to the table. "I will play the game, white man."

"Wot ho, me 'earties. Gather round. 'Ere's a real live sport. Watch, 'ere she goes. Once, twice, thrice. Now where is the little pea? Back yer fancy."

" It is under the middle one," said Shamwari, placing a shilling on the table.

" 'H'under the middle, you says? 'H'and right you are me 'earty. 'Ere's yer three bob. Now 'ow's next? 'Ere she goes again. Once, twice, thrice."

There were no hangers back now. All were anxious to play the game with the " mad " white man. Failure to win served only to increase their ardor. They did not stop to think that some white men will lie and cheat for paltry shillings; neither did they wonder why Shamwari always won, or only played when the game began to lag.

That night Harris handed over just twenty-one shillings to Shamwari.

" 'Hi don't know w'y I'm doing this. You didn't do nuthin'. 'H'im a good mind to 'and you 'h'over to the p'lice."

" And then who would help you, boss?"

" Yus, that's right. 'Hi expect 'H'ive got to give her a share o' my 'ard earned winnings a bit longer."

Night after night they played the game, and when one compound was sucked dry, they went to another. Shamwari's savings grew—it was a poor night that his share did not amount to fifteen shillings. Familiarity with Harris bred contempt—that goes without saying—and they often bickered over the division of the spoils.

One night Shamwari was sure that Harris was cheating him. He had kept careful tally. The white man had taken two hundred shillings. He gave Shamwari only twenty.

" To-morrow," said Shamwari, " we will go to the quarters of the hotel servants. They are rich, they make big money, and to-morrow they are paid. Now, white man, why do ye say put down ' one shilling.' Let these men play five, six, seven shillings, what do we dam care, all at one time."

" 'H'alright, me bucko. You start 'em 'h'off wiv betting ten shillings, yer can raise it to twenty 'h'if they don't bite. I'll pay out ten to one. Might as well be a 'undred to one for all the chance they've got o' winning."

That next evening, acting on mysteriously received information, the police raided the hotel compound, shortly after Shamwari had successfully played the game twice. His winnings amounted to three hundred shillings. Harris was arrested for gambling, but though he talked volubly about an accomplice, " 'H'a bloody little black wot led me into this," no accomplice was found.

Shamwari had laid his plans well, and at the time of the raid was boarding a train going north, toward home.

If Shamwari had any doubts as to what his reception would be on returning to his native village he hid them under a gay appearance. His suit, made by a coolie tailor in Durban, was of a light blue serge plentifully adorned with bright brass buttons. The trousers, creased the wrong way, were an exaggerated imitation of the old-fashioned American pegtop style.

He wore a white Panama hat with gaudy ribbon, a green shirt, high, white collar and pink tie. His shoes, the crowning glory, were long and narrow and of a light yellow color. They hurt him dreadfully so that once out of sight of a kraal, he took them off and slung them over his shoulders. In his hand he carried a cheap leather satchel, which was evidently very heavy.

Altogether Shamwari's appearance was the cause for laughter, admiration, or pity —according to the taste of the beholder. Scornful laughter from the unsympathetic white man; admiration from the would-be native dandy; pity from the white man who understood the stages through which Shamwari had passed to come to this, and mourned that such things must be when civilization meets savagery.

Word of Shamwari's coming reached Jonte, his father, who received the news with phlegmatic calm.

" Ye say that Shamwari comes. That is as it may be, but until I see him I will not say my son comes."

When Shamwari arrived at his kraal he at once sought out his father, ignoring the young men who clustered around him seeking news of the great outside world.

He found his father seated before the entrance to his hut.

"*Sauka bona, Indoda*—good day, my father."

Jonte looked up and regarded him coolly, almost impersonally, so that Shamwari fidgeted under his scrutiny.

"How then, is this the way ye greet thy son?"

"Ough!" It was an exclamation of disgust. "If thou art indeed my son, then have I an ape for a son. An ape that mocks the manners and clothing of the white men, yet knows not why.

"Hast made note of thy arrival to Mshlega, the headman? And hast thou given to Mopo the witch doctor ought in payment for keeping thee safe from evil during thy wanderings?"

"Nay, my father. I hold myself to be a free man, the dog of no headman, nor do I recognize his authority over me. As to Mopo, why should I give that gluttonous one a present? He is a trickster. I care not for his charms and foolish ceremonies."

Jonte's eyes blazed with wrath, and he rose to his feet, his hand raised menacingly. Then, as one making a sudden resolution, he let it drop to his side.

"I see that thou art as all the others who go out into the big kraals of the white men. There ye pick up a little wisdom, and much foolishness. He looked at Shamwari's clothing scornfully. Then ye say, 'Now am I wise like unto the white men. I will return to the place of my father and proclaim the depths of my knowledge, showing nought but scorn for the ancient customs.' However, come ye to the meeting place, for without doubt the headman would hold speech with thee."

Before the hut of Mshlega the headman Jonte and Shamwari found the elders of the village assembled. Jonte they greeted warmly and made place for him. Shamwari they regarded with curiosity.

The headman came out of his hut. Once a great warrior, he was now enfeebled with old age. Still his mighty frame gave evidence of the strength that had once been his.

"Greetings, O Shamwari, son of Jonte. Ye see that we are all assembled. Now give an account of thy wanderings since ye left the place of the umfundisi (teacher).

"And if I refuse."

"Then shall ye be beaten."

"That ye dare not do. Should I go to the white man, the commissioner, and tell him what thou hast threatened, how long, think ye, would Mshlega be headman of this kraal?"

"Speak not further with this impudent one, O Mshlega. He is my son—*I* will beat him. That is permitted by the white man.

"Ye see how it is with him. He hath earned money wherewith to purchase the white man's clothing and donning it, holds that he hath the white man's wisdom. I will beat him and he shall be cast out from among us."

"*Hamba gaghle.* Not so fast, old man. Ye have said that I have worked in the big kraals of the white men. See ye then. Here are the fruits of my labors."

He opened his satchel and disclosed to the elders quantities of coins—gold and silver—four hundred pounds in all, representing the savings and unlawful earnings of five years.

"As ye see," continues Shamwari, with a smirk at their gasp of astonishment, "I am rich. It was in my mind to honor ye by dwelling among ye, thinking that ye might profit somewhat by my wisdom—and my wealth."

"Nay thou wilt not honor us, rather bring us to shame, for thou hast forsaken the customs of thy people."

"Shame on thee, Jonte, to so treat thy son. What say ye, Shamwari? Wouldst buy cattle with thy wealth? I have ten head I would sell thee out of the respect I have for thee."

"And thou wouldst marry," broke in another of the elders. "My daughter, my youngest daughter, is of an age."

The council became a scene of great confusion. Some of the elders were of the opinion that Shamwari should not be allowed to stay at the kraal. But the majority, hoping to acquire some of his wealth, and arguing that he would later conform to the customs, decided that he should be allowed to remain. Some even hinted that he ought to be appointed headman in place of Mshlega. As to the

object of their discussion, he listened with the aloof air of a disinterested spectator.

In such a manner did Shamwari once again become a dweller in the kraal of his father. He sought to take up the life where he had left it six years previously—before he entered the mission. But he did not find it easy, he had been away too long.

True, he had invested all his money in cattle—driving hard bargains—and had approached the fathers of several maidens. Next to cattle a man's wealth is counted by the number of his wives.

For a time he was the most popular man in the kraal. Every night the young men would gather around him asking for stories of the outside world. And he did not allow his adventures to lose anything in the telling.

But later, when the newness of him had begun to wear off, they rather neglected him. Unable to readapt himself to the customs of his people; lacking the physique to compete with the young men in tests of strength; so softened by his years of false civilization that he could not follow the trail, and quite ignorant of bush craft, he soon found himself at a disadvantage and on the way to becoming a nonentity.

True, wealthy as he was, he could always command a hearing, but that was not sufficient for him. He had always been a leader, the pivot around which things happened.

It was his attitude toward the religious customs of his people that did more to widen the breach between him and them than anything else. His overweening conceit, his boasting, they could have put up with, might even have valued him at his own estimation—they knowing so little of things beyond their narrow boundaries. But they could not overlook his contemptuous manner toward the headman, or his ridicule of things sacred to them. When he killed a snake that had taken up its abode in the roof of his hut, they remonstrated with him. But Shamwari replied:

"Ye are all fools. What? Would have me believe that the soul of my ancester was in the body of the snake? What then—shall I permit my ancestor to bite me?"

This, and his continual mocking jeers at a time when the witch doctor was solemnly invoking the spirits of the Great Great to bless a "rain dance," counterbalanced the power of his wealth.

Left more and more to his own devices, Shamwari's thoughts turned toward Durban, and then he bethought himself of the "shell and pea" game.

In the secrecy of his hut he practised it assiduously until he became as adept as his former master Harris in palming the pea. Satisfied, at last, with his proficiency, his spirits rose, and he lost no time in introducing the game to the people. A born mimic, he imitated all of Harris's trick of speech and gesture. His opening speech, modeled on that of Harris's, was a strange jargon of English and Matabele, and delivered in this manner:

"Walk 'h'up lydies and gents—and that means, O ye pig like foolish ones, come here. Walk 'h'up and back yer fancy. Before yer 'h'eyes I place the little pea 'h'under the shell. I move the shell—once, twice, thrice. Where now is the pea, O ye wise ones? To the one who tells where the pea is I will give thrice whatever he pays."

The game appealed to the people, for the Matabele are born gamblers, and day and night they pursued the elusive pea. Shamwari's wealth increased steadily. He would only play for money—which he later converted into cattle—and many of the young men had to seek work in the mines in order to replenish their diminished herds.

From the nearby villages also came young men, who having heard of the game, were anxious to have a try at the riches which were so easily won!

"'Look ye. Before thy eyes he places the pea under the shell—once, twice, thrice." The phrase had become a shibboleth. "Ye see the shell under which he placed the pea, always before thy eyes. You say, 'I bet twenty shillings on the middle shell,' thus must you say, or—'I bet twenty shillings on the shell on my left.' And lo! if the pea is under the shell ye name, sixty shillings will Shamwari give thee."

In their childlike simplicity, none questioned the strangeness of the fact that no one ever judged aright, none that is, save the relations of Shamwari.

It was not long before knowledge of the effect Shamwari was having upon the young men of the district, came to the ears of Radicladi, the chief. He was disposed to wink at the fact that Shamwari was setting aside the traditions, holding that it was a matter for the headman to deal with. But this other matter—the departure of his young men to work in the mines—that was "the barking of a hyena in the cattle kraal," a thing to be at once exterminated.

He took the matter to Thompson, the native commissioner.

"But what can I do, O Chief. If he hath, as thou sayest, mocked at the traditions—ye must deal with him."

"It is not only that, Inkosi. He is gaining by this 'game' much wealth from my young men, who are going to the mines in order that they may earn more money wherewith to play again. And well ye know that labor at the mines leaves them weak as little children."

"And yet I cannot help thee, O Chief, for he hath not in any way broken the law. This is my counsel. Go ye to the kraal of Mshlega the headman, and play the game of this Shamwari. Mayhap the Great Spirits will show thee a way out."

Word came to Mshlega the headman, that the chief was on his way to inspect the young men of the village, and the cattle. Preparations were at once made to provide a feast befitting such an illustrious guest. But Shamwari took no part in the preparations, neither would he contribute anything toward the feast.

Most of the time he spent in mocking the efforts of others. He was resentful of the chief's coming, for none of the young men would play the game until the chief had once more departed.

The chief's entry into the village was imposing—even Shamwari refrained from sneering. Preceding the chief marched his body-guard of fifty picked men. All were of powerful build, and carried shields of bullock hide, and the short stabbing assegais. They were naked save for a loin cloth, and their skin gleamed like black satin.

Radicladi was a chief in all things. A big man—he stood head and shoulders above the tallest of his body-guard—his stature was truly royal, and his countenance noble. About his shoulders he wore a magnificent leopard skin; a smaller skin formed his loin cloth. In his hand he carried a miniature assegai, the symbol of his state.

In breathless silence the people watched the chief take the place of honor, and when he had seated himself, Mshlega, the headman, advanced to do him honor. The body-guard brandished the assegais, and from their powerful throats came the roar, "Bayete—Chief." The cry was taken up by the people of the village: "Bayete—Chief."

Radicladi acknowledged the salute with a grave smile. Then:

"I thank thee, my children, for thy loyalty. Now it hath come to my ears that one dwelleth among thee who hath but lately returned from the kraals of the white men bearing great wealth. Where is he? for I would see him."

Mshlega called for Shamwari, and the latter stumbled into the presence of the chief, terror and brazen assurance struggling for the mastery. He stood awkwardly before the chief, conscious perhaps of his incongruous appearance. He typified decadent civilization in the presence of royal nature.

The chief looked at him intently.

"It would seem, O Shamwari, that thou hast forgotten, having sojourned so long among the white men, the manner of saluting thy chief; or perchance thou hast lost thy speech. But let that pass.

"Now I have heard of a game that thou playest with these people—a game whereby it is possible to acquire great wealth easily—I would play that game."

Gone now were all Shamwari's fears, and he was once more Shamwari the gambler, the man of the world, full of jaunty assurance. Squatting on his haunches he produced the shells from his pockets and

placed them on the ground before him. Then taking the pea, he began his rallying cry.

"Walk 'h'up, lydies and gents. I am ready to play the game, O chief. Walk 'h'up and back yer fancy. This 'h'is where yer tries yer luck. 'H'if yer don't speculate yer can't 'ope to accumulate. The prize goes to the bold 'eart. Watch O ye people, the great chief plays the game. Once, twice, thrice. Say, O chief, where now is the little pea?"

Because it was his desire to gain the good will of the chief, Shamwari cunningly manipulated the shells so that the pea was under the one the chief backed.

'H'under the middle one, the mister says. 'H'and so it is. See O ye people, the chief is all wise. He smells out the little pea. Nah! 'Ere she goes again. Once, twice, thrice."

Many times the chief played the game, and each time Shamwari saw to it that he won.

"Now, O Shamwari," the chief said. "It seems a strange thing that I should always win, while these others have ever lost—saving only thy kindred, they also won. It is a strange thing I say, and I like it not, for it smacks much of witchcraft."

With the suspicion of witchcraft leveled against him Shamwari's jaunty spirits fled and he gazed around in fear at the armed body-guard.

Again the chief played the game, and this time Shamwari saw to it that he lost.

"Hold. It is enough," cried the chief. "Shamwari, thou hast condemned thyself. This is indeed witchcraft. Because I am Radicladi, the chief, thou didst permit me to find the pea, thinking thereby to gain favor in my sight. And lo! I ponder aloud on the strangeness of things, wondering that I should always win. Again we play—and I lose.

"What else is there to say, but to pass judgment upon thee—for thou art indeed a dealer in witchcraft. This then is my order. The cattle that ye bought with the money won from these people, shall be returned to them, for ye gained the cattle by witchcraft and they are not rightfully thine.

"The rest are forfeit to me, that I may dispose of them as I think best, for thou has wrought all manner of evil among my people. Further thou art banished from this, my country, lest ye work still greater evil. What say ye, O my people. Is my judgment a just one?"

"Yea, O Chief, thou art all wise. It is just."

"Then see ye to it. It is my order."

That same day Shamwari, shorn of his riches, clad only in a moocha of goat skin, left the kraal of Mshlega, the headman, followed by the mocking jeers of his people.

Nut Sunday

by

Samuel G. Camp

VERA—that's the wife, you know—Vera claims we're all through in this man's town and we'd better move along to the next one or somewheres. And—well, I've got a strong hunch she's right. She generally is.

And here's another thing she says. She says that when our engagement was announced all her friends told her she was taking a fierce chance because everybody knows that left-handers are nutty—but she never believed it until now. You know what I mean, of course. There's a sort of superstition among baseball-players that all left-handed pitchers are squirrel-meat—and I'm left-handed. Still, I don't claim to be a ball-player, and so maybe that lets me out.

At that, as I say, the wife is generally right about things; and, for a fact, I'm not so sure that she isn't right about this one—that I was away off in the old bean when I did what I did that Sunday. Now that I come to think of it, I'll admit it was a kind of crazy thing to do. And no doubt if I had stopped to think I wouldn't of done it. But I'll say this: If I had stopped to think for a couple of weeks I'd never have been able to dope out what—well, what happened.

But even barring that—the thing that happened—I guess if I hadn't sort of acted on impulse, without thinking, I'd have thought better of it before long and acted differently. No, on the whole, I'm inclined to think that maybe there's something in this south-paw superstition, after all.

And Vera is right about this, too: We're all through in this man's town. My reputation is shot fuller of holes than a porous plaster or a sieve; it would take me a thousand years to live down the stuff they're saying about me, and I don't expect to live that long; and, besides, I've got other things to 'tend to.

So I guess the only thing for us to do—Vera and me—is to pull out and forget it. Though, believe me, taking the wife on the form she's displaying just at present, it 'll be a long, long time before she forgets it. In fact, just now I don't hear about anything else from her—and I'll say I'm getting pretty well filled up with it. Why—but never mind. These family brawls don't need any advertising from either one of the principals; the neighbors will attend to that.

But as for going away from here before I've squared things up with this fellow, Pete Williamson—nix! Never. I'm going to stick around here till I get that cheap stiff where I want him if it takes me a year. And when I do get him where I want him—I'm going to knock him for a row. I'll say I will. Oh, man, what I won't do to him! You watch me.

No doubt you get the idea that I've been having a little trouble of some sort. I'll say I have. Jimmy Ward started it. He started it by ringing in this fellow Pete Williamson. It was like this: You see, the antisaloon bunch has biffed old John J. Barleycorn for a goal, and I hear that another gang is organizing to give Demon Nicotin the run, and no doubt pretty soon you'll hear that the Antipoker Association has been formed and is out to put the kibosh on the national indoor pastime; and if they put it over I see where three or four famous cartoonists, that just now the sport of kings and queens is keeping in wheat-biscuits, country homes on Long Island, and the like—I see where those fellows will have to go to work.

But so far the lid is off, and for quite a while four of us had been having a little friendly game most every night in the rear room of Charley White's tobacco-store. My, my! According to the—what is it they call 'em?—the moral standards we're having fitted to us nowadays, that sounds like pretty rough stuff, doesn't it?—poker in the back room of a tobacco-den?

Gracious! Not that I'm any friend of old John J.; but—but back to the story. There was Jimmy Ward, Doc Roper, Charley White himself, and I—you know me. And, of course, there wasn't any rough stuff. They were just nice little friendly sessions—generally.

And then one night Jimmy Ward rang in this fellow Pete Williamson.

I remember that Jimmy was a little late, and Doc and I and Charley were champing on the bit, hankering for a little action, when finally Jimmy blew in—with a stranger in tow.

"Meet Mr. Williamson, boys," says Jimmy, and then introduced this fellow Williamson to us separately. "I just now happened to get acquainted with Mr. Williamson over in the lobby of the American," Jimmy explained. "Seems he was all dressed up and no place to go—he's having a night off—and so I invited him to come on over here and sit in."

Jimmy is one of these fellows that are all the time picking up new acquaintances like that. On the average it doesn't take him more than five minutes to get to be most anybody's old friend, Jimmy. You know the kind.

"Fine," said Charley White. "Glad to have him."

"Fair enough," said Doc Roper.

"The more the merrier," says I.

But just the same I don't think any of us fell very hard for Jimmy's new old friend, Mr. Pete Williamson. That welcome-home stuff was mostly camouflage—anyway, it was with me.

Now, just because I'm a plain sort of fellow myself, I suppose that's no reason why I've got a right to take a sort of prejudice against somebody else if he wants to go and doll himself up like the end-man in a minstrel show. It's a free country and all that; and just because my tastes are different from yours is no sign that you are a crook—or I am.

So if you want to wear a suit of clothes that makes you look like a walking checkerboard, and a red necktie with a piece of ice in it the size of a walnut, and a dinky little black mustache with wax-tight curlicues at the ends, that's your business and I haven't got any right to complain; and I suppose it doesn't necessarily mean that you are a tin-horn, or that you've got a blackjack in your hip-pocket, or something. No, not necessarily.

And if your eyes are, say, a trifle undersize, and sort of restlesslike, and maybe a little bit closer together than—but never mind. Anyway, you understand, right from the first I didn't take much of a shine to this fellow, Pete Williamson. And I'll say this, too: I've never taken any lessons, by mail or any other way, on how to read your character while you wait; but, believe me, I was right.

We cut for deal; it was up to Jimmy; and Jimmy passed 'em round. The fight was on. I won't go into the details—I've forgotten 'em, anyway. For quite a while, and hour or more, nobody lost much or won much. You understand: this wasn't any bet-a-million game, anyhow; and the cards ran pretty even—didn't favor anybody particularly.

Yes, it was a pretty conservative game. You see, Doc Roper was a good deal of

a bluffer, but Doc was sort of laying back and sizing up this fellow, Pete Williamson's game. After a while, no doubt, Doc would open up on him. But just now Doc was pulling a little watchful waiting. Charley White was one of these sure-thing players; any time Charley went into action the one best bet was that you had to beat five of a kind—a flush—or better, and Charley wasn't holding 'em very strong. Neither was I; and—well, I was playing 'em pretty close to the breast, anyway.

You see, this fellow, Pete Williamson, sort of had me guessing in a way. So most of the action was between Jimmy Ward and this new lifelong pal of his, and it wasn't so exciting that it made you hold your breath or anything. As for me, it was beginning to look like that was the only thing I *could* hold—my breath.

Then things began warming up a little; and this fellow Williamson began winning. After a while he was pretty well ahead of the game; and then he started cheering for himself and rubbing it into the rest of us—a lot of cheap wit about where did we learn the game, and all that. And I want to say right here that if there's anything that gets my goat worse than a hard loser it's a loud winner; and generally if a fellow's one of those things he's the other, and so that makes twice you've got it in for him.

But I wasn't surprised. It was just about what I'd expected from this fellow Williamson. But just because I'd discounted it, that didn't make me feel any less like busting him one right in the eye or somewhere. And—well, I didn't say much; but right after I'd said it I noticed that he sort of cooled off and wasn't quite so enthusiastic and all. And you could see he had it in for me.

And about here Doc Roper started something. I don't know—either Doc figured that finally he had got this fellow Williamson's number, or else he was jealous. It doesn't make any difference. Anyway, starting with a pair of eight spots, Doc made it cost a lot of money to draw cards—that's Doc, all over.

Everybody stayed but me; I figured that with nothing but a pair of deuces I'd be better off in the bleachers; though, at that, I had a hunch that Doc had nothing but a prayer.

Well, as it happened, this fellow Williamson was loaded for bear; and besides, I guess he had sized it up that Doc was betting on his nerve. Anyhow, shortly after the draw, Jimmy Ward and Charley White dropped out, and then Doc and Williamson started boosting each other. And, to make a long story short, the upshot of it was Doc Roper was repulsed with heavy losses.

Yes, it surely looked like things were coming this fellow Williamson's way—strong.

But—then came the break in the game. Like a lot of other people, it seemed that Williamson couldn't stand prosperity: he started to press his luck. Some of the rest of us began getting hands; and we began to tear into him. We kept it up. And—in the end—we took it away from him—all of it. And—crab? Well, you know what I said about a loud winner generally being a hard loser; and all I've got to say is, this fellow Williamson proved it.

Well, it was up to him to buy another stack of chips, or quit. And he didn't quit. But I don't give him any credit for that; it's a lot easier to quit when you're winning than when you're losing. That's the psychology, as they call it, of the game. Anyway, Williamson blew himself to another stack of the ivories, and the game went on.

I don't think I've mentioned before that Charley White generally acted as banker in those little friendly games of ours. Anyway, he did, though there wasn't any particular reason for it. It just happened that way. So Williamson bought his chips from Charley.

And the game went on—but not for long.

It came my deal. I went through the motions. And then—well, there was plenty of action, but I'll go straight to the showdown. Everybody had stayed but Charley White; nobody had any chips left in front of him, and this fellow Williamson had had to buy two more stacks to stay with the game. You get the idea; it was the big inning. And when we layed 'em down, Doc Roper and Jimmy Ward showed cards that

were certainly worth playing; but Williamson had four kings, and I came through with a couple of pairs—of aces.

So you know who won—but you don't know what happened next. This: This fellow Williamson let out a roar, jumped to his feet, pretty nearly upsetting the table, and opened up on us. And the gist of his remarks was as follows:

He had been framed! We were a bunch of sure-thing gamblers and had played him for a sucker. Charley White was running a regular gambling-joint—you remember Charley was acting as banker, and of course he owned the place, and all that. Jimmy Ward was a capper for the game—hadn't Jimmy picked him up over in the lobby of the American? And as for Doc and me, we were a pair of common gamblers—common gamblers! And there are a lot of other hard names he called us.

And then he went away from there.

Well, sir, we were honestly struck dumb. But after a while Doc Roper came out of it and said: "Well, gentlemen, I want to ask you one and all, can you beat it?"

We couldn't.

"When it comes to making friends with people you're certainly some picker and chooser," Charley White said to Jimmy. "Who is that fellow Williamson, anyway? What's his business?"

"You can search me," said Jimmy.

But not to make any secret about it, I can tell you now what this fellow Williamson's business was: He was a plain-clothes man—so I guess that checked suit must have been a sort of disguise. He was a city detective. And the way we happened to find it out—two nights later this fellow Williamson and a couple of coppers crashed into the back room of Charley White's tobacco-joint, pinched Charley as the proprietor of a gambling-place, Jimmy Ward as a runner for the game, and Doc and me as common gamblers, and took us all for a ride.

Of course, he couldn't make it stick—the charge; but it was all in the papers, and everything, and you know what that means; and so I guess that he figured that he'd had his revenge. And, believe me, if he'd heard what Vera said to me, he'd have been sure that he'd had his revenge. But we won't go into that.

At any rate, dating from about then, I had an idea that if this fellow Williamson ever met me again he'd find that I was a mighty interesting person to meet, as they say. Anyhow, I'd try to make it interesting for him. But somehow I didn't happen to see him again anywhere; and neither did Doc or Charley or Jimmy.

And so—well, that's that.

Now I guess there isn't any truer saying than that trouble always comes in bunches. Anyway, it was about this time that Vera opens up on me about moving up-town. Of course, she said, she realized that as the wife of a common gambler she didn't have any right to be too particular; but, for all that, she'd stood for this neighborhood, and the neighbors, as long as she was going to. She wouldn't stand it another month.

Well, I'll have to admit that maybe Center Street wasn't exactly desirable as a residence district. You see, there were a good many fruit-stands, fish-markets, and the like, and the population ran a good deal to different kinds of foreigners, all the kinds there are, I guess; and—in a way Vera was right. She generally is. The street had changed a good deal since we moved there.

But for all that, I had made a lot of good friends in the neighborhood, such as Doc and Charley and Jimmy, and—I didn't propose to leave. So there was a sort of civil war. At any rate, I tried to be civil; but as for the wife—however, we'll let it go. Anyhow, she certainly gave me an awful battle. I'll say she did. And in the end—the war lasted about three weeks, and you know who won. I never had a chance, anyway; you know it.

So we moved away up-town; into what you might call the suburbs. When I finally threw up my hands I went the limit—I left it all to Vera. And I'll have to admit that she showed pretty good judgment. She generally does. It was a mighty nice little house—we took a whole one—or Vera did—and the rent was reasonable. It was a nice, clean, quiet neighborhood; and somehow the air was a good deal better than the kind of air you get in the vicinity of Center Street.

There was only one thing that seemed to be the matter—one of two things: Either we had settled down to live up right in the midst of the worst bunch of snobs on the face of the earth, or—or else they were certainly mighty hard people to get acquainted with. I'd say that for them. Anyway, for all the attention we got paid to us you'd think the house was still vacant. Our arrival in Winthrop Street, like it was called, started up about as much interest in the inhabitants as a fire-alarm in Hades—or maybe a little less.

After we'd been there three weeks I had got to know the copper on the beat—by sight—and that was all.

It didn't seem to worry Vera any; she said we'd get acquainted with somebody after a while—provided they weren't so particular about who they associated with.

But as for me—I'll say I certainly did miss the old gang, Doc and Charley and Jimmy Ward, and the rest. And naturally, Sundays were the worst.

And if I remember right, it was the last Sunday in September that—well, it was like this: You remember that the White Sox had won out in the American League, and the Reds in the National, and the World's Series was just about to start, and everybody was excited and talking about it, and everything.

Well, after breakfast I read the advance dope on the series in the papers, and then I got to wishing I was where I could have a regular good old fanning-bee with some of the Center Street bunch, Doc or Charley, or somebody.

But it was out of the question. You see, I was away from home most of the time during the week, and there was a sort of understanding between Vera and me that I'd stick around the house on Sundays, unless we were going somewhere together, or something. And so—I didn't want to start anything. But if it had been any other day than Sunday I'd have hopped a trolley and gone down-town and looked up some of the old bunch. I hadn't seen any of 'em for ten days or more. You know how it is when you move from one part of a town to another, especially when you move as far as Vera moved me.

So I passed up the idea of hunting up any of my fellow jail-birds, and went out and took a couple of turns around the yard. It was an average Sunday morning on Winthrop Street; quiet and peaceful. So quiet you could hear yourself think, and as peaceful as a country graveyard—in fact, it reminded me of one. I didn't see anybody; and if I had seen anybody it wouldn't have made any difference; because, of course, you understand, I was invisible myself—on Winthrop Street.

Nothing stirring.

I went back into the house and prowled around for a while. Then I sat down and picked up the paper again. In about a minute I chucked the paper away and jumped up and walked to a window and looked out. Winthrop Street still waved—I mean slept. For a minute or two I stood there, on the inside looking out, sort of lost in thought, or something.

Then I turned away from the window and went and got the telephone-book and an Occupational Directory that I happened to have, and a piece of paper and a pencil; and then I went to work. In about twenty minutes or so I was ready to shoot.

I called up a number and got my party.

"Hello," I says. "Is this Dr. Weston?"

He said it was.

"Well, listen, doc," says I. "I want to have you come right over to No. 16 Winthrop Street. Can you do that?"

He said he could, and so I said all right and hung up.

Vera was sitting near by, sewing or something. "For Heaven's sake, Al!" she says. "What do you want a doctor for? Are you sick? Why didn't you say something about it? Is there anything I can do?"

"No, I guess not, thanks," I says. "You see, I don't exactly know whether I'm sick or not. You see—well, I just sort of feel as if I might be sick some time. You never can tell. Maybe I do feel kind of queer; but I guess it ain't going to be anything serious. Anyway, I thought I'd have this fellow Weston drop in and kind of look me over. I haven't been examined for my health in quite some time, and—you never can tell. Maybe I've got something and don't know it."

Well, I forget what she said; but from the way she looked at me I could tell that she had a pretty strong hunch as to what was the matter with me.

Anyway, I called up another party—a professional man that lived in the vicinity of Winthrop Street the same as this Doc Weston did.

"Hello," I says. "Is this Undertaker Graves?"

He admitted it.

"Well, listen," I says. "I think there's going to be a job for you at No. 16 Winthrop Street—yeh, No. 16 Winthrop Street. This is Al Williams talking, and that's where I'm still living—No. 16 Winthrop Street—but it looks like there was going to be something in your line. Can you drop in in about an hour?"

He said he could, and so I said all, and hung up.

I guess Vera was pretty sure now that her first guess as to what was the matter with me was right. Still, maybe, she was still guessing a little at that. Anyway:

"Al Williams," she shot at me, "what do you mean? Have you lost your mind, or what? What do you mean—calling up an—an undertaker like that and asking him to come here? Of all things! What under the sun do you want with an undertaker?"

"Not a thing—just now," I says. "But—well, since we moved to Winthrop Street I've somehow got to thinking about such things—undertakers and the like—and I happened to think that we didn't number any undertakers among our list of acquaintances, and—well, I always did prefer to do business with my friends. And so—but you get the idea: This will give me a chance to look this Undertaker Graves over, and if he happens to suit my fancy, why, maybe, I'll follow it up—cultivate him a little. And besides, maybe he'll come in handy right away, because what do I know about this Dr. Weston?"

"Al," says Vera, "you're up to some sort of game—and I want to know what it is."

"Game nothing," says I. "Where did you get any such an idea as that?"

And so then I went to work at the phone again and made dates with a plumber, a horse-doctor, a caterer, a barber, a real-estate agent, a carpenter, a fortune-teller, and several others—I forget just who or what. And then I called it a day.

By this time Vera was in a state of mind that certainly would be difficult to describe; and so I won't try to. But I'll say this: Along toward the last she suggested that I had better call up the City Hospital and have 'em send a couple of men to examine me as to my sanity—and she was pretty sure they wouldn't find any.

And—well, as I may have said before, she's generally right. Still—but, anyway, this Dr. Weston was the first to show up.

"'Lo, doc," I says. "Come in. Welcome to our home. Have a chair. Have a cigar—have two. Fine day, eh? Well, what d'you think? How does it look to you?"

"Not having seen the patient, I can't say," says he.

He was one of these short, fat, pompous little men, and acted like he had a hair-trigger temper. He didn't look very promising.

"You don't get me," I says. "I mean the series. Reds versus White Sox. Now if you leave it to me—"

"Pardon me," he snapped. "Not interested. Never read the baseball news. And now, if you'll have the kindness to show me the patient—"

"All right," says I. "Take a look. I'm it!"

"Ah!" says he. "What seems to be the matter?"

"That's what I'm paying you to find out!" I says. "But if you leave it to me, I'm dying of neglect. Nobody loves me."

Well, I guess that about here he began to get an idea of his own about what my trouble was. But he went through the usual motions; felt my pulse—and it was still there; had me stick out my tongue at him; took my temperature and three dollars, and went away leaving a prescription to be filled out at the drug-store. He said there didn't appear to be anything special the matter with me, except that I seemed to be in a sort of general run-down condition; and I guess he was right about that, because Vera hadn't been doing anything

but run me down ever since I was arrested as a common gambler.

There was just time for a little light conversation between Vera and me before Undertaker Graves arrived. I met him at the door. He certainly looked the part. I never saw one that didn't.

"I'm Mr. Graves, the undertaker," says he in a sort of soothing, sorrowful voice.

"You surprise me!" says I. "Come in. Make yourself at home. Have a cigar—take half a dozen. Great weather we're having, what? Looks like business ought to be pretty good, eh—what with all the doctors predicting another outbreak of the flu. But, of course, you never can tell. And that reminds me: How does the series look to you? Think the Reds have got a chance?"

"The Reds? Oh—I think they ought to be deported!" says he. "But—I understood that my services were needed here. What—"

"Oh," I says, "as to that—ah—you see, it's like this: It's a relative that came to visit us, and—well, the results were fatal. But, you see, when I called you up I didn't know that the wife had made other arrangements—see? But it seems she had, and so I guess there's nothing doing. But, listen. After this, if anything comes up in your line, I'll see that you get the business. Is that fair enough? And now about the Reds—I guess you don't get me. I mean Pat Moran's bunch—the Cincinnati Reds—see? D'you think they've got a look-in with the White Sox?"

"You'll excuse me," he says, "but if my services are not needed—at present—well, I have a funeral in half an hour, and so I'll have to be going. Good morning."

"Well," I says, "I'm sorry you can't stay; but if you insist on going, it's nobody's funeral but your own."

So then Undertaker Graves went away—and then the plumber came. And—well, in a nutshell, they kept stringing in and out all day—the carpenter, the fortune-teller, the horse-doctor, and all the rest of 'em. But by four o'clock the last of 'em had come and gone—and you could tell from the way Vera looked at me that she expected me to start in imitating Napoleon most any minute, or maybe get violent and take after her with a butcher-knife or something.

Then there was still another ring at the door-bell, and I answered it. And what do you know? It was Doc Roper, Charley White, and Jimmy Ward—the bunch! Well, you can tell the world I was never so glad to see anybody in my life; and it certainly seemed to me as if this was one of the times when it was up to me to do the honors. It certainly was. Now I usually keep a little something on hand for medicinal purposes and rare occasions; and so I got it out, and some glasses, and—

Just then they crashed in on us; two strangers and—this fellow, Pete Williamson!

"The same old gang, and believe me, this time I've got you with the goods!" sneered this fellow Williamson.

"What do you mean?" says I. "What right have you got to come busting into a man's private house like this, and—"

"Can it," he says. "It won't do you any good. Get this: I'm working for the Revenue Department now. For some time I've been watching this street for a blind-tiger that we knew was located here somewhere. And to-day—well, I'll say you've certainly been doing business! There's been a perfect string of men running in and out of the place since morning.

"Getting a little careless, weren't you? Thought you were getting away with it, eh? Well, believe me, you weren't. I've got you and I've got you good! We'll look the place over, and then—you come with us. These other fellows—they're held as witnesses. Conley, you watch this bunch while McGeehan and I give the place a look-over."

Now I'll say this: I knew, of course, that they could never prove the charge—why, it was ridiculous! In spite of the fact that maybe things did look a little bad for me on the surface—but only on the surface. And if it had been anybody but this fellow Williamson—

Well, anyway, it was a grand rough-house while it lasted; though, at that, there wasn't a great deal of satisfaction in it for me because those two other fellows kept me so busy that I never got a chance at this

fellow Williamson—and so that's why I'm still looking for him.

You understand, I'm passing up all the details. It's just as well. If I hadn't tried to assassinate this fellow Williamson I'd probably have got off a good deal easier. As it was, it cost me a pretty penny; and though, of course, I was proved not guilty, you know how much difference that made so far as my reputation was concerned—not the slightest. And you know the old expression: Every little bit added to what you've got, and so on.

Anyway, having now been celebrated in this town as a common gambler and the operator of a blind-tiger—Vera is right. She generally is. It's time for us to move on.

As for Vera, she never spoke one word to me for as much as two weeks. Then one day she broke the long continued silence and asked me:

"Al, were you really crazy that Sunday, or what? What was your idea?"

"Well," I said, "if you've simply got to know, *I was lonesome!*"

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AUTUMN

I.

SUMMER, with the slow, palsied haste of age,
Belts on his battered armor once again,
Mounts his halt steed, and hobbles o'er the plain,
His wavering lance held ready to engage,
Young Autumn, who with youth's first reckless rage
Seething within each artery and vein,
Rides out to meet him, eager to be slain
Or slay—wild for the battle he must wage.
They meet, with a loud clash of lance on shield,
And sharp steel biting into rusted steel:
Summer, fair stricken unto death, falls prone,
A lance-head in his breast, upon the field—
And Autumn, victor, spurs him with his heel
To the red earth—and leaves him there, alone.

II.

Yesterday it was Autumn: the red hills,
The vales, the valleys, and the russet plain,
Assumed a mighty and a mad disdain;
Brooks, streams and rivers, cataracts and rills
(Oceans and inland lakes their labor fills),
Wore velvet-cloth and ermine, and were vain—
Even the starry distances did deign
Drink of the drought that arrogance distills.
Yesterday it was Autumn—but to-day,
Where are the halls where Autumn held his sway?
All in an hour his Kingdom was o'erthrown;
All in a night it vanished quite away:
Of all the pride his royal hands had sown,
Only a few leaves, helter-skelter blown!

H. Thompson Rich

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SAILING under the name of man. You know the truth if no one else does—you know what you lack—what you need. You may hide it from others in a way, but you can't hide it from yourself. Are you a victim of any pernicious habit that you want to get rid of? Have you a spark of ambition left to be the man you once were, to be the man you ought to be? Are you an easy victim of every little ailment that comes along, going around without snap or ginger, losing ground when you ought to gain it? Then wake up and be a man, not a misfit. Deserve the name of man; be vigorous, virile. It makes no difference if you are a physical wreck, if you join hands with me, I'll make you the kind of man that's wanted, the kind of man needed, the kind of man looked for, sought for, bid for all the time, and it will be done without drugs, or tonics or stimulants.

You will gain in vim, and vigor; your muscular power will increase in flexibility and strength, your nervous system fortified to renew its energy, not bolstered up for the time being, to fall back below the level it was, as it does when you resort to drugs or medicine.

You business man—overworked did you say? You are not doing half as much as you ought with your experience. Never mind, there is a way to get back your aggressiveness, to be right in the fight and enjoy it. You can double your percentage of real worth as a man, and enjoy life as you ought to be able to do.

You young man—think of your future—how about it—are you qualified—do you feel it in your soul—are others sliding by you doing more—getting more than you are? Do you want to be a failure or even worse than a failure? Then come to me; I have helped thousands; physically, mentally, morally. I will help you; I will make you the kind of young man that is a credit to any community—I will make you so that your progress in any undertaking will be easier. Just be frank and above board—tell me your troubles. I will guide, direct and point the way; the natural way for you to achieve what I have said—Nature's way. You can gain muscular tissue, be strong, virile, erect in carriage, courageous and likable to all you meet.

Let me be your guide, your teacher. I have pupils all over the world, learning a system of Health, Strength, moral courage building, known as

Strongfortism Will Enable You to "Come Back"

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Physical and Health Specialist

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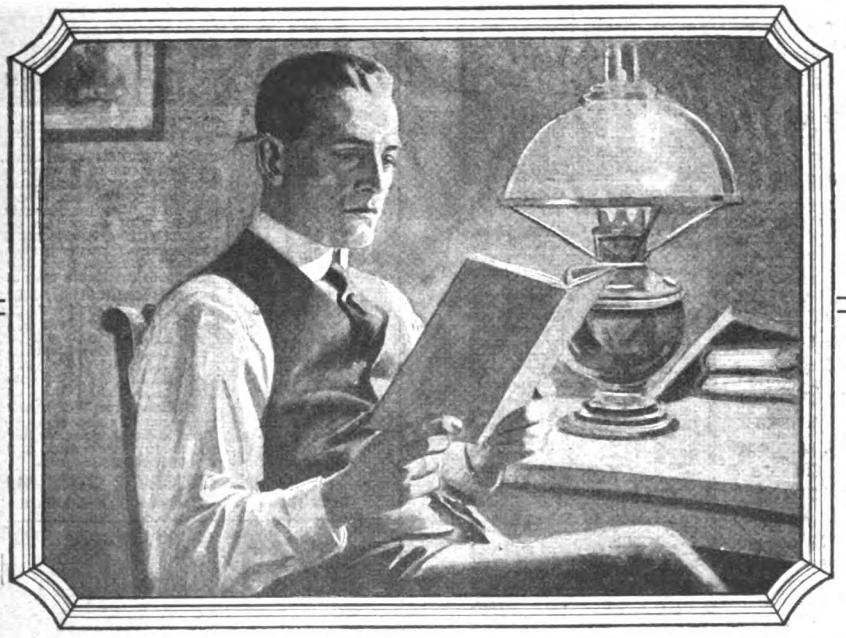

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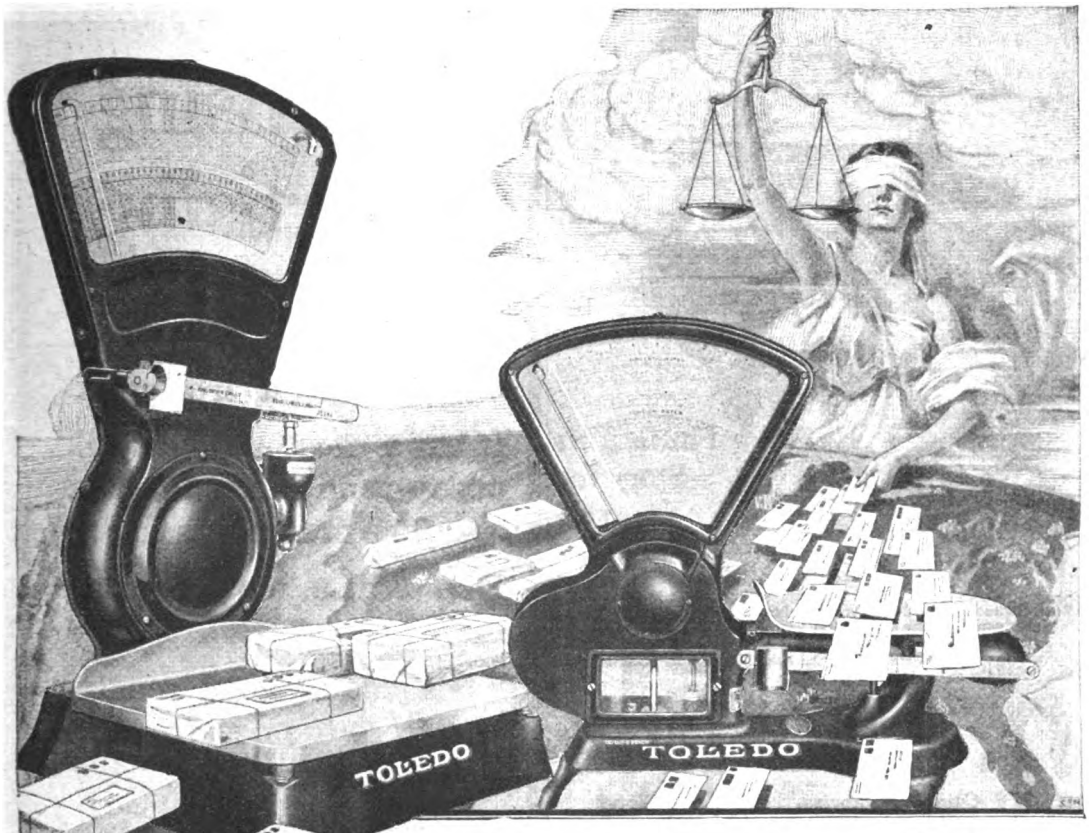

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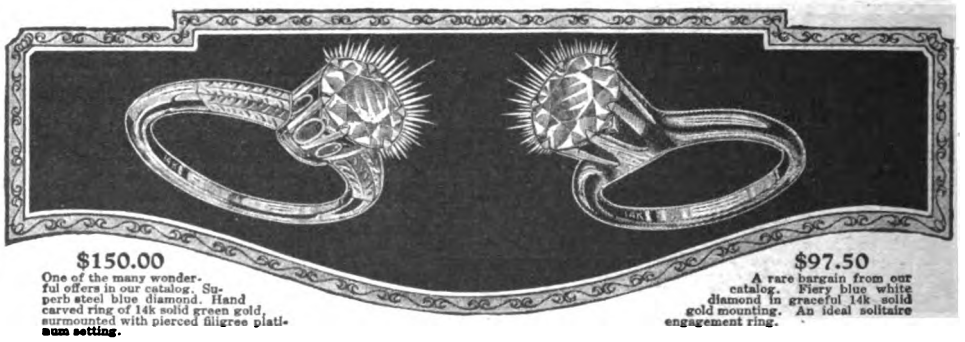

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