ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY

Prairie Flowers

by James B. Hendryx

A Sequel to "The Texan."

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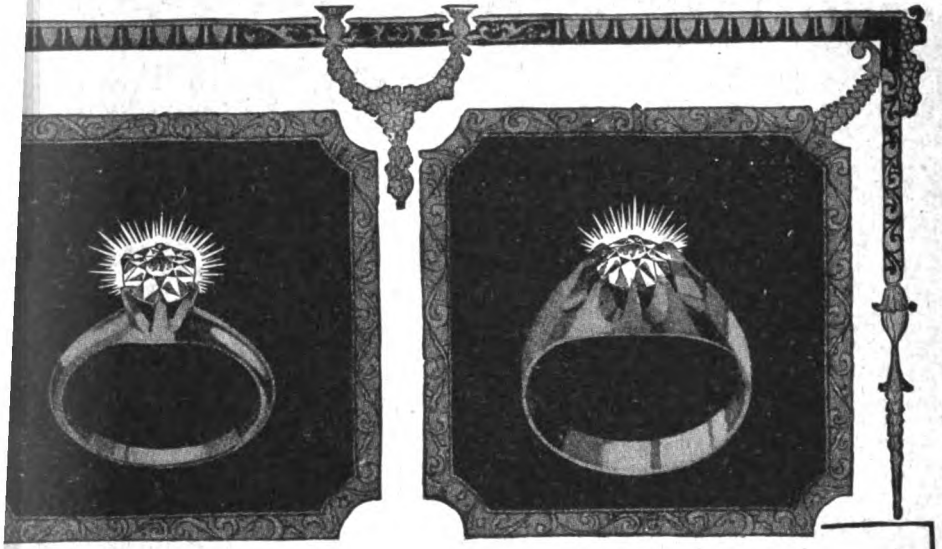

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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOL. CXXVII CONTENTS FOR NOVEMBER 6, 1920 NUMBER 2

FOUR CONTINUED STORIES

ONE NOVELETTE

SIX SHORT STORIES

BEGINNING NEXT WEEK, TAKE THE TRAIL WITH

THE ORCHID HUNTRESS

BY MARGUERITE C. STORRS

A DRAMATIC ROMANCE OF TWO SOCIAL WORLDS

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"The time will come," writes the same authority, "when millions of people will be writers—there will be countless thousands of playwrights, novelists, scenario, magazine and newspaper writers—they are coming, coming—a whole new world of them!" And do you know what these writers-to-be are doing now? Why, they are the men—armies of them—young and old, now doing mere clerical work, in offices, keeping books, selling merchandise, or even driving trucks, running elevators, street cars, waiting on tables, working at barber chairs, following the plow, or teaching schools in the rural districts; and women, young and old, by scores, now pounding typewriters, or standing behind counters, or running spindles in factories, bending over sewing machines, or doing housework. Yes—you may laugh—but these are The Writers of To-morrow.

For writing isn't only for geniuses as most people think. *Don't you believe the Creator gave you a story-writing faculty just as He did the greatest writer?* Only maybe you are simply "bluffed" by the thought that you "haven't the gift." Many people are simply afraid to try. Or if they do try and their first efforts don't satisfy, they simply give up in despair, and that ends it. They're through. They never try again. Yet if, by some lucky chance they had first learned the simple rules of writing, and then given the Imagination free rein, they might have astonished the world!

But two things are essential in order to become a writer. First, to learn the ordinary principles of writing. Second, to learn to exercise your faculty of Thinking. By exercising a thing you develop it. Your Imagination is something like your right arm. The more you use it the stronger it gets. The principles of writing are no more complex than the principles of spelling, arithmetic, or any other simple thing that anybody knows. Writers learn to piece together a story as easily as a child sets up a miniature house with his toy blocks. It is amazingly easy after the mind grasps the simple "know how." A little study, a little patience, a little confidence, and the thing that looks hard turns out to be just as easy as it seemed difficult.

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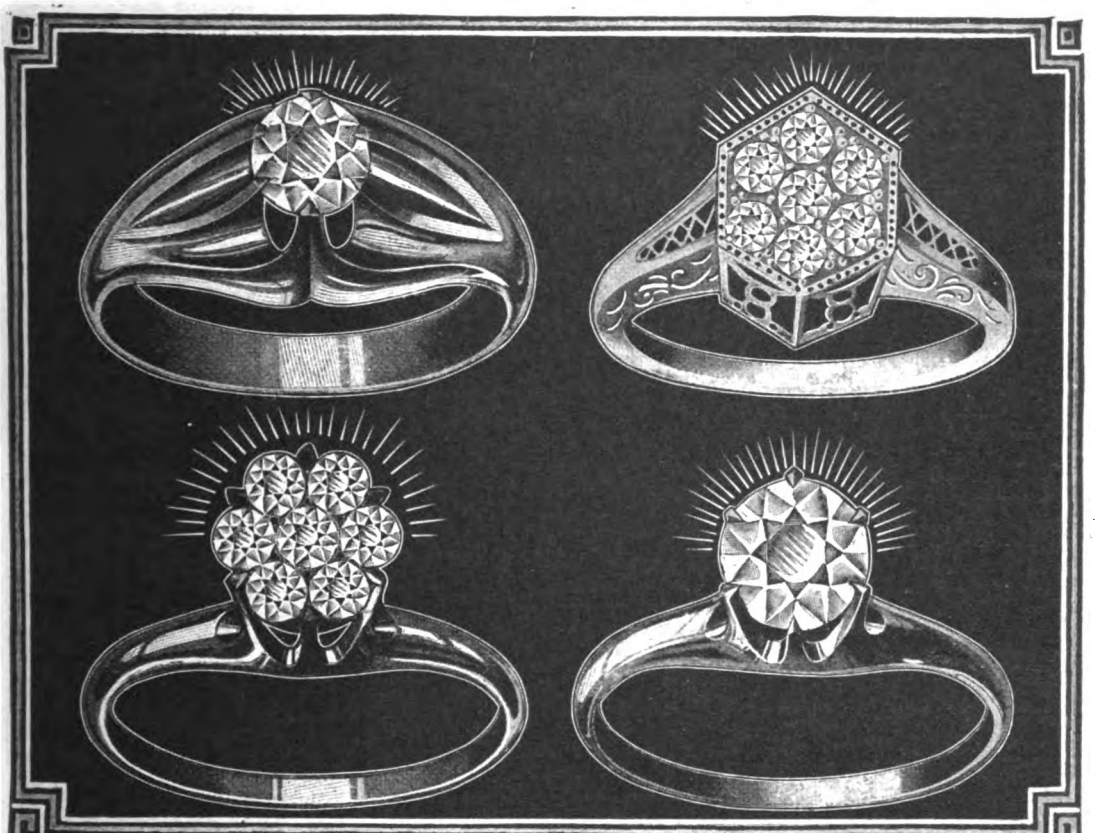

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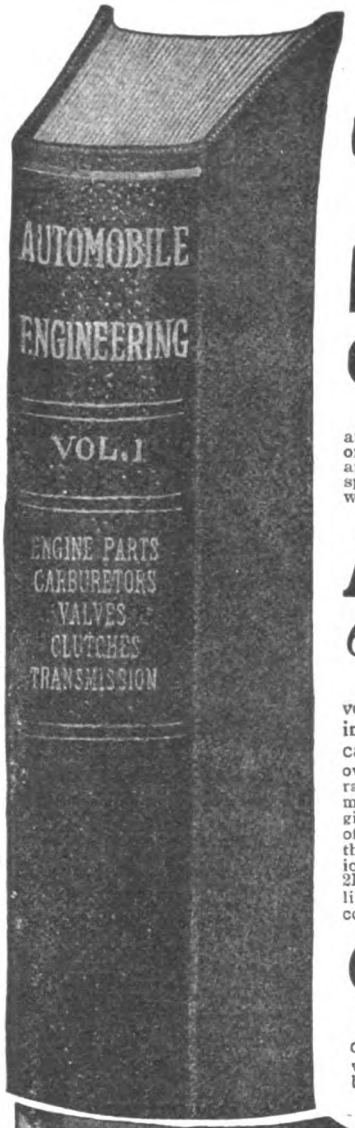

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Prairie Flowers

by James B. Hendryx

Author of "The Gold Girl," "The Gun Brand," "The One Big Thing," etc.

(A Sequel to "The Texan")

CHAPTER I.

AN ANNIVERSARY.

THE Texan drew up in the center of a tiny glade that formed an opening in the bull-pine woods. Haze purpled the distant mountains of cow-land, and the cowpuncher's gaze strayed slowly from the serried peaks of the Bear Paws to rest upon the broad expanse of the barren, mica-studded bad lands with their dazzling white alkali beds, and their brilliant red and black mosaic of lava rock that trembled and danced and shimmered in the crinkly waves of heat.

For a long time he stared at the Missouri whose yellow-brown waters rolled wide and deep from recent rains. From the silver and gold of the flashing waters his eyes strayed to the smoke-grey sage flats that intervened, and then to the cool dark green of the pines.

Very deliberately, he slipped from the saddle, letting the reins fall to the ground. He took off his hat and removed its thin powdering of white alkali dust by slapping it noisily against his leather chaps. A light breeze fanned his face and involuntarily his eyes sought the base of a huge rock fragment that jutted boldly into the glade, and as he looked, he was conscious that the air was heavy with the scent of the little blue and white prairie flowers that carpeted the ground at his feet. His thin lips twisted into a cynical smile—a smile that added an unpleasant touch to the clean-cut weather-tanned features. In the space of a second he seemed to have aged ten years—not physically, but—he had aged.

He spoke half aloud, with his gray eyes upon the rock:

"It—hurts—like hell. I knew it would hurt, an' I came—rode sixty miles to get to this spot at this hour of this day. It was here she said 'good-by,' an' then she walked slowly around the rock with her flowers held tight, an' the wind ripplin' that lock of hair, just above her right temple, it was—an' then—she was gone."

The man's eyes dropped to the ground. A brilliantly striped beetle climbed labor-

iously to the top of a weed stem, spread his wings in a clumsy effort, and fell to the ground.

The cowboy laughed. "A hell of a lot of us that would like to fly has to crawl," he said, and stooping, picked a tiny flower, stared at it for a moment, breathed deeply of its fragrance, and thrust it into the band of his hat. Reaching for his reins, he swung into the saddle and once more his eyes sought the painted bad lands with their background of purple mountains.

"Prettiest place in the world, I reckon—to look at. Mica flashin' like diamonds, red rocks an' pink ones, white alkali patches, an' black, cool-lookin' mud-cracks—an' when you get there—poison water, rattlesnakes, chokin' hot dust, horse-thieves, an' the white bones of dead things! Everything's like that. Come on, old top horse, you an' I'll shove on to Timber City. 'Tain't over a mile, an' when we get there—say, boy, little old unsuspectin' Timber City is goin' to stage an orgy.

"We don't aim to pull off no common sordid drunk—not us. What we'll precipitate is goin' to be a classic—a jamboree of sorts, a bacchanalian cataclysm, aided an' abetted by what local talent an' trimmin's the scenery affords. Shake a leg, there! An' we'll forget the bones, an' the poison, an' the dust, an' with the discriminatin' perception of a beltful of rollickin' ferments, we'll enjoy the pink, an' the purple, an' the red. To-morrow it'll be different, but as old Bat says, 'Wat de hell!'"

Thus adjured, the horse picked his way down the little creek and a few minutes later swung into the trail that stretched dusty white toward the ugly little town whose wooden buildings huddled together a mile to the southward.

Before the door of the Red Front saloon the Texan drew up in a swirl of dust, slid from the saddle, and entered. The bartender flashed an appraising glance, and greeted him with professional cordiality, the ritual of which included the setting out of a bottle and two glasses upon the bar.

"Dry?" he invited as he slid the bottle toward the newcomer.

"Middlin'," assented the Texan, as he poured a liberal potion. The other helped himself sparingly and raised his glass.

"Here's how."

"How," responded the Texan, and returning the empty glass to the bar, produced papers and tobacco and rolled a cigarette. Then very deliberately, he produced a roll of bills, peeled a yellow one from the outside, and returned the roll to his pocket. Without so much as the flicker of an eyelash the bartender noted that the next one also was yellow. The cow-puncher laid the bill on the bar, and with a jerk of the thumb indicated the four engrossed in a game of solo at a table toward the rear of the room.

"Don't yer friends imbibe nothin'?" he asked, casually.

The bartender grinned as he glanced toward the table. "Might try 'em, now. I didn't see no call to bust into a solo-tout with no trivial politics like a couple of drinks. Gents, what's yourn?"

From across the room came a scraping of chairs, and the four men lined up beside the Texan and measured their drinks.

"Stranger in these parts?" inquired a tall man with a huge sunburned mustache.

"Sort of," replied the Texan. "But let's licker before this sinful decoction evaporates."

"Seems like I've saw you before, somewheres," opined a thick man with round china-blue eyes.

"Maybe you have, because astoundin' as it may seem, this ain't my first appearance in public—but you might be nature fakin', at that. Where was it this here episode took place?"

The man shook his head: "I dunno, only it seems like you look sort of nat'chel, somehow."

"I always did—it's got so's it's almost what you might call a fixed habit—like swallowin' when I drink. But, speakin' of towns, Timber City's sure had a boom since I was here last. You've got a new horse trough in front of the livery barn."

The tall man ordered another round of drinks, and the Texan paused to fill his glass. They drank, and with an audible suck at his overhanging mustache, the tall man leaned an elbow on the bar: "It ain't

noways safe or advisable," he said slowly, looking straight at the Texan, " fer no lone cow-hand to ride in here an' make light of Timber City to our face."

A man with a green vest and white, sleek hands insinuated himself between the two and smiled affably. " Come on, now, boys, they ain't nawthin' in quarrelin'. The gent, here, was only kiddin' us a little an' we ain't got no call to raise the hair on our back for that. What do you say we start a little game of stud? Solo ain't no summer game, nohow—too much thinkin'. How about it, stranger, d'you play?"

" Only now an' then, by way of recreation. I don't want your money, I got plenty of my own, an' I never let cards interfere with business. Down in Texas we—"

" But, you ain't workin' to-day," interrupted the other.

" Well, not what you might call work, maybe. I aimed to get drunk, an' I don't want to get switched off into a card game. Come on, now, an' we'll have another drink, an' then Jo-Jo an' I'll renew our conversation. An' while we're at it, Percy, if I was you I'd stand a little to one side so's not get my clothes mussed. Now, Jo-Jo, what was the gist of that there remark of yours?"

" My name's Stork—Ike Stork, an'—"

" You're a bird all right."

" Yes, I'm a bird—an' Timber City's a bird, too. They can't be no other town in Montany touch us."

" Wolf River's got a bank—"

" Yes," interrupted the bartender, " an' we could of had a bank, too, but we don't want none. If you want a town to go plumb to hell just you start up a bank. Then every one runs an' sticks their money in an' don't spend none, an' business stops an' the town's gone plumb to hell."

" I'd hev you to know," Stork cut in importantly, " that Timber City's a cow town, an' a sheep town, an' a minin' town, an' a timber town—both of which Wolf River ain't neither, except cattle. We don't depend on no one thing like them railroad towns, an' what's more, it tuck a act of Congress fer to name Timber City—"

" Yes, an' it takes an act of God to keep her goin', but He does it offhand an' casual, same as He makes three-year-old steers out of two-year-olds."

The bartender grinned affably, his thoughts on the roll of yellow bills that reposed in the pocket of the Texan.

" Don't regard Ike none serious, pardner," he said, " he's settin' a little oneasy on account he got his claim all surveyed off into buildin' lots, an' they ain't goin' like, what you might say, hot cakes."

" Oh, I don't know," Stork interrupted, but the bartender ignored him.

" Now, about this here proclamation of yourn to git drunk—not that it ain't any man's privilege to git drunk whenever he feels like it, an' not that it's any of my business, 'cause it ain't, an' not that I give a damn one way or the other, 'cause I don't, but just by way of conversation, as you might say, what's the big idee? It ain't neither the Thirteenth of June, nor the Fourth of July, nor Thanksgivin', nor Christmas, nor New Year's, on which dates a man's supposed to git drunk, the revels that comes in between bein' mostly accidental, as you might say. But here comes you, without neither rime nor reason, as the feller says in the Bible, just a-honin' to git drunk out of a clear sky, as the sayin' goes. Of course, they's one other occasion which it's every man's duty to git drunk, an' that's his birthday, so if this is yourn, have another on the house, an' here's hopin' you live till the last sheep dies."

They drank, and the Texan rolled another cigarette: " As long as we've decided to git drunk together, it's no more'n right you-all should know the reason. It ain't my birthday—it's my—my anniversary."

" Married?" asked the man with the china-blue eyes.

" Nope."

" Well, no wonder you're celebratin'!"

" Shorty, there, he's married a-plenty," explained the man with the green vest during the general guffaw that greeted the sally.

Again Shorty asked a question, and the Texan noted a hopeful look in the china-blue eyes: " Be'n married an'—quit?"

"Nope."

The hopeful look faded, and removing his hat, the man scratched his head. "Well, if you ain't married, an' ain't be'n married, what's this here anniversary business? An' how in hell do you figger on this date?"

The Texan laughed: "A-many a good man's gone bugs foolin' with higher math-'matics, Shorty. Just you slip another jolt of this tornado juice in under your belt, an' by the time you get a couple dozen more with it, you won't care a damn about anniversaries. What'll be botherin' you'll be what kind of meat they feed the sun dogs—"

"Yes, an' I'll catch hell when I git home," whimpered Shorty.

"Every man's got his own brand of troubles," philosophised the Texan, "an' yours sure set light on my shoulders. Come on, barkeep, an' slip us another round of this here inebriatin' fluid. One whole year on crick water, an' alkali dust has added, roughly speakin', three hundred and sixty-five days an' five hours, an' forty-eight minutes, an' forty-five and one-half seconds to my life, an' has whetted my appetite to razor edge—an' that reminds me—" He paused abruptly and picking up the yellow backed bill that still lay before him upon the bar, crammed it into his pocket.

CHAPTER II.

KANGAROO COURT.

BOTTLE in hand, the bartender eyed the cowboy quizzically. "What's the big idee—pinchin' back the *dinero?*" he questioned.

The Texan smiled. "Just happened to think that this is the identical spot, a year ago, where I imbibed the last shot of red licker that's entered my system till I intruded this peaceful scene to-day."

"What's all that got to do with you grabbin' that there money which I want two dollars an' a half out of it fer them two rounds of drinks that's on you?"

"Don't go worryin' about that, you'll get all that's comin' to you. But a little reference to back history might fresh up your memory that I've got four dollars change comin' from a year ago—"

"Wha'd ye mean—a year ago? I wasn't here a year ago! My brother run this joint then. I only be'n here a couple of months."

The Texan regarded the man with puckered brow.

"Well, now, since you mentioned it, there is somethin' disparagin' about that face of yours that kind of interfered with me recognizin' it off hand. The Red Front, changin' hands that way, complicates the case to an' extent that we'll have to try it out all legal an' regular *pro bono publico,* kangaroo court. I studied law once way back in Texas with a view to abusin' an' evadin' the same, an' enough of it's stuck to me so we can conduct this case *ex post facto.*

"Barkeep, you're the defendant, an' for the purposes of the forthcomin' action your name's John Doe. You four other characters are the jury, an' that don't leave nothin' for me to be except plaintiff, prosecutin' attorney, judge an' court bailiff."

Jerking his gun from its holster the cowboy grasped it by the barrel and rapped loudly upon the bar: "Oh yes! Oh yes! You bet! Court is now open! The first case on the docket is Horatio Benton, alias Tex, vs. John Doe, John Doe's brother, an' the Red Front Saloon *et al.*"

"Hey, what's all this here damn nonsense about?" asked the bartender.

For answer the Texan rapped the bar with the butt of his gun: "Silence in the court!" he roared. "An' what's more, you're fined one round of drinks for contempt of court."

Taking a match from his pocket he laid it carefully upon the bar, and continued:

"The plaintiff will take the stand in his own behalf. Gentlemen of the jury, the facts are these: One year ago to-day, along about 3:30 P. M. I walked up to this bar an' had five drinks, one of which was on the house an' four on me, at two bits a throw. I was packin' a couple of black eyes, the particulars of which is extramundane to this case, an' the barkeep, defendant here's alleged brother, asked certain pertinent an' unmitigated questions concernin' the aforesaid black eyes. In ex-

plainin' to him how they were come by, I had occasion to take a shot at a mouse. The bullet hole, an' doubtless his dried-up remains can be seen yonder against the base board an' constitutes Exhibit A—"

"Well, I'll be damned!" exclaimed Shorty, his china-blue eyes round with excitement, "I know'd I'd saw you before!"

"Me, too, we was settin' there playin'—"

Again the six-gun rapped on the bar.

"You, Green Vest, you're fined a round of drinks for contempt of court! An' Shorty, you're fined two rounds. Not that there's any doubt about your first statement, but this here *profanus vulgus* business has got to be cut out."

Depositing three more matches beside the first upon the bar, the Texan proceeded:

"Shortly thereafter, an' right in the middle of my remarks the said barkeep disembarked in tumultuous haste, like he'd be'n sent for an' had to go. I waited around a spell an' not favorin' this spot for a permanent abode, I laid a five-dollar goldpiece on the bar, an' rode off. Therefore, gentlemen of the jury, it's plain to see that I've got four dollars comin', as an off-set to which the present specimen here has got a just an' valid claim fer two rounds of drinks to the total value of two dollars an' four bits, leavin' a dollar an' four bits still owin' to me. The case is now closed, owin' to any testimony the defendant here might introduce would be mere hearsay an' therefore irrelevant an' immaterial, he havin' admitted he wasn't here at the time. Now, gentlemen of the jury, what's your verdict?"

Thus appealed to the four gathered at the end of the bar and held whispered conversation, Shorty glancing furtively the while at the gun in the Texan's hand.

Presently, mouthing a corner of his mustache, Ike Stork spoke. "It's the undivided opinion of the jury, except Shorty disagreein' fer fear he'll git shot, that this here party behind the bar's name ain't John Doe, which it's Pete Barras, same as before, an' likewise he's got two dollars an' four bits comin' from you fer the drinks. Them four dollars of yourn is comin' from Sam Barras, which he's runnin' a saloon over to Zortman."

The Texan produced another match and laid it beside the others upon the bar: "You're fined a round of drinks for misnomer of the defendant," he announced gravely, "an' seein' the jury is hung—why it ain't be'n hung long ago is surprisin' to me — you're discharged—bob-tailed discharge, as they'd say in the army, which carries with it a recommendation that you're a bunch of inebriated idiots that's permitted to stand on your hind legs an' walk upright so's to make more room for regular folks to move around in. The case is taken out of your hands an' adjoodicated upon its merits which accordin' to the statutes in such cases made an' provided, judgment is rendered for the plaintiff, on account of the above transaction bein' with the saloon, as such, an' not a personal matter with the bartender. Plaintiff is also ordered to take over an' run said saloon to the best of his ability until such time as the said dollar an' four bits is paid."

"Look a-here, pardner," began the bartender, edging along opposite the Texan. "Fun's fun, an' kangaroo courts is all right as fer as they go an' as long as they don't mix up no regular money in their carryin's on.

"Me an' my brother Sam ain't on what you might say, fambly terms, which he'd of skun me to a frazzle on this here deal if the claim I traded him fer the saloon had of be'n worth a damn. But in spite of me an' Sam bein', what you might say, onfriendly relations, I've got to say fer him that he never pays a debt, an' if you've got four dollars comin' from him you might as well set around like a buzzard till he dies, which he's that ornery it prob'ly won't be long, an' then file yer claim ag'in' his executioner."

The Texan grinned: "I hope fer your sake that advice is sound, for I'm handin' it back in the original package—"

"You mean you ain't a-goin' to pay fer them drinks?" The bartender's voice held a truculent note, and his eyes narrowed, "'Cause, believe me, stranger, if you think you ain't, you're plumb misguided. Things has be'n quiet an' peaceable around here fer quite a spell, but you'll pay fer

them two rounds of drinks or Timber City's a-goin' to see some excitement."

The Texan noted that the man's hand was reaching along the under side of the bar, and his own dropped unobserved to the butt of the six-gun that he had returned to its holster.

"Speakin' of excitement you're sure some prophet," he observed, dryly, "an' therefore prob'ly without honor, but as far as I'm concerned, your brother Sam's nothin' but a pleasant memory while, as we say in the law, this saloon here is a corporeal hereditament—"

"You're a damn liar!" flared the aproned one, indignantly. "They ain't no wimin allowed in here—" With the words the man's hand leaped from behind the bar, there was a crashing report, a heavy six-shooter thudded upon the wooden floor, and with a cry of pain the bartender spun half around clutching at his limp right arm.

"Backin' up hard words with gun play is dangerous business onless you're a top hand at it," observed the Texan, dryly, as he stepped around to the man's side. A movement in front of the bar caused the six-gun once more to leap from its holster and at the action four pairs of hands flew ceilingward. "Just you hombres belly right close up to the rail an' all yer hands open an' above board on top of the bar, an' you, Stork, you come on around here an' tie up this arm or there'll be some more casualties reported. If you're all as plumb languid on the draw as yer fellow citizen here your ranks is sure due to thin out some."

The Texan stooped to recover the bartender's gun from the floor and as he did so Ike Stork stepped around the corner of the bar, and taking instant advantage of his position, administered a kick that sent the cowboy sprawling at the feet of the bartender. Pandemonium broke loose in the smashing of glass and the thud of blows. Forgetting his injured arm, the bartender joined Stork, who had followed up his advantage by leaping upon the struggling Texan. Reaching over the bar, Green Vest sent the heavy whisky bottle crashing into the mêleé while his two companions contributed the array of empty glasses and then valiantly bolted for the door.

The narrowness of the alley behind the bar undoubtedly saved the struggling Texan from serious mishap. As it was his two assailants hindered and impeded each other and at the same time formed a buffer against the shower of glassware that descended from above. Freeing one hand the Texan began to shoot along the floor. With the first explosion the bartender scrambled to his feet and leaped onto the bar at the precise moment that Green Vest, pausing in his flight toward the door, seized a heavy brass cuspidor and hurled it with both hands. The whirling missile caught the bartender full in the face and without a sound he crashed backward carrying Ike Stork with him to the floor.

The next instant the Texan was upon his feet, and a gun in each hand, grinned down into the face of the terrified man who lay helplessly pinned by the inert form of the bartender.

"Any friends or relations you want notified, Isaac, or any special disposal of the remains?" he questioned, as the guns waved back and forth above the prostrate man's face.

"G'wan, shoot if yer goin' to. I ain't packin' no gun. I done my damnedest when I booted you down, an' we'd of had you at that if them damned idiots hadn't begun bouncin' bottles an' glasses, an' spittoons off'n our head. Shoot—an' for Heaven's sake, make a job of it!"

The Texan's grin broadened, and reaching down he rolled the bartender over. "Get up, Ike," he said. "You're a he-one, all right, an' it would be a pity to waste you."

The other struggled to his feet and as he faced him the Texan saw an answering grin widen the mouth beneath the heavy mustache. "Pour us a couple of drinks out of that private stock, an' in the meantime I'll just fog her up a bit as a warnin' to the curious not to intrude on our solitude. An', say, watch this, so you can tell 'em out there I can shoot." Four stacks of chips remained on the table where the players of solo had abandoned their game, and shooting alternately with either hand,

and so rapidly that the explosions sounded like shots from an automatic, the Texan cleaned the table and filled the air with a blue-gray haze and a shower of broken chips. Suddenly he glanced at the clock. Its hands pointed to half past four, and with an oath he sent two bullets crashing into its face. "Four-thirty!" he cried. "A year ago this minute—" He stopped abruptly.

Ike nodded approval and raised his glass.

"Now," he pronounced, solemnly, "I've got to own that they ain't none of us in Timber City that's as handy with guns as what you be—but, at that, most of us kin hit a man reasonable often—an' some of us has."

"I'll give you a chance to do it again, then. But, first, you slip down cellar there an' h'ist me up a bunch of beer kegs. I'm goin' to build me a barricade so you birds can't rake the back bar through the window."

As Ike passed up the kegs, the Texan arranged them in such manner that from neither windows nor door could any one upon the outside cover the space behind the bar. When Ike came up into the room he shook his head, gloomily. "What's the big idee," he asked, "of startin' a war over a dollar an' four bits? It ain't too late yet fer to leave yer guns in here an' plead guilty to disturbin' the peace. That won't cost you much—but this way, how in hell do you expect to play a lone hand agin a whole town an' git away with it? You're either plumb crazy or drunk or there's somethin' settin' heavy on yer mind—"

"I want my change," insisted the Texan stubbornly, "an' I'm goin' to take it out in trade, an' also them fines—there's twenty or thirty drinks comin', accordin' to the matches. Pour us out a couple of more an' then you've got to take our little friend here an' beat it before the fire-works start. I ain't drunk now, but I'm goin' to be! An' when I am—there's a little song we used to sing way down on the Rio Grande. It runs somethin' like this. Raising his voice the cowboy roared forth the words of his song:

I'm a howler from the prairie of the West.
If you want to die with terror, look at me.
I'm chain-lightning—if I ain't, may I be blessed.
I'm the snorter of the boundless prairie.

He's a killer and a hater!
He's the great annihilator!

He's the terror of the boundless prairie!
I'm the snoozer from the upper trail!
I'm the reveller in murder and in gore!
I can bust more Pullman coaches on the rail
Than any one who's worked the job before.
He's a snorter and a snoozer.
He's the great trunk line abuser.
He's the man who put the sleeper on the rail.

I'm a double-jawed hyena from the East.
I'm the blazing, bloody blizzard from the States.
I'm the celebrated slugger; I'm the Beast.
I can snatch a man bald-headed while he waits.

He's a double-jawed hyena!
He's the villain of the scena!
He can snatch a man bald-headed while he waits.

He finished with a whoop, and picking up the glass, drained it at a gulp. "Beat it, now, Ike, ol' Stork!" he cried, "an' take a bottle of bug-juice, an' our slumberin' friend with you. So long, ol' timer! I'm a wolf, an' it's my night to howl! Slip up to the hotel an' tell the cook to shoot me down a half-dozen buzzard's eggs fried in grizzly juice, a couple of rattlesnake sandwiches, a platter of live centipedes, an' a prickly-pear salad. I'm hungry, an' I'm on my prowl!"

CHAPTER III.

THE STAGE ARRIVES.

THE Timber City stage creaked and rattled as the horses toiled up the long slope of the Dog Creek divide. The driver dozed on his seat, his eyes protected from the glare of the hot June sun by the wide brim of his hat, opened mechanically at intervals to glance along the white, dusty trail. Inside, Winthrop Adams Endicott smiled as he noted the eager enthusiasm with which his young wife scanned the panorama of mountains and plain that stretched endlessly away to disappear in a jumble of shimmering heat waves.

"Oh, Win! Don't you just *love* it? The big, black mountains with their girdles of green timber, the miles, and miles, and miles of absolute emptiness, the smell of the sage—yes, and the very rattle of this bumpy old stage!"

Endicott laughed. "I believe you do love it—"

"Love it! Of course, I love it! And so do you love it! And you were just as crazy about coming as I was—only you wouldn't admit it. It's just as Tex said that day way up on top of Antelope Butte. He was speaking of you and he said: 'He'll go back East and the refinement will cover him up again—and that's a damned shame. But he won't be just the same, because the prejudice is gone. He's chewed the meat of the cow-country and found it good.' I've always remembered that, and it's true—you are not just the same, dear." She reached over and took his hand in both of hers. "And, oh, Win—I'm glad—glad!"

Endicott smiled as he raised the slim hand to his lips. "Considerable of a philosopher—Tex. And cowboy par excellence. I hope we can find him. If we buy the ranch I've been counting on him to manage it."

"We've got to find him! And dear old Bat, too! And, Win, won't it be just *grand?* We'll live out here in the summer and in the winter we'll go to New York and Florida, and we'll never, never go back to old Half-Way Between. The place fairly reeks of soap and whisky—and I don't care if their old soap does float."

Again Endicott laughed. "I suppose it will do us lots of good. I'll probably spend my days in the saddle and come home smelling of horses, and covered with alkali dust."

"Horses smell better than gas, anyway, and alkali dust is cleaner than coal-soot. Look, Win, quick! A family of Indians camped beside the trail—see the scrawny, sneaky looking dogs and the ponies with their feet tied together, and the conical teepee. And, oh, on that red blanket—the darlingest little brown papoose! I can hardly wait to get into my riding clothes and gallop for miles! And, Win, dear, you've just got to promise me that if we do buy the ranch, you'll never bring a motor out here—not even a roadster—it would spoil everything."

"Don't set your heart too strongly on buying that ranch," cautioned her husband.

"But the man said he'd sell at a reasonable figure."

"Yes, but you must remember that a 'reasonable figure', when you're talking about an outfit that runs ten thousand head of cattle mounts up into big money. It all depends upon the terms."

"Well, if he wants to sell his old ranch, he'd be foolish to haggle over a little thing like terms. Some way, I just feel it in my bones that we're going to buy. A woman has intuition—you wait and see."

"Colston was to meet us at Timber City to-day, and to-morrow we'll ride out and look over the ranch. Do you think you're up to a sixty-mile ride?"

"Sixty! I could ride six hundred." The brake-shoes creaked as the driver drew his horses up for a breathing spell at the top of the divide.

"See!" Alice cried, pointing far out into the foothills, "there is Timber City, with its little wooden buildings huddled against the pines exactly as it was a year ago to-day when we looked back at it from this very spot. And 'way beyond you can see the river glistening in the sun, and beyond that are the bad lands."

Involuntarily she shuddered. "It's all as vivid as though it had happened yesterday—the dust storm, and the terrible thirst—only you and Tex cheated and gave me all the water."

Endicott nodded. "I don't think we'll ever forget it—it was a mighty close call for all of us."

The stage descended the long slope and wound in and out among the foothills, its two occupants contenting themselves with watching the lazy wheeling of the buzzards against the blue, and the antics of the prairie dogs that scolded and chickered at the stage, only to dive incontinently into their holes at its approach. The little steepleless church loomed up before them, and Endicott glanced at his watch.

"Four o'clock," he announced, "I wonder if Colston is waiting?"

"Well, if he is, he can wait a little longer," smiled Alice. "Because the first thing we do after we have removed some of this dust will be to go right over and call on the Camerons—there's the cottage now, dear—just think, a year ago to-day we stood in that little corner room and Mr. Cameron pronounced the words that made us two the happiest people in the world—stop—please—Win! We're right in town! And if we hurry we can be there at the very same hour and minute we were there last year."

The stage drew up at the door of the little wooden hotel. The driver tossed his reins to the hostlers, who were waiting with fresh horses, threw off the mail pouch, and lowered the express box to the ground, where it was receipted for by the agent, who was also the postmaster, and the proprietor of the hotel.

Endicott approached that dignitary who, mail pouch in hand, was gazing toward a little knot of men farther down the street. "I want to engage two rooms and a bath," he explained.

The man favored him with a glance of surprise. "Goin' to stop over?" he queried.

"Yes, my wife and I shall be here over night."

"Married? What d'ye want of two rooms then? Have 'em if you want 'em. Cost you more—'tain't none of my business. Take them two front ones—head of the stairs. Just give a hand an' we'll git yer trunk up, an' quick as the old woman gits the worsh out you c'n have a tub of water—that 'll be four bits extry, though—an' a dollar if I've got to fill it up twice." As they descended the stairs the man's eyes sought the group down the street. "Must be somethin's comin' off down to the Red Front. The boys ain't missed a mail sence the day they strung up Red Kelley, an' that's seven year ago, come August the 4th—"

"Fifth," corrected the stage-driver.

"They brung Red in on the fourth, an' some of the boys hadn't got in yet, an' they didn't git in till after dark, so they held Red over—"

"That was the third—"

"'Twasn't neither! I'd ought to know—it was the day my off-leader throwed his nigh fore shoe—"

Alice was manifesting impatience, and Endicott interrupted with a question: "Is Mr. W. S. Colston here?"

"Colston? You mean Y Bar Colston? Yer right, Slim, it was the fifth, 'cause I got a tooth pulled that same day, bein' as the dentist had rode over from Judith to see the hangin'. Why, no, Y Bar ain't here. He gits his mail an' trades over to Clagett."

"He was to meet me here to-day."

"Well, to-day ain't over yet. If Y Bar said he'd be here, he'll be here. Jest go in an' make yerselves to home. You can't count on that tub fer an hour er so yet, so if you want to worsh up, go right on through an' you'll find the worsh-dish on the bench beside the pump—an' if the towel's crusty from the boys worshin' up this noon, tell the old woman I said to hang up a clean one."

"Hurry, Win!" cried the girl as she gave her face a final rub with the clean towel. "We've got just time enough to get into our riding-togs. We both look like awful 'pilgrims' and besides, I want it to be just like it was last year."

A quarter of an hour later they were receiving a cordial welcome from the Rev. Cameron and his wife at the door of the little cottage beside the church.

"We were speaking of you to-day," said the minister's wife, "and wondering how your romance turned out."

"No need to ask," laughed her husband as he followed them into the little living-room.

"You see," cried Alice, pointing to the clock, "we arrived at almost the exact moment we did a year ago." She started slightly as a volley of shots sounded down the street. "Oh!" she cried. "They're shooting some one!"

Cameron shook his head. "No," he smiled, "we've learned that it is the single shots, or one and then another, that mean trouble. When they come in volleys that way, it means that some cowboy is 'celebrating' down at the Red Front. When

there are cowboys in town and they are singing, or racing their horses up and down the street, or shooting into the air or the ceiling, we know they're all right. Of course, one could wish that they wouldn't drink—but if they must drink by all means let's have the noise with it. If cowboys are drinking and silent, trouble follows as surely as night follows day."

"Maybe it's Mr. Colston," giggled Alice.

"Colston, of the Y Bar," smiled Cameron. "No, I think we can eliminate Colston. Do you know him?"

Endicott shook his head. "No, except through correspondence I was to meet him here to-day on business."

Cameron regarded him with sudden interest. "I heard in Lewiston a couple of weeks ago that the Y Bar might change hands and, frankly, I will tell you that I was sorry to hear it."

"Why?" asked Endicott.

The minister frowned thoughtfully. "Well, Y Bar Colston has been a power in this country, and if the wrong man were to step into his place there might be no end of trouble."

"What kind of trouble?"

"Sheep and cattle. The Y Bar outfit has been a sort of buffer between the two factions. If a rabid cattleman stepped in it would immediately mean war, and if a weakling were to take Colston's place the result would be the same, because the sheepmen would immediately proceed to take advantage of him and encroach on the cattle range, and then the cowboys would take matters into their own hands and we'd have a repetition of the Johnson County war—sheep slaughtered by the thousands upon the range, dead cattle everywhere, herders murdered and their bodies left in the ashes of their burned camp wagons, and cowboys shot from ambush as they rode the range. I tell you, Mr. Endicott, I don't envy the man that succeeds Colston as owner of the Y Bar."

Endicott smiled. "Thank you for the tip. It may, or may not interest you to know that, if the business can be satisfactorily arranged, I myself am about to assume that unenviable position."

"And the best of luck to you," said Cameron heartily as he extended his hand. "What one man has done another can do, but your job will be no sinecure. But, come, we're not going to permit you to return to the hotel for supper, because with cowboys in town the place will in all probability be uncomfortably noisy, although I will say for the boys that Mrs. Endicott's presence would be a safeguard against any unseemly talk."

Endicott's objections were met by the Camerons who pointed out that the road by which Colston must enter Timber City ran right past the door and in plain view of the porch where they were accustomed to eat the evening meal.

Alice insisted upon helping Mrs. Cameron, and left to themselves, Endicott skillfully led the minister to talk of the country, its needs and requirements, its advantages, its shortcomings, and its problems. Cameron was a minister in every sense of the word, a man who loved his work and who was beloved of the cattle country, and when, a couple of hours later, the ladies summoned them to the table, Endicott took his place with the realization that proprietorship of an outfit like the Y Bar carried with it responsibilities and obligations that had nothing whatever to do with the marketing of beef on the hoof.

CHAPTER IV.

Y BAR COLSTON TALKS.

"THERE'S Colston now!" exclaimed Cameron, rising and hailing a rider who approached, leading two saddled horses. The rider drew up, Cameron descended to the little white gate, and a moment later was helping the ranchman to tie his horses to the picket fence. As they approached the porch, Endicott noted the leathery gauntness of face that bespoke years on the open range, and as their hands met he also noted the hard, firm grip, and the keen glance of the gray eyes that seemed to be taking his measure. The man greeted the ladies with grave deference, and seated himself in the empty chair.

"Well, I got here, Endicott, but it was a considerable chore. Ain't as young as I was

once. Time I was lettin' go, I guess. Seventy years old—an' young-hearted as any buck on the range—but along toward night, after a hard day's ride, I find myself beginnin' to realize I be'n somewheres, an' the old bed-roll looks better to me than a carload of white faces."

Instinctively Endicott liked this man—the bluff heartiness of him, and the alert litheness of motion that belied the evidence of the white mustache and silvery white hair. "I hope I shall be half the man you are at your age," he laughed.

"You will be—if you buy the Y Bar outfit. Believe me, young man, there's enough to do around that outfit to keep a man up an' jumpin' if he was a hundred an' seventy. A man just naturally ain't got time to get old!"

"Win tells me the ranch is sixty miles from here," smiled Alice. "And that's a pretty good ride for anybody."

"Pretty good ride! Young woman, if that was all the ridin' I done to-day I'd b'en here before breakfast. I couldn't get away till afternoon—up before daylight this mornin', rode two horses plumb off their feet huntin' the wagons—foreman quit yesterday—best blamed foreman I ever had, too. Just up an' quit cold because he took a notion. Tried every which way to get him to stay—might's well talk to a rock. Away he went, Lord knows where, leavin' me nothin' on my mind except bein' owner, manager, ranch boss, an' wagon boss, besides tryin' to sell the outfit. Confounded young whelp! Best doggone cow-hand on the range."

"Why did you have to hunt wagons, and what has a wagon boss got to do with a cattle ranch?" asked the girl.

"The wagons are the round-up—the rodeo. We're right in the middle of the calf round-up. The grub-wagon an' the bed-wagon makes what you might call the field headquarters for the round-up—move every day till they cover the whole range."

"How interesting!" exclaimed the girl. "I know I'm going to love it!"

"Sure is interesting," remarked the old man, dryly, "with the wagons twenty or thirty miles out in the foothills, an' workin' over into the sheep country, an' eighteen or twenty knot-headed cow-hands hatin' sheep, an' no foreman to hold 'em level, an' hayin' on full tilt at the home ranch, an' the ranch hands all huntin' the shade! Yes'm, interestin's one word for it—but there's a shorter one that I'm afraid the parson here wouldn't recommend that describes it a heap better."

"By the way," asked Endicott, "Mr. Cameron tells me that the cattle and sheep situation is a rather delicate one hereabouts. He says that you hold the respect of both factions—that you seem to have a peculiar knack in keeping the situation in hand—"

"Peculiar knack!" exclaimed the ranchman. "Peculiar knack's got nothin' to do with it! Common sense, young man! Just plain common sense, an' maybe the ability to see that other folks has got rights, same as I have. The Y Bar stands for a square deal all the way around—when its own calves are branded, it quits brandin', an' it don't hold *that* open range means cattle range an' not sheep range. Any fair-minded man can take the Y Bar an' run it like I've run it, an' make money, an' let the other fellow make money, too. There's plenty of range for all of us if we keep our heads. If you're afraid of buyin' into a war—don't buy. I can sell any day to parties I know are just layin' to get the Y Bar, an' the minute they got it, trouble would start an' there'd be hell a-poppin' all along the Mizoo. Somewhere there must be a man that 'll buy that is fair-minded, an' not afraid to take hold an' run the outfit like I've run it."

Endicott flushed slightly. "I am not afraid of it. I only wanted to know—"

"An' you've got a right to know. If we deal, I'll stay with you long enough to wise you up to the whole layout. That would be no more than right. I'm considerable used to judgin' men, an' I think you can handle it. Let 'em know right off the reel that you ain't afraid of any of 'em—an' get this before you start out: A man ain't God A'mighty because he happens to run cattle, an' he ain't the devil because he runs sheep, neither. There's cattle men on this range I wouldn't trust as far as I could throw a bull by the tail, an' there's

sheep men can have anything I've got just on their say-so—mind you, that ain't the general run—pickin' 'em in the dark, I'd tie to a cow man every time—but there's exceptions, as the fellow says, to every rule. If that confounded Tex hadn't quit—"

"*Tex!*" cried Alice, and Endicott smiled at the glad eagerness of the tone.

The old cattleman glanced at her in surprise. "Yes, my foreman. Best man on the range—handled men the easiest you ever saw. Never had any trouble with the sheep outfits—but just the same, there ain't a sheep man south of the river that would care to try to put anything over on him—nor no one else, neither. There ain't any bluff an' bluster about him, he's the quietest hand you ever saw. But, somehow, lookin' into them eyes of his—a man just naturally stops to think—that's all."

"Oh, what is he like? Tell me about him! What is his name?"

"Name's Tex. That's all I know, an' that's all—"

"Tex Benton?" interrupted the girl.

The man regarded her curiously. "Maybe. Oh, Tex Smith, or Tex Jones, or Tex somethin' else."

"I—we knew a Tex once—"

Colston laughed. "There's lots of Texes here in the cow country. Tryin' to find one that you didn't know no more about than that would be like me goin' East an' sayin' I knew a man by the name of John."

"How long has he worked for you?"

"He quit last evenin'. If he'd of stayed till day after to-morrow it would have been just a year." The old man's voice had softened, and his gaze strayed to the far hills. "I made him foreman when he'd b'en with me a month," he continued after a short pause. "I can pick men." Another pause. "He—he called me 'Dad.'"

"Did he know you were going to sell?" asked Endicott.

The old man shook his head.

"Then, why did he quit?" Somehow, the question sounded harsh, but the man seemed not to notice. There was an awkward silence during which the old man continued to stare far away over the distant hills.

"He quit to get drunk," he said abruptly, and Endicott detected a slight huskiness in his tone.

Across the table Alice gasped—and the sound was almost a sob.

Colston cleared his throat roughly, and turned his eyes to the girl. "That's the way I feel about it, young woman. I got to know him mighty well, an' I know what was in him. From the time he went to work for me till he quit, he never took a drink—an' God knows it wasn't because he didn't want one! He fought it just like he fought bad horses, an' like he'd of fought men if he'd had to—square an' open. He'd give away an advantage rather than take one. He was like that.

"I saw him ride an outlaw once—a big, vicious killer—a devil-horse. The Red King, we called him, he's run with the wild bunch for years. Two men had tried him. We buried one where he lit. The other had folks. Tex run him a week an' trapped him at a water-hole—then, he *rode him!*" The old man's eyes were shining now, and his fist smote the table-top. "Ah, that was a ride—with the whole outfit lookin' on!"

Colston paused and glanced about the faces at the table, allowing his eyes to rest upon Alice, who was listening eagerly, with parted lips.

"Did you ever notice how sometimes without any reason, things gets kind of—of onnatural—kind of feel to 'em that's *different?* Well, this ride was like that. I've seen hundreds of bad horses rode, an' the boys all yellin' an' bettin', but this time there wasn't no bettin', an' the only sounds was the sound made by the Red King. It wasn't because they expected to see Tex killed—all of 'em had seen men killed ridin' bad horses, an' all of 'em had cheered the next man up. But, somethin' kep' 'em still, with their eyes froze on what they saw. It was uncanny—one hundred an' forty pounds of man tacklin' eleven hundred pounds of red fury.

"There we stood, the white alkali dust raisin' in a cloud, an' the devil-horse, crazy mad—screamin' shrill like a woman, snappin' like a wolf, frothin', strikin', kickin', buckin', twistin', sun-fishin', swappin' ends, shootin' ten foot high an' crashin' down on his back—fightin' every minute with the

whole box of tricks, an' a lot of new ones—an' Tex right up in the middle of him with that twisty smile on his face, like he wasn't half interested in what he was doin'. Didn't even put a bridle on. Rode him with a hackamore—jerked that off an' give him his head—an' he rode straight up, an' raked him an' fanned him every jump. It wasn't *human*.

" For three days they fought, man an' horse, before the Red King knew his master —an' when they got through, the Red King would come when Tex whistled. For ten days he rode him, an'—there was a horse! A bay so bright an' sleek that he looked like red gold in the sunlight, mane an' tail black as ink, an' his eyes chain lightnin'—an' the sound of the thunder was in his hoofs.

" It was moonlight the night I rode home from the NL. I had just topped a ridge that juts from the foothills into the open range an' all at once I heard the thunder of hoofs ahead. I slipped into a scatterin' of bull pines at the edge an' waited. I didn't wait long. Along the ridge, runnin' strong an' smooth, like the rush of a storm wind, come a horse an' rider. Before I could make 'em out, I knew by the sound of the hoofs what horse an' what rider. They passed close—so close I could have reached out an' touched 'em with my quirt.

" Then I saw what made my heart jump an' my eyes fair pop out of my head. The Red King flashed by—no saddle, no bridle, not even an' Injun twitch, mane an' tail flarin' out in the wind of his own goin', an' the white foam flyin' in chunks from his open mouth; an' on his back sat Tex, empty-handed an' slick-heeled. I thought I caught a glimpse of the twisty smile on his face as he swayed on the back of the devil-horse—that I saw—an' ten rod further on the ridge broke off in a goat-climb! I went limp, an' then—' Whoa!'

" The sound cracked like a pistol-shot. The stallion's feet bunched under him an' three times his length he slid with the loose rock flyin' like hailstones! He stopped with his forefeet on the edge an' his rump nearly touchin' the ground, then he whipped into shape like a steel spring an' stood there on the rim of the ridge, neck an' tail arched, head tossin' out that long black mane, red flarin' nostrils suckin' in the night air, an' a forefoot pawin' the rock.

" If Remington or old Charlie Russell could have seen what I saw there in the moonlight—man an' horse—the best man, an' the best horse in all the cow country—the sky black an' soft as velvet, an' the yellow range — no one will paint it — because no one will ever see the like again. There they stood, lookin' out over the wild country.

" And then Tex slipped down an' stepped slow to the Red King's head. He put up his arms an' they closed over the arched neck an' his cheek laid against the satin skin of him. For what seemed like a long time they stood there, an' then Tex stepped back and pointed to the yellow range: ' Go on, boy!' he said. *' Go!'* An' he brought the flat of his hand down with a slap on the shiney flank. For just an instant the horse hesitated, an' then he went over the edge. The loose rocks clattered loud, an' then come the sound of hoofs on the sod as the Red King tore down the valley.

" Tex watched him, an' all of a sudden his fingers flew to his lips, an' a shrill whistle cut the air. Down in the valley the devil horse stopped short—stopped an' whirled at the sound. Then of a sudden he reared high his forefeet, pawin' the air in a fume of fury, an' up out of the night come the wickedest, wildest scream man ever heard—it was a scream that got to a man. It sent cold shivers up an' down my back. The Red King had come into his own again—he was defyin' his master. He turned, then, an' the last I saw of him was a rude blur in the distance.

" Then Tex turned an' started back along the ridge. I could see his face, now, an' the twisty smile was on his lips. I aimed to stay hid an' never let on I'd seen —it seemed somehow best that way. But when he was right opposite me he stopped an' rolled a cigarette an' the flare of the match made my horse jump, an' the next second he was beside me with a gun in his hand, an' his face flamin' red as the coat of the devil horse.

" ' You saw it?' he says, kind of quiet.

" I shakes my head. ' Yes,' I says, ' but

not intentional. I was ridin' home from the NL, an' I slipped in here to let you by.'

"Pretty soon he spoke again, kind of slow. 'If it had b'en any one else but you, Dad,' he says, 'I'd of—of— But, you understand—you savvy. He's wild—we're both wild—the Red King an' me. We'll fight like hell—for the fun of fightin'—an' then we'll go back to the wild again—an' we'll go back when we damn please—did you see him when I whistled?'

"'I saw,' I says. To tell the truth, I was kind of catchy in the throat, but I managed to blurt out: 'An' that's why you wouldn't brand him?'

"'Yes,' he says, 'that's why—' An' of a sudden his voice went hard. 'I licked him to show him I could. But I didn't brand him—an' if any one ever lays an iron on him, I'll kill him as sure as hell—onless the Red King beats me to it.'"

The old man paused and cleared his throat huskily, and as Alice dabbed at her eyes he noticed that her lips quivered.

"An' that's the way he fought the booze—open an' above board—not takin' the advantage of stayin' away from it. He carried a half-pint flask of it all the time. I've seen him take it out an' hold it up to the sunlight an' watch the glints come an' go—for all the world like the glints on the coat of the Red King. He'd shake it, an' watch the beads rise, an' he'd pull the cork an' smell it—breathe its flavor an' its bouquet deep into his lungs—an' all the while the little beads of cold sweat would be standin' out on his forehead, like dew on a tombstone, an' his tongue would be wettin' his lips, an' his fingers would be twitchin' to carry it to his mouth. Then his lips would twist into that grin, an' he'd put back the cork an' put the bottle in his pocket, an' ride off—*singin'*.

"When I saw him tackle that horse that no man had ever rode, I knew, somehow, that he'd ride him. An' when I'd see him pull that bottle, just tormented crazy for a drink, I knew he wouldn't take a drink. An' the same way, when he come to me yesterday an' said he was goin' to quit, I knew he was goin' to quit, an' there was nothin' more to be said. I asked him why, an' open an' above board he says: 'Because I'm goin' to get drunk.' I couldn't believe my ears at first. It turned me kind of sick—an' then I knew I loved him. All at once I saw red. You see, I knew what he didn't know I knew—about his fight with the booze. 'So it got you at last, did it?' I says.

"He looked at me with those quiet eyes, an' the twisty smile come into his tanned face.

"'No, Dad,' he says, 'it didn't get me—an' you know it didn't get me—an' it never could. I showed it I could lick it, an' that's all there is to it. I'm goin' away, now, an' get drunk as hell—deliberate—not because I have to get drunk, but because I want to.'

"An' as I watched the boy ride away, I remember how it had been with the Red King—he licked him an' turned him back with the wild bunch—because he wanted to."

CHAPTER V.

ALICE TAKES A RIDE.

THE meal proceeded in silence, and at its conclusion Alice rose and stood with her hand resting on the back of her chair.

"And old Bat?" she asked, "isn't there an old half-breed named Bat?"

Colston nodded gloomily. "Yes, there's old Bat. He's been cookin' at the home ranch, but when he finds out Tex has blown the outfit I expect he'll light out after him."

"I think so, too," agreed the girl. "I haven't the least doubt in the world that when we reach the ranch it will be to find old Bat gone."

After helping Mrs. Cameron with the dishes, Alice returned to the porch where the men were deep in the discussion of business, and as she listened her eyes rested longingly upon the three saddled horses.

Colston noticed the look. "Like to take a little ride?" he smiled. "That buckskin's woman broke—I brought him a purpose when your husband wired that he was bringing you along. You've got an hour yet before dark, an' the trails out of Tim-

ber City are all main traveled ones—no danger of gettin' lost around here."

Alice shot a questioning glance at Endicott, who nodded approval. "Go ahead if you want to, dear—only be sure and be back before dark."

"Oh, I'll be back before dark!" she assured him as she stepped into the yard. "I remember—" she laughed a trifle nervously. "I'm just dying to get into a saddle. No, you don't have to help me!" she called as Endicott rose from his chair. And her husband watched with a smile as she untied the horse, led him into the trail, and mounted.

At the first little rise, Alice reined in the buckskin and gazed about her, breathing deeply of the sage-laden air. In the gradually deepening twilight the Judith range loomed dark and mysterious, and far to the northward the Bear Paws were just visible against the faintly glowing sky. Before her the white trail wound among the foothills in its long climb to the divide, and beyond the little town it flattened away toward the Missouri. Over that trail just one year ago she had ridden in company with her two lovers. Her heart swelled with pride of the man who had won her.

"But I love Tex, too," she murmured, and blushed at the words, "I do! Nobody could help loving him. He's—he's—well, he's just Tex!"

Her glance strayed to the distant reaches beyond the great river, and she shuddered slightly as she thought of the bad lands that lay between her and the fast-dimming mountains, and of Long Bill Kearny and his flat boat ferry. A mile beyond the town a dark patch of pines loomed distinctly. It was there she had said good-by to the Texan, and— Her lips moved: "The cherry blossoms are in bloom over there—and the dear little blue and white prairie flowers—"

Impulsively she started her horse, and skirting the town, came out onto the trail beyond and urged him into a run.

She drew up at the little creek that came tumbling out of the woods, and peered, half fearfully, half expectantly, among the tree trunks.

"It isn't dark yet. And it's only a little way," she thought, and dismounting, tied the buckskin to a low-hanging limb, and plunged into the woods. "Here are the cherry blossoms, the same as a year ago, and yes, there is the big rock!"

She stepped around the boulder, and stood upon the edge of the tiny glade.

"A year ago," she breathed, with a catch at her throat. "And it seems like yesterday! He stood there with his cheek resting against his horse's neck, staring out over his beloved range—and then he told me that Win hadn't killed Purdy. Right here on this spot at that moment I was the happiest woman in the world—and I've been the happiest woman in the world ever since, until—until—" The words faltered, and she stamped her foot angrily: "Oh, why does he have to drink? And to-day, of all days!"

Her eyes rested upon the little prairie flowers that carpeted the glade, and stooping, she picked a huge bouquet as the darkness gathered, and when she stood erect with her hands full of blossoms, the big rock at the edge of the glade was hardly distinguishable in the dusk.

With a little cry, half surprise, half fright, she hastened toward it. The woods were darker than the glade, and for a moment she stood peering into the thicket through which she must pass to reach her horse, while foolish terrors of the dark crowded her mind and caused little creepy chills to tickle the roots of her hair. She glanced at the flowers in her hand.

"If I only hadn't stopped to pick them," she faltered. "If I were only out on the trail—" And then she pulled herself together with a laugh—a forced, nervous laugh, but it fulfilled its purpose. "You're a little fool, Alice Endicott, to be afraid of the dark! And you, a prospective rancher's wife! What would people say if they knew that Mrs. Y Bar Endicott was afraid to go a quarter of a mile through a perfectly peaceful patch of woods just because it was after sundown?"

Resolutely curbing the desire to dart fearful glances to the right, and to the left, and behind her, she kept her face to the front, and plunged into the woods following the little creek. A few minutes later

she gained the trail, and untying the buckskin, mounted and headed him toward the scattering lights of Timber City.

At the edge of the town she drew up abruptly. A volley of shots rang out, and she could see the thin streaks of flame that leaped out from the crowd of men that were collected in front of the saloon. Her first thought was to skirt the town and arrive at the rectory as she had left it. But once more she upbraided herself for her foolish fear.

"Mr. Cameron said when they came in volleys they were harmless," she reassured herself. "And I may as well get used to it now as later." She urged her horse forward, and as she reached the edge of the crowd a man raised his gun and sent a shot crashing through the window of the Red Front. Other shots followed, and Alice saw that the building was in darkness. Something in the attitude of the men caused her to draw up and regard them closely. Very few of them were cowboys, and they were not shooting into the air. Also there was nothing in their demeanor that savored of any spirit of jollification. They seemed in deadly earnest. More shots—streaks of thin red flame, and a tinkling of glass. This time the shots were answered from within the building, the crowd surged to one side, and those who were unable to get out of the line of fire dropped swiftly to the ground and wriggled away on their bellies.

A tall man with a huge drooping mustache came toward her. "Better git along. This here ain't no place fer women folks."

"What's the matter?" asked Alice.

"You better pull there in front of the livery barn. You might git hit. They's a ring-tailed desperado in the Red Front, an' he's mighty permiscuous about his shootin'."

"Why don't they arrest him?" asked the girl.

The man had walked beside her, and seating himself upon the edge of the horse trough, began deliberately to reload his pistol.

"Arrest him," he drawled. "That's jest what we aim to do. But first we got to git him in shape to arrest. He's imbibed to the point where he won't listen to no reason whatever—an' shoot! He's a two-handed gunman from hell—beggin' yer pardon, mom—I didn't aim to swear—but them Texicans—when they gits lickered up. I'd sooner try to handle a oncontented grizzly—"

"Texan!" cried the girl. "Did you say he is a Texan? Who is he? What's his name?"

The man regarded her gravely. "Seems to me he did say—back there in the saloon, when he was holdin' kangaroo court. The rookus hadn't started yet, an' he says—"

Alice had thrown herself from her horse, and stood before the man, the wild flowers clutched tightly in her hand. "Was it Tex?" she interrupted, impatiently.

The man nodded. "Yeh, it was Tex—"

"Tex Benton?"

The man scratched at his head. "Seems like that's what he said. Anyways, he claimed he was here a year ago, an' he aimed to git drunk on account of some kind of an anniversary or somethin'—an' he will, too, if he drinks up all them fines—"

Alice interrupted by clutching the man's arm and shaking it vigorously.

"Oh, tell them to stop shooting!" she cried. "They'll kill him! Let me go in to him! I can reason with him."

The man regarded her with sudden interest. "D'you know him?"

"Yes, yes! Hurry and tell them to stop shooting!"

"You wait here a minute an' I'll git Hod Blake, he's the marshal." The man disappeared, and a moment later came toward her with another man, the two followed by a goodly part of the crowd.

The tall man stepped to the girl's side. "This here's Hod," he announced by way of introduction, and "That's her."

Gun in hand, Hod Blake nodded curtly. "D'you say you know this here party?" he asked.

"Yes, that is, I think I do."

"Ike, here, says how you figgered you could go in an' make him surrender."

Alice nodded; somehow that word surrender had an ominous sound. "He hasn't killed any one, has he?"

"No, he ain't killed no one yet. He nicked Pete Barras in the arm, an' has otherwise feloniously disturbed the peace of Timber City to a extent it 'll cost him a hundred dollars fine besides damages fer shootin' up, an' causin' to git shot up, the Red Front Saloon."

"And you'd kill a man for that?" cried the girl indignantly.

"I'll tell a hand, we'll kill him! Any one that starts gun-play in Timber City's got to go on through with it."

"You're cowards!" exclaimed the girl. "How many of you are there against one man?"

"That don't make no difference. We got the law on our side, an' he ain't on hisn. He come in here a huntin' trouble—an' he got it. An' he'll pay his fine, an' settle up with Pete Barras, or we'll plant him—one."

Alice thrust the flowers into the bosom of her soft shirt and regarded the man coldly.

"If all of you brave gun-fighters are afraid to go in there and get him, I'll go. I'm not afraid."

Ike Stork warned her.

"You had better keep out of it, mom. He's lickered up an' liable to shoot sudden."

"I'm not afraid, I said," repeated the girl.

Hod Blake shrugged. "Go ahead if you want to. Tell him we'll git him, sure, if he don't give himself up. An', s'pose you git shot fer yer trouble, you got any folks to notify?"

Alice glanced at him coldly. "My husband is up at Mr. Cameron's with Mr. Colston, you might mention it to him, if you think of it," she answered scornfully. "Get me a light."

Match in one hand, candle in the other, the girl advanced to the front of the saloon, while the crowd remained at a respectful distance. The door of the building stood open, but the interior was screened from the street by a heavy partition of rough planking around which one must pass to gain access to the bar. At the doorway the girl paused, and her figure leaped sharply into view in the bright flare of the match. The flame dimmed as she held it to the wick of the candle, then brightened as she stood with white face and tight pressed lips, framed in the black recess of the doorway. For a long time, as tense seconds are measured, she stood wondering at the sudden silence. She knew that the eyes of the crowd were upon her as it waited just beyond the circle of her candlelight—and her shoulders stiffened as she realized that not a man among them would dare stand where she stood with a lighted candle in her hand. She felt no fear now. It seemed the most natural, the most matter of fact thing in the world that she should be standing thus in the doorway of the Red Front Saloon, with a crowd of armed men in the darkness behind her, and in the darkness before her—what? What if the man behind that rough plank wall were not Tex—her Tex? What if—

It seemed suddenly as if icy fingers reached up and clutched her heart. She felt her knees tremble, and the candle swayed in her hand until it threw moving shadows on the plank wall. Thoughts of Win crowded her brain. What would Win think of her? What could he think if the man behind that screen were not Tex, and would shoot the second she came into range? What would every one think? "She was a fool—"

"Douse yer light an' crawl back!" She recognized the rough, half contemptuous voice of Hod Blake. And the next instant she thought of the roar of guns, the acrid smell of burned powder, and the thin red streaks of flame that had pierced the night like swift arrows of blood. They would kill him. "He's the best man among them all," she sobbed, and closing her eyes, held the candle at arm's length before her, and walked slowly toward the black opening at the end of the plank screen.

There was a crashing report. Alice opened her eyes in darkness.

"Tex!" she cried frantically. "Tex, strike a light!"

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.

With Clean Hands

by Hamilton Craigie

SILENT as always, Worumba stared, unwinking, at the figure in khaki which faced him in the hot sunlight of the campong. His eyes, lidless, like a snake's, the eyebrows and lashes plucked out in the sacred ceremony of *daimonu,* or disenchantment, held Osborne with a basilisk, ophidian brightness in which there was at once a question and an entreaty.

Osborne, of the Protectorate police, grunted; then he cast a whimsical eye at his friend. Antipodean in everything but a mutual taste for good tobacco and hock-and-soda, these two—the native chief, and the representative of His Britannic Majesty for Upper Uganda, were friends of long standing—and fullest understanding.

"U-m," remarked the policeman after an interval, "they're a rum lot, these 'children' of yours—as you say: thieves, and the sons of thieves, every last one of them."

The chief shrugged; then he grinned, without offense, showing his two remaining incisors, of which he was very proud: one just above the other—and both filed to a needlelike sharpness. He spoke in sonorous Swahili, as had Osborne:

"They are my children—true," he declared, simply, "but there is one only who is the thief, and him I know not, and therefore are they all thieves until he be found."

Osborne stroked his nose with a lean forefinger, puffing thoughtfully at his pipe.

In the white man's understanding the thefts had been negligible: a few yams, a pullet or two, a jar of native wine—but what rendered them significant, from the point of view of the native, was the fact that they had been filched from the store of offerings made to Kali, taken under the very ægis of the grotesque and hideous image of the goddess herself. And—by just so much as the deity failed to protect its own perquisites, by just so much was lessened the prestige of Worumba, the chief. And Mengwe, medicine man, master of *juju,* and maker of *tambos,* was much troubled that this should be so—

"And you suspect no one, my father?" Osborne was beginning, when abruptly a swart shadow fell between them, foreshortened in a grotesque and ugly silhouette of the ebony giant who now faced them, silent, unwinking.

To Osborne a shadow was—merely a shadow. He knew much of native cults and superstitions, but he did not know that the almost imperceptible withdrawal of the chief's lean body was the instinctive shrinking of a man who knew that to touch or be touched by that shadow was a perilous matter—for it was in truth a cloak that hid many secrets—the dark ægis of the Master of Mengwe himself, flung visibly upon the sand before them as if in challenge.

Beneath that cloak were devils, big and little; spells, incantations; the sleeping death; thunder; and the sickness that wastes by night.

Assuredly, Worumba knew of these

things; the while, with his newly acquired Occidentalism, he scoffed at mumbo-jumbo, he had a very real fear, a wholesome respect for the necromancer's power—a power, indeed, grown into a mountain—a cloud at first no bigger than a man's hand.

Osborne gazed at the man curiously, coldly, whose eyes regarded him for a moment with a sort of sightless glare—then turned upon Worumba with an inward squint.

The Medicine Man, unlike most of his caste, was tall and broad, thewed like a bull buffalo, standing, perhaps, a good four inches over six feet, exclusive of the nodding head-dress of roc's feathers, to the soles of his huge, splay feet. He was entirely naked, save for a sort of singlet of cowry-shells about his middle, through which was thrust the haft of his sacrificial hammer, its rough knob-end protruding menacingly at his hip.

His face, brutish, broad, flattened to a smudge of flaring nostril and thick lips, was a dead gray black, out of which, however, his eyes stared with the unwinking fixity of a snake's, his loose lips just now parted in a wolfish grin, the teeth filed, as were Worumba's, to needle-points. A rumble, growing to a mutter, broke from his lips:

"My father—the young men grow uneasy—twice now hath Kali been despoiled of that which is hers. It is not seemly that this be suffered to endure."

His tone rose a note, and Osborne fancied that it held now a menacing timbre:

"And—thou knowest, oh, my father—the punishment—for it is in my mind that the goddess is an hungered."

Osborne, gazing from the medicine man to Worumba, saw that the chief's face had changed to a mottled, unhealthy gray. For a moment he fancied that the latter's hand moved toward the short, stabbing assegai which he kept ever within reach—his own hand dropped lightly to the automatic at his belt.

But Worumba, his lids drawn downward, his chin sunk on his breast, answered slowly:

"Ai—sayest thou so, Eater of Souls—Black One—Minister of the Seven Hells, the little and the big! Thou speakest strong words and true."

For in truth was Mengwe bold, assured. For his power had waxed even as the strength of the old chief had waned, little by little. Bold indeed was he to speak of punishment, but it was not merely of the punishment of the thief or thieves at which he hinted—his oblique reference was pointed at the tribal custom which Osborne knew well meted to the chief the penalty for the goddess's dishonor, equally with that decreed for the thief: the ordeal of the ants.

This, indeed, had been rare—unknown during Osborne's incumbency, in fact; it appeared that proof must be adduced that the tribal authority had failed for the third time to apprehend the culprit.

"Three times—and out!" Osborne reflected grimly. Twice had the thefts occurred, and the third—Osborne could do nothing. He liked the old chief, savage that he was—but liking would not serve where a master of craft such as Mengwe was concerned. And Osborne's actual authority as Resident ended at the jungle's edge.

Now the towering figure of the medicine man appeared to expand, to grow visibly taller, as he thrust out his scarred barrel of a chest in an insolent defiance.

"It is said!" he pronounced harshly, his guttural intonation carrying with it a savage undertone almost of exultation. He turned on his heel without a backward glance, striding from the campong like a conqueror.

Osborne, walking homeward to the Residency in the moonlight, halted opposite the colossal image of Kali, the Ever Hungry. Twice the height of a tall man, the huge figure of gaudily painted wood and shell brooded under the moon like some monstrous, bloated fetish of fear, stark, unlovely, hideous in its suggestion of implacable waiting.

Osborne was imaginative—for a policeman—and now something drew him forward to the image, which, under the leprous finger of the moon, seemed to draw him onward with a curious and terrible fascination.

He stood a moment, pondering the question of the thefts, the subtle reek of the

campong in his nostrils, the blended effluvia of the sweating African night rising in a tide which seemed to reach the stars.

His glance, ranging from the offerings piled at the figure's base, ran up to where, at the swollen midriff, the height of a man's shoulder, he saw—

And at what he saw an inspiration struck him like a blow. He fell back a pace, a queer smile about his lips, his eyes narrowing to slits, studying the grim figure which had furnished him with the inspiration for its minister's confounding.

He slapped his thigh as a low chuckle escaped him. It would work—there could be no doubt of that—and Mengwe—well—it would be: "Hands off!" hereafter with a vengeance.

A grim justice—a poetic justice, indeed—for if the plan worked, and there was no good reason why it should not—Mengwe must show his hand, for all to see. The goddess herself had answered.

But as he proceeded on his way Osborne had not seen the slinking shadow, drifting like a wind-blown leaf out of the encircling ebon wall of the jungle, at his back.

And the shadow followed him, a dim bulk, with its swift, silent jungle step, so that the two—pursuer and pursued—seemed like figures in a curiously terrible pantomime in the soaring silver of the moon.

The shadow was nearer now, and a chill wind, pattering in the dust like the feet of an invisible army of the dead, whispered in Osborne's ear a message, a warning, a betrayal.

There was the brief clink of steel on steel, a grunt—the squat figure stood rigid, poised like Discobolus, the soaring shaft of the assegai streamed forward like a silver flame under the moon: h-i-i-ss—thud!

Osborne went to one knee as the broad blade drove past his shoulder into the sand even as the wind of its passing kissed his cheek.

He had heard, seen, suspected nothing, but that little wind, sighing past his ear, had brought with it the unforgettable and unmistakable reek of the Thing which followed.

A heart's-beat before the launching of that silent death he knew—and even as the point bit into the sand, he had acted.

As a javelin thrower, in other days and on other fields, Osborne had acquired the knack of the forehand swing and the follow-through, which is a combination of the golfer's technique and that of the expert of the courts. Now he whirled, seized the weapon's haft, swung, and the heavy spear flashed like Excalibur under the moon, its low-pitched flight curving in a short arc.

There came a spanking thud, a yelp, inhuman, doglike at the jungle's edge, a threshing of the thorn-bushes—silence.

Osborne, automatic in hand, peered into the ink-black shadows, but the jungle remained voiceless, enigmatic, unrevealing. He shrugged, turned away. And all about him, as he went, the blackness and the mystery of the aromatic night closed in to right and left, whispering, sinister, alive—

The Residency was dark, the windows staring like blind eyes under the moon as he lifted the matting and entered.

"Ho—Kralla—Mzimu (literally: 'departed soul')!" he called, but the echoing silence answered him—no voice, no answering footfall.

His automatic ready, he went forward in the velvet black, his free hand searching in his pocket; the match flared, and a long shadow wavered, retreated before him, bending grotesquely as he advanced, swaying along the walls. All about him was silence, yet it seemed a silence freighted with a tide of menace, a dim flood: whispers, rustlings, the squeak and scurry of rats—on two feet.

There was no one in the house. He did not know what he had expected to discover, but he was conscious of a feeling of relief that the worst was merely the desertion of his servants. He knew now what to expect.

Mengwe, for some reason, feared him. Well—he would have good cause when the last hand was dealt. It had been the Medicine Man, beyond peradventure, who had arranged that stealthy ambush: Osborne was certain that he had recognized the misshapen bulk of the half-man, half-*loubali* (demon) who was Mengwe's constant at-

tendant. That was why, too, he had found an empty house to greet him on his return.

He must work fast if, as he now suspected, the third and final act was to be played out before the setting of another sun. He rummaged in a closet where, among a riffle of gear of all descriptions, he finally found that which he sought: a something round, and hard and cylindrical. He shook it, holding it to his ear. Its contents gave off a musical gurgle. Jamming it into the pocket of his coat, together with an object long and flat and hard, yet curiously pliant at one end, he set forth.

The moon had waxed and waned, and starshine powdered the black blot of shadow at the jungle's edge as, walking stealthily, Osborne approached the huge figure of Kali, the Ever Hungry.

His hand reached up to where, at the swollen midriff, the height of a man's shoulder, there appeared a crude device, the size of a hand's-breadth in diameter. Perhaps ten seconds—no more—had passed when the policeman gave a satisfied grunt, his busy fingers ceased their manipulation. He had set the stage.

A grim smile edged his lips as he turned, and with never a backward glance, strode swiftly in the direction of the Residency. An hour would bring the dawn. Let Mengwe call upon his *loubalis*, big and little, with spells and incantations. He would have need of them.

Osborne, with the readiness of an old campaigner, came broad awake in his chair as the thunderous morning leaped at a stride the treetops, crashing into the full orchestra of day. There was a sound on the wind—he had been sensible of it in his dreams: a mutter, a grumble, a muted clamor, faint and far, and somehow menacing.

He left the bungalow at a fast walk, and ever as he went, down-wind there swelled that faint susurrus of sound, which, as he came nearer, began to be distinguishable in broken shouts, high, menacing, and the synchronous drone of drums. Spears clashed, and now he could hear a wailing chant:

"Katonda — mzimu — mzimu — Katonda!"

Thus, over their watch-fires, had chanted the impis of Lobengula, with the clashing of their stiff shields.

And now, in his path, to right and left, he saw that at which a strong shudder shook him. Here, all about him, the ground rose in a series of conical hills, which, even as the sun baked them with tropic flame, grew black—with life.

And down these slopes of death soldiers marched and countermarched, by battalions, regiments, armies: the legions of the Ants! As they went they clashed and rattled, so that the sound of their armor made a dry whispering, ferocious mandibles raised aloft in challenge to the temerarious intruder.

This was the Place of Expiation, the sacrificial ground, the antechamber of death.

Osborne passed swiftly by; he was strong, and fleet of foot, but for a moment his flesh crawled as he vizualized that which to him had been a tradition, merely. In a moment he had left them behind.

And in a moment, as it seemed, as at the lifting of a curtain, unrolling before him in a panorama of flashing spear-points, the impi of Worumba, drawn up in hollow square.

At Osborne's approach the rolling rattle of the drums ceased with a startling suddenness; as if at a hidden signal, the square opened, and through this opening Osborne beheld a tableau:

The figure of the old chief, erect, weaponless, naked save for his breech-clout, flanked on either hand by two giant spearmen. And off to one side, the gross figure of Mengwe, Master of Magic, resplendent in full panoply of his office, knob-kerrie dangling from his huge fist—behind him his satellites, the lesser priests.

And behind them all, towering above them like some cruel Juggernaut, the insensate image of Kali, the Ever Hungry, bloated, hideous, whither it had been moved in preparation for the ceremony.

Osborne knew well enough what it was, and for a moment, despite the secret which was his, the dread certainty possessed him that Worumba's doom was upon him. Black though he was, Worumba was the

policeman's friend, and there was a small debt also which Osborne had never forgotten—did not want to forget. And then, too, if his authority ended with the jungle, the Power of which he was the representative demanded his intervention in anything approaching too public a demonstration of tribal "justice."

But he was but one against many. Even at that distance he fancied he could see the sneering grin on the face of Mengwe—a grin which the Medicine Man did not attempt to conceal.

Drunk with power, he would dare even the displeasure of that great nation overseas, and perhaps—

The lane stood open; it had not closed; to Osborne the two horns of that wedge of bristling spear-points seemed curiously like the mandibles of a huge and rapacious ant, ready and waiting. He could withdraw—he could turn his back and shut his eyes—he need never know—with a firm tread he marched, head up, between the spearmen—the gap closed—he stood facing Mengwe, whose countenance, a demoniac mask, broke obscenely into a myriad of chuckling lines, in a silent, ferocious grimace of implacable hate.

Osborne sensed now that it was a trap—that opening lane an invitation to death—how could he have doubted it?—but nevertheless he lifted his gaze in a hard stare at the Necromancer.

Mengwe's lips drew backward from his pointed teeth in a soundless snarl. Then:

"Well met, *Bwana!*" he said ironically. "*Bwana,* from whose hand speeds the swift death. Thrice welcome, tall one—thou art in time—yet methinks the creeping death is faster than thy spear-hand, oh, maker of white magic! Thus I say to thee: but a little, and thou shalt see the justice of the Unyanyembe."

The necromancer lifted his hand, and for a heart-beat Osborne fancied it a signal to the spearmen at his back. For a moment he felt in anticipation the driving impact of a spear-point between the shoulders—the crushing fall of a stone club at the base of the brain.

But he turned to Mengwe as of right, ignoring Worumba and his guards:

"Thou hast found the thief, then, oh, Black Bull?" he queried.

Mengwe scowled. "Nay, white man," he said harshly, the mock deference in his tone passing swiftly to savagery undisguised:

"But for the third time hath Kali, our mother been cheated of her sacrifice. And—thou knowest the law. It is said."

Osborne felt himself helpless.

It is a tribal custom among the Unyanyembe that in extremity the condemned may call upon the Goddess for an omen. This, Osborne knew, and had counted upon reaching Worumba in time to insure his calling if the chief himself, as was likely, felt such a course to be futile, but Mengwe had forestalled him; his plan, by which he had hoped to meet guile with guile, was of no avail now that he was himself a virtual prisoner within that encircling, savage ring of steel and could not reach Worumba.

His heart sank.

At that moment he would have bartered his hope of heaven for a file of his old Sudanese—his Ghurkas—his brown men from the Residency, even. Worumba had saved his life in a day long past. Well, he would cancel that debt, and the first entry against it would be a slug from his automatic in the black heart of the Medicine Man.

He was calculating the distance with the impersonal detachment of a man who has done with life—he had picked out his target where the swelling breast muscles of the Necromancer rippled downward to a hollow pit just beneath the drumlike chest. His finger itched for the trigger—as there came a hoarse command from the Medicine Man, when of a sudden, high, resonant, his voice pealed above the thud and shuffle of sliding feet, in an inspiration from the high gods:

"Kali—I call upon the judgment of Kali! *As the friend of Worumba I call!* Let the Goddess speak!"

It was bluff pure and simple. The right to call upon the Goddess was vested in the accused by custom; no one else had ever thought of using it before. Would they accept this extemporized amendment?

For a timeless interval there held an in-

tense and painful silence. Then—how, Osborne neither knew nor remembered—there followed the thunder of spear on shield, and a hoarse, answering cry:

"The white man has spoken—it is said—ai—ai—hear him, brothers?"

Osborne was conscious of the face of the Medicine Man, like the face of a devil—he saw his mouth open—but the words were lost in the tumult. For a split second it was touch and go. Then—Mengwe's face, sullen, raging, told Osborne that he had won. In the ensuing silence the policeman's voice rang clear:

"If the thief be found, my brothers, will the Goddess live (*i.e.* 'eat')?"

"Ai—ai—she will be full—it is said—thou hast said it," came the chanted answer.

"Then keep ye the faith," thundered Osborne. "Let all of ye, one after one, approach the Goddess, laying his hand upon her heart—so shall ye swear that ye be true men—and him that is not true will the Goddess herself proclaim. So shall the thief be found. It is said."

As the long line, fearful of they knew not what: lightnings — thunder — the sudden, swift anger of the outraged deity—passed in turn the hideous figure of the Goddess, each, some timidly, others boldly, but all, without exception, touched with moist, black palm the crude image of a painted heart where it stood out like a crimson scar against the somber background of the wood. But the expected doom did not materialize; a silence held—thick, heavy, breathless.

Last of all came Mengwe—savage, sullen—for once the leaven of his own teaching working in him like yeast—a little afraid—for this was something beyond his comprehension. And—he was no longer the Medicine Man, the Black Bull, the Keeper of the Seven Hells—he was but a man on trial, as were his fellows.

The last native had passed, and the Medicine Man, halting opposite the idol, had lifted his hand, palm outward, with an assumption of careless yet dignified contempt. He turned, calling in a loud voice, harsh, exultant: "The Goddess is silent, white man; she has not answered." But Osborne's voice came again, stern, authoritative:

"Ay—she *has* answered!" he thundered.

"Now — all ye — together — salute the Goddess, mother of Gifts."

The Unyanyembe salute is made with the arm raised, the hand turned, palm outward. There came instant obedience—the hands flashed up—and in every palm, clear in the sunlight, there glowed a crimson stain.

And Mengwe? He, staring in unbelief, dismay, and dawning terror, alone concealed his hand.

In two strides Osborne was upon him, had grasped the thick wrist, and swung the hand aloft, palm outward, for all to see.

A yell of execration and understanding burst from a thousand throats as Osborne's voice rose like a bell above the tumult:

"My children—he comes—the thief—*with clean hands*—as ye see—judge ye, therefore—"

For Mengwe had wrought upon himself the doom which he had planned for another. Failing to accept the trial, by so doing he had confessed. For had he been guiltless he would not have feared.

A surging wave, a resistless sea rolled in a ravening tide over the place where the Black Bull had stood, and even in his triumph Osborne shivered as, faint and fainter, the howling chorus drove onward to the Place of Expiation.

To-day, among Osborne's possessions, he will show you—and, if you are curious as to its history, will tell you the story—a flat-handled brush, and a battered cylinder of tin, bearing the label:

"Carmine."

The Picture on the Wall

by J. Breckenridge Ellis

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

"DO you see that?" Jim Blearstead shoved a newspaper story of how John Lyle Warring was still expecting the return of his son who had been kidnaped some twenty years ago, under the eyes of Harve Cleek, a local pugilist, who came into Blearstead's eating-house at closing time. Blearstead had abducted the child, but reported the nurse-maid, who had been his pal, had drowned the boy. With Cleek's help, Blearstead now proposed to palm off his young nephew, John Walters, for the long lost son.

The young man who had been induced by the pair to assist in a robbery against his will, insisted he was going straight and declined to take part in the deception. But the entrance of the police cut short his protestations. The law was looking for the burglar who had entered the Troost Avenue house of Alice Klade.

Blearstead hid his nephew under a pile of soiled linen while the police searched the premises. Next day Cleek hauled him away in a laundry-basket and hid him in a tenement, where he left clothes and instructions from his uncle. Tacky Hode would row him up-river, and then he was to exchange his identity for that of John Lyle Warring, kidnaped son of the millionaire of Lagville.

Hode's daughter Bettie and John were friends. On an old pencil-addressed envelope which he found in his hiding-place, and which envelope had been stamped "New York, March 4," without the year, John wrote Bettie a note which might serve later on to establish an alibi.

When John reached "The Bottoms" he knew from the light in the Hode house-boat the police were there. Bettie met him and rowed him to safety.

Two days later he rang the bell of the Warring house and waited while a none-too-obliging young woman consented to carry a message to Mr. Warring.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CLAIMANT.

WAITING on the porch, John spread his legs rather far apart to examine as much of himself as possible in his pocket-mirror, to find if his hair was well arranged and his trousers still perfectly creased. But the sound of light footsteps caused him to perform a miracle of readjustments. The door was opened with a jerk, and a girl of nineteen or twenty bade him come in, her voice breathless, her cheeks burning as if she had just broken away from a scene of warm dispute.

He had the impression, which did not strike him as contradictory, that the dark hall was flooded with light by her presence and that in going with her he was not leaving earth's brightness but was following the day.

He might have found her less bewilderingly appealing had he not been expecting the return of the long nose, the diminutive mouth, the sallow cheeks. On account of the previous vision it was natural to take keener delight in the slight and graceful figure, the fresh complexion of the oval cheeks, the glowing golden hair reminding him of fairy tales, the hands exquisitely shaped.

Wherever she moved, light flashed, leaving an incredible emptiness where she

had been, a coldness, a desolation. Here indeed was a sister worth having, and, to his way of thinking, worth terrible plunges into the depths of fictitious narrative. What a shield to wear as a defense against the vengeance of the law! How perfect her mouth, how rounded her cheeks, what adorable ears!

Not one word did she utter while leading him across the hall to what in Lagville was always known as the "front parlor"; but he could see that she was tremendously moved. It was shown in her rapid step, her flashing eyes, the eagerness of her hand upon the door, her manner of waving him into the room. But alas! when they were within she joined herself to two persons in waiting as if to show emphatically that he must stand or fall alone. Yet in spite of this definite withdrawal he felt that she was leaning toward him, and he believed that one of her friends—she who had first opened to him the door—was destined also to prove his ally.

"Be seated," said the oldest of the waiting group—a lady in middle life, correct in tone, poise, and dress, really a formidable creature who knew the standards of society's more sheltered classes and conformed to them scrupulously as to a religion. John was really afraid of her nose-glasses dangling on their elegant gold chain, of her rustling skirts, of her severe gray eyes.

As all sat down, those three in a row across the room, he decided with a pang that the beautiful blonde could not, after all, be his "sister." Surely the overpowering lady with the handsome face and austere countenance must be her mother, whereas the millionaire's wife was dead. Emerging from a cloud of disappointment, he realized that they were regarding him with intent eyes which constantly rose from his face to a spot in the wall above his head, only to return more fixed than ever. It was like a pantomime, and there was perfect concert in their movements, as if they had been rehearsing their mystery play.

He shattered the sinister silence by exclaiming, with a smile, "Let me have a look, too!" then turned to stare upward.

They were instinctively comparing him with a portrait done years ago when Mr. Warring was a young man—for the portrait was that of the millionaire. John slowly rose, staring, chilled by the conviction that all resemblance was lacking. If he knew himself, he did not look like that. He did not feel like that. Would they not presently cry out "Fraud"?

The oil painting was that of a dark, aristocratic-looking young man with clustering hair, high forehead, sensitive mouth. The chin was very handsome, the nose straight and fine. The whole expression was that of dignity, sincerity, self-respect without arrogance. One felt that such a man could do nothing mean, that his thoughts would not be trivial, that his words would be measured, his opinions of weight. He was a thorough gentleman, and could not have been otherwise. It is good to be thought well of by such a man; his approval conveys distinction.

John stared in dismay, fancying himself as far removed from such a personage as he felt Blearstead to be removed from his sympathies. Surely they must see that for him to claim relationship with the head of the family was preposterous. The silence deepened; the lady's skirts no longer rustled, her slender chain ceased to dangle.

But he must try for it. There was nothing else to do. After all, it could not be said that any feature in the painting offered absolute contradiction. He turned to the group with an air as cool as if he were the portrait-painter, betraying by no quiver of tone the pounding of his heart. "If it were hung in a better light—" he murmured.

Touched by the sound of his voice to emotion seemingly of amazement alone, the lovely blonde started up with a breathless cry. He was struck by the wholly unconscious rhythm of her movements. What a different girl from those of his world! He tried to imagine Bettie, for instance, sharing the atmosphere of this home, but fancy limped under the burden. This made him realize how alien he must appear to the scene, but he lost self-consciousness in wondering what the girl was

about to do. Standing with eyes glued to his face, she uttered no word, yet seemed about to cry out, her arms visibly trembling as she pressed them against her body.

"Wait, Lucia!"

Under the compelling voice of the lady with the nose-glasses she fell back in her chair, covering her face with her hands. The ugly girl, shoulders bent as if to diminish the extraordinary height of her thin frame, kept her round, fascinated eyes upon the stranger, yet through her homeliness and open curiosity shone an indefinable something akin to Lucia's charm. All these people were kin to the picture on the wall, if not in blood, then in spirit. But *he!* Surely they would cry out against him.

"I must warn you," the lady spoke with cold repression, "that we have in times past been imposed upon by men pretending to know that Mr. Warring's son is living. A few years ago an unspeakable character had the baseness to claim that he was the missing heir." She gave a slight but quite obvious twitch to her skirts as if to remove them by that much from proximity with the stranger, "There was, I must admit, a certain resemblance, but Mr. Glaxton exposed the impostor. It was at that time that Mr. Glaxton came to live in the house."

"I can well believe," John gravely responded, "that you must have been persecuted by false claimants showing up from mercenary motives."

As if he had not spoken, she continued, her voice at the freezing-point: "Mr. Warring is seriously ill; his heart is affected. Doubtless he could endure the shock of happiness on learning that his son is living. But should he take to heart some one who later proved an impostor, it would kill him. The evil one who should play upon his credulity would be not alone an impostor, but a murderer." Then, abruptly: "Had we not better end this interview at once?" And she lifted the glasses to her nose.

He rose. What she had said weighed more with him than her manner, although the effect of the nose-glass movement was to transport him to the uttermost horizon of her perception. Even for the sake of his personal liberty, could he voluntarily take chances of forever stilling the father's overburdened heart?

"I think," he said, still outwardly calm, "that possibly I had better retire."

Lucia, who, according to his judgment, resembled the austere lady more nearly than he resembled the portrait, again sprang to her feet, her hands leaving her face.

"No! You shall not retire!" Her tones were vibrant, her eyes flashed, her cheeks glowed, her little white fists were clenched. With her burning hair and rose-leaf complexion she made a living picture in deeply laid colors that filled his eyes to their remotest depths. "No!"

"Lucia!" the lady warned. "The best families, Lucia!"

This phrase was a reminder of the duty she owed her station in life, the duty to appear reserved, untouched by circumstances—something Lucia, with her impulsive nature, was often forgetting. She darted to the wall to press a call-button, at the same time looking back over her shoulder at the lady who remained a handsome statue of petrified propriety. "You must let me manage this, Aunt Hildegarde."

John, who had made a movement to retire, stopped short. Then she was not, after all, the daughter of the austere lady. She must be Mrs. Warring's daughter. If he could risk the shock to the invalid's heart, thereby saving himself from the officers of the law by remaining in the house for a few weeks, this young girl would be his "sister." He was overwhelmed by the desire to remain near her in this miraculous circumstance.

She wheeled upon him, not with hostility but with scintillating eyethrusts that sought to pierce his armor.

"Who are you?" she demanded.

He was drawn toward her so strongly that he felt it necessary to brace himself by placing between them a barrier. "It doesn't matter—I'll go."

Her face lost much of its color, her soft lips hardened. "You have made a claim,

indirectly, it is true; but you shall justify it, or—" She pointed toward the open door.

In the hall just beyond the threshold, in answer to the push-button, stood a man of extreme height, slender but powerful, who could have held his own with even Blearstead or Cleek. Clean-shaven with blue jowl, no expression but that of eagle watchfulness dominated the large features. He gave a singular impression of clamminess as if his hands were always damp, though his black suit was speckless, his linen scrupulously fresh.

John, regarding him appraisingly, felt frailer than he really was. It seemed his ill-fortune always to be opposed by larger and stronger men; still, there was compensation in the fact that his courage always swelled to meet the issue. He could make no pretense to the joy of a son of the house coming to his own, because he could not play the hypocrite; but he could regard the man-servant with a look of cool contempt.

"I am determined," the girl cried, "that my father's health shall not be undermined by these—these interviews. If all is not right, I shall make an example of you as a warning to others." She looked toward the hall door, and the man gave a furtive and sinister nod. "No one shall ever come again as you have come." Her voice was hard, her eyes flashed fire.

And then suddenly the mist showed in the tender blue, and impassioned longing struggled into her voice. "But if you can prove yourself—oh, prove yourself!"

His eyes fell before her yearning look, and with the music of her desire ringing in his ears he could find no word. But the issue must be met, now and forever. He snatched the package of baby-clothes from his pocket and tore it open to display the time-stained letters.

Her brave defiance was gone. With shaking hands she opened one of the letters to find words dancing at her in her father's unmistakable writing. Here were phrases he had often repeated to her from memory, acceptance of the abductor's terms, description of the proposed hiding-place for the ransom money. The page blinded her eyes as if it burned as the sun. To clear them, she swept John with a wavering glance, then turned for a last time to the picture on the wall. It seemed to whisper to her, telling her that all was well. Suddenly she dropped everything to throw her arms about his neck.

"My brother!" she sobbed, holding him close.

CHAPTER IX.

ACCEPTED AS THE HEIR.

DURING the first breathless moments following his definite claim to the heirship John's senses were blurred. A dream-sister clung to him, while to himself he became also a figure in a sweet, impossible dream. In this misty unreality it was Aunt Hildegarde who acquired the sharp outlines of the world of fact. Her hand clasped his with the cool pressure of one whose emotions conform to the strictest standards of politeness.

"I need not say that it rejoices us to accept you as John Lyle Warring." Her air was that of one who seldom reveals herself. "We never dare wake your father, but as soon as he is awake Simmons will call me to break the news to him." She nodded dismissal to the watchful man-servant, who glided away from the door without having expressed any understanding of what had taken place.

The ugly girl was on her knees, gathering up the scattered objects and putting them in Aunt Hildegarde's lap without a word to indicate her thoughts or explain her relationship to the group; if it had been defined, John had been too stunned to grasp distinctions.

"I felt from the very first you were my brother," Lucia was saying hysterically, as far as possible keeping him all to herself. "I believed in you—oh, I want you to know that I did believe in you! Only, I was determined not to be disappointed again. I have wanted you so long. And I have wanted you so—so *hard!* I could not think you were dead. When even father gave you up, I said—I *knew*. And here you are!"

"Yes," he murmured, "there's nothing more wonderful than that—here I am. It seems my mind can't get beyond that."

She lifted her head to brush back his hair, examining his face through swimming eyes. "You are so handsome."

"Oh, please!" he gasped, closing his eyes.

"And just exactly like father at your age."

"I wish I could think so." He faced Aunt Hildegarde determinedly: "Did you observe the likeness?"

"My reception of you was cool because, as you can well imagine, we have been so often deceived," was the indirect answer. "It was so far from our thoughts—and you were dressed so—so as you are." Her tone of voice opened his eyes to the incongruity of his appearance. He looked ruefully at his clothes.

"Yes," Lucia laughed, "aren't they dreadful!" Seeing his countenance fall, she hurried to present the ugly girl who proved to be Aunt Hildegarde's daughter. "You must call her 'Virgie.' She's the best friend I have in the world, and now she's your best friend. Everything I am, of course, you are; and everything I have, of course, you have."

She drew him down beside her on the divan, clinging to his hand. Then she jumped up to look him over with the most adorable enthusiasm; then resumed her seat and his hand with an air of absolute proprietorship.

John said to himself: "Of course, it was never intended for a man to get into heaven with a false passport. I wonder what will happen to drive me into outer darkness? This can't last."

Lucia, still breathless from joy, gazed upon him fondly.

"Are you really glad?" she insisted. "I mean, *glad?*"

"Just like that."

"You don't show it. Oh, what a dreadfully reserved brother I've found! Not once have you kissed me."

He tried to rally. "But you see, I'm not used to finding sisters. But if you think I am not enjoying it—well! You just go on holding my hand. I like that, too. I—I know I'm hardly adequate, I've been raised so queer."

"You are to tell me all about that. I know I'm selfish, wanting you all to myself, but father's turn will come. His heart is so uncertain. We daren't rouse him. But I simply can't wait till he wakes up. I want to hear every little thing that belongs in your life up to this hour. Begin at the beginning, dearest boy, and don't leave out a morsel. Are you always so good-natured and forgiving when people doubt you as we seemed to doubt you a while ago? Darling John, promise never to think of that again."

While soothing her regret he was trying desperately to recall the narrative invented in the basement of the Smiling Lane tenement. To gain time he addressed the girl still kneeling on the floor: "Come sit on my other side, Virgie—then, listen, children, to the story of my life."

Virgie looked eagerly to her mother for permission, for in spite of her years she was completely under the other's domination. "You'll crowd him," Aunt Hildegarde decided. "Mercy, child, how you stoop! I'd straighten up my figure if I were as high as the moon."

Virgie reddened. She had been persecuted thus through life, so keen had been her mother's disappointment over her lack of beauty.

"You shall sit on my other side," John declared, taking her hand as if she were a princess. "And let me say that you are higher than the moon in my regard." Then quickly, to divert the mother's attention from her daughter: "What about this Mr. Glaxton, who has gone away to be absent a month?" On his arrival the name had been used as a threat against him; now it seemed to react upon them. Into their faces flashed looks of fear or distrust, instantly suppressed.

"He is a lawyer," Virgie said, her voice sharp with precision.

Lucia spoke constrainedly: "And father's cousin; after us, his nearest relative."

"Yes," Aunt Hildegarde spoke with a note of triumph in her cool voice, "first come you two—then Mr. Glaxton. It is

delightful to know that since an hour ago we have found another link in the chain of relationship."

"It comes to me," John murmured, "that Mr. Glaxton is not a jolly person to have in the house."

Lucia darted her eyes toward the door as if to make sure that Simmons was not listening, then grasped his arm intently. "If you could—" She checked herself abruptly, but her eyes never left his.

Virgie muttered, "Oust him!"

"Virginia," her mother sighed, "where do you pick up such words? Will you never remember the best families?"

"Just wait till I get in the game," John boasted. "I'll do for Cousin Glaxton. I guess that's the work in this house cut out for me. It's my pass to this Garden of Eden."

CHAPTER X.

JOHN ACCOUNTS FOR HIMSELF.

CONFRONTED by the necessity of giving a full account of himself, John was dismayed to find that the dizzying experiences of the past hour had wrought havoc with his prearranged narrative. To fortify himself against possible cross-examinations, he maneuvered for time by urging the others to define the conditions to which in the new home he must adapt himself.

He learned that J. L. Warring, his "father," had, as a penniless orphan, been taken care of by a well-to-do couple to whom, a few years later, a daughter was born. Mrs. Abbottsfield ("Aunt Hildegarde") was that daughter; and though the orphan boy had never been legally adopted, they lived in the same house until his majority as brother and sister. Then Warring went to New York, and, during feverish years of growing prosperity, lost touch with those who had made his success possible. He married; his first-born was kidnaped, and after spending an immense sum in the vain endeavor to find trace of him, his wife died, leaving a daughter, Lucia, about ten years old.

Then his heart turned toward those who had been to him father, mother, sister, and he journeyed to what he had always called "home." But his foster-parents had died after severe reverses of fortune, and the daughter, now a widow with an only child, was earning her living as a social secretary.

Warring, who had conceived a strong dislike for city life after his wife's death, left New York to bury himself in the little river-town of the Middle West, and hither he brought Mrs. Abbottsfield and Virgie to live as intimate members of his family. That was before his health showed signs of failing. Mrs. Abbottsfield felt free to accept his generosity, not so much because her parents had once been everything to him, but because she could serve as governess to little Lucia.

All had gone smoothly until Mr. Glaxton entered upon the scene, taking Mr. Warring's business affairs in charge. He was a Denver lawyer, whose relation to the millionaire was clearly established, and Mr. Warring, who had known nothing of his people, developed an affection for the other amounting to infatuation. He would not hear a whisper against his adviser, and, during the past year of rapidly failing health, even a look of disapproval of Glaxton caused the old man's heart to flutter alarmingly. Glaxton had given up his Denver practise, which was considerable, to devote all his time to the management of the Warring properties.

"I fancy I can see through that fellow," John said indignantly. "He came to this little village meaning all the time to live off of—*him;* but managed it so that he thought he had to beg him—that's Glaxton—to build his nest right up in his roof-tree. I suppose there's no doubt that he is a cousin of—of *his?*"

"Dear," Lucia entreated, "call him father."

"Yes, of course. But are you certain of Mr. Glaxton's kinship?"

"There is absolutely no doubt possible," said Aunt Hildegarde in a repressed tone. "It's as certain as your own."

"Oh, I see," John murmured uncertainly. Lucia had accepted him wholeheartedly. Mrs. Abbottsfield had appeared to

do the same; but had she? And what was Virgie thinking behind those big round eyes with their show of milky whites?

Lucia grasped his arm to give it an affectionate squeeze. "Do let's drop Cousin Glaxton!" she exclaimed vivaciously. "When he's here you can't think of anything else, but let's enjoy our month's holiday. I'm crazy to hear all about you. It 'll be another hour before father can see us, so don't leave out a thing."

His thoughts had not been given up wholly to Glaxton; he had made several wild efforts to recapture the main points of his story. Upon one thing he was resolved: not to connect his mother in any way with his fiction. He had seen enough of the world to understand that she did not belong to the world his new friends inhabited.

They would not understand how she had spent herself for him at humble toil, teaching him to aspire to what she had been denied, and how, though so incompetent a guide, she had in fact led him to the foot of the upward path. "I may not ascend with you," she had in effect said; "but yonder is the setting for your solitary adventures."

He would have liked to explain how the obscure woman had installed bright dreams in his mind and preserved him from the arrogance of ignorance. Since this could not be revealed, he was resolved not to invent another woman to take her place, for he was jealous for the sacrificing devotion of her who had died in his arms. Yet, how could his story be told with no mention of her gentle hand at his pillow, her cheery voice at the door?

With their eyes fixed intently upon him, he realized how difficult it was going to be to hide the truth. But John was always at his best when most hardly beset, and he began in his easiest manner:

"I was born— Wait; I'm back too far. The first things I can remember: I'm a kid living in New Orleans. I guess you can call it living. Pretty hard living! I'm with the man that kidnaped me—Jake Baxter; you know, the man your father wrote the letters to."

"*Our* father," Lucia corrected him.

"Certainly. Do you see my abductor? A big ox-jawed bully of a man with fists like sledge-hammers and a way of swearing to raise your hair on end. At first he expected to get a fortune out of my bones—such of 'em, I mean, as he didn't break when knocking me about. Meant to take me back home when he could do it in safety to himself. But when I was big enough to catch the vision that beatings are not real necessities of life I ran away. I'd always wanted an education, and I was determined to get one or die trying. So one cold, bitter night, with the snow up to your shoe-tops—"

"This was New Orleans?" Virgie murmured inquiringly.

"Yes, that was the year that froze the bananas on the trees. I went East and got a job. I think I've done every kind of work—except act as waiter at a restaurant. I drew the line at eating-houses. I sure fought for an education, but at last got it down with both hands about its throat. If all the books I've read were in this room, you and I would have to go out in the hall. Understand me, my knowledge is fearfully limited, of course; but there are a million things in my mind I've never had a chance to use. I've been thrown all my life with the kind of people who didn't care whether *Hamlet* was mad or not. To pick up my learning I've literally scoured the country; been everywhere, I think, except Kansas City. I was on my way to Philadelphia when I got a wire saying Thompson was dying—to come quick, he had an important secret to tell me concerning my parents."

"Who was Thompson?" Lucia asked, listening absorbedly.

"Don't you know? The man that kidnaped me."

"But *his* name," Aunt Hildegarde said with a gasp—"his name is Jake Baxter."

"Yes—but he'd been breaking into banks and that sort of thing, and had to change his name. He was Thompson at the last. But he's the same person you're speaking of. Of course, his real name was Jake Baxter. So I hurried to New Orleans, where I'd never expected to set foot again. And there on his death-bed he told

me everything and turned over the articles of identification that he'd kept all this while in an old suit-case. He'd lost track of the man he'd stolen the child from—"

"Father," Lucia prompted.

"Yes, certainly. Didn't have any idea where he was living, or he'd have drained him long ago. But an article came out in the paper during his last sickness, and he saw the piece and found out. He died, and I came straight here. I'd always thought that kidnaper was my father. I'd never suspicioned my name was John Lyle Warring, never once."

"Will you be satisfied to live in a quiet little town after all your wonderful adventures?" Lucia asked wistfully.

"Satisfied!" he exclaimed. "With you here?" After their acquaintanceship grew deeper, he remarked: "I wish I'd put as much time in at law as I have at Greek and Latin. Then perhaps I could persuade Mr. Glaxton to go back to Denver. I know a lot about police courts and all that, but I'm afraid my law isn't legal."

When Simmons came to announce that Mr. Warring was awake, Mrs. Abbottsfield went up-stairs to break the news. Lucia dared not show her father the betraying radiance of her face.

CHAPTER XI.

DOES HE RESEMBLE THE PICTURE?

JOHN'S compunction over rousing false hopes in Mr. J. L. Warring, his aversion to the deceptive part he had assumed as Lucia's brother, and the realization that always the danger of exposure hung over his head dwindled in a brief time to insignificance. Nor was this because to have acted otherwise must have proved his undoing. His acceptance of the situation was not based upon negative grounds. During the first interview with the millionaire he found how incredibly weak he was, just hovering, as it appeared, upon the border-line between life and the great silence.

The reaction induced by the recovery of his "son" was marvelous. It was not that Mr. Warring became a new man; rather, that he became a man, the master of his own desires, his own actions. For months he had existed in a state of apathy, staying in bed or being laboriously helped down-stairs, according to the advice of Mr. Glaxton—or, during Mr. Glaxton's absence, of Simmons, the man-servant whom Mr. Glaxton had brought with him from Colorado.

But now Mr. Warring knew exactly what he wanted—to be constantly with John and the rest of the family—and Simmons, who had gradually encroached with his ministrations till he had become the autocrat of the sick-room—found himself reduced to the status of an ordinary servant.

Spring was opening up delightfully, and a few days after John's coming Mr. Warring, with one arm about him and the other resting upon Lucia's shoulder, toured the premises, discussing gardening and the making of new lawn-beds, and declaring his purpose of going to church and taking up his business at the bank.

Though John had seen nothing of his slowly fading away in flesh and interests, he had been told about it, and even without having been told must partly have understood. No one could take such an immense zest in the commonest experiences of a secluded life had he not for a long time lost zest in everything. Mr. Warring was like a prisoner unexpectedly given freedom, and John realized that his coming had wrought the transformation. When he should vanish from the scene it would no doubt terribly shock the old man, who, however, would be none the worse for the episode—might indeed be the better for it, since he already looked younger.

His rapt attention while John related experiences from his turbulent life brought the sparkle to his deep-set eyes; his form would straighten, his thin cheeks glow, his shock of white hair seem to bristle with renewed vitality.

What a simple-hearted, confiding man! How could John help loving an audience that hung so breathlessly upon his every word? The old man and the girl grew dear to him, and it was his steadfast purpose so long as he must hide under their

roof to be to them a son and a brother; also, to remain as long as Blearstead kept away. But the moment it became a question of getting money from these trustful friends for Blearstead or for himself, he would flee, though that might mean State's prison.

These reflections did something to rob the days of a part of their charm. Regret that he was not what he appeared, and realization that, once driven out, he could never come back, lent vague unreality to everything he said or did. He told himself he was no longer John Walters, but John Lyle Warring, and to preserve the incognito he sought to enter into the feelings that could belong by right only to John Lyle Warring.

In this he was so successful—for his adaptability had always been marvelous—that when he thought of one day resuming his old self he felt cold, as if stripped of covering in an icy wind.

"Yes, I'm going to take up everything right where I dropped it," Mr. Warring enthusiastically declared as the three slowly promenaded the garden, still brown with last year's leaves. "There's the bank; a few years ago I was the president, and I'm still a director. I'll go there daily as I used to, meet the boys, and gossip in my easy chair before one of the big windows. If a farmer's wagon or a stray dog comes to Lagville it passes before that bank window. I always spent a couple of hours there in the afternoon. Your Cousin Glaxton got me out of the habit, I hardly know why.

"I'll work you into a place there—No, I've been turning over a big lumber scheme for you, John. You ought to be at the head of a big business. I own a lot of timber-land and a string of lumber-yards in small towns. But all that must come later. I'll have to take a trip and nose around a bit. Before Cousin Glaxton comes back—he's always afraid I'll overdo my strength.

"And there's church. Your mother was a devoted member, and after I lost her I found some comfort there. No one was a more regular attendant at services until—Well, it seems I've dropped everything. Lucia keeps up the family religion. It's very curious, now that I think of it, how all my old habits are broken. John, what church are you a member of?"

"I've never taken the vows," John answered with deep solemnity.

"But you're young. Listen, my boy: when your heart's broken, there's nothing else. I shall be cruelly distressed if you are antagonistic to the church."

"Don't you have one uneasy moment over that," John said heartily. "If you want me to go to church, that's where I'm going. How often is it?"

Lucia laughed. Her smile was one he had grown used to look for, full of whimsical humor, softened by deep affection, and it was enough to make her smile just to look up and find before her the brother she had yearned for throughout life. "Twice on Sunday and every Wednesday night." She bent her head behind her father's shoulder to give him one of those adorable smiles. "And just think—always alone! Aunt Hildegarde and Virgie belong to a different church."

"You'll never go alone while I'm in the city," John declared. "And as to that other church—couldn't we go to both of 'em? Couldn't be too often to suit me; not with you."

"Bless your heart, it does me good to hear you." Mr. Warring squeezed his arm. "Your Cousin Glaxton has taken a violent antipathy to our minister, and is determined to drive him away. He thinks, of course, that he has just cause, but I'm sure he must be mistaken."

"Our minister is a splendid young man," Lucia declared glowingly.

John felt a lowering of his spirits.

"Single man?" he hazarded.

"Yes—but he's engaged."

John sighed, "Then I'm for him."

Mr. Warring spoke hesitatingly: "Your Cousin Glaxton is mistaken in him, I'm sure. But he is so set against him—that may be one reason why I quit going to church. But the minister never comes near—he ought to hunt me up, oughtn't he? I hardly understand." He passed his hand through his hair. "I hardly know what has taken place about me the past

eight months. I have been in a sort of daze. It's my heart. My heart has been terribly out of order. But you've made it whole, my son."

This was spoken with such touching simplicity that dimness came to the young man's eyes. He wondered at the affection his presence had evoked. Why did they like him? That he should love them seemed the most natural thing in the world. But what, he asked himself, was there about him to win their love? Possibly his unconsciousness of charm might have partly met the question.

Lucia murmured: "We are rather unfortunate in our friends, as far as the church is concerned. I have no right to reproach Mr. Glaxton."

Her father corrected her: "Call him Cousin Glaxton, my dear."

"Because," Lucia went on, "Eugene Ware is just as determined to drive away our minister. He is very bitter against him, and indeed against the members of the church. I seem to be his only exception."

John looked around Mr. Warring to scrutinize her countenance. "Who's this Eugene Ware?" he asked abruptly.

She blushed, and for once did not meet his eyes.

Mr. Warring said: "Eugene and Lucia are to be married the first of June."

"You don't mean it!" John exclaimed. "Shall we go in the house? Seems chilly out here."

The next afternoon John sought Virgie Abbottsfield, finding her in the up-stairs living-room, busily sewing. He drew up his chair with a confidential smile. "Sewing the wedding garments—what?"

Virgie had so long been used to social neglect that John's friendship never lost for her the freshness of its charm. She never felt that she should straighten up when he came through the door, or that he was seeing her nose when looking into her eyes.

"Tell me," he continued, "just what sort of a chump is this Eugene Ware."

Virgie kept her gaze upon her needle. "He's good-looking and just the right age for Lucia, and he's the proprietor and owner of the Ware Drygoods Company. The girls consider him the 'catch' of Lagville. There's no other young man so prominent. He belongs to one of the best families, and he has a good deal of money."

"I suppose there's nothing criminal against him?" John suggested, not hopefully.

Virgie opened her eyes, showing a great deal of the whites. "He's at the head of our best set."

"'Our best set'!" John echoed disconsolately. "I wouldn't think Lagville big enough to have two sets in it without crowding one of 'em into the river. But I suppose there never was but one time when everybody belonged to the best family, and that was when Cain and Abel was kids. Just between us, Virgie, what does a fellow do in this burg to pass the time? Of course, I appreciate the opportunity of making church three times a week, but that must leave a good many hours unoccupied."

"We have our Moving Picture Palace," Virgie said brightly.

"Yes, and I'll bet that's where Eugene Ware is sitting himself up while Lucia is doing time at the meeting-house. But I'll put a stop to that."

"How do you mean?"

"I mean, he'll go to church, and he'll swallow that minister while I'm in the city. Lucia is unhappy about him, but I'll lead him right up to the front seat and make him graze on that young minister's discourses."

She shook her head. "Eugene is a very hard man to lead."

"All right; don't say anything to her about it. This is a little secret between you and me. Of course, if she knew he'd been dragged there by force she wouldn't find the sacrifice so acceptable."

"That's all right, Virgie—I know how you feel. But you don't realize how determined I am that Lucia shall be happy. Now, give me a line on this affair, that's a good fellow. All I need to know is this: does Lucy think Eugene Ware a through ticket to happiness with no stop-overs?"

She regarded her needle intently.

"It makes me feel ashamed to talk like

the words to sheet-music, but this is too important to stand on dignity, so I ask in plain words: is she really and truly and forever in love with this—shall I say lobster?"

"One thing I am sure of," Virgie said at last; "the marriage will take place the first of June. Many things may happen before two and a half months pass, but nothing ever happens to change Eugene Ware's mind; and Lucia wouldn't break her word, even if she wanted to."

"If they think everything of each other, of course it ought to come off. All right, then, I'll head the young gentleman up the main aisle of the church and stop the fight against the minister. I guess that is the point of the thorn. And now—another thing. I need your help. It has come to me that I'm not suitably dressed for the scion of a royal house of Lagville. But the governor doesn't notice anything except that he has his boy again, and Lucia is afraid of hurting my feelings by making suggestions.

"It 'll occur to you that I ought to consult my sister in these domestic matters, but I just can't. I want to appear the proper thing, but I can't ask her opinion. See? Of course, it's pride or some other ignoble feeling that makes me want, all the time I'm with her, to keep keyed up to concert pitch. Now, with you, Virgie, I don't know why, but I can let down my e-string and be as comfortable as you please.

"It comes to me that we are going to be the best friends on the river. You've seen how I could talk to you about Eugene Ware and all that. It would choke me if I started it with Lucia. Now, take a good look at me and say what's the matter. My difficulty is that I feel so awfully complete.

"If I knew of anything I needed, I'd go buy it. Yet all the time I can see that your mother is weighing me and finding me nothing but a handwriting on the wall."

For the first time in a long while Virgie laughed aloud. Her mother, who happened to be passing down the hall, looked in and said:

"Mercy, child! How noisy you are! And how you are stooping over! Please sit straighter, Virginia."

Virgie cringed, and Mrs. Abbottsfield passed on.

John urged: "Let's take it right up where we bit off the thread."

She recovered much quicker than was her wont. "My advice is, consult Brother Tredmill—everybody in town calls your minister 'brother,' whether of his church or not. Brother Tredmill will tell you exactly how you should be dressed."

"Oh, I say! Look here: is he a man as well as a minister?"

"Really, John, I want you to consult him; you'll never regret it."

"But wouldn't it be an impertinence to ask him to clothe both the inner and the outer man? No? Then I'll see him this very evening. Now, another thing—the way I express myself. You must understand that I like my way. But your mother doesn't.

"I want to express myself in such a way as to give the password to the best families. Look here: when you and I are together, couldn't you give me a few points? And when there's a crowd about, every time I let out something that I think particularly good when it isn't, couldn't you put up your hand as if to smooth your hair? It might give you the arm-ache the first few days, but I'm quick to get onto all sorts of new curves.

"Will you play my short-stop? You see, I have a part to fill as John Lyle Warring that I've had no chance to rehearse. But if you will sit in the wings with the prompter's book, I know I can work through without falling over the footlights."

Virgie glowed with excitement. Into her drab life something had entered to stir her heart as she had not dreamed it could be stirred. She could not remember she was ugly when he was with her, therefore lost the look of discontent and the slump of indifference that did much to make her aspect forbidding.

"Virgie," he asked abruptly, "do you think I resemble the governor?"

She corrected him: "Father."

"Yes, certainly; him."

"He is so broken," she murmured; "not really old, but old-looking."

"Yes, but did I ever look like him? You never believed from the first that I looked like his picture on the wall."

"I never looked like my mother," Virgie sighed.

"I don't look like that picture. I'm all different. But there's something I *can* get onto—"

Virgie put her hand to her hair, and he laughed, but the next moment grew very serious.

"There's something I mean to accomplish—with your help. I am going to look like that picture before I leave this house—I mean, before I die, you understand. Not the features, that isn't it, but the expression; I want to be like that—a gentleman. Not that I doubt I'm a gentleman, but I want to *show* the gentleman, and show it so unmistakably that I won't have to watch myself doing it.

"You can't see that my hair and eyes and nose and mouth and chin are like those in the picture; neither can I. But I want you one day to be able to say that in spite of the difference, I'm like that picture on the wall. All this, not for my sake, but *his*—and Lucia's."

There was an eagerness in his frank eyes, a wistfulness about his lips, that touched her deeply. He stretched out his hand, and she took it impulsively. "I'm not so sure," she told him, "but there's a little resemblance already."

CHAPTER XII.

SOMETHING HAS HAPPENED.

AS yet the village had not been formally presented to John because his "father" and "sister" wanted him all to themselves, but naturally everybody had heard about the recovered heir and smiled in neighborly fashion on passing the yard-gate. Though he had not been off the place, he had no difficulty, that evening, in finding the boarding-house where the Rev. Harry Tredmill lodged. The landlady knew at first glance who he was because, as she said, he looked like his father, but in reality because he was the only stranger in the village.

She sent him up-stairs where the minister had two rooms, a library with a bedroom in the rear. John found it unnecessary to introduce himself, and was rejoiced to find in his host a man to whom one instinctively opened his heart. Tredmill was young and rather serious-minded, with a rich ministerial atmosphere and somewhat worn-out in his intense desire to uplift a world determined not to be uplifted. One saw clearly enough that there was no affectation in him.

He could not say "Sunday," like other men, for to him it was solely "Sabbath," and his promises were conditioned by consent of the divine will. Many of his forms of speech had been worn smooth from having so often been jingled in ecclesiastical usage, but when he cast them down in exchange somehow they rang true.

Even if he had not been normally of a trustful nature, it would have been impossible to resist John's ingenuous confidence. "You see how it is, Brother Tredmill: nobody at home but women and an old gentleman who's let himself down. All my togs are brand-new, but something's wrong. I want you to go with me early in the morning and fit me out for the race."

"Surely, surely." The minister seemed to understand everything by instinct, to appraise at full value the reasons for John's ignorance of form, to think it natural that he should be consulted rather than one of the family. That was one reason why people liked to confide in the young minister: his sympathetic understanding came to meet them at the door of their reserve.

John warmed to him. "I knew if you were anything like the description Miss Virgie Abbottsfield had painted, we'd get along fine. You're going to find me your right-hand bower at all the Wednesday and Sunday meets.

"Now, that's all right, Brother Tredmill—don't thank me, the pleasure's all mine. I'll be glad to help you along by filling up as much of a pew as I can spread

over. How's your attendance kept up, anyhow? Maybe I can help."

"I regret to say, Brother Warring, the attendance leaves much to be desired. I find it particularly troublesome to get the men and boys. I've toiled day and night—however, it's not for me to speak of my labors. It seems that the young men cannot be induced to help build up the kingdom."

"I'll get 'em there; set your mind on something else."

The minister regarded him not hopefully. "I think I have tried every method of reaching the uninterested."

"I'll herd 'em in. You be thinking what to hand them when I've got 'em bunched together with the bars up. You can get a mob to do almost anything the first time. But if they come again, it's because they want to—see?"

After he had bade him good-by, John turned back from the head of the stairs. "Look here, Brother Tredmill, you and I are going to be friends, and between friends there shouldn't be any gate nailed up in the fence. As anxious as you are to build up your business—why haven't you been to see my governor?"

A slight color stained the thin cheeks, but Tredmill answered with his usual gentleness: "I was turned from the door with orders from your father never to come again. It is an inexplicable thing that he should have taken so violent an antipathy to me that the mere mention of my name sets his weak heart to palpitating dangerously."

"I suppose that's what Mr. Glaxton told you?"

"He verily did. He met me there at the door and later came here to explain the situation. He behaved in a gentlemanly manner, but I could perceive that he is a sadly worldly man—a very, very worldly man."

"You didn't mention this to Lucia?"

"I could not wound her; and it would have been to no purpose."

John slowly went back to the minister's study. "Look here, Brother Tredmill, what do you know about this man Glaxton?"

"Of course," with constraint, "you know he is your father's cousin."

"It seems we can't get out of that. I've examined the Bible files. But that's nothing. There's more solid meat in abusing your relatives than other people, so if you know anything about Glaxton, hand it over."

Tredmill shook his solemn head. "He stays very closely at home—I mean, your father's home—except when abroad on business for your father, who for some time has been able to look after none of his affairs. Mr. Glaxton has been given power of attorney; he directs everything about the place."

John muttered: "And has been given power of conscience, too, apparently." Suddenly he pounced upon a new topic. "What about this Eugene Ware? Don't think strange that I should drag in the family, for you know more about it than I do. A few days ago I didn't know I had it. Is he worthy of Lucia?"

"His reputation is good. I think his tastes are not your sister's tastes; they are very unlike, but I hope they may find true happiness. It is possible that happiness is the easier realized when two people look at it from different life-angles."

John slyly hinted: "Haven't had experience in that line?"

Tredmill flushed and laughed with sudden boyishness. "Not yet—but soon, I hope," he exclaimed, looking like a man who has temporarily emerged from his official capacity.

John grasped his hand. "I wish I could say, 'Here, too.'"

Tredmill confided bashfully: "She's a great friend of your sister's and occasionally visits her for a week or so at a time—she lives in a distant city."

"Is the church willing? I know more about religion than some people imagine. What about the old cats?"

The other's countenance fell. He started to say something, then checked himself. He was too honest to pretend not to understand. At last he admitted: "It is verily a difficult situation."

John fixed him with his bright eye. "What about the choir?"

"Oh!" Tredmill groaned, clasping his head with both hands.

John went home feeling that his hands were full. He must watch Glaxton—the lawyer, cousin though he undoubtedly was, must be a cold and bloodless schemer to have installed himself in the bosom of the family that he might systematically deceive his benefactor. And there was Eugene Ware, evidently a hard-headed, unsympathetic merchant, refusing to accommodate himself to the ardent desires of his betrothed—after marriage he would prove as unyielding as granite. He regretted that Lucia should be engaged to any one. He would have liked to think of her as a sweet, unattached spirit, caring for no one more than she did for him. However, since she had given her heart, it was his brotherly duty to make sure that it had been worthily received.

These two tasks, he told himself, were as important as they were difficult, and in some degree justified the deception practised upon J. L. Warring. However, on reaching home, something had happened to cause him less to seek excuses for impersonating the kidnaped heir than to cling to his rôle from the sheer instinct of self-preservation.

CHAPTER XIII.

SAFE FOR THE PRESENT.

IN the spacious Warring reception-hall he found awaiting him the three women of his new family, all in a high degree of excitement. Any such general change of countenance was enough to arouse fear of discovery; he seemed to breathe danger on the very air, and he braced himself, his determination not to look afraid causing him to overshoot the mark. His manner was debonair as he gazed upon one then upon another, at the same time from intense nervousness balancing himself queerly upon the farthest points of his heels, a feat as difficult as it was void of grace. Sustained thus in all unconsciousness, he made a miraculous presentation that might have caused a stranger to seek above his head for sustaining wires.

Virgie, mindful of her past as prompter, put her hand desperately and very obviously to her hair.

John caught the gesture, and said blankly: "But I haven't said a word."

"Brother," Lucia hastily interposed, "please sit down." She turned to Mrs. Abbottsfield, who was eying John with astonishment. "Let's all sit down, Aunt Hildegarde." Then to John: "Father retired early, and we are exceedingly glad of it, for we've had a strange interview that would have disturbed him dreadfully."

"Strange interview?" repeated John, striving to appear calm, but so certain that Blearstead had been in that hall during his absence that he threw his weight on the back legs of his chair and strove desperately to shift the burden to a single leg. "How do you mean?"

"Two dreadful men were here."

John said to himself: "Not only Blearstead, but Cleek!"

Mrs. Abbottsfield shuddered.

"We never expected," said she, "to be brought into contact with such creatures. John—they were *detectives!*"

John grew a dull red. "What were the villains doing here?"

"Brother," Lucia cried with animation, "you'd have laughed if you could have heard them."

"Would I? Oh, yes, of course I would. Detectives, you say? No doubt they were amusing. What did they have to talk about?"

"They claimed to have traced a young man to this town—and really, he must have come to Lagville the same day you came. As soon as he got off the train he called for a suit-case at the express office and hasn't been seen since. The amusing thing was that they thought you might be that young man."

"No wonder you imagined I'd have laughed to hear that!"

"Yes. At first it was hard to make them understand anything. I had always read that detectives are immensely clever, but these two men must be very poor specimens of their profession. They were determined that you should be that young man! We

had to describe your very clothes to show that you didn't come to Lagville dressed as their escaped prisoner—that's what their young man is, an escaped burglar."

"Where are these blockheads?"

"They were determined to wait here to see you," Lucia cried indignantly. "They showed us pictures of the wretch they're hunting and wanted to know if you looked like them. Of course there wasn't the slightest resemblance.

"At last Aunt Hildegarde showed them father's picture on the wall. She explained that you were the living image of that portrait. Then they said their man didn't look anything like that, and they went away."

"And I told them," Virgie cried, "that although you've traveled about so much, you've never been to Kansas City, for you told us so. The person they are after *lives* in Kansas City with his uncle."

"Virginia," her mother murmured, "your voice is so sharp. Do soften it!"

"Did they fall for what you said?"

Virgie smoothed her hair.

"My meaning was this"—John collected his bewildered wits—"did they accept your statements without reserve?"

Virgie said oracularly: "They did and they didn't."

"Oh, I see," he murmured, compressing his lips in intense thought. "That's a very nice distinction. Where are they now?"

"But, *Virgie!*" Lucia protested. "They were perfectly convinced. They ran from here to catch the train back to Kansas City."

"Virgie," her mother complained, "one never knows how to take you."

"Virgie," John said with gentle desperation, "what do you mean by your 'do' and your 'don't'?"

"They went away," Virgie conceded, "but I thought they looked as if they might come back. I'm hoping they'll find their burglar somewhere else. But if they don't, I believe they'll come here again."

"Let them come," Lucia flashed.

"Yes," John agreed. "I should say it might be a good thing to train Simmons to deal with the scamps. Simmons looks like he could do for a couple of detectives. Just what are they trying to find, anyway?"

"It's a man named John Walters, housebreaker and thief, a terrible desperado, the very one— But I haven't told you about that." She smiled at him with sudden tenderness, and in his joy at the sunshine that danced in her eyes beneath the golden hair his danger suddenly seemed infinitely remote.

"There is so much I haven't told you yet," she went on. "We're so *new* to each other! Anyway, my dearest friend—after Virgie—lives in Kansas City: Alice Klade. You seem to have heard of her."

"For the second I thought I had," he gasped, swallowing hard.

"You read of her in the dreadful newspapers, of course. The man the detectives are looking for is the John Walters who broke into her home less than a week ago. She woke up to find him standing near her bed with, oh, such a terrible look in his eyes!"

"Good Heavens!" John ejaculated. "Is *that* your friend? I mean, the lady. Yes, I read all about it. Very interesting reading matter. But—I say! And you actually *know* her!"

She laughed at his rueful amazement. "We're intimate. You'll find that I know other famous people, if I do live in a little town lost on the river-bank! Poor Alice nearly died from terror right then and there."

"But I didn't gather that he was so dreadful," John protested. "The papers called him the polite burglar."

"You know how the papers distort facts. Alice says he was perfectly frightful. But he went away without murdering her, as she expected. Of course that was polite in him!"

"I think you're pretty hard on him," Virgie objected. "As an abandoned outcast of society, it seems that he behaved rather decently."

John smiled at her somewhat grimly. "It seems to be one of your cases of 'did' and 'didn't.'"

Lucia smiled at him. "Alice is coming on the fifteenth of next month to spend a week." Then she blushed slightly, imag-

ining he would in some way connect the proposed visit with her approaching marriage. She hurried on: "And when she comes we'll have her tell us all about it and minutely describe her uninvited midnight caller."

John started up, looking to right and left, then with a deep breath reseated himself. In answer to their surprised looks he murmured: "I was thinking of going somewhere—but I've concluded to stay where I am."

CHAPTER XIV.

LUCIA IN THE MOONLIGHT.

JOHN planned to stay in Lagville until the day before Alice Klade's visit. This would give him a week to find out whether or not Glaxton was bent upon evil designs. Convinced that the lawyer was a dangerous schemer, it helped to reconcile him to his anomalous position in the household to think of frustrating his schemes, then vanishing just before the arrival of her who must recognize in him her polite burglar.

If he could drive Glaxton away before his escape, doubtless the village would recall the adage that it takes a thief to catch a thief. He would be remembered as a rascal who, after all, was not wholly bad, and this seemed the best he could expect from the verdict of the world. In the mean time he would act as if unmenaced by the slightest danger.

Changes in his dress and manner were astonishing. So scrupulously did he imitate the Rev. Harry Tredmill, with whom much of his spare time was passed, that his tone of voice and at times his very choice of words betrayed the ministerial touch; in the mean time Virgie did much to eliminate slangy phrases of which he was overfond, and unconventional poses involving the pocketing of one's hands. It was like learning a new science, and John pursued it with the same enthusiasm he had devoted to his other studies.

In the seclusion of his room, while breathing in the atmosphere of its refinement, he tried to match himself in thought and outward showing with the books and pictures—the thousand objects that seemed so natural here, but which would have appeared astounding in Blearstead's Eating House.

Hours were spent with his "father" in going over plans bearing upon his career—the launching of big business affairs of which, as soon as possible, he was to be the head. It was all like a fairy tale, and despite his resolution to banish the future from his scheme of things often his heart was wrung when it flashed over him how tremendous must be the other's disappointment when he should vanish into thin air.

A few evenings after the coming of the detectives a reception was given at the Warring mansion in John's honor. It was a great and rare event in Lagville, so long had it been since the millionaire had appeared among his friends. Everything was done to honor the returned heir, whom the village folk received without reserve, first for the sake of his family, then almost from the first moment because of his genial friendliness. He had the magic of rousing spring-memories in the aged and bringing a warm glow to the hearts of the lonely.

The occasion lingered in his memory as a series of pictures of Lucia. First, here was Lucia coming down the stairs to him before the first arrival, so beautifully dressed that she seemed a new wonder with every bit of the old wonder preserved but somehow transfigured; a smiling Lucia, a gloriously radiant Lucia before whom he was very shy.

And when the orchestra from a neighboring town was filling the air with delicious strains to mingle with the murmur of happy voices, the sight of this wonderful Lucia, all creamy white and blue-and-gold, made him unutterably sad. But when later he found her sequestered in a fern-nook with a man he never could appreciate at his real value because he was her accepted lover, John lost his shyness. Afterward, he and Lucia were in that nook—he hardly knew how, except that she had read and helped his wish—and Eugene Ware was gone.

He tried to be to her only a brother, and certainly never once did she regard

him in any other light. But sometimes he wondered—and long after that reception-night he dreamed strange dreams.

His " father " had resumed his old-time habit of spending two afternoon hours in the bank, now with John to bear him company; and he was never prouder than when they set forth for church, Lucia's father in the middle, while Mrs. Abbottsfield and Virgie followed to the corner, where they turned off to their particular denomination. In Lagville, congregations were small, but there were as many denominations to be found as anywhere.

The Rev. Mr. Tredmill could hardly believe his eyes on the second Sunday when a long line of young fellows trooped rather sheepishly down the aisle and filled the front bench which not even the most seasoned attendant could be induced to occupy. He glanced involuntarily toward John, but received no sign from that serious-faced worshiper, nor did the young men once glance back at him.

After the benediction they passed John in the yard as if they had never seen him before, and when Mr. Warring called back the son of one of his old friends to present him to " my boy " they shook hands with solemn ceremony and were " glad to know " each other.

If the acquirement of " good form " was like a course in education, John felt, toward the end of the month, that he was crowned with a diploma by the finality of Lucia's high praise. They were seated on the front steps in the moonlight, where she had been lightly touching the guitar to his many songs, wonderful songs in ragtime that made one's feet twitch without reaching one's brain. He was always urging her to " join in," but she could only shake her head. Impossible as it seemed, she had never heard them.

Suddenly he had an inspiration. " But you're bound to know, ' Hold Me Tight, O Honey-Boy, Hold Me Tight.' When I left, everybody in the best houses and every kid on the streets of Kan—wait, my tongue slipped—in San Francisco was warbling it." But the tremendous success even of " Hold Me Tight " had not caused a ripple on the placid waters of Lagville's musical current, and a deep, sweet silence fell upon them, broken only by the fitful whispering of the chords as Lucia fingered the strings ever so lightly—those same chords which could do duty for ten thousand songs.

Somehow the guitar seemed the voice of the moonlight, while the moonlight became the visible image of Lucia's beautiful youth. The world was bathed in a silver glory, not because a dead world swung high in the sky, but because a young girl sat on the steps, music slipping from under her finger-tips. John felt words forced from his husky throat:

" Lucia, do you really love that Eugene Ware?"

But he would have withheld the question could he have known how the sound of the words would start his heart to violent throbbing.

Her hand fell across the strings and lay very still while a minor vibration whispered plaintively under its weight. Her face lost much of its light, although the moonlight was full upon her hair. A cloud had passed over her spirit. At last she said, " I think so."

" Why?" he inquired somewhat breathlessly.

She shook her head.

" He doesn't like the things you like," John persisted. " He'll never be interested in what interests you. I've been giving him a close study—of course, in a perfectly proper way—and I think I could get my grades on figuring out his sum-total. I wouldn't say a word if I thought you knew your own mind. I hate to see you taking such awful chances. I can't find anything in Eugene Ware but dry-goods. He thinks dry-goods, and he *is* dry-goods. Of course, he makes a living that way—a good one—but what's the use of his living? I mean, if you don't really love him. Lucia, should you ever change your mind about that—that young man, don't keep it to yourself till it's too late."

Such a long silence succeeded these impetuous words that he grew cold. " You're angry with me," he lamented, " and no wonder. But I couldn't help saying it. I had the feeling that it ought to be said,

that nobody else would do it, and that if I lost your confidence it couldn't be helped —I'm not important, anyway. But you are all there is; that's the way I feel about you, Lucia; if you can get my meaning—you're all there *is*. And there's nothing in the world I'd put up a more desperate fight over than your happiness. It's just as I said—to me there isn't anything else *in* the world."

Then she turned to look into his pleading face, and he saw that she was not angry. Presently she began speaking in a soft, hesitating voice utterly unlike her usual crispness of utterance, sweet and deeper with magic music than the strains from the guitar which filled in her brief pauses. "I think I do. It never occurred to me that I really didn't until you asked the question, a little while ago. It wouldn't have seemed that I ought to ask myself after giving my promise. The time for questions was then.

"But I think I do. It might be because—because there wasn't any one else. There are so few people in Lagville—hardly any young men. They go to the city before they're grown, and of course Eugene is above all those stranded here. That's how they seem to me—stranded.

"But Eugene is energetic, and he has made it pay to live in the village. He has enterprise and—you know he is considered very successful. And I haven't had any one here at home to compare him to—until you came."

John groaned. "I wish you had a standard worthy of you to compare him with, so you could see just how high he measures."

"Dear brother, you are so wonderful to me. When I consider the terrible disadvantages you've labored under all your life long—how you've struggled for refinement —it must have been the instinct of race drawing you up—the Warring blood—and how you've kept yourself fine and honorable in all sorts of surroundings—and since you've come here, your genius of fitting into our kind of life—and fitting into our hearts, filling the empty places that were always there before you came.

"When I consider all this, I tell myself I can't expect to meet any one your equal. You are going to be a brilliant man, a man of wide affairs, the man father has yearned for at the head of his business. I can't expect Eugene to be like that—he hasn't your quickness and imagination. And, besides, you're the handsomest boy I ever saw, and the sweetest to all sorts of people.

"I'd have fallen in love with you just from the way you've brightened up poor Virgie; and put heart into our minister; and made a new man of father; and shown me what it means to be alive in this beautiful world. And I know it isn't fair to Eugene to compare him to **you**, for you're like nobody else in the world.

"So I mustn't let myself get dissatisfied. My word is given, and you must help me to believe that it cannot be broken. I must believe that all is for the best."

Her words had sunk so deep in his heart that they carried all power of speech below the surface. Presently he rallied with: "Let's hope so. That's the sort of cold comfort I try to give myself when I think of my own engagement."

"Oh!" She gave a sharp exclamation and dropped the guitar. "Oh!" she gasped again. "I'm afraid it's broken."

"No—just one of the heart-strings." He replaced it gently upon her knees.

Her head was turned aside, so all he could catch was the silver sheen on the glowing hair.

"But what did you mean?" she faltered.

"There's a girl up the river I think a good deal of, and she likes me. Her father's a pretty hard case—up to any kind of rascality as a side line, but his main business is fishing. However, Bettie's an awfully nice girl, and pretty, too. Yes, prettier than just pretty. I wish you could see her running along the river-beach, bareheaded and barefooted—that's poetry, Lucia.

"Lots of people think they don't like poetry, but that means only that they don't care to read it. When you can look at it, why, it's different. A fellow may not be a Shakespeare, but he couldn't help feeling an ode or a lyric of some sort on seeing

Bettie wading in after the boat, with the water glistening on her."

Lucia protested vehemently: "But you could never marry a girl of *that* sort. She wouldn't know how to adapt herself. And a father such as you describe! Oh, John, surely you are not bound to her?"

"We are not precisely engaged, unless a letter I left with her does the work. But we've been chums for years. Her mother was my—I mean she was always good to me. She's the only girl I ever kissed when I said good-by. Well, of course, she isn't in your class, but it's not fair to compare her to you.

"I don't mind saying I've never seen a girl, and never expect to see one, who wouldn't go into eclipse every time you smiled. I'll admit right now that my wife can never be the woman my sister is."

She clasped his hand. "But I don't want to think of your having a wife at all," with a sigh. "Why not be satisfied just as you are? That's the way I'll always like you best." She rose with sudden energy. "It's getting late. I'm going to tell you good-by."

Before he could rise she stooped over him, resting one hand upon his shoulder. "I want you to break your record, John," she said with a sudden flashing, teasing smile. "Bettie mustn't continue to be the only girl you ever kissed when you said good-by."

John rose with a laugh and patted her hand.

"If I never marry, may I come to live with you and Eugene?" he asked lightly.

She did not respond to his laugh, for it lacked contagious quality, and they parted rather awkwardly without the good-by kiss.

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.

Samson—1920 Model

by Henry Vance

THE Billikins were in the dumps, having been victims of an elongated losing streak that ran into weeks. It seemed that they were on their way to a record for losing games in consecutive fashion, and each member of the ill-fated club wore a face as long as theatrical jumps of the old days, and went about baseball duties accompanied by an ever-present grouch. Bill Joiner, a patient soul withal, and usually recognized as a big, good-natured chap, a prince of a fellow, had also joined the crape-hangers' union, due to the persistent pursuit of the hoodoo from Jonah land, and had reached the point of cracking under the strain.

Bill had guided the destinies of the Billikin ball club for a quartet of tumultuous campaigns, and had always succeeded in coming through with colors flying in each crisis confronting him. But throughout this presidential term as general misso of

the Billikin forces he had never experienced as tough breaks as now.

He and his hopeless hopefuls were returning *a la* trolley on this particular morning, from a forenoon session at the ball park. Bill had waxed warm beneath the neckband at this conclave, and had spoken profanity more fluently than ever before in his lengthy career. During this curtain lecture sulfurious sentences surcharged with sarcasm had fallen from his lips. Without mincing words, he had informed members of the Billikin outfit that they were just about as rotten a galaxy of ball-players as had ever been assembled on a minor league pay-roll. Bill gazed out of the window as the car slowly made progress toward town. He was in a disgruntled frame of mind, and with face wreathed in gloom, he looked like an appropriate subject for grand march leader at the annual undertakers' ball.

"Something's got to be done, and it must be pulled off in double-play order," he confided with emphasis to Bronk Madden, veteran catcher of the outfit, his seat partner.

"You spoke a mouthful then," replied Bronk. "If this here ball club don't show a change for the better, we're going to finish about one thousand feet below sea level."

A few blocks of unbroken silence.

Then the manager of the Billikins, unable to drop the subject for a greater length of time, leaned over toward his catcher and counselor, and in whispered but earnest tones, confided:

"Bronk, my back's to the wall. We've got to get out of this rut or they'll have all of us jailed for obtaining money under false pretenses. I pulled something to-day that's always been strictly against my rule, but I did it as a last resort."

"Name it," the back-stop demanded with a show of interest and a querulous look in his eye.

The manager of the Billikins explained that he had received a letter from a hick pitcher who was seeking a job.

"This bloke admits he's the best that ever came strolling down the boulevard. To read that letter you'd think he had more steam than a circus caliope. It would be funny if it wasn't tragic," explained Joiner.

"Well, what's the plot?" queried Bronk.

"Drowning guys grab at straws, and I guess I'm in a drowning fix, so far as this ball club is concerned."

"You mean you're going to give this rube a trial?"

"Why not? I got to do something. I'm going as nutty as a Lady Baltimore cake if this slump keeps up."

"And you've made up your mind to bring this furrow phenom to town?"

"Exactly."

In a voice laden, with sarcasm, Bronk asked: "Well, when does this Christy Alexander Johnson person cast anchor in our beloved municipality?"

"He'll get in about noon to-day," explained this troubled pilot, "and I got to get him tried out and see if he has got any stuff before the club officials get wise. If they knew how desperate I am, or that I was running in a knight of the crossroads on 'em, I'd be wearing tinware decorations, and receive a little slip of paper with the color scheme of pink carried out."

"And you want me to keep mum about this Horace of the Haymow person, and not reveal his identity or address?"

"That's the dope, Bronk. You were always good at keeping a secret."

"You tell 'em while I pat my foot. I'll be as silent as the hot towel victim in a barber's chair."

The car had reached the business section, and Bronk made his exit, flinging back as he went: "Luck to you, Bill; anything to double-cross this jinx and get it off our trail."

II.

THE noon accommodation crept into town two hours behind schedule. Among the passengers was a male being who had exhausted his vocabulary so far as profanity was concerned in giving vent to his wrath.

Because of his impatience and disgust over the slow progress, Theopolis Higgins had roamed from one end of the train to the other several times over. As the minutes accumulated, and his vehicle emulated

in true style members of the snail family, and plowed farther and farther behind its schedule, his wrath increased. He was the living picture of anxiety, and a coat of gloom several inches thick clothed his rustic countenance.

Shortly after 2 P.M., however, the recalcitrant accommodation steamed into the Union Station and parked under the shed. Theopolis Higgins bounded from the platform like a rifle shot even before a full stop had been negotiated, and looked wildly around in an attempt to get his bearings. Of a sudden he shoved himself in high and cantered up the street at a gait that would have caused the late and lamented Daniel Patch to turn green with envy.

"Which car do you take to get to the ball park?" breathlessly shouted the wild-eyed Theopolis into the ears of a policeman.

The blue-coat lazily viewed the perspiring Mr. Higgins and replied with a drawl:

"You can catch her right here, mister; but if you'll only keep up that stride, which brought you up against me, you're sure to beat it out to the old ball game with room to spare."

Ignoring the cop's attempt to josh him, Theopolis paced back and forth on the walk with all the restlessness of a circus leopard in its cage. Finally, however, the trolley hove into view and the impatient one boarded it with a jump.

The Billikins were taking their batting practise. There was no such thing as pep to the proceedings. The frequent bobbles brought forth an avalanche of jeers and boos from the early arrivals.

Local fans displayed a tendency to ride every player on the club, making no exception of honest Bill Joiner, who had rendered such valiant services in campaigns agone.

Bill's four-year record as manager was one that any man would be proud to look back upon. He had won one pennant, and boasted with a just degree of satisfaction that he had not finished in the hated second division since taking over the managerial reins.

Still baseball fans do not judge a man by his past performances; neither do they make allowances for same. As a rule the average species of baseball bug lives in the present and finds it easy to forget.

Heinie Jantzen, chief of the Coyotes, opponents of the home club for the day, had just directed a stinging remark to Joiner.

"Made any plans for next year, Bill?" he sarcastically asked.

"Nope," replied Joiner in good-natured tones. "I happen to be still plugging along on the pennant chase this present year."

"Put that in the fat chance column," prodded Jantzen. "Your ball club looks like a bunch of old women. You've got just about as much chance to beat us to-day as a drummer has of selling an overcoat line in Hades."

Bill treated the last slurring remark with silence. He had grown sick and tired of the continual ragging of the opposition, and the incessant and innumerable gibes of the home-town fans.

Bronk Madden strolled by.

"Looks like your rube wonder has been lost in the shuffle, don't it?" he remarked.

"Can't figure it out," mournfully responded Bill. "I sent him transportation, and that's more than I've ever done for any rookie since I been handling ball clubs."

"Maybe he's got cold feet."

"Don't let that thought contaminate your belfry. You never lamped that letter he wrote me. It ain't in that guy to get cold feet. Oh, how he does hate himself! Still, if he should happen to blow in here before the game, I'm going to work him to-day. Looks foolish, I know, but we got to do something. These Coyotes got our number, and we might as well shoot this bird in and get the agony over with. Them wolves in the bleachers won't have no comeback at me, for we hit the trail in the morning on a road trip."

"Yep," answered Madden, "the guy what invented road trips should be voted a medal. He certainly was the ball-player's friend, for if a bloke on a losing club had to play at home day in and day out all season, he might as well go jump in the

lake or buy himself four-bits' worth of bichloride sandwiches."

III.

A FACE, gorgeously bedecked in a flowing pair of luxuriant red whiskers, peered through the doorway of the Billikin clubhouse underneath the grand stand.

"I'm looking for Mr. Bill Joiner," said the owner of the facial foliage.

"Why look further? I'm what's left of him," disconsolately replied the Billikin manager as he hovered over the little gas-stove, seeking to steam up his ancient and creaking muscles prior to going on the lot and entering the game.

"Pleased to meet you, Mr. Joiner."

With this greeting the awkward giant stepped forward and grasped the puzzled pilot by the hand, his viselike grip and hearty shake leaving Bill very much the worse for wear.

"And who have I the pleasure of addressing?" questioned Joiner wth mock formality.

"Oh, me? Why, brother, I'm your new pitcher, Theopolis Higgins!"

Before Bill could recover from the shock the gawky Mr. Higgins was literally jumping into a uniform. This task accomplished, he strode forth to the field of conquest, the startled manager having preceded him to the open air, which after his recent jolt he felt he sadly needed.

Ten minutes later the manager of the Billikins took Bronk Madden by the arm and pulled him aside.

"Has he got anything, Bronk?" Bill's tone was anxious.

"Say, Bill, that rube must have absconded with all the smoke there was in Pittsburgh. Got a good hook, too. Looks like one of them birds with a million-dollar arm for an asset and a jitney brain as a liability. But you ain't by no means going to work him to-day, until he gets that shrubbery scraped off his face, are you?"

"Got to, Bronk; he's our only hope. And sink or swim, in the box he goes right now."

The umpire ambled in front of the stand, cap in hand. The sun's rays hit his shining bald head, and the reflection of the peeled-onion pate sent a glare into the stands. Switching his tobacco cud to the port-side jaw, the arbiter announced with pomp and gusto:

"Battreeze for to-day's game: Home team, Higgins and Madden. Visitors, Bagby and Wallace. Play ball!"

A tidal wave of curiosity swept over the stands, and a flood of queries were forthcoming following the announcement of the referee.

"Who's this Higgins?" chorused the bug colony.

"De boss done rung a new one in on us," opined a male being, with a dress-suit complexion who occupied a vantage point in that section of the bleachers referred to by ball-players as "the coal-pile."

There was a hush, probably a couple of them, as the lanky rube strode awkwardly toward the pitcher's box.

"Go get the lawn-mower," jeered the bugs.

"No use to do that," laughed Jantzen of the Coyotes. "We gonna knock enough line drives his way to-day to trim them whiskers off at the roots."

The embarrassed Mr. Higgins turned as red of complexion as the tail-lights of a motor-car.

Bronk Madden noted the nervousness of his battery mate, and saw the crimson blush mount his cheeks. He motioned him plateward for a pre-game conference, and in order that he might give him a reassuring pat on the back.

"Don't let 'em get your angora," advised Bronk. "Ain't no use to get peeved about them insults to your spinach."

"Well," drawled the rube, "I don't know as they ought to bring anything personal into the game about my whiskers. Fellow can't help but be a little bit flabbergasted about it. But as far as getting my goat's concerned, they'll have a whole crate more of thinks coming on that. These here Coyotes won't be able to do a thing to me, brother. When I cut loose that fast one of mine, I'll have 'em thinking I rung in a golf ball on 'em, it 'll look so little crossing the plate."

The game began, and at the conclusion of the fourth inning spectators of the thrilling contest, members of the Coyote outfit, and the team-mates of the rube, all realized that they were witnessing a pitching exhibition by a man who had carloads of stuff on the ball, and who seemed perfectly schooled in the wizardry of the national sport.

Through six innings, in fact, Billikin baseball enthusiasts witnessed the prize battle of the season. The Coyotes were helpless before the dazzling offerings of the rube. Bagby, of the opposition, did not have a great deal on the ball, it is true, but the home clan had been in the throes of that dread and usually fatal disease, slumpitis, for such a lengthy period, and had entered the game under such doubtful conditions they had not really become wholly cognizant of the fact that they might possibly win a ball game.

Up to the seventh a runless tie had been chalked by the scorer. Scintillating plays, shoe-string stabs, and brilliant box work amazed the fans, and they ceased their barrage of jeers anent the crimson-hued whiskers.

In the latter half of the seventh, Clancy, for the Billikins, beat out an infield tap as a starter. The next two men who advanced to the plate were retired in order, however, with no advance to the runner. With two gone, Bronk Madden ambled to the plate.

Bronk bore the reputation of being the best waiter in the entire circuit. He stalled through a period and finally pan-handled the exasperated pitcher for a complimentary ticket to first.

This walk placed two men on the paths, and Theopolis Higgins appeared with bat on shoulder, his noble facial hirsute flowing in the summer breeze. Bill Joiner would probably have derricked Mr. Higgins at this juncture to send in a pinch-hitter, but in view of the fact that the rube had pitched the only real brand of ball seen in weeks, and because all batting orbs on the Billikin club were in total eclipse, he allowed his new find to hit.

None of the Billikins had ever been first-ball hitters, and employing the time-worn custom of opposing pitchers, when facing the Billikins, Bagby sent the first offering straight down the groove.

The gawky gent from the rural districts saw the pellet grooveward bound, braced himself and swung with all his might. They stopped him at third, but before the ball had been retrieved and relayed to the infield, two Billikin runners had crossed the pan and a couple of markers bedecked the scoreboard.

The rube held them for the two remaining innings in the palm of his hand, and the Billikins got from under the tenacious jinx at last, winning the gruelling battle by a 2-0 score.

Bill Joiner was overjoyed. It was the first time he had smiled in weeks. And Bronk Madden, despite his thirty-odd years, raced for the showers with all the pep and vim of a youngster.

The rube stood aside in the clubhouse, very much like a bashful schoolboy, as he drank in the words of praise on his good work. The laurel-wreath stuff made him happy from his tousled head to his bunioned toes.

"Buddy," Bronk Madden remarked, "I got to hand it to you; some stuff you had on the old apple to-day. As a agate chunker, you're all to the mustard and then a fraction."

The only rejoinder forthcoming was:

"Dog-gone it, brother, I'm for the way you got of making them there smoke balls pop in that pad. When the old pill pops in there thataway, it gives a guy the old confidence like mother used to make."

The evening following the Billikins' long-delayed victory, several members of Bill Joiner's ball club assembled at Mike's place. They had enjoyed the past hour or so immensely, having been successful in starting the rube's tongue wagging for the first time.

Suddenly, however, Theopolis Higgins bade his companions farewell. "Good night, boys, I got to be vacating," he said, and he started to leave the gathering.

"What's the hurry? Where's the fire?" asked Johnny Clancy, who had been one of the promoters of the kidding bee.

"Going to the barber-shop and get some

of these whiskers chopped off," dolefully responded the rube.

Clancy's face registered counterfeit seriousness. This man liked his little joke and was forever prodding members of the Billikin outfit. His pals noted the wink-signal from his mischievous eye, and they gathered around to ascertain what Johnny would perpetrate on the unsuspecting delegate from the rural districts.

"What's the big idea?" he queried.

"Well, bo, the folks what goes out to the pastime is getting too much fun out of these here whiskers. With me it ain't no laughing matter. I realize that a fellow can't hold down a pitching job and be fighting and busting some guy what had paid admission into the park all at the same time. So I've decided to have them amputated and pass up the temptation."

"I think you're making a mistake," rejoined Clancy.

"How's that, brother?" innocently interrogated the rube.

"Well, it's this way," continued Clancy shamelessly, "you've always pitched with them whiskers on, ain't you?"

"Correctest thing in the world."

"Well, I was just thinking back yonder in the old Biblical days they was a guy named Samson what had a strong-man act. You recollect this Samson person, don't you?"

"Yep, but what's that got to do with me?"

"Well, this gazabo Samson was the strongest bloke in his league. He was standing 'em on their heads and knocking 'em dead all over the country. He could muscle out a pianer with his left arm and do a jazz on the ukelele with the other hand all at the same time. This boy Samp had a Paderewski head of hair and he knew that them lengthy and bushy locks gave him his horse-power. Unfortunately, the missus stole his signals and got hep to where all that strength was coming from.

"Samp had worked pretty hard one day, playing a matinée and had gone home to take a little nap on the davynette. Samp was a simp in domestic matters and didn't realize that friend wife would double-cross him if she ever got the chance. He thought he was ace-high with the missus, and didn't dream that she had sold out to the opposish. Well, he's all fagged out, just like a guy what has pitched a double-header, and he kels over on the sofy and gets to sawing logs.

"Then the missus gets in her dirty work. She reaches in the machine drawer, gets the buttonhole scissors and haggles off them locks while Samp is asleep at the switch and snoring, with the muffler wide open. When Samp wakes up he's so weak he couldn't have lifted a watch. And I was just thinking—"

"You was thinking which?" breathlessly queried the rube.

"Don't you get the drift, or is that dome of yours solid concrete? You say you have always pitched with them whiskers on. Well, haven't you always got by? Now, you might be like Samp. Cut off them whiskers and you might not be able to break the cuticle of a cocoanut custard. Do you get me?"

The rube's face brightened.

"Brother, you should have been a lawyer. That's pretty good dope you got, and I'll be horn-swoggled if I don't let these whiskers stay on. Might lose my stuff, for a fact. Besides, if the folks back home was to see my picture in the papers with my whiskers off they'd swear it wasn't me."

And solely due to this convincing argument, the brain-child of a practical joker who had found it difficult to keep a straight face while outlining the ridiculous scheme, the rube voted to cling to the facial vegetation.

After he had departed the boys had a good laugh over Clancy's little joke, but Clancy cautioned them never to give him away.

"That big bloke would kill me if he ever found out that I had made a fall guy out of him," he explained.

The addition of a slugging outfielder, a bolstering at first base and the acquisition of the rube to the pitching staff, made an entirely new team out of the Billikins.

Having discarded the jinx and won a few games, the same thing happened to Bill Joiner's club that can happen and does hap-

pen to any baseball clan. By shaking the slump and getting their share of the breaks they suddenly emerged from a hopeless tail-ender to one of the most feared clubs in the league.

And so, the season wore on, the Billikins gradually ascending the percentage table, regaining lost prestige and commanding the respect of all competitors. Theopolis Higgins went about establishing himself as a fixture in rapid fire fashion and soon proved that he was the star slabber of the Joiner aggregation.

He and his inseparable whiskers were famed over the entire circuit, the rube clinging tenaciously to the superstition that his hirsute appendages were responsible for his effectiveness. A number of Billikins knew of this ridiculous belief, but they had never breathed it outside their own camp.

Shut-outs were getting to be commonplace affairs with the lanky boy from the rural districts. His eccentricities made good copy for the scribes and Bill Joiner became aware of the fact that he had not only acquired the services of a man who was pitching him pennantward, but who was a drawing-card of the highest caliber as well.

IV.

THE campaign was scheduled to close the early part of September and the Billikins had gradually climbed to within a few points of their hated rivals, the Coyotes. The last week of the campaign was at hand.

The Coyotes had everything in their favor, however. They possessed a slight lead and were booked at home for the remainder of the season, while the clan of Bill Joiner would be forced to face the handicap of battling on strange lots, with the home-town rooters—alway a big asset to any ball team—not among those present.

Tension was at a high pitch when the Billikins reached the home of the Coyotes for the final series of the season. With three games scheduled as a grand finale to the bitter fight, the fast-moving Billikins had a chance of snatching the pennant from the hated foe. If they could take two out of three the bunting would come into their possession and they would be hailed champs of the league.

Bill Joiner and his right-hand ma Bronk Madden, held a council of war on th train en route to Coyoteville and at th conclave the decision was reached to sta their all on the rube.

"We'll work him in the first game," sa Joiner, "and if he can get through th with a win, he ought to be able to co back for the grand finale and the knoc out blow."

"Easiest thing in the world," repli Madden. "Why, that bloke gets bett the more you work him. He certainly mu have chalked up absent the day they gi out sore arms, for to my certain knowled he ain't had a kink in his lunch-hook sin he joined this club."

True to trust, Theopolis strong-armed h way to victory in that initial fracas. H breezed through to a triumph with room spare.

The next day rain halted the proceedings, and Heinie Jantzen's face looked as gloomy as the skies. The rube had beaten his club with such ease in the first battle and had proved so invincible to the local hitters that Jantzen felt that he had but little chance in the final game unless something of an extraordinary nature could be made to happen.

He suddenly remembered that Jimmy Boyle had been pushed out of a pitching berth on the Billikins staff when the rube had made good. Unable to land a job in mid-season, the cast-off pitcher had returned to his home town, Coyoteville. Remembering these things, Jantzen sent for Boyle, planning to cross-examine the disgruntled one in an effort to ascertain the rube's weak spot.

Jimmy had been present but a few minutes at the conference when he yielded some information that caused the hawk-eyed Heinie to smile wickedly.

"You say he actually believes them pesky whiskers are responsible for his good work?" he queried.

"Not a doubt about it. I was in the bunch that night when Clancy sprang this Samson rot and the poor nut grabbed hook, line, sinker, and all."

"Well, that settles it," rasped Jantzen with emphasis.

V.

WHEN approached on the subject Harrison Sudduth, sleuth of the town and principal in many shady transactions as well, remarked:

"Of course, I wouldn't break the law for anybody, or nothing like that, but fifty dollars is fifty dollars. Besides, a man ought to be public spirited enough to do 'most anything to help his home town win a pennant, just for civic pride's sake, if for nothing else.

And so it happened before the cold gray dawn heralded the coming of a new day, and under cover of darkness happenings of a startling nature took place within the confines of the Hotel Hamlin. Had his movements not been clothed in secrecy, Sleuth Sudduth could have been seen emerging from room 346, a hank of pulley rope dangling from his shoulders and also carrying a pair of shears.

Reporting to the headquarters of Heinie Jantzen, he reported the success of his mission, collected half a hundred iron men, and vanished.

VI.

MEMBERS of the Billikin outfit, possessing knowledge that a bonus would be given them if the flag was captured, spent the forenoon hours planning an attack and discussing an offensive. Many of them noted that the rube was not in evidence, but in the excitement they forgot to make inquiries.

The Coyotes went about town with a confident air, hurled threats at the opposition when they encountered any of the Billikin members and actually had the audacity to place bets openly that they would emerge winners from the final game of the season.

At lunch time the rube was still conspicuous by his absence. Members of the team fired questions at Bill Joiner, who answered that the rube was in his room.

"I told him to keep away from the mob and get all the rest he could," lied Joiner.

But, despite his caution and his attempt to appear unconcerned and at ease, this weather-beaten pilot of many campaigns could not conceal a worried look.

Each team took batting and fielding practise before the biggest crowd that had ever packed into the park.

It was only a few minutes before play was scheduled to start and still Theopolis Higgins had not appeared on the scene. Harper was warming up for the Billikins, and Bill Joiner was sitting in the dugout, head bent almost to his knees, holding his throbbing dome in the palms of his hands.

Every Billikin was plainly worried, with the exception of Bronk Madden. It seemed they had a premonition that something of an ominous nature was in the offing. They could not fathom the continued absence of the rube, and with each moment their anxiety increased. As for the wise Madden, he wore a knowing expression, went through the practise with a mammoth smile and assured his teammates that everything was all right.

Presently he walked over to the dugout and, looking at the worried Mr. Joiner, sarcastically jeered:

"Oh, come out of the trance, Bill. You look like the ragged end of a misspent life. Cheer up or they'll be electing you president of the crape-hangers' union on the Bolshevik ticket."

The perturbed Mr. Joiner was not in a conversational mood, however, and he retained his dejected pose without rejoinder.

The umpire stepped over to the Billikin bench to learn the batteries.

"What 'll I tell him?" appealed Joiner, with a groan.

"Tell him it's a nice day, and that you hope his folks are the same," grinned Bronk.

"Cut the comedy," snapped Joiner. "Who will I tell him the battery will be?"

"Tell him Higgins and Madden, just like we agreed on," replied the veteran catcher.

The umpire walked in front of the stands, cap in one hand and chest-protector in the other, assuming a senatorial manner as he stood before the mighty gathering, preparatory to conveying the all-important news as to the selection of pitchers and catchers for the contest of contests.

There was a hush over the assemblage.

It was a tense moment. Then, the grizzled "ump" cleared his throat, his voice penetrating through the stillness. It had gone the rounds that the celebrated rube, for some reason, would not work that final game.

"Battreeze for to-day's game," shouted Bill Kerin. "For the home team, Bagby and Wallace. For the visitors, Higgins and Madden!"

"Great gosh!" exploded Heinie Jantzen. "The poor old rube is going to die game, is he? Well, by the holy mackerel, he'll be sorry for it."

"Never be able to pull it off," opined another Coyote. "Even if he hasn't lost his stuff, the loss of them pet whiskers will get the fans on his neck till he can't stand it."

The Coyotes took the field as full of pepper as a bowl of chili. Bagby shot over the four fast ones and the game was on.

Billikin players, still possessing the vague feeling that all was not as it should be, didn't enter the contest with the spirit and dash evident in the past few games. There was something lacking, and with little encouragement from the home-bench in the way of chatter and noise, the first three men to bat were retired in one-two-three order.

Bill Joiner looked like a cowering fugitive from justice. With three men gone and the Billikins due to take the field, Theopolis Higgins was still missing. The sorrowful Mr. Joiner huddled on the bench near the water-cooler entirely weighted down by gobs of gloom.

Billikin players ambled silently into their positions with about as much pep as is displayed by a graduate pallbearer. The pitcher's box was empty.

Umpire Kerin fidgeted nervously, switched his tobacco-cud to the port-side jaw, spat upon the ground, brought his little whisk-broom into play and otherwise stalled for time. He looked askance at Bill Joiner.

Bill, however, was unconscious of the questioning glance. It was about the most miserable moment the Billikin boss had ever experienced. If he had obeyed impulses he would have darted away from the park as fast as his feet could have carried him and retired from baseball forthwith.

"Play ball!" shouted the judge of play, his patience exhausted.

Bronk Madden, who apparently had been enjoying the predicament of his club, broke into immediate action and gave a shrill whistle.

A war whoop sounded from the clubhouse of the visitors, and Theopolis Higgins trotted into view, his flowing red beard glistening in the sun.

"What the h—" ejaculated Heinie Jantzen, losing fully ninety per cent of his equilibrium over this shock.

No doubt about it—there were those crimson whiskers waving majestically in the summer breeze, accompanying their famous owner into the pitcher's box.

The delegation of rooters from Billikinville gave a mighty cheer while all the starch and pep of the Coyote crew vanished. They went about their tasks like men in a trance.

The Coyotes, crestfallen by the turn of affairs, they proved dubs on the bases and unreliable on the defense. And so the game wore on.

The rube didn't have a great assortment of stuff on this eventful afternoon, but fortunately for him he didn't need a great amount of effectiveness in this, the deciding, crucial contest of the season. The Coyotes, it seemed, were beaten from that first surprise appearance of the rube with whiskers intact, and they never resumed the dash and vim shown at the start of the game.

The count stood 6 to 2 in the Billikins's favor at the beginning of the last half of the ninth. The rube disposed of the first two men easily, but following this he suddenly wabbled in his control. Two walks and a hit batter crowded the runways and left the bases playing to capacity.

Indian Guyon was at bat and the stands went wild, for the redskin was noted as one of the most timely hitters in the circuit. For just a moment Mr. Higgins lost his head and had one going down the groove. Guyon drove the pellet to the outskirts of leftfield for three bags, and a trio of runners scampered across the rubber.

This sudden prank of fate made the count

5—6, with a man on third and the leader of the Coyotes, Heinie Jantzen, advancing to the plate. Just one little single was needed to tie the score. And, verily, it looked like the rube had staged an ascension.

The Coyote manager glared at the gawky Mr. Higgins.

The occupant of the pitcher's box sent a menacing grin plateward in return.

Cutting loose all the steam that strong right arm possessed, the rube threw two strikes past the irate boss of the opposition. Jantzen was frothing at the mouth by this time and was vehemently pounding the plate with his bat. To add insult to injury Theopolis unwound and hooked the third strike over the plate for the end of the game, for Jantzen didn't offer at the deceptive shoot, and was called out on strikes.

The home-town patriots were sick. Nausea swept over every member of the Coyote crew. The delegation of rooters from Billikinville went wild. They swarmed onto the field and placed the happy Mr. Higgins upon their shoulders. It was the most joyous moment of his short but eventful career. Even Bill Joiner had come back to life and romped in this impromptu celebration like a kid.

That night the lobby of the Hotel Hamlin presented a rather deserted appearance. Out-of-town fans from near-by municipalities had come in for a celebration, in the event the Coyotes had won. It had proven a funeral instead.

Theopolis Higgins and Bronk Madden stood talking in low tones. A trio of the ill-fated Coyote club strolled in and sought out the rube and Madden. They congratulated the gent from the rural districts on his triumph.

"But, believe me, you had a narrow escape," remarked Matty McHenry, a Coyote gardener.

"Meaning which?" questioned the rube.

"Well, I ain't calling no names, but a certain member of my ball club framed up to play a little joke on you last night. He was going to have them whiskers of yours chopped off."

"Do tell!" exclaimed the rube with fake innocence.

"Yes, and the funny part of the whole business is that some guy in this hotel did lose his whiskers last night."

"I know it," stated the rube with emphasis.

"How did you know so much about it?"

"Because I'm the guy what lost his whiskers, that's why."

"Fan me with a brick!" muttered McHenry. "But, by the great horn-spoon, you've still got 'em on!"

"Surest thing what is," replied the rube. "They can't double-cross me and my buddy, Bronk Madden. I picked up them whiskers off'n the floor one by one, took them to a costumer and he fixed 'em on me with spirit gum."

McHenry looked blankly at his two comrades. They were also wild-eyed and groping for support.

And grinning, the rube picked up his grip, flinging back as he went:

"We win by a hair, boys."

THE DREAMER

SHE dreamed of beauty, though she moved
In home's gray round of toil;
She saw the years with searing touch
Make life and love their spoil.

But with her dreams she wrought a change
So mystical and fine
That life was beautiful to live
And love itself divine!

Arthur Wallace Peach.

Latitudes of Madness

by Magda Leigh

Author of "The Derelict," etc.

CHAPTER I.

JUNK.

EVEN before his hands were entirely healed of the terrible burns received at the time of the steam-schooner Pinto's fatal plunge against the Coos Bay jetty, Larry MacGregor, newly rated as chief engineer of the S. S. Arguello, was taken aboard his ship and introduced to the chamber of horrors which served her as engine-room.

If there was a pipe or tube that didn't have blisters or pits; if there was a pump that functioned smoothly; if there was a bit of gear that hadn't been patched or replaced by any old spare part, Larry had still to find it. Her furnace crowns were down and showed signs of being burnt. Her tubes were leaking so that her back connections were full of salt and scale, requiring entire new tubes in many cases. Many of her tubes had been rolled and rerolled so many times that they would not stand rerolling any more, and were very thin in the tube sheets.

It took Larry the shortest time possible to understand why the inspectors of hulls and boilers in San Francisco had condemned the Arguello. The only thing Larry could not grasp was why she had been purchased by any one—even by a Chinaman. (Larry's discourse with the Oriental had been confined to a pidgin English tête-à-tête across the counter of an odoriferous laundry on lower Sacramento Street. He is scarcely to be blamed for his opinion of the new republic.)

"You gotta learn her by heart," the ex-chief of the ship had told him. "You got-ta know every damn sizzling piece of her in'ards by its first name—aye, its pet name! You gotta blarney her, coax her, pray to her to hold together and go—and then you're lucky if the whole works don't naturally fall on your shoulder and die of broken parts some fine day!

"Man, you have courage to go out in her after she's stripped of her wireless—which she will be, of course!"

"Stripped of her wireless? They can't do that to her. It's unlawful."

"Oh, no!" The ex-chief grinned. "They'll cut down the crew so they won't have more'n fifty men. The law compels wireless only when a ship carries fifty men or more, son!"

MacGregor considered this a moment. Finally he remarked: "Oh, well! Wireless never helped me out o' my troubles before. Guess I can manage without it this time."

"You're not ferry-boating up and down the coast, now, MacGregor!" the ex-chief sternly reminded him. MacGregor was too young, he told himself. To make such a lad chief was scandalous!

"Twin-screw!" Larry murmured, not heeding the other's rebuke. "Think of it—after these lousy little steam-schooners!"

"Twin devils!" the other man grunted. "Oh, you'll love her when you've nursed her a week or two! You'll be wishing

she'd sink and be done with it—the rotten rattle-trap!"

"Not till we fetch Hong-Kong!" MacGregor replied dreamily. "I've a mind to see the Chinese women. 'Tis said they're beauties of a kind, in their little trousers and coats of fine stuffs. I'm believin' it. There's a pretty Chink girl up near Stockton Street on Clay—"

"Women!" the ex-chief snorted. "It isn't women you'll be dreaming about, my boy! This old girl is all the trouble you'll be wanting. Come along, now, while I explain the particular disease she suffers from in her starboard crank shaft!"

And Larry had proceeded to "meet up" with another sore spot in his future charge.

By the time the Arguello cleared the Heads and had dropped the Farallones astern, MacGregor had, catalogued in his brain, every bit of junk with which her machinery was patched. The confidence he had displayed while the Arguello still clung fast with bow and stern hawsers to that part of California known as Pier 62, San Francisco, was suddenly overshadowed by an acute attack of stage-fright. He realized that, after all, he was very young for such a responsibility.

The Arguello was under way, bound for China, and the next signal for breathing space would happen when they sighted Makapuu Point on the Island of Oahu, and eased up for the approaching comfort of a two-day stop in Honolulu harbor.

Twenty-one hundred miles—and Larry was to be the doctor in charge of this very sick patient. And after that respite in Honolulu, another four thousand eight hundred and fifty-seven miles to the Kowloon docks in Hong-Kong.

Larry had been far too busy for the past forty-eight hours for any conversation with his particular pal, Charles Green. He and Charles had weathered two recent shipwrecks together—in fact, Charles had saved Larry's life in the second event. Now by great good luck in passing his examination in time—not to mention a degree of recognition bestowed upon his heroism—Charles was going out on the Arguello as chief officer.

To the taciturn old man—an old man who might be either young or old as far as years went—the fact that his chief officer and his chief engineer were both mere boys, apparently gave him not the slightest concern.

He was a "queer duck," according to those who had sailed with him. A silent man, a man of deep gloom. He might have been created by Conrad. Nothing seemed to penetrate his bronzed skin. Climaxes left him unmoved. Tragedies passed him by without touching him. He took command of his ship with an air of fatality. He would do his duty. If his ship failed to arrive when and where she was due, it seemed certain that he would not even bother to shrug his shoulders.

There were two other officers besides Green; three engineers besides MacGregor. But in order to take the wireless set from the Arguello—and cut down expenses—the rest of her crew had been reduced to a minimum.

It was not until supper-time, when Larry was vaguely wondering if he would have to eat in the saloon with the old man, now that he was chief, or whether he could eat with his engineers in the mess-room, that he came face to face with the chief officer.

"By the particular grace of my guardian angel, I am to eat with you, Larry, my lad!" said the latter, with a wide smile.

"Eat with me? Do I have to go into the saloon, then, with that old Sour-Face?" Larry questioned, disgustedly.

"Nothing like it!" was the cheerful rejoinder. "You eat with your tribe, and so do I. But I had to do some talking to swing it. I was wanted in the saloon."

"Leaving the poor second mate to eat alone with old beeswanger?"

"Alone?" A quick twinkle shone in Green's eyes. "Far from it!" He leaned close to the chief, and assuming an expression of mystery, he whispered: "Man, dear, we've passengers along!"

"What?" The single word was almost a shout. "Passengers? What are you sayin', Carlo? Isn't this angel of disrepair condemned and be-damned? Isn't she in fit state to sink like a sack of rocks? Passengers—who?"

"There's four of them," Green replied, drawling. He was enjoying himself. "Four of them."

"But who are they? Agents? Owners? Or are they foresighted men who have heard the rumblin's of approachin' prohibition?"

"One of 'em's the big cheese of the American end of the Chinese company that's bought the Arguello," Green grinned. "One of 'em's a young dude connected with some island concern. He's just going as far as Honolulu with us."

"And who are the other two damn fools?" MacGregor snapped, as Charles paused.

"I don't know whether they are damn fools, yet, old dear," the mate grinned. "They haven't set eyes on you, yet. Wait until they do, and then I'll be better able to tell you whether they are what you call them, or what I think them."

MacGregor stared at him a moment. A quick look of suspicion shot into his eyes. But he shook his head, muttering: "No, never!" to himself. Aloud, he demanded: "Just what do you mean by that stuff, Carlo?"

"Mean?" Green smiled off into space tantalizingly. Then, as Larry caught his arm and shook it impatiently, he added: "Oh, keep your greasy singlet on! I'll tell you about 'em. One is the aforesaid big cheese's daughter! The other seems to be a sort of companion or something to the lady fair. You may think them what you called them, but believe me, lad, I'd call them a pair of queens. Wait until you see them!"

MacGregor, still clinging to the mate's arm, stared blankly into his face. "Women? You're sayin' there's two women in my ship? Women on this— Aw, get away with you, Carlo!" He broke off and took a sweat rag from about his neck. He mopped his face and grinned sheepishly at the mate. "You had me goin'!" he confessed. "I was believin' you!"

"Believing? You better believe! Wait until you see them, my Adonis! Wow! Wait until they see you! If the movie queen on the Younger could get up as bad a case on you as she did, in a few days, what will happen between here and China? Oh, boy!" Green shook his head in mock despair.

He could never forget the look that had swept over the actress's face the day Larry had made his final decision to go out as chief on this condemned ship, rather than go into the movies at an abnormal salary as her leading man.

"It's never true!" MacGregor groaned. "Women—here? Didn't I take this berth to get away from 'em? Didn't I—"

"No, you didn't!" Green retorted. "You took it because only asses like you and me would take the responsibility of such berths, and jolly well the dear steamship folks knew it! Oh"—as he saw MacGregor's cheeks flush—"I know you were glad enough to get away from the movie lady, but I'm betting you fall for one of the two dames above, on the way to China!"

Instead of flaring up, as Green expected him to, MacGregor wilted. "Carlo," he wailed, "'tis one of my weaknesses—women. I don't believe I'll ever be sure which I love most: machinery or come-hither eyes! It makes me sick at heart to say it, but 'tis so! I'd like to damn the two up yonder into an eternal hell fire—instead of which I'm fair dyin' to gaze upon them. Are they good to look at? Carlo, are they young and lovely?"

Green snorted. "Young? Sure. They're just at the age ripe for picking. Lovely? As night and day. Oh, you benighted son-of-a-sea-cook! I suppose we'll all land at the bottom of the Pacific while you're trying to make up your mind which of the two you could love the most! You make me sick, Larry! Honestly, you make me sick!"

MacGregor grinned affectionately. "If you're sick, maybe one of them will hold your hand. Carlo, my boy, the one thing lackin' in you is a real appreciation of the fair sex. Sometimes I'm thinkin' you're not quite human!"

Green shrugged broad shoulders. "I've other affairs on my mind. And take it from me, Larry, you better keep that wonderful department of yours on your mind! We can steer the old hooker from here to

China, up above; but it's up to you and your bunch to make her go!"

"Thanks for the sermon," MacGregor remarked dryly. "I'll keep her goin' if she doesn't just naturally fall to pieces." He looked down at his finger-nails thoughtfully, then drew a knife from his pocket and began to work at the black beneath them. After a moment's silence his blue eyes twinkled into the mate's. "Which one is the fair one?" he asked. "The daughter of the big cheese?"

"Oh, come on and eat!" Green replied disgustedly. And he turned abruptly and led the way to the mess-room.

CHAPTER II.

AT HONOLULU.

EILEEN FAIRFAX, daughter of the big cheese, was one of those cold, disdainful women. It seemed odd in one so young. Eileen herself probably could not have explained it. But the truth of the matter was that she had lost her mother when a little girl, and had spent her "growing up" period with her father and his business associates.

She had never known a real home. That robbed her of tenderness. And she had been thrown with men since her doll days. Which robbed her of any tendency toward romance. A home of her own, and babies, would have set her straight. But here she was, at twenty-five, chasing off to China with her business-absorbed father. Eileen was heartily sick of it all. In fact, she was in a dangerous state—but her father did not suspect it.

It annoyed Mr. Fairfax to find Sterling Massey, "the dude," hanging about his daughter's deck chair. There was something different in Massey's manner toward Eileen—different from the manner of most men who met her. As a matter of fact, Massey was almost the first man to think of Eileen as anything but "Fairfax's daughter."

Massey did not even consider the elder man, except when the latter sank into a deck chair near himself and Miss Fairfax, and intruded upon their conversation. Then Massey usually made some excuse to rise and go away, as if he felt himself *de trop*. Mentally, he was cursing the other man for being just that.

Miss Fairfax's companion, Patricia Herron, was neither cold nor disdainful. She was red-headed. Gold-red—not brick-red. Now, there are just two types of red-headed women. The one is lean, angular, and caustic of tongue. The other is petite, dimpled, and a natural-born vamp. Patricia was not the former.

For all that he had hoped to hear his ship purring her swift way across the Pacific, Larry gave sudden thanks that she was old and slow, and that the trip would therefore be a long one. Patricia Herron—Larry forgot the women of China and their costumes of rich stuffs. He forgot sampans and pagodas, temple bells and all the other alluring things toward which he had so dreamily set forth. Here was a dream aboard his ship—a dream with peach-blow skin and great brown eyes. And that dimple in her left cheek—it was that deep!

Nobody, if asked, could have told just when the chief slept. He was about the deck most of the day with the vivacious Pat. At night he was in the habit of dropping into the engine-room for a long session with each of the engineers under him. Never for one moment were the feeble engines of the Arguello neglected by their chief. Even the corpselike skipper had to acknowledge this to himself after he had glumly watched the chief fluttering around the female flame for a day or so.

The Arguello made her slow way across calm seas, gradually drawing nearer and nearer to Honolulu. As she passed down the latitudes and the weather grew warmer and more languid, a change came over Eileen Fairfax. She grew restive. Her usual coldness gave way to sort of a furtive disturbance. She spent more time in Massey's company, even wandering away from her deck chair with him, finding odd nooks and corners in which to talk undisturbed by the glowering presence of her father.

"I'm glad the stiff-necked dude is leavin' us at Honolulu," MacGregor confided to Green as they sat in the former's small

room smoking after supper one evening. "He gives me the creeps. I don't like his sneakin' eyes. There's somethin' wrong somewheres about that particular clothin'-store dummy."

"Rats!" Green replied shortly. "You're jealous because Miss Fairfax—"

"Cut it, Carlo! I'm not wastin' time sighin' over Miss Fairfax! She's a very pretty little girl, but she's like imitation champagne beside her friend. Man, I've asked Miss Herron will she dance with me at that hotel out at Waikiki the evenin' we get to Honolulu. We're dated up to go swimmin', too, if we have time," Larry sighed soulfully. "Only two days at Honolulu—only time to soothe up my ailin' boilers and to read a few Christian Science lessons to the old Arguello so she'll only think she's sick. I don't see how I'm goin' to get out to look over the dusky hula ladies at all!"

"Never mind, my statue of manly beauty!" Green comforted. "You run along and play with Miss Herron while the playing's good. We may have forty different kinds of weather between Honolulu and Hong-Kong, and then your engines will need you. Anyway, after the dude leaves, your Titian friend will have to earn her pay as companion to Miss Fairfax. Had you thought of that?"

MacGregor looked up suddenly at this. "Oh, Carlo, what are you sayin'? No, I'd not thought of it. The damn dude did have his uses! Lad, dear, you'll have to take his place—you'll just naturally have to! I can't have that pampered daughter of the rich breakin' in on my little taity-tait!"

"What do you think I am?" Green growled. "I'm no lady's man, and well you know it!"

"You're my pal—my buddie—my—" the chief mopped his face, a picture of despair. "Man, you saved my life, once, and I haven't a right to a second savin'; but—Patricia—she's one grand, grand girl! Carlo, the red hair of her! Have you never noted it when the sun shines upon it? Have—"

"Oh, Lord!" Green groaned. "I'll do 'most anything if you'll only shut up! But after this I'm going to sign on a cargo-boat, where there won't be any women! I'm fed up with 'em!"

He stormed disgustedly out of the room, calling the Misses Fairfax and Herron anything but "angels."

The tropics have been called "the devil's happy hunting-grounds." They were well so-called. They are in the latitudes of madness.

To Larry MacGregor, whose life had begun along the grimy Brooklyn waterfront; whose outings had been confined to trips to Coney Island; whose growing up consisted in going to sea, first along the east coast, with its summer thunder-storms and winter sleet and snow, and then along the west coast, with its fogs and raging south-easters—to Larry MacGregor, Honolulu was a fairyland, a paradise, a dream come true.

His ardent nature was thrilled to ecstasies by the riot of color—lapis-lazuli skies pillowed with snow-white clouds—flaming hibiscus and poinciana—purpling bougainvillea—greens that were somber—greens that danced with shimmering lights.

The moon was full the night of his taking the radiant Patricia out to the Moana at Waikiki. They danced but little. The inviting benches along the sea-wall claimed them. Here they sat, beneath palm and hau trees, listening to the faint strains of music from the hotel, and to the surf playing a ceaseless serenade over the coral reefs at the outer edge of the lagoon.

Perhaps, too, Larry's own appearance made him heady. For the first time in his seafaring experience he was resplendent in whites. The dungareed grub had emerged from his chrysalis. If the lady whom Green called the "movie queen" had found Larry a "Greek god" in the ill-fitting old clothes he was wearing when she met him, it is to be questioned what she would have likened him to now! A well-cut white uniform, a natty white cap, white shoes—Larry MacGregor was intoxicated with his own butterfly state and with the joy of having at his side the stunning, laughter-loving Patricia.

The moonlight, the flower-scented breeze, the faint strains of a waltz—Larry's

blood leaped in his veins, and he wished something would "happen" so that he might prove to Patricia the depths of his feelings.

It was a wonderful evening. That Larry did not go wholly mad and take Patricia in his arms and kiss her is astounding. Perhaps he was too dazed—from Brooklyn's water-front to Waikiki is such a jump!

The second day, after hastily overseeing the work in his engine-room, Larry took Patricia for a drive about Honolulu. He chose as vehicle a runabout, and specified to the liveryman that he desired a horse that would "mind its business." Larry wished no machinery—even under the hood of a flivver—to distract him from his enjoyment.

He begrudged every moment, as Patricia had told him she must return to the ship early.

Miss Fairfax wished her to go somewhere for dinner with her and Sterling Massey. They were to spend the evening ashore, too, as the Arguello was not to sail until midnight.

The horse had met specifications. He had trotted peacefully up the Punchbowl road, and out to the Pali and back. Although Miss Herron enjoyed the scenery, it is doubtful if Larry saw anything but herself.

On the way back to the ship, MacGregor asked her if she had any shopping to do. She replied in the negative.

"If you won't be mindin' a short wait, I'd like to stop in somewhere and get me some pipe tobacco," Larry said.

"You men and your smoking!" Patricia murmured, smiling into Larry's blue eyes. "Of course I won't mind! I'd hate to have you run short of tobacco between here and China! I can imagine what a bear you'd be."

"Never with you!" MacGregor returned fervently. Then he flushed and added, hastily: "There's a shop over there. I won't be gone a minute." He drove over to the curb, and, handing the reins to Patricia, went into the shop.

Much to his disgust, he recognized the back of a man entering just before him as that of the dude. The latter paused at a counter, and Larry, who was close behind him, heard the fat proprietor greet him familiarly.

"Hello, Massey. Glad to see you back. I expected you here yesterday. How are you?"

"Thanks, I'm well. How's everything?"

"Never better. How's your wife?"

"Mrs. Massey is all right," the dude answered shortly. "She's East right now. Did you get my letter from San Francisco? And my message yesterday? Have you fixed up everything for me at the bungalow?"

The other man leered at him. "Sure, I fixed it all up. Kalunani 'll be out there in the morning to cook for you. I sent out supplies to-day. Everything's ready."

Massey grunted a short thanks. Then he added, as if anxious to change the subject: "Where is Sing Lung?"

The proprietor jerked his finger over his shoulder. "So happens he's right in back. Go on in. I'll be along in a minute." And as Massey, without looking around, went through a rear door, the proprietor turned to MacGregor.

The Arguello's chief made his purchases in a haze. Massey married! The dirty dog, playing with Miss Fairfax! Good thing for him he was leaving the ship in Honolulu. He'd been getting a little too friendly with Patricia the past day or two. Larry had found them standing in close conversation several times when he had come on deck from below.

"I knew he was a sneakin' hound!" Larry muttered to himself. "Damn good thing this is his farewell to those two girls! Him and his money and his clothes! His sort seems to turn women's heads, but it's not me that can see why!"

The frown in Larry's brow was smoothed, however, as soon as he emerged from the shop and met the radiance of Patricia's smile, and he drove merrily back to the dock with Miss Herron, and turned the rig over to the waiting livery-stable man.

"Don't be too late gettin' back this evenin'," he begged Patricia. "The moon

will be fine out over the harbor. And I'm needin' a kind word or two to start me on my long worry toward Hong-Kong."

CHAPTER III.

LARRY SWIMS.

LARRY stood drearily at the rail. He had watched Miss Fairfax, in shimmering white, and Miss Herron, in contrasty black, walk down the gangway with the dude, for dinner ashore. Eileen's cheeks had been unusually flushed; Miss Herron's dead white. The dude, to Larry's biased mind, looked sneakier than ever.

The big cheese was dining ashore with one of the island magnates. The skipper was shut up in his tomblike quarters. Even Green had deserted his chum to spend the last hours ashore.

Larry hovered between engine-room and deck. The hours dragged slowly. From over the hills the northeast trade blew in flower-scented gusts. Now and then a car passed along Allen Street, and over at the naval station there sounded an occasional snatch of music, either from a phonograph in the wireless quarters or from a piano in the house of the captain of the yard.

Although the Arguello was not to sail until midnight, she was to move out from the dock at eleven o'clock to lie in the harbor for an hour. A Japanese steamer was due to dock at the wharf during the night —she had been loading at Hilo and was looked for before morning.

Larry's anxiety increased as the evening dragged away. He wanted to see the two women on the ship before she moved from the wharf.

Green came aboard early, but found the chief in no humor for small talk, so he went to his room and turned in to snatch an hour's sleep. One by one the crew drifted back.

Finally, at quarter to eleven, when Larry's nerves were ready to snap, he saw a woman at the foot of the gangway. She was in white, with a white scarf draped over her head. Miss Fairfax. Larry sighed largely with relief. Patricia would be at her heels.

The figure in white sped swiftly up the gangway and disappeared in the cabin. Larry waited and watched. There was no one following. Larry stood, straining his eyes through the gloom. Still no second figure issued from the dock. After more time passed, Larry found inaction unendurable. He did not like interrupting what was apparently a long leave-taking between Patricia and the dude; but knowing the latter for what he was, the engineer felt that his presence would be a good thing for the woman.

He walked along the deck and down the gangway. Hastily he strode down the length of the dark dock to the street. There was no one in sight.

What had happened? Why had Miss Fairfax returned alone to the Arguello? Where was Patricia?

With his heart thumping absurdly in his throat, MacGregor made his way back to the deck of his ship. He would question Miss Fairfax—it didn't matter whether she thought him bold or not.

But as he reached the saloon entrance, he ran into the second engineer.

"Been looking for you, chief. More of that damn junk below needs your personal touch! You best come down and take a look, see."

MacGregor hesitated a moment. Then he cursed low and deep. But he followed his assistant down into the sweltering engine-room.

Time, though MacGregor could have sworn it dragged, sped by as he worked with his two men below. When he was finally free to return to his vigil on deck, he discovered it was time for the Arguello to move into the stream. "Stand-by" rang, even as he glared at the clock.

"I'm a blitherin' ass," he scoffed at himself. "She's aboard by now. She's all right. I'll get this blamed tub out where she belongs, and then I'll be runnin' up and makin' sure. The quartermaster will tell me. He's been at the top of the gangway right along. Oh, a thousand plagues on women, anyway."

It took some time to move the steamer from dock to anchorage. Larry remained below until he received a welcome jangling

release via the telegraph. Then he sped up the ladder and went in search of the quartermaster who had stood watch at the gangway. Luck was with him. He ran into the man on the main deck.

"You've been at the gangway the whole evenin', haven't you?" the chief asked eagerly.

"Yes, sir."

"Miss Herron came aboard all right before we moved from the dock, didn't she?"

"One of the ladies did," the man replied. "I don't know which one it was. She had a veil over her head and I couldn't see her face."

Larry stopped breathing. "Only one? You mean the one in white?"

"Sure—yes, sir. She had on white."

"That was Miss Fairfax. I'm meanin' the other. Isn't she aboard yet?"

"No, sir. Mr. Fairfax come aboard a little bit back, and I think the men are all here. But the other lady ain't come yet."

For a moment Larry stood as if rooted to the spot. Then he turned and stumbled into the saloon alleyway. This was no place for him in his singlet, dungaree pants and greasy slippers; but he did not care. There would be no steward on watch to see him as he made his way to the room occupied by the two women.

He paused outside the cabin which had been allotted to the girls. Rays of light showed through the ventilator above the door. Miss Fairfax was evidently up, waiting for Patricia.

Larry tapped lightly.

"Who's there?" came in a startled, muffled tone.

"Miss Fairfax, I'm askin' your pardon. It's me, MacGregor. The quartermaster says Miss Herron isn't back aboard. I—she—it isn't my business—but we'll be sailin' soon. I'm worried. Is she comin' shortly?"

There was a pause. It seemed to Larry an age before the muffled tones spoke again.

"She isn't coming back. She's gone with Mr. Massey. It's really none of your affair, of course, but they're to be married. There's no use your telling anybody. It's nobody's business but theirs."

Larry reached out gropingly for the handrail along the bulkhead. The sweat upon his body seemed to turn to ice. For a moment he clung dizzily to his support. Then he swung about and walked blindly away.

The cool air on deck cleared his mind a bit. He looked out over the water to the lights ashore. He tried to curse Patricia and Massey together, but the latitudes of madness were stirring the blood in his veins.

"The scum! The dirty hound! The—" he whispered into the night. "That's what he meant when he asked that cigar-store man if he had fixed everything all right at the bungalow. And Mrs. Massey is in the East at present, is she? By God, I'll break his filthy head for him! Patricia—I'm thinkin' you must have been taken crazy! That skunk! That low skunk!"

He stood a moment longer, his mind racing. Then, with a sudden catch in his breath, he drew himself up, squaring his broad shoulders.

"That's it!" he breathed. "I'll take a chance! Patricia may have gone daft, but not daft enough to elope with that crimson bigamist!"

He ran aft, flung down the ladder to the after well-deck, and glanced about him. There was no one in sight. He dropped the greasy slippers off his feet, climbed upon the rail, and slipped over the side of the Arguello into the warm waters of the harbor.

Quietly, quickly, with a strong overhand stroke, Larry swam shoreward. When half-way in he veered off to one side. There would be a sentry on the naval dock. It wouldn't do to be seen and challenged. He swam so as to bring up on the far side of Alakea Wharf. Here he found an easy landing and soon stood upon Allen Street, his singlet clinging to him, and his dungarees shedding water over his bare feet.

His appearance suddenly occurred to him. How could he hope to board a car in his present state? The first policeman who spotted him would run him in as a probable deserter from some ship.

Allen Street was quiet except for a car

that was coming behind him. Larry ran lightly to the corner and looked along Fort Street. Another car was approaching from the opposite direction. They would meet at the siding, just around the corner, and then pass on. Larry sped into the shadow of a pile of lumber just outside the Oceanic Dock and waited.

Once the cars were gone on their way, Larry loped up Fort Street. There was one chance in a hundred that the tobacconist lived in the rooms at the rear of his shop. Larry was counting on that one chance.

After dodging a wandering kanaka policeman, he gained the corner of King Street. He looked up and then down this thoroughfare, but aside from the lights and sounds in the grill, half-way down the block all was still. What life there was in Honolulu at this time of night was centered about the big hotels. The business district was asleep.

Larry crept down the King Street side of the tobacco shop. There was a window toward the rear, open, but protected by a mosquito screen. Larry paused outside and listened, stilling his own gasping breath so that he might catch the slightest sound within.

After a moment there came to his ears the one sound they most desired to hear—the slow, regular breathing of a sleeping man. MacGregor stole noiselessly along the wall. There was a yard behind the house, just over the high fence that closed it in from King Street.

CHAPTER IV.

"MANY A SLIP."

THE proprietor of the "Pipe Shop" awakened abruptly from his sleep. The light had been switched on in his room. He opened his eyes to gaze upon what, at first, seemed to him an apparition of some kind. A big, husky man, blazing of eye, wet, and half dressed, confronted him. Before he could utter a sound, Larry had clapped a dirty hand over his mouth.

"I wouldn't stop at murder this night!" MacGregor snapped between set teeth. "You best keep quiet—I'll choke the breath out of you if you don't!" His tone was low but thoroughly businesslike.

"All I want of you is information. And I'm wantin' it quick *and* concise!

"Where's this bungalow of Massey's that you had all ready for him? Talk quick and quiet, I'm tellin' you! I've a pair of powerful hands on me, and they're achin' to do damage this minute!"

The tobacconist needed no assurance to this effect. The hand that had been over his mouth had slipped rapidly to his throat. His eyes were starting from their sockets, and his heart was running with the muffler cut out.

"I'll be quiet! You needn't choke me!" he gasped. "You can take your hand away."

"Not by a damn sight!" Larry snarled. His fingers twitched at the skin beneath them. "Speak up—I'm waitin'!"

"Massey'll kill me!" the other man whined. "Listen! Don't bother him tonight. Can't you wait till to-morrow? I'll get him here to-morrow, and you can make him square up!"

Larry opened his lips to speak, then closed them again. What was this, now, about squaring up?

"I didn't know you at first," the man in the bed wheedled. "You're Tomlinson, of course, off the China. I'm sorry you're impatient with Massey, Mr. Tomlinson. He's been busy since his arrival. I'm sure he'll square up with you to-morrow."

He squirmed beneath MacGregor's relentless fingers.

"Sing Lung just paid for the dope today. You managed fine, Mr. Tomlinson. There's a big chunk due you. I know Massey'll be down to fix you up before you sail to-morrow!"

Sing Lung! Dope! An opium smuggler as well as a would-be bigamist. Unconsciously Larry tightened his fingers.

"I'm wantin' to see Massey to-night—now!" he exclaimed.

"All right! All right!" the man, watching his eyes, half sobbed. And he told Larry the location of Massey's bungalow—gave him full directions how to get there "quick *and* concise."

When the tobacconist finished speaking, Larry acted speedily. He proceeded to gag and bind the fat man in the bed, and to do it in an amazingly thorough fashion. Then because of the proximity of the window, through which Larry had reason to know sounds easily drifted, the engineer mercilessly proceeded to shut that means of ventilation.

His man trussed up, MacGregor looked about. He snatched up a coat from a chair back and put it on. It did not fit, but it covered his singlet. He took a cap from a hook and pulled it over his wet hair. A pair of soft slippers at the bedside became possessed of his feet.

"Some one 'll let you out of this!" MacGregor muttered. "And if you pry loose and phone that—just remember I'll be passin' back this way, and I'll finish you."

He turned, snapped out the light, and departed the way he had entered, via the rear screen door. Through this latter the mosquitoes might now wander at will, for there was a large opening where the wire net had been pulled away in order to admit Larry's hand, so he might unfasten the hook on the inside.

The car that had brought MacGregor out toward Kapiolani Park—and for which he had had to wait a maddening length of time—was receding down the track. Larry waited until it was half a block away, and then he crossed the street, sped up a driveway, and came to a halt outside a large beach bungalow.

From a near-by house came the strains of the intermezzo from "Naughty Marietta." Larry stood, motionless, a minute, listening. The sweetness of the music swept over him, thrilling him as all beauty thrilled him. Aye, sweet, sweet music! But MacGregor knew he would always hate that air if ever he heard it again.

The shades of Massey's house were down, but Larry could see that there were lights inside. He stepped up on the lanai, and, breathing hard, knocked softly at the door.

For an instant he regretted this manner of approach. Probably Massey would not open the door. But Massey, evidently expecting some one, did. He opened it, and his neck was immediately encircled by two strong hands. MacGregor pushed him backward into the room, kicking the door closed as he stepped inside. He heard a quick exclamation beyond him, but he did not take his eyes off the man in his clutch.

"The Arguello is about to sail, Mr. Massey," MacGregor said softly, "and we're a passenger shy. I've discovered that that passenger is here—probably through some mistaken idea about you. I've come for her, to take her back to the ship."

Massey stood motionless, either through astonishment or through good judgment, and made no attempt to escape the other. For a moment there was silence. Then MacGregor heard a low, whispered: "How dare you?"

At this Massey smiled insolently into Larry's face.

"The engineer!" he exclaimed in mock amazement. "What are you getting excited about, Mr. MacGregor? How is this your affair? And if you'd be so good as to tell me, how did you get here?"

"Never mind how I got here. I'm here."

"But—but this is none of your affair!" came again the low voice from the corner.

Larry started. That was not Patricia's voice. He tightened his hold on Massey and glanced over his shoulder.

Facing him, her eyes flashing with indignation, was Eileen Fairfax.

Larry stood, staring. She was dressed in the black gown Patricia had worn ashore.

"Miss Fairfax! You!" He felt Massey move beneath his hands. "Stand still, you!" he growled. "I'm not clear in my mind, I'm confessin'; but I'm not through with you at that." He turned back to the woman. "Miss Fairfax, what does it mean? I saw a woman in white come back to the ship. I thought it was you. You wore white ashore. When time went on and no one else came, I naturally wondered what had happened to Miss Herron. Finally I went to your room and asked. I was told that Pat—Miss Herron was ashore with this—with Massey. That she was goin' to marry him. I came to get her." He paused, bewildered. "I'm findin' it's

you here. It must have been Miss Herron who answered me."

"It undoubtedly was. Now you can return to your ship. I'm sure Miss Herron will be flattered by your anxiety over her."

The woman's voice was hard as steel.

"I'm returnin' to my ship in a hurry," MacGregor answered. "But I'm not goin' alone. You're comin', too, Miss Fairfax."

"That will be about all from you, Mr. Engineer!" Massey cut in. "Miss Fairfax and I are to be married, which is none of your affair! Now you better get out!"

Larry stared at the other man coolly. Then he said over his shoulder: "Are you really expectin' to marry this man, Miss Fairfax?"

"Most certainly!" There was scorn in her tone.

"Do they permit bigamy, then, in these islands?" Larry noted with fierce joy the start Massey gave. But the man recovered himself quickly.

"You're crazy! You've been drinking! I'll phone the police if you don't get out, MacGregor!"

Larry smiled. "No. I'm thinkin' you're too well known in Honolulu to risk that! I've met at least one of your friends who knows your wife, Mr. Massey. There'll be others. Even Sing Lung"—again he rejoiced at the quick movement beneath his hands—"even Sing Lung probably knows of Mrs. Massey. And I'm thinkin', too, that your opium-smugglin' friend, Mr. Tomlinson, of the China, will be only too glad to help me put you in the hoosgow! It seems you cheat men as well as women."

"Tomlinson!" The word was whispered furiously through Massey's white lips. "So that's where you got your information, eh? I suppose you engineers do hang together. Well, if you do, maybe the same amount I owe Tomlinson will pacify you and make your trip back to the ship worth while."

"I'd beat you to a frazzle," was Larry's reply, "if I had time. I haven't. Miss Fairfax, Massey has a wife already. She's East, just at present. I heard Massey say it with his own lips this afternoon."

He paused. He felt that he was being brutal to the woman; but he had no time for finesse. "He's married, and he's an opium smuggler. If you're wantin' to remain here with him, knowin' all of that, I'm leavin' you. My ship needs me."

Miss Fairfax had approached. She stood staring at Massey. "Why don't you say something?" she whispered. "Why don't you tell this man he lies and make him go?"

Massey laughed shortly. "Because it's no use. He'd have your father and half the town about my ears in another hour." He shrugged his shoulders. "I can't afford that. If I could have kept you here until to-morrow, when the Arguello would be well on her way to China, I think you'd have remained. I know you. You would never have faced your father again."

"But—but—it isn't true?"

"It's true. All of it. I was mad about you—you with your pride and beauty. I wanted you—I could have made you happy."

There was a broken sound from the woman. She turned swiftly away and hid her face between her hands.

"We'll be gettin' back to the ship," Larry said shortly. "It's after sailin' time. They'd be gone, long since, only I'm thinkin' they'll be missin' me and will wait for me to turn up. Are you ready to come, Miss Fairfax?"

The woman caught up a lace scarf from a chair and stumbled toward the door, keeping her face averted from Massey. "Come!" she whispered. "Come, quickly!"

"I'll be returnin' by way of Honolulu, you!" MacGregor muttered beneath his breath. "I hope to God you're here when I do! I'm wishin' to meet up with you just once more!"

Then he followed the woman out into the night.

MacGregor nearly went mad waiting for a car to come. When they were finally aboard it, it crawled slowly back toward the city. MacGregor spoke no word to the woman who sat huddled beside him. She had drawn the scarf over her head and her face was hidden. Now and again Larry felt her shudder.

When they finally reached Alakea Wharf and Larry signaled the conductor to stop, every nerve in the engineer's strong body was jumping.

The conductor stared as the oddly matched couple stepped off into the night at the deserted wharf. Queer doings, he thought, as he rang for the motorman to go ahead. He looked back at the two figures outside the dock, but his curiosity was doomed to disappointment in the dark.

Miss Fairfax seemed unsteady on her feet, so Larry took her arm. He was shocked to feel the flesh of it cold. As soon as the car was out of sight, he turned her back toward the street.

"I'll have to borrow a boat from somewheres, to row out. The sentry on the naval dock will be knowin' where he can get us one," he said simply. He was superlatively tired.

As they walked from the shelter of Alakea Wharf, Larry glanced out over the harbor. He could not see the Arguello. They went on in silence. Again and again, Larry stared out across the moonlit water. There was not the sign of a ship at anchor.

At the entrance to the naval dock, Larry paused. He tried to make his voice sound matter-of-fact as he spoke.

"You wait here while I speak to the sentry. I'll be right back. There's no one about. You'll be all right." He left her abruptly and walked inside the gate. The sentry, coming forward at a swift trot, promptly challenged him.

Larry waited for no preliminaries. "Man," he said, under his breath, "where's the ship that was anchored out yonder?"

"Who are you?" the sentry demanded.

"I'm chief engineer of that ship!"

The sentry lowered his gun and chuckled. "Glory be! I hope you're a good swimmer, then! She sailed at midnight, if you mean the two-stack steamer that was lyin' out there."

"Sailed? You're daft! Sailed?"

"Sure. I said sailed. You don't see her, do you?"

"But—" Larry drew a deep, painful breath. "By Heaven, they never sailed without me! Man, man, they must have thought I was aboard!"

"What's the matter? Can't the rest of her engineers run her without you?" the sentry snorted.

"You wouldn't be understandin'!" MacGregor groaned. "My ship!" Then suddenly he thought of the woman waiting at the dock gate. Another groan issued from his lips. "Oh, this is fair hell!"

"So stuck on the old tub, eh? They must feed you well! Too bad! You better go up-town and get a nice soft bed," the sentry jeered. "You'll have a long sleep before she gets back from China."

"Man, there's a passenger who missed that ship, too—a woman passenger!" Larry exclaimed.

"The hell you say!" The sentry shouldered his gun. "Where's she at?"

"At the gate. Will you tell how I'm goin' to break this to her?"

"Not me! I suppose she'll have hysterics! Better get it over with, though. It's almost three o'clock. Women had orter be in bed." He walked along beside Larry, who moved in a daze toward the gate.

Miss Fairfax turned swiftly at their approach. "I can't see the Arguello, Mr. MacGregor!" There was panic in her tone. "Where did they anchor her when they moved her from the dock?"

Larry swallowed hard. "Out there," he answered. "But she's not there now."

"What do you mean?" MacGregor noticed the keen terror in the woman's question.

"I mean—the sentry says she sailed at midnight."

Eileen clutched his arm. "Sailed? You mean she's gone—on her way to China?"

"Oh, aye—on her way to China!" MacGregor muttered, dully. Then as he felt the woman sway against him, he threw his arm about her.

"She's gonna faint!" the sentry grunted.

"I'm ill—ill—" came from between Miss Fairfax's bloodless lips.

"Is there no place I can take her—no place near here?" MacGregor questioned in despair.

For a moment the sentry considered. Then he brightened. "Sure. Take her over to the wireless station. The chief 'll

be on watch. There's a spare room there, with probably a cot or somethin' in it."

"Come!" Larry said gently. "That's fine. It's just across the road." With his arm still about her, he drew Eileen forward.

"The last gate!" the sentry called after them.

"Right!" MacGregor responded. He led the woman across Allen Street and down to the gate at the end of the yard. He was obliged to half-drag her up the few steps and across the lanai of the wireless quarters. A screen door opened into the office, and as Larry drew Eileen inside, a chief petty officer rose, staring, from a chair before the wireless set.

"The lady is ill," MacGregor announced shortly. "The sentry told me there was a spare room here where maybe she could rest a moment?"

The C. P. O. removed the phones from his ears. "She may rest in my room. I'm on till four o'clock. Come right this way." He went ahead of them and switched on a light in a small bedroom beyond the office.

Larry drew Miss Fairfax inside. "Lie down there on the cot," he suggested gently. "Maybe I can get you somethin' to drink."

The C. P. O. caught the word. "Drink?" He shook his head, dolefully. "Nothing but water and tea and coffee on the premises!" he grieved. "We've a cranky old captain of the yard."

"Coffee!" The single word was a whisper.

"Righto! You lie down! I'll bring your coffee right away," Larry comforted. He followed the C. P. O. back through the office and into a galley at the rear.

"Me and the lady missed our ship," MacGregor explained. "I'm chief of the Arguello—her that was at Alakea Wharf these two days."

"Missed her? How come, chief?" asked the other as he put a coffee-pot on the gas-stove.

Without a pause Larry answered. "Me, I was busy gamblin' in a joint I stumbled across. The lady—she was dancin' at a hotel and hopped the wrong car when she started back to the dock. Then she got all balled up, and I just happened across her, way down the line, and fetched her to the wharf. The Arguello sailed at midnight."

"But how did that happen? They must have missed you?"

Larry shook his head heavily. "We're sailin' short-handed—the few there was aboard would have been too busy to miss us. They must have thought we were aboard. I sneaked ashore myself without sayin' anythin' to any one."

"The Arguello," the C. P. O. mused. "She didn't carry wireless this trip, did she?"

"No." MacGregor's tone was lifeless. "No. Dismantled." His head sank and he covered his face with his hands. "She was condemned—old—engines fallin' apart. There's not a soul aboard knows her in'ards like me. Man, man, they trusted me with her!"

"But surely the skipper 'll put back when he learns of your being left ashore?"

"Him? That fossil? He'd sail her to hell first. And I'm thinkin' it's to hell she'll go, without me nursin' her sick soul!" MacGregor groaned.

A picture of the Arguello, storm-tossed, swept before his mind's eye. Disaster. The big ship slowly sinking. Patricia—Patricia.

He flung his head up. "By God, man, I've got to get to her!" he choked.

The C. P. O., pouring steaming coffee into two cups, glanced sympathetically at the engineer.

"It's tough luck, chief. But I don't see how you'll make it, unless you fly!"

Fly! The word brought Larry up short. Fly! He looked quickly at the C. P. O.

"Man, dear! Tell me, didn't I see a seaplane hereabouts yesterday?"

The C. P. O. stared at him. "Yes. There is one, but—"

"There's no 'but'!" MacGregor cut in tensely. "Where is it? Who runs it? Where can I get hold of him?"

"You're crazy!" the other exclaimed. "It's a navy seaplane. Lieutenant Travers is the pilot, but—"

"I'm tellin' you there's no 'but'!" Larry repeated. "Where's this lieutenant?"

"Home, in bed, you wild man! You can't hope to get him to chase you after

your ship! He has a test flight about the coast in the morning. I mean, this morning. He and Ensign Baird."

Larry's eyes were glowing. "I'll be takin' the lady her coffee," he breathed. "Then I'll be comin' back for a talk with you!"

CHAPTER V.

BILLY BEST.

EILEEN, upon finishing her coffee, sank back on the cot and turned her face to the wall. MacGregor's eyes were filled with pity as he regarded her.

"I'll be chinnin' with the wireless man, Miss Fairfax," he said. "If you want me, call me. Try to sleep. I've an idea the dawn will be bringin' us comfort," he added gently.

"Oh, *don't!*" the woman whispered as if unable to endure a touch of tenderness. As a sudden sob shook her, Larry stepped out of the room and closed the door noiselessly behind him.

In the office he found the C. P. O. again before his set. Larry sank down into a chair beside him.

"Lady all right?" the C. P. O. questioned.

"Sure. I think she'll sleep a bit, maybe. It's all right for her to stay a while, isn't it?"

"Yes, as long as no one knows about it. And I guess no one will. There's never any one about but my relief, who comes on at four. He's a close-mouthed lad. I'll fix him."

Larry's tired eyes wandered over the office. Suddenly they paused at a chart on the wall. He went to it. "Ha! This 'll be showin' me just about where my ship is now, won't it?" he questioned eagerly.

"She sailed at twelve, you say?"

Larry nodded. "If she's movin' at all, she'll be doin' about eleven knots now, I'm thinkin'."

The C. P. O. leaned across his shoulder and stared at the chart. "She has gone about thirty-three miles then—she'll be only about there." He pointed to a spot on the map.

"Your lieutenant won't be comin' along till when?"

"Oh, probably six or seven."

"That 'll take the Arguello three or four hours further if she's still runnin'." Larry pondered. "Is the seaplane any good at all?"

"Look here! You're not counting on any such wild thing as that?"

Larry swung around and faced him.

"I gotta!" he said quietly. "I can't be tellin' you all that's on my soul, this hour. But, man, dear, I gotta get to my ship!"

The C. P. O. returned thoughtfully to his set, and readjusted the phones over his ears. His fingers strayed over the instruments before him.

"Is this lieutenant man a human bein'?" MacGregor asked.

"He is. And I was just thinking. I happened to do him a mighty good turn, last month. Maybe if I—"

Larry clutched his arm. "You can! You will! You must! Man, I'm not boastin' my powers nor my importance. I'm just tellin' you facts. My ship is a dyin' creature and I'm the doctor. I gotta get to her—I gotta, I say!"

"All right. I'm not making any promises, but I'll do my best. By the way," he interrupted himself with a smile. "My name is Best—Billy Best. But now about the lady. She's worrying me the most. I can't imagine Lieutenant Travers setting out on an official flight with a lady aboard in a black evening dress."

The glow in Larry's eyes died. "Oh, aye. The lady!" he said dismally. "I'd forgotten her!" He sank into a chair, his eyes closing wearily. There was a long silence in the wireless-room.

Suddenly MacGregor sat upright. "I've an idea! Miss—I mean, the lady, would be wishin' to keep her identity hid, I'm thinkin'. She's slight—maybe there'd be some spare clothes hereabouts — men's clothes. And a cap to cover her hair?"

The C. P. O. gave MacGregor a quizzical glance. "You're going to make it or burst, aren't you?"

"I gotta!" was the short reply.

"There's nothing but a suit of dungarees," the C. P. O. mused. "And I've a

canvas hat, a wide-brimmed thing I use to keep the sun out of my eyes when I'm working up on the mast. But her feet!"

"Hell, man!" Larry exploded. "Every time you send my hopes flyin' up like a balloon, you stick a pin in 'em and they bust!"

Again silence fell over the office. It was broken by the C. P. O. "I've an old pair of sneakers—if she'll wear 'em! We can pad them and tie them on her feet."

"'Tis done!" Larry sighed, relaxing. "I'll see if she's awake. No matter what comes, she'll do better out of that damn black dress!" Patricia's dress—Larry felt as if he could tear it to pieces. Patricia, tricking him into thinking she was ashore with that unmentionable combination dope peddler and bigamist! Letting him go mad with fear for her! Aye, that damn black dress!

Larry went softly to the room where Miss Fairfax lay, and tapped on the door. "It's MacGregor!" he called in a low tone.

There was an immediate reply. Eileen had been far from sleeping.

MacGregor felt uncomfortable as he met her red, swollen eyes. "I'm thinkin' you'll forgive me for intrudin'," he apologized. "I can't swear that I'm bringin' good news. I'm only hopin' so."

Eileen sprang to her feet. "You mean the Arguello is returning?"

"You don't know that skipper! No, Miss Fairfax, not that.

"I've been conversin' with the wireless man. Seems there's a seaplane goin' out for a test trip about the island this mornin'."

"A seaplane?"

"Aye. An airplane that can fly over the waters and then light upon them like a gull. There's a small chance that the lieutenant who runs her will take us after the Arguello. If he does consent to do it, there's only a small chance the seaplane 'll make it. It's a risky business. Are you willin' to take that risk, or would you want to wait in Honolulu?"

"Wait—in Honolulu?" There was unutterable horror in the girl's tone. "I'd risk anything to get away from here!"

MacGregor sighed with relief. "So I was thinkin'. You'll excuse me for askin' a question or two, Miss Fairfax?"

Eileen's reply was very humbly spoken. "You've every right, Mr. MacGregor."

"'Tisn't a question of my rights. I need to know. Was Miss Herron to break the news of your—your stop-over, here, to your father?"

A quick shudder shook the woman. "Yes, but not until to-morow evening, when the Arguello will be some distance from Honolulu. She was to pretend that I was ill and confined to my room. Father would not have bothered me. She would have told him I was sleeping, if he had wished to see me. And as there was no stewardess, Patricia would have insisted upon carrying my meals to my room."

"But the quartermaster on watch knew that only one of you was aboard!" Larry objected. "He would have reported it."

"Miss Herron would have insisted that he was mistaken. She is not only my paid companion. She is my friend."

"I'm hopin' it all worked out accordin' to Hoyle. It 'll simplify matters. About gettin' back. You'd just as soon your father doesn't know the story, now, Miss Fairfax?"

Again the woman shuddered. "He disliked Mr. Massey."

"He would," Larry murmured. "Any man would."

"If there were any way in the world to keep him from knowing."

"I'm thinkin' there is," MacGregor interrupted, soberly. "If we do persuade the lieutenant to carry us along, you couldn't hope to go flyin' in party clothes. I've a little idea which we could try out if you're willin'."

Miss Fairfax looked inquiringly at the man. He showed signs of great fatigue and even greater anxiety. Yet she was more than ready to lay the burden of their future movements upon his shoulders.

Eileen spoke suddenly. There was no trace of her usual coldness in either tone or manner. "I'm not going to try to thank you for what you've already done for me, Mr. MacGregor. No. I won't say a word about it. You know from what you've saved me, and you must know what that

means to me. Whatever your plans are now, tell me, and I'll do my part to carry them out."

"That's fine!" Larry exclaimed. "Here's my idea." And he proceeded to detail to her the plans he had evolved for their return to the ship.

Lieutenant Travers swung off the car at the last gate into the yard. He knew he could get a cup of coffee from the wireless quarters' galley before starting on his flight. Besides, he had a pleasurable surprise for a certain C. P. O., in whose debt he was. He strode into the office and greeted the operator before the set.

"Best about? Or has he turned in?"

"I'm here, sir," the C. P. O. replied, coming from the mess-room. "If you have a minute to spare, I'd like to speak to you, sir."

"Right with you, Best. I want to beg a cup of coffee from the chef."

"I'll fetch it. You can drink it while I'm talking."

"Better talk quick! I've news for you. Ensign Baird sprained his ankle last evening out at the Pleasanton, and can't go with me. I couldn't think of a better man than yourself, so you're to go along with me on the flight this morning."

The C. P. O.'s eyes lighted with enthusiasm. "Great! I never dreamed of such luck! When do we start?"

"Soon as we're ready. Rustle along the coffee."

"Come to my room to drink it, please, sir!" Best asked, and he led the way into his small quarters, closing the door behind him.

CHAPTER VI.

THE WILL TO WIN.

IT was only a little after six when Lieutenant Travers and Best crossed the road to the naval dock. No one was about except a sentry and two very dirty, queer-looking civilians. The former was at his post by the gate. The latter were sitting on the string-piece of the dock, gazing disconsolately over the harbor.

"Those two my birds?" the lieutenant chuckled.

"Them's those!" Best replied, striving to hide under a facetious manner the anxiety he really felt.

"Gad! You don't mean one of them is really chief engineer of a steamer?"

"The big one. The other is the coal-passer."

"They look like a couple of bums!" was the lieutenant's low retort as he and Best approached the two figures.

MacGregor was almost afraid to look up, for fear he'd read bad news in Best's eyes. He scrambled to his feet, however, keeping between the navy men and the figure of his companion.

Lieutenant Travers smiled cheerily at him. "Best has told me of your troubles, chief! I'll be court-martialed and have to commit hari-kari, if ever I'm found out—but I'm going to take you and your man along. I'd like to see how the plane will act with four of us aboard."

The tired droop fell away from MacGregor's shoulders. In fact, years seemed to drop away from them.

"Hold hard!" the officer said, seriously, as he noticed this. "I'm warning you and your coal-passer that this is a very uncertain joy-ride you're going on! We may get as far around the island as your ship now is and we may land in the Pacific."

"I'm as good as dead, anyway, if I don't get to my ship!" MacGregor replied somberly. "As for the Portuguee—the coal-passer—from what I can make out of his lingo, he says he got into trouble last night, and he's as anxious to get away from Honolulu as me."

"Then let's hop! The admiral and the captain of the yard spoke of seeing me off last night. Fortunately I told them it would been near seven before I'd get away, so they won't be over for a while yet. If they come early, you're out of luck. Let's go!"

He led the way down a step ladder to a float, alongside which was moored the sea-plane.

MacGregor waited for Best to go, then he cast a quick, encouraging look into the grimy, blackened face half concealed beneath the canvas hat.

The officer showed the others where to sit in the little crowded cockpit of the seaplane. Then he and Best busied themselves casting off the lines that held the flying craft to the float.

When the engine-room telegraph had jingled "stand-by" the night before, the second and third engineers were both below.

"Wonder where the chief is?" the third remarked.

"Up in the moonlight with the red-headed Jane!" the second promptly replied. "Hasn't he been chasing up there to see if she was back every little while? She's probably aboard, and him and her's looking at the beautiful moon. The chief 'll hop down, pronto."

"Speak the language, bo!" the other grinned. "Not 'pronto.' My little dusky friend give me a lesson this afternoon. 'Wiki-wiki' is the Hawaiian for 'pronto.' There's a song about

> Honey-cow, wiki-wiki,
> Sang a sweet young maid to me
> As she—"

"Stew it!" the second growled. "It's the chief we were discussing—not your chocolate-colored skirt!"

"Oh, let the chief be! Guess we know enough to start the old hooker if the chief's busy with the moonlight!" the third remarked cockily. "Gawd knows, the chief may be asleep, and I'm not begrudging him any rest. He's worked like a hellion over this limping daughter of gloom!"

"You said it!" the second agreed. Then, as another jingle sounded, he added: "There she goes!"

Above, as far as the passengers were concerned, all was peaceful. Mr. Fairfax, who had gone to the girls' room before turning in, to see that the two were safe aboard, had been answered in the affirmative by Patricia.

"Eileen says good night. She is in bed. Her head aches," the red-headed young woman lied pleasantly. Patricia was romantic, and the entire situation suited her taste.

"I'm sorry about the head. Good night, Eileen!" Mr. Fairfax called. Then he added: "Make her stay in bed to-morrow if she is no better, Miss Herron. Any one who is crazy enough to dance in these latitudes ought to suffer! Good night!"

He turned and went to his room, feeling rather well pleased now that Massey was no longer one of the party.

Patricia, wide awake, and dimpling as she thought of the shock she must have given MacGregor—and the second shock she would give him the next day, when she appeared and confided the entire story in him, sighed and picked up a book.

It was after the Arguello lay at anchor in the harbor that Patricia was startled by another knock on the door. MacGregor again?

She muffled her voice so that it was indistinguishable from Eileen's as she said: "What is it?"

"It's the quartermaster, miss. We'll be sailin' soon. Shall I tell the skipper the other lady ain't aboard yet?"

"But she is aboard," Patricia replied. "We're both here."

The quartermaster stared at the closed door as if he were trying to look through it. "Both aboard, miss? But—I was at the gangway the whole evenin'—I seen just one of you come back."

Patricia forced a merry laugh. She had not counted on this watchful guardian of the gangway.

"We're both here, quartermaster! You must have indulged in a little nap, if you missed seeing us both come back!"

The man was silent, puzzling. Then he protested: "I wasn't asleep. And I wasn't away from the gangway save for a minute to get a drink of water from the saloon cooler."

Again Patricia laughed. "Then that must have been the very minute I came aboard."

"But I'd have seen you come through the saloon alleyway!" the bewildered man insisted stubbornly.

Patricia thought quickly. "I didn't come in that way," she explained finally as if humoring him. "I ran down the deck toward the back of the ship for a moment. I wanted to speak to some one. And I came in that rear door at the end of the hall."

Secure behind the closed door, the quartermaster grinned broadly. "Oh! You'll excuse me, miss. I was worried, thinkin' one of you was still ashore and us sailin' so soon."

"You're very faithful to your duties," Patricia answered graciously. Then, muffling her face against the pillow and assuming Eileen's languid, disdainful tone, she said: "You were quite right in making sure, quartermaster. Good night!"

"Good night, miss. Good night!" the man replied, and he went away chuckling to himself: "That red-headed one! I'll bet she leads the chief a grand life between here and China all right, all right!"

The seaplane was doing far better with four persons aboard than Lieutenant Travers had dared hope she would. She had "hopped off" neatly, and was making about fifty miles an hour, steadily winging her way round the southwesterly turn of Oahu.

From time to time, Larry MacGregor glanced at Miss Fairfax. The girl sat erect, eyes staring straight ahead. Larry was sure she was scared half to death, but if she was, she did not show it.

"Some little trump!" Larry exclaimed to himself. "Some fine little trump! Any other woman would have gone smash last evenin', and hocus-pocused the whole works to-day!

"Never a wink of sleep, and a heart-hurt big enough to paralyze her! And now this unseemly business of traveling' up over the water instead of down under it, as is *my* custom. She's all right!"

The Arguello would be well around into that channel with the devilish name by this time, Larry mused. Had they missed him yet? Would that mad skipper really continue along without him? Had Patricia found out that he had taken her at her word and gone ashore to seek her? Was she making a joke of it? Was his sick ship making out all right? These and a dozen other questions kept Larry's mind in a turmoil.

In the mean time the seaplane was skirting around the island, which lay, a panorama of beauty, to the right.

They passed over one or two ships: the Mauna Kea, rolling from one island port to another; a Japanese cargo boat steaming unhurriedly on her course toward Honolulu Harbor.

It seemed a thousand years to Larry before the seaplane turned northwestward over that stretch of water known as Kaieie Waho Channel.

Suddenly Best turned in his seat, smiling, and waved an exultant arm. He had sighted the Arguello, twin black streamers of smoke pouring from her funnels, about thirty miles west of Waimea Bay.

And just then something went wrong with the seaplane. The propeller abruptly stopped its rapid revolutions—the zooming of the motor ceased.

Eileen, with a sharp, indrawn breath, clutched Larry's arm. With his free hand, he reached out and patted her. His heart, which had been beating with hope and exaltation, seemed to die in his breast.

Then, just as Lieutenant Travers was planning a sweeping descent, the motor resumed its functioning and the little craft sped ahead.

Larry could have sobbed like an overwrought woman.

In a few minutes more they had the Arguello abeam. The waters beneath them were choppy, but the seaplane was nosing downward toward the steamer. Lieutenant Travers smiled cheerfully at Best as he shouted: "We may have to swim—it 'll be a good thing for those two passengers of ours if they do get a bath!"

CHAPTER VII.

HAIL TO THE CHIEF.

HAD his three assistants not so wholly liked him and so fully appreciated his present need of rest, the chief engineer of the Arguello would have been missed long before he was. The ship was throbbing steadily along, and not one of the junior engineers felt the need nor the desire to disturb their chief, who they now took for granted, was sleeping the sleep of exhaustion in his room.

In the mess-room at eight o'clock, Charlie

Green sat down to breakfast with the weary second assistant.

"Where's the chief?" he asked.

"Sleepin' in, I guess. He's been doin' double tricks, what with his engines below, and his lady friend above."

Green frowned. If only Larry did not have such a weakness for the fair sex!

"I'll give him a call when I'm through. He'll need a bite to eat." But it was half past eight before Green made his way to the chief's door. He, too, knew how little sleep MacGregor had indulged in—and it was a long way to Hong-Kong.

The chief's door was on the hook. Green reached up and unfastened it, and stepped over the high threshold.

The room was like a furnace. The electric fan was shut off, and the little current of air that blew from port-hole to the slightly open door had not even driven out the fumes of Larry's pipe.

Green stopped short in his tracks and stared at the bunk. There was no sign of the chief. No sign of his bunk having been slept in. Green stood for a moment taken aback. Then he turned and stepped swiftly to the second assistant's room, rudely interrupting that young gentleman's entrance into slumberland.

"Second, when did you actually see the chief last?"

"What? The chief? What's the matter?" the engineer asked as he noticed Green's expression.

"I said when did you actually see the chief last?"

"Why—last night—half an hour or so before we sailed. What do you mean? Isn't he in his room?"

"He's not."

"Then he'll either be down in the engine-room or on deck, forward, with the red-headed lady," the second replied crossly. "What's the big idea of your excitement?"

"Oh, nothing!" the mate jeered. "Just a hunch that the chief is still in Honolulu."

"You're crazy with the heat!" the second growled inelegantly. He rolled over on his side, and immediately fell asleep again.

Green spent the next ten minutes hunting for his friend. No one remembered having seen the chief since the night before.

The old man was on the bridge, watching the approach of a seaplane, when his mate hurried up to him.

"The chief's missing!" Green announced abruptly.

The skipper turned a slow gaze on him. "What's that?" he asked in his flat, emotionless way.

"I said the chief is missing, sir," Green repeated loudly. He felt a desire to shout at the old man—to shake him—to do something to send him flying out of his usual calm.

For a moment the skipper considered this statement. Then he turned his back on the mate and again looked away toward the seaplane, which was drawing rapidly abeam and descending toward the channel waters.

Green was about to curse the old fossil beneath his breath, when he, too, caught sight of the flying craft. He leaned over the starboard rail and peered intently at the four occupants of the seaplane. He saw that two of the men in her were waving their arms, as if to attract attention. The skipper, standing unperturbed, called to the third mate, who was on watch:

"You might inform the engine-room that we shall stop and wait for the chief engineer of this vessel to get aboard and resume his duties."

As the third mate, his eyes popping half out of his head, sprang to the telegraph, the old man added to Green:

"Get a ladder over, from the after-well deck, Mr. Mate. When the chief engineer is aboard, you might ask him to step up here for a moment's conversation."

Green took the bridge ladder at almost one bound. He was aft in another, and had a couple of men carrying out orders before the seaplane was fairly settled in the choppy waters.

The sudden stopping of the ship brought Mr. Fairfax and Patricia Herron on deck. They leaned over the rail, watching the seaplane taxi toward the ship.

Patricia stared hard at the occupants. Then she gasped. Larry MacGregor!

What on earth did this mean—his being here in a seaplane, when she thought he was breaking his heart below? She could not resist walking aft to watch him come aboard. The grimy figure in dungarees beside him did not interest her.

Mr. Fairfax, also recognizing the chief, strode amazedly after Patricia. He gained the after rail, just as the two from the seaplane started to climb up the Jacob's ladder.

Larry came first. As he neared the top he heard the old man's bellow from the bridge:

"Who's that coming aboard with the chief?"

"One of the coal-passers, sir!" MacGregor roared back.

He stood at the rail until the second figure awkwardly made the deck. Then he turned on the cowering creature in the dungarees and shouted:

"Now get to hell below, where you belong! Pronto!"

The slight figure shrank away and ran for the port alleyway.

Larry had instructed Miss Fairfax well. Those who had watched the pseudo-coal-passer's hasty retreat took it for granted that he was making for his post below. But Eileen, seeing the deck clear, as Larry had been sure it would be, ran along it and up through the deserted cabin, darting up the companionway to the deck above, where in another instant she was safe—though hysterical—in her own room.

MacGregor turned back to the rail and waved a hand to the two navy men, who were grinning good-naturedly up at him.

"I'll be comin' back through Honolulu!" he called. "'Tis then I'll be sayin' what I haven't had chance to say to-day!"

"Aloha oe!" Lieutenant Travers laughed. "Good luck, chief! See you on your return—if we don't get drowned before we fetch back to Honolulu."

And as the Arguello and the seaplane drifted apart, the motor of the latter resumed its humming. In another minute she was in the air, with Best waving a friendly hand backward.

MacGregor swung weakly about, to find the mate staring into his face.

"'Lo, Carlo!" he said wearily. "I'm sick in my stomach and dead for sleep."

Green continued to study him a moment; then he said:

"The old man wants to see you. As for me, don't mind me! I'm only supposed to be the chum of your bosom—so don't think anything of dropping lightly out of the clouds and telling me simply that you have the belly-ache!"

MacGregor did not even smile. "It's the droppin' out of the clouds that give it to me, son!" he exclaimed wryly.

"Well, get up to the bridge and get the little dose of medicine the old man has for you, you black bird!" Green growled. "I'll wait on Your Touristship in your stateroom."

"Don't do it!" MacGregor answered soberly. "If the engines are runnin' and the furnace crowns haven't gone, complete, I'm goin' to give an exhibition of how a man can sleep—and I'm wantin' no interference!"

He reeled to the ladder, climbed painfully to the saloon deck, and made his unsteady way past Mr. Fairfax, who stood glaring at him, too incensed to speak.

Had any one been close enough to have heard the whisper from Larry's lips, he would have caught the words:

"The little brick! She carried it off like a soldier! Oh, she's a woman after my own soul—even if she is a brunette!"

Larry had not had time to consider every angle of his plan to smuggle Eileen back aboard the Arguello. His one concern had been to get her to the ship without her father learning of her adventure in Honolulu. He was reasonably sure that he could manage to fool every one who saw her in her disguise as coal-passer. Where he slipped up was in failing to realize that the Black Gang would be curious to find out which of its number had been the chief's companion in the seaplane chase.

The Black Gang lives in a small world of its own, down in the bowels of a ship. It has practically no intercourse outside. Therefore its members are drawn very close together. Owing to the cutting down of the Arguello's crew, and the consequent smallness of her Black Gang, the men were

kept in touch with each other's actions to an unusual degree.

The news of the chief's bringing a coal-passer back to the ship, eight hours and a half after she had left port—and above all, in a flying craft—had furnished the men with an exciting item of conversation. Every one of them was eager to find out which of the crowd had figured in the adventure. And it followed, inevitably, that each man had denied his being the culprit. Not one of the Black Gang but could prove by one of his shipmates that he was aboard the Arguello when she cleared from Honolulu Harbor.

The thing became a mystery; and mysteries are bad business at sea.

The Black Gang was composed of Portuguese—a superstitious, excitable lot. The jokes and guffaws that greeted the first telling of the tale gave way, quickly, to puzzled questioning. When it was finally determined among them that none of their number could possibly have been the chief's companion, this questioning developed into uneasy speculations among that section of the crew.

In short, before the Arguello had traveled very far from the islands, the Portuguese had decided that there was, somewhere aboard the ship, a man who didn't belong there.

Their mutterings gradually seeped to the ears of the deck force, who, although they were certain there was some " funny business " going on, were at first not so prone to consider it seriously.

CHAPTER VIII.

SUPERSTITION.

AS the days dragged on and the old ship's progress became patently more painful to her, unrest grew among the seamen. They were tormented now by an old fellow among their number who had put in many years on sailing ships and who seemed ridden by every superstition known to sailormen.

This old sea-dog, known among his shipmates as " Captain Gloom," had an uncomfortable habit of singing all the doleful old chanties he had ever picked up. His quavering voice disturbed the forecastle many a time as he sang:

Stormie's gone, the good old man,
To my aye, storm along!
Oh, Stormie's gone, that good old man,
Aye, aye, aye, Mr. Storm along.

They dug his grave with a silver spade,
To my aye, storm along!
His shroud of finest silk was made,
Aye, aye, aye, Mr. Storm along.

They lowered him with a golden chain,
To my aye, storm along!
Their eyes all dim with more than rain,
Aye, aye, aye, Mr. Storm along.

Many a time Captain Gloom had been threatened with a bucket of suji over his head or a holystone through it, but nothing deterred him from his lugubrious chanting, nor did anything interrupt his vicious pastime of worrying the men with his talk of the mysterious " Jonah " hidden somewhere about the ship.

There was an atmosphere of depression about the rest of the ship, too, owing to the certainty among the mates and engineers that Larry would find himself in deep waters over his missing the ship in Honolulu.

MacGregor was liked—greatly liked. The story of his heroism aboard his two former ships had been told and retold by Green. His shipmates were proud to have such a man acting as chief. And now he would lose his license—and through his own fault!

MacGregor had been able to think up no good excuse for his belated joining of his ship. He had repeated the story he told in Honolulu: that he was gambling and the time had slipped by unnoticed. It never occurred to him to tell the truth. That was Miss Fairfax's affair, and Larry would as soon have drowned himself as have betrayed her secret.

The old man had not said much, but Mr. Fairfax had. He had told MacGregor his unvarnished opinion of an engineer who would let his rotting old ship sail while he enjoyed himself ashore. He had told him a few other things, too, which had made Larry wonder where Eileen got her sweet

disposition from. For he had decided that neath there must be a wonderfully lovely her coldness was a mask, and that under-character. It could not be otherwise with the woman who had been the trump she had proven herself.

The skipper had grown more and more peculiar. He took to keeping to his room in seemingly endless spells, leaving the navigation of the ship in the hands of his young officers.

And as sort of a finishing touch to the entire situation, there sprang up a marked coolness between the two fair passengers. This was not surprising, under the circumstances.

Patricia, upon going down to her room, while the ship was in Kaieie Waho Channel, on a pretense of seeing if Miss Fairfax wished anything—smiling to herself, meanwhile, as she thought of Eileen as Massey's bride—was almost paralyzed with amazement upon finding a really sick woman in the bunk.

Miss Fairfax was not in the mood to explain her return in detail. She could not force herself to tell even Patricia that Massey was a married man. She felt smirched by his actions. Her self-respect was suffering. She merely told Patricia that Mr. MacGregor had persuaded her to change her mind, and that she had come back to the ship with him.

Patricia not only objected to the scant information she could draw from Miss Fairfax, but she also disliked that "Mr. MacGregor persuaded me." Larry had been her "property." She did not like to have him show too much interest in some one else. Her retroussé nose was out of joint.

To add to this, Larry and Eileen naturally drifted into a warm friendship. The engineer had not taken the first step toward this. The woman had sought him out, soon after the ship had left the islands behind, to tell him about her wild near-elopement.

"'Tis none of my business," Larry objected, as she broached the subject.

"Please! Don't you see that it will make me feel easier to talk to you about it?"

"If 'twill be relievin' your feelin's, tell me," was the grave response. "Only, remember I'm against Massey, first, last, and always. I'm a prejudiced man, and 'twill be hard for me to understand how a woman like yourself could have cared enough to marry such as him."

"Oh, I didn't care enough!" Eileen burst out. "I was not in love with him! I was desperate. If you'd lived my life, you'd understand. He talked of home to me. I've never had a home. I've been running about the world for years and years, listening to father talk business. Men have never made love to me. They've been too concerned with making money in connection with father's affairs.

"I was sick and tired of that kind of life when Massey appeared. He liked me—did not treat me as if I were merely an object of courtesy because of my relationship to the big Fairfax! He made love to me—it was the first really human thing that had happened to me, and it swept me off my balance.

"When he described his bungalow in Honolulu, and I dreamed of having a home with flowers, and a kitchen to putter around in, and a man who—who—cared—" Her voice broke and her eyes filled.

"And you would have given your life for such things?" Larry questioned, in amazement.

"A woman's life is a worthless thing without love and a home—and children," Eileen answered bitterly.

MacGregor considered this. Aye, that was what women wanted most. Perhaps that was why the MacGregor women had had sadness in their eyes. They had their homes and their children, to be sure—but love! Love was given them, but how? By men who were never in the home—men who sometimes were away at sea until their children came into the world and were months old before they ever saw them—men who sometimes went to sea and then never came back.

This conversation between MacGregor and Eileen was the first of many. And close companionship between two such natures, particularly at sea, is bound to bring results. As will be seen later.

From stem to stern, from bridge to bunkers, there was a new atmosphere over the Arguello. The rumblings before a storm—a smoldering fire that needed only a puff of wind to fan it into flame.

The Arguello had traveled well over half her course toward Hong-Kong before the first "puff" came. It blew upon the Arguello in the form of a broken crank shaft. Her starboard propeller went out of commission, in consequence, and the sick ship became a limping one as well. Her speed dropped to five knots an hour.

Under normal conditions, it would have taken the Arguello about twenty days to reach Hong-Kong. That is a long enough period at sea under pleasant conditions. Conditions aboard the Arguello were not that. Her supplies were found to be running low. Her coal might and again might not hold out. And the men were daily working themselves—aided by Captain Gloom—into a state of tense, overwrought nerves.

Captain Gloom took advantage of the broken crank shaft. He went about muttering that the Jonah was beginning to show his work. There would be worse, he prophesied, hollowly—much worse.

There was no definite, concerted plan among the men, but little groups of them got together and talked over the advisability of taking some action regarding the Jonah. It was time they located him and drove him out of his hiding-place. This was agreed upon, but there was much hesitation, as the mysterious person was undoubtedly not quite human—else how could he live without food? And no one was even seen carrying food to any secret corner of the ship.

Had time not hung so draggingly over the crew, things might have been different. The weather was calm, and the days and nights seemed endless through lack of change.

Men began telling of various noises they heard in different parts of the ship. This was not imagination. There were mysterious small sounds. But they were caused by the more adventurous men who had taken upon themselves the task of digging the Jonah out of his hiding-place. These men acted cautiously, as they had no mind to be found out by the officers and given what for. They were very secretive about their searching.

Finally, one night, an overwrought stoker, determined to explore the after hold, stumbled into a man in the dark below. Both he and the man into whom he ran had one and the same idea. The other must be the mysterious Jonah. Though each had carried a lantern, he had unfortunately placed it where he could not reach it at the minute. Quick as a flash the Portuguese drew a knife and plunged it, in panic, into the other man's breast. Then he grabbed up his lantern as he fled, and made for the poop deck, his face ghastly beneath the grime on it.

In the morning, during the first watch, it was discovered that one of the seamen was missing. A search was made for him, but he was not found. The day passed, ending with the verdict that he must have fallen or leaped overboard during the night.

It was not until two nights later that his body was found. Another seaman, doing his share of the hunt, fell across it. Terrified, he raced above—almost too terrified to make a report to the already harassed mate.

"The Jonah, sir! I fell across his body in the hold, aft. He's dead—lyin' there, dead!"

Green grasped the man's shoulders and shook him.

"What in hell's this? What's the matter with you? What are you talking about, anyway?"

Then the man tried to explain. He was in such a state of fear and excitement that Green could neither make head nor tail of what he was driving at. He took the man to the skipper.

The old man exhibited his usual calm. "Put that man in irons, Mr. Mate. He's crazy. He may do damage if he's at large."

That was all.

Green led the sailor away, to carry out the skipper's orders. But the man broke down completely as they went aft.

"Not in irons, sir! Oh, my God, not in

irons! If he should walk—his spirit—I couldn't get away! Don't put me in irons! I'm not crazy! You go below, sir, and you'll see for yourself."

"I'll go below, all right!" Green growled. "I'm damned sick of this sort of monkey-business! And if I don't find that corpse, you stay in irons until we reach Hong-Kong!"

"You'll find it, sir! You'll find it! For God's sake, weight it well and heave it over!" the man babbled.

As soon as he had obeyed the skipper's orders Green called two men and told them he wished them to go down into the after hold with him.

The men hung back. They looked at each other and then away.

"Get along there! What's come over this ship, anyway?" the mate roared.

"I'm thinkin' hell's come aboard, ever since that Jonah joined us back yonder," one of the men muttered sullenly.

"What's that? Jonah, again? I'll Jonah the whole boiling of you if you give me any more lip!" Green said furiously. "Now march!"

He made his way, circuitously, below into the big after hold. His lantern cast grotesque shadows along the deck. The two men following him, hesitant and fearful, hung close together.

Suddenly, Green stopped short.

"Hello! What's this?" he exclaimed. The two men behind him stopped in their tracks, ready to turn about and flee. Fear of the dark, once they were out of the dim lantern light, held them to the spot.

Green stooped down and stared at what lay at his feet.

"Larsen!" he ejaculated. "Larsen, with a knife through him!" He straightened and wheeled upon the cringing, amazed seamen. "Now, out with it! What has been going on? What's this about a Jonah? And what was that damned crazy man doing down here anyway? What did Larsen want down here?" The mate strongly suspected that the men were after liquor, as the Arguello carried a large cargo of it.

The two men were too astonished to speak. They had fully expected to find the body of the mysterious "coal-passer." Finding one of their own number murdered was too much for them.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PASSING OF JONAH.

CAPTAIN GLOOM was in his glory. His Jonah was working fine! A murder—a seaman in irons, under suspicion of being the murderer—and one of the stokers beginning to show signs of insanity.

The latter was undoubtedly a fact. Guilt, added to fear, caused sleeplessness. This, with his work in the stifling fire-room, was telling on the man who had knifed Larsen. As the Arguello crawled slowly on her last lap of the long trip to Hong-Kong, the Portuguese ran amuck, and was captured and thrown into irons, with difficulty.

All this time, days lengthening into weeks, and the weeks into a month, the food supply was growing less and the men's nervous condition increasing.

Larry, working like ten men to keep the ship from "falling into broken parts on his shoulder," had the comfort of Eileen's warm friendship—a friendship that was rapidly growing into something more, keeping pace with Larry's feelings.

Finally, within three hundred miles of Hong-Kong, when the men should have begun to "see daylight," things came to a crisis. It was because of the scant food being served. The men had found out about the cargo of liquor, and one of them, a trifle madder than the rest, suggested that all hands get together and help themselves. One glorious spree, he put it, as the glass was falling and there would be the devil's own job for them if they ran into a storm.

"That old fool of a skipper doesn't give a damn whether we ever reach port alive or not! He's starvin' us and drivin' us, and me, I'm gonna have a drink or die!" said the ringleader to as many of the men as he could gather together. "It won't be no use for a handful of us to rush the booze. It's gotta be every man in the ship. We'll get hold of the other guys and give 'em the

good word, and this afternoon we'll nacherly help ourselves to what's sloshin' about in them kegs and barrels below."

Even the most timid spirit aboard the Arguello was inflamed at the thought of "booze." There was not a dissenting voice to the preposterous proposition. And as it was handled carefully, not a breath of the intended raid on the after hold reached the ears of the officers or engineers.

It was planned that the break for the hold should be made at three o'clock, during the second mate's watch. The quartermaster at the wheel could easily find an excuse for handing over his duty to the mate for a moment, and could get below. The Black Gang would simply have to rush it—through the 'tween decks.

Little was thought of the men off watch congregating on the after-well deck. There was weather making, and it was taken for granted that they were out for a breath of air before the storm came. But when three bells sounded on the bridge, the group aft became suddenly active.

"Any man who's got sand and a thirst, follow me!" rang out the cry.

There was a joyous roar from all hands. Then a rush for No. 3 hatch.

Before the emotionless skipper had been notified and had sent the mate and the second mate tumbling aft, armed with revolvers, wedges had been driven out, battens torn away and the hatch cover hauled off. The mad crew swarmed down the ladders into the hold.

Green, revolver in hand, sent the second mate flying above with a report to the skipper, who had been forced to stand watch on the bridge, with the third mate at the wheel.

Below, in the engine-room, MacGregor stood, cursing. To use his own words, there was a funeral taking place in the steam gage. Without steam, he could not make the Arguello go. And without the suddenly crazy Black Gang, he could not get any steam.

The third assistant, sent above to find out what was going on, came back with the laconic reply that "hell was popping." At last the skipper shook off his lethargy. In fact, he seemed to shake off a score of weary, dreary years. His eyes lighted for the first time.

"Send Mr. Fairfax up here to me. I'll take the wheel for a minute. No danger of running into anything out here now. You and the third mate go join Mr. Green. Tell him I say to get that hatch cover back in place and to batten it down securely."

"But the men—" stuttered the second mate.

"Batten that hatch down so they can't get out. Then get word down to the chief to see to it that they don't get out through the engine-room. Then come up here, all of you."

By the time the mates had started their task of battening down the hatch, the men below had broached much liquid refreshment. And they found it good. So good that they laughed derisively up at the officers struggling with the hatch. Not one of them believed for an instant that he could not get out when ready. And not one was ready, nor would he be until he had his fill of the booze flowing so plentifully in the hold.

Up on the bridge, a hurried council was held. Not only Mr. Fairfax, but also the two girls were in attendance. Eileen, flashing a quick look at MacGregor, stood quiet and aloof, listening calmly to the skipper, who placed the situation before them and spoke briefly of the need of keeping up steam.

"Even if we don't make headway, we must keep up steam. I never thought to see the day I'd ask mates of mine to handle scoops and slice bars, but it's come. I'll stand watch on the bridge, and Mr. Fairfax can do his best at the wheel."

Eileen stepped forward. "Why put father at the wheel? He is big and strong. He could do better below, with the other men. I don't know anything about steering a ship, but I know as much as father does. Isn't it possible for Miss Herron and me to take turns at the wheel?"

MacGregor, listening, smiled. He smiled because of the valiant spirit of her, and he smiled because he thought he detected a slight malice beneath Eileen's suggestion that her father don dungarees. Was she punishing Mr. Fairfax for his prejudice

against himself, MacGregor? To his own surprise, he spoke.

"Miss Fairfax is right, sir. You've said we've the Japan current to buck now, and that we must keep up steam. I'm needin' man-power below. With you here on the bridge, the ladies could keep the ship headin' as straight as Mr. Fairfax could. I'm askin' you to give me the extra hand, sir."

The skipper looked at the two girls. And suddenly he smiled—yes, actually smiled.

"All right!" he said, and his voice was almost gentle. "Get below with your handful, Mr. MacGregor! Keep the pumps and dynamos going, anyway. It 'll be quite a little time before those fools in the hold sleep off their folly. We'll keep up steam, if only to show them our feelings!"

In the hold pandemonium reigned. The men had had all the liquor they wished. When they had drunkenly tried to get out of their prison they found they were unable to do so. Their hoped-for exit through the 'tween decks was securely fastened.

Then, in the dark, men inflamed by liquor began to yell for the damned fool who had suggested this adventure. In another minute, they had fallen upon each other and begun a murderous fight.

Down in the engine-room, MacGregor stood alone, listening to sounds from the stokehole and bunkers, where his three juniors, the three mates, and Mr. Fairfax labored at feeding the fires. Larry's eyes were glued to the steam gage, and his lips whispered a sort of prayer.

Night found the skipper at the wheel. More than ever he resembled a figure of Fate.

On the bridge, almost too exhausted to keep on her feet, Eileen paced back and forth, pausing now and then to lean faintly on the rail.

She had exchanged places with the skipper because of the pains in her arms from holding the wheel. Not that this was an effort, but it was an unaccustomed use of certain muscles.

Patricia lay on the settee in the chart-room, sleeping the sleep of exhaustion.

Turn and turn about, watch was kept on the bridge, for the determined men below were keeping up steam, and the engines of the Arguello were working and the ship's propeller was feebly turning over. It seemed a waste of coal, but the skipper was watching the glass, and he had no desire to have the approaching storm sweep down on a powerless ship.

In the morning all hands knocked off until something to eat was procured. Those who had worked below were half dead with fatigue. They ate like men drugged—too numb to taste what was set before them. When they had finished, the skipper called them together and made a short speech. He complimented them upon what they had done, but his greatest praise was for Eileen Fairfax. She had done not only her share of the work, but it was she who had got together the breakfast just finished.

"And now," the old man concluded, "I'll go down and have a word with the men."

When the hatch cover was again lifted and the after hold exposed, the skipper and his faithful allies stood above, revolvers in hand. They looked down upon a scene reminiscent of the days of buccaneers.

Two men were dead, one knifed and one with a skull crushed. Others were battered beyond recognition. The rest were parched with thirst and splitting of head.

The skipper's speech was short and concise.

"You hellions will either come up and go to work, or you'll stay below and die there. The glass is down, and you know what that means off the China coast. I'll give you five minutes to decide."

One of the quartermasters staggered to the foot of the ladder.

"I've had enough," he said weakly. "I'd go to hell for a drink of water and some air, right now. Can I come up, sir?"

"Come along. Any more of you wanting air and water?"

There was a moment's hesitation. Then a general movement among the men below.

"'S no use," a voice cried. "He'll beat us up, now, and throw us in the calaboose in Hong-Kong! Le's stay!"

"Is that there Cap'n Gloom?" a second voice cut in.

"No, by Gar! He ees dead—estuck in hees guts!" another cried.

"Dead?" There was a sudden rough laugh from one of the seamen. "Then it's my opinion we best get to hell out of here and back to work! He was the Jonah, himself, if you should ask me! I'm for my job and China, calaboose or not!"

His words were greeted by a dizzy cheer. Slowly, one by one, the men clambered painfully up the ladder and into the dazzling light of day. They found the hatch surrounded by grim, armed men.

"Mr. Green, select the men most fit for work in your department. You do the same, Mr. Chief," the old man grunted. The light had died from his eyes. He looked very old and again very mummy-like.

But in spite of his return to his former state, there was a note of real respect in the tones of both his officers.

"I shall take the bridge," the skipper resumed. "When you get your men picked, Mr. Green, you and the other mates better turn in. There's weather making." He looked toward MacGregor, who was watching him. For a moment their eyes met in deep understanding.

"It looks as if you would have to keep up a bit longer, chief," the skipper remarked almost gently.

"Oh, aye, sir," MacGregor remarked simply. "'Tis only fair. Coal passin' and stokin' is a damn sight harder work than what I did last night! I'll be turnin' in later."

The first watch was a thing of anguish to the men concerned, and of despair to the skipper and chief. The Arguello moved—that was about all that could be said of her. When the watch was changed, the men who came on were fresher. But it took time for the ship to resume anything like her normal course, and in the mean time heavy clouds had lowered above the trucks of the masts.

Below, men eagerly fired the boilers. Calaboose or no calaboose, they wanted land beneath their feet and more food in their stomachs. Scoops were dug strongly into the rapidly decreasing coal—the opening of fire-box doors showed glowing beds.

What had been a brisk wind began to stiffen into a fresh gale. Heavy seas rolled down upon the ship. Her ribs and plates groaned beneath the onslaught; her bolts and rivets protested against further strain.

When the second assistant came to relieve him, MacGregor turned in for a few hours' sleep. Then he was about again, snatching a hurried meal and climbing once more down the iron ladder into the depths. The coming hours marked the crisis in his sick ship's fight for life.

The skipper, who had also turned in for a brief spell, as soon as he could, was now back on the bridge. Eileen and Patricia half sat, half lay in the social hall, trying to ease their bodies from an exhaustion they could not seem to shake off. Their conversation was spasmodic. This was due partly to the increasing fury of the gale into which the Arguello was butting her way, partly to the diffidence born between them.

"Thank Heaven, we have not much more of this to endure," Patricia sighed gratefully. "I'm heartily sick of it." As Eileen made no comment, she added: "Aren't you?"

Eileen had been gazing into space dreamily. Her companion's question startled her into an unguarded reply.

"I was just thinking how sorry I'd be when the trip was over," she said.

Patricia glanced at her sharply.

"Sorry? Good gracious, Eileen, haven't you had enough? Mysteries, mutiny, murder! I never want to see a ship again!"

Eileen smiled, still with the dream in her eyes. "I believe I've learned to love the Arguello."

"The Arguello?" Patricia laughed shortly. "It looks to me as if you'd learned to love something more human than the Arguello! Eileen! A grimy engineer! And you've always been so fastidious!"

Eileen met her eyes squarely. "I should scarcely classify Mr. MacGregor as a grimy engineer. I owe him a very great debt, besides. And he is every inch a man."

"Oh—a man! Of course, he's very fine and all that; but—"

"I don't care to discuss him with you," Eileen interrupted shortly.

"My! You are serious!" Patricia's

laugh was scornful. "I suppose the next thing I know you'll be telling your father the whole story, in order to break down his prejudice against Mr. MacGregor for missing the ship in Honolulu." She moved uneasily as she spoke, and watched her companion's face closely.

Eileen was silent for a moment; then she said quietly:

"In justice to Mr. MacGregor, I can scarcely fail to do so."

"But your father! Oh, Eileen! You know he'll be furious with me! He'll blame me for the whole thing—say I should have prevented you from running off with Massey, or that I should have told him when you did! He'll be wild!"

"And you think I ought to sacrifice Mr. MacGregor because of that? Do you know that father is planning to see that Mr. MacGregor loses his license as chief engineer when we reach Hong-Kong?"

It was Patricia's turn to flush. "Oh, of course! By all means let me suffer! I couldn't expect you to—what was the dramatic word you used?—oh, yes, 'sacrifice' Mr. MacGregor for me!"

A heavy silence fell between them, broken only by the sound of the gale.

Finally Patricia arose, clinging for support to a chair back.

"I'm going to bed," she announced. "Are you coming?"

"No." Eileen's tone was gentle. "I couldn't sleep if I tried. I shall remain here. You go to bed, Pat. You're all worn out. You've been fine—you deserve warmer friendship than I've been giving you."

The other girl burst into sudden tears.

"Oh, you've been all right! It's I that have been horrid. I'm just tired—and sick for land. I never want to see a ship again!" She fled unsteadily to the companionway, and down to her room.

Eileen sat quietly where she was, thinking. In her mind's eye she could picture MacGregor, sweating, laboring, cheering on his driven men in the engine-room and stokehole. She pictured him as he had been when they had sailed from San Francisco, and compared it with the way he looked now.

Larry had aged since leaving the islands. He had grown thin, worn, haggard of face and hollow of eye. There were lines about his mouth—a droop to his splendid shoulders. A man whose duty seemed an obsession—a man one could trust with one's life.

Eileen felt the hot blood rush into her cheeks at the thought, but she faced it bravely and honestly.

If he would only come to her for a moment—a moment.

And suddenly Larry stood before her, looking down at her. He had flung a coat over his singlet, and his face and hands showed signs of a recent scrubbing.

"I don't know why I thought you'd still be up," he smiled wearily. "I just had a hunch."

Eileen had risen and was standing before him, bracing herself against a chair.

"You're not afraid to go to bed?" Larry asked gently.

"No. I was—was—waiting to say good-night to you." She met his eyes steadily.

There was a short silence while they looked into each other's faces. Then, of a sudden, MacGregor held out his arms. Eileen went slowly to him. Her hands slipped up over his tired shoulders and around his neck.

There was a little broken sound from the engineer's lips. He caught her close and held her so, his cheek pressed hard against her dark hair.

Finally she raised her head, leaning it back against his arm so that she could look up at him.

MacGregor's eyes were dark with trouble. "Eileen, Eileen! This should never have happened!" he whispered huskily. "God forgive me for lettin' myself forget!"

"Forget what, Larry?" Eileen asked softly.

MacGregor shook his head sadly. "Not to-night! Oh, not to-night!" he pleaded. "Let me be weak just this once, Eileen! I'm lovin' you so that I can think of nothin' else!"

One of her hands stole upward and pressed his head down toward hers.

"My darlin'!" he murmured unsteadily. "I am goin' to kiss you. God knows if

we'll be seein' another day—and I can't be lettin' you go like this!"

He bent his head until his lips met hers.

CHAPTER X.

LOVE'S DECISION.

THEY did see another day. Two days. Two days that were like some hideous nightmare from which there was no awakening. A nightmare of monstrous seas, devastating winds that poured from dark clouds which closed down about the ship, crucifying work that strained the bodies and harried the souls of all hands.

The Arguello labored heavily against the elements. If any one aboard her had been told she could live through such a storm in her condition, he would have jeered. But she did it—did it valiantly—a testimonial to her builders. She fought her way up the sides of mountains of waters—poised sickeningly at the crests—plunged dizzily down into cavernous troughs.

The men forgot about the Jonah. They were too busy battling for their lives to worry about imaginary things. A new spirit seemed to pervade the ship—the spirit that is found on battle-fields. In this respect the storm was a blessing in disguise: it put the men on their mettle.

"Carry things away, will she?" the bosun would shout to his men. "Come on, boys; we'll cheat the hellion out o' her fun!"

And the hands, with a cheer, would follow their leader out upon perilous decks, everlastingly making fast, battening down afresh, struggling to hold together whatever remained exposed to the fury of the storm.

In spite of their labors, wind and sea stripped the Arguello of her life-boats. And finally, as she heeled over to a perilous degree, her foremast carried away, snapping off several feet above the deck, and stripping away the entire starboard rail along the well deck for'ard, as it went over the side.

But always the ship struggled forward, gaining slowly against the seas crashing over her stanch bow and thundering over her decks.

Patricia and Mr. Fairfax succumbed to seasickness, and lay inert and anguished in their bunks. Eileen, pale and quiet, went from one to the other, doing what she could to ease and comfort them. She seemed indefatigable. Her old-time languor and disdain had been shed like an old cloak for which she had no further use. The change in her gave her an added beauty.

On the third day the weather lifted. The racing seas seemed spent. The wind moderated. The clouds broke. The Arguello, sadly battered and groaning in every joint, forged slowly ahead.

MacGregor made his way above for the first time since the beginning of the storm. He found Eileen leaning against the rail outside the saloon entrance. She greeted him with a slow, glad smile.

"I am thankful, for your sake, that our troubles are practically over," she said softly. "You look as if you were ready to drop."

MacGregor answered her smile ruefully.

"My troubles are only beginning," he answered. "That blow opened up seams, somewheres. She's leakin'."

"Leaking?" The word was a gasp of dismay. "Then that means added work for you?"

"Oh, aye. I've been expectin' that. 'Tis now my joyous duty to see that the pumps work faster than the Pacific. I'm thinkin' we'll make Hong-Kong with our stern scrapin' the bottom."

"The captain said we ought to make it by the afternoon of the day after to-morrow," Eileen told him encouragingly.

MacGregor's face sobered. "So we ought. And then your trip is over. You'll be leavin' us."

He paused, and the woman watched his face anxiously. As he said nothing further, but only gazed somberly toward the horizon, she stepped closer to him and laid her hand on his arm.

"Larry!" Her breath caught. "What is it you've come to say to me?"

He turned a slow gaze on her, his eyes filled with pain.

"Eileen! I'd give my two hands if I could say only what's in my heart to say

And that is that I'm lovin' you with all my strength."

"Is there anything more to be said?" she asked gently.

"Don't make it any harder for me, my dear!" he murmured. "There is so much more."

"There's this, Eileen. I am an engineer—uneducated, save in the matter of valves, pumps, boilers, and the like. You are a rich man's daughter, with schoolin', tastes, and surroundin's that have no place alongside such as me."

"Larry! You can say such a thing as that?"

"Aye. For it's far more serious than you're realizin'. My dear, I can't enter into your kind of life—couldn't, even if I had money, which I've not. I just don't belong. And—don't you see, Eileen? I have no life to ask you to share. I've known only engines, all my life.

"The only home I've had since I was a kid along the water-front was in the depths of some ship. Even my love for you, Eileen, could not transplant me from my profession. I'd have to be born all over again, of a different stock. Can't you see, Eileen?

"Your comin' into my life has been—oh, I'm not speechmaker enough to be puttin' my feelin's into words." He swallowed hard and a sudden mist clouded his eyes. "All I can be offerin' you, my dear, is the remembrance of my love. You will go your way—be findin' your mate in your own world, some o' these days. He will give you the home—and the other things you desire. Me—I—" He smiled bravely, the look in his eyes falling upon her like a benediction. "I'll go along with my work of nursin' ships across the waters. And I'll be carryin' with me a dream that 'll never, never change."

Eileen's eyes closed sharply. A dry sob broke from between her white lips. After a moment she looked up and met MacGregor's regard courageously.

"Perhaps you are right, Larry. You know yourself best."

"I know I am right. To offer you anythin' besides my love would be to offer you nothin' at all, Eileen. I'm givin' you the best I have to give. I shall go through my days givin' you that."

He gazed for a long instant into her face, as if to impress her image upon his mind.

"Even now," he said gently, "when every minute with you is like a blessed minute in heaven, I'm needed below. Can't you see, my dear?"

She nodded dumbly. "I'll come to you before you're leavin' in Hong-Kong."

Larry wheeled quickly about and made his way blindly to the engine-room.

The Arguello, somewhat down by the stern, had crawled sluggishly in through Lyemun Pass, and on to her anchorage off Kowloon Point. She accomplished the last few miles with a dying gasp—her bunkers scraped clean of coal.

The passengers were gone ashore. The ship seemed strangely still. She was waiting for more coal—either it must come at once, or Larry's gloomy words about the stern scraping the bottom would come true.

MacGregor climbed heavily up the iron ladder to the main deck and went slowly out to the port rail, where he could gaze shoreward.

He was startled from his day-dreaming by the skipper's voice at his elbow.

"I'm going ashore, Mr. MacGregor, for dinner with Mr. Fairfax. A coolie just brought off a note from him. And one from the agents. There'll be coal aboard in a short time. It will do until we are in drydock."

The skipper paused, and his eyes suddenly twinkled. "There's a note for you, too. But before I give it to you I want to say something. Miss Fairfax came to me last night, and told me the truth about your overstay in Honolulu."

"She told you?" Larry exclaimed.

"She did." The old man smiled sadly. "If only something like that had ever happened to me in my youth! It would have kept me from growing old—the remembrance of it!" he murmured. He held out his hand. Larry took it uncertainly. "If ever you see that hound, Massey, again, just remember I'm not young enough for fisticuffs, and give him my share!"

"Oh, aye!" MacGregor responded heartily. Then he added hesitatingly: "You was sayin' somethin' about a note for me?"

The skipper reached into his pocket and drew forth a letter, which he handed the engineer.

"Better write your answer right away, and I'll take it ashore with me."

"I'll be doin' it. Thank you, sir!" MacGregor sped to his room.

The note was not, as he had hoped, from Eileen. It was from Mr. Fairfax, and read as follows:

MY DEAR CHIEF:

Eileen has told me the story from beginning to end—including the stand you have taken regarding herself. I always believed there were men like you, somewhere in the world. Only, it has been my misfortune never to have met one before.

If you think you could be content ashore, with a stationary engineer's billet, let me know and I'll see what I can do. If not, we have a vacancy as chief on one of our liners. Would you care to consider it? Come up and see me about it to-morrow.

Sincerely,

H. V. FAIRFAX.

Larry's reply, written on borrowed notepaper, and scrawled laboriously in an uneven, boyish hand, was short and concise.

MR. H. V. FAIRFAX:

Dear Sir—Thanks for your kind offer. I could not live upon a floor that stood still. I'm a seagoing man. As for a liner thanks again. I'm going in cargo boats after this. Women and engines have no place together in a man's head. Regards to the ladies espeshully Miss Fairfax.

Respectfully,

LAWRENCE MACGREGOR.

Then Larry, having despatched his note, lit his pipe and sank down upon his settee.

There Green found him, half an hour later.

"Carlo, my boy," MacGregor greeted him abruptly, "were you meanin' what you said about a cargo boat, long since?"

Green stared. "Yes. Why?"

"You and me'll still be shipmates," Larry replied soberly.

The mate smiled at him affectionately. "Meaning you're through with the women, old son?"

"There's only one woman in the world, Carlo," Larry replied gently. "And I've found her. But since I love her and can never mate with her, I'm thinkin' to occupy myself entirely with machinery in future." He paused and blew a wreath of smoke into the air.

"Some whole families is crooks," he mused. "Some is entirely made up of imbeciles. Some is engineers. The crooks, some of 'em, escape jail. There's lots of imbeciles outside of asylums. But engineers—" He sighed mightily. "I'm wishin' I hadn't been born a MacGregor!"

(The end.)

TO A HOTEL BLOTTER

ABSORBER of unknown news,
Thou, porous sheet of greenish hues,
How many secrets, good and base,
Have placed their imprint on thy face!

Love's tender whispers of romance,
Clandestine meetings, games of chance,
Attempts at literature and art
Leave smudged facsimiles on thy heart.

Your cryptic surface might unfold
The rainbow's end and pot of gold
Were it not the desk clerk's plan
To give you to the old rag man.

Janet Elizabeth Curtis.

Racker Remembers

by Olin Lyman

THE gray-haired judge finished pronouncing sentence. A subdued hum started in the court-room. Two policemen took Joe Racker toward the corridor. From this a stairway led to the cells below.

Close to thirty and a burglar since his 'teens, Racker had spent five years—from twenty to twenty-five—in Sing Sing. He had been an ugly prisoner, knowing ignominious punishments. It had been hell—and now he was sentenced, after four years of liberty, to ten years more in the gloomy pile at Ossining.

He stumbled forward, massive head thrust forth from between thick shoulders. Little gray eyes gleamed wickedly; the heavy jaw was set. He was burly, nearly six feet tall, clad roughly.

Near the door to the corridor Joe looked up. His eyes grew lurid with hate. There stood the man whose cleverness had caught him.

When young Hartley Zane, in pursuit of a hobby, began to ferret crimes that interested him, the police had dubbed him "the amateur society detective." His repeated success had changed their mockery to respect.

Joe Racker had enjoyed good luck after resuming business following his prison term. It had changed when he chanced to choose the Long Island summer home of one of Zane's New York friends to burglarize. When the police gave up the case Zane went "on his own" and succeeded.

His work had been so thorough that Racker's lawyer had made but a perfunctory plea for him. The jury was out for ten minutes.

Approaching Zane, Racker tried to pause before him. The policemen would have urged him along, but Zane intervened.

"Let him speak if he wishes."

His voice was of basso *timbre,* deep and soft, the enunciation finished. The robust tone seemed strange in the physique of frail seeming. Folk thronging out cast curious glances at the group.

Racker glared at the man who had "got" him. The memory of the hell to which he must return engulfed him. His lip curled over his teeth.

He faced a figure garbed in the correct afternoon style of that year, 1909. He stared into large, steady, pale eyes behind glittering shell-rimmed spectacles.

Zane's fine-featured, clean-shaven, blond face remained impassive like his eyes. He leaned upon a rosewood cane, waiting.

Finally Joe found a writhing tongue in a hoarse murmur. "Damn you, *I'll remember you!*"

Zane's wide, calm look through thick lenses subtly returned the challenge. His white hand, of delicate thinness, lifted to

brush back a lock of dark hair from his brow. He donned a brown derby.

Whistling softly a snatch from a popular musical show, he turned away, questing the spring sunshine denied Joe Racker for ten years to come—while the march of seasons would be as winter.

The policemen led Racker below. A steel door clanged.

Five years—again ten more in Sing Sing, work changes in the inmate not in accord with the musical name of the prison. These changes are found in the face and body—and in the soul.

In the heart of Joe Racker, waiting through the years, were deepening shadows. In his mind were two objects to be pursued when he regained his freedom.

Renewed burglaries, of course; but these were secondary. The first object was murder.

The chrysalis of stone and steel yielded a repellent figure one raw spring day. Joe Racker shambled toward the station. His bloodshot eyes contracted in the strong March sunlight. Deep lines were chisled in the heavy face. Now thirty-nine, his grim cloistering had taken its toll.

There was a little money in a pocket of his cheap suit. His shoes were thick enough to spare him the discomfort of wet feet upon the sloppy walk. The wind was keen and he walked fast, mulling a dark plan.

It was of revenge for his incarceration. He meant that his first job should be the robbery of Hartley Zane. He hoped that it would involve the added pleasure of killing him. If not then, at the first chance thereafter Zane's life would be snuffed out.

Catching a train to New York he sought his former haunts, securing the burglars' kit that two old pals had kept for him. He rented a room in Orchard Street, an environment of squalor matching his twisted soul.

The next day he entered a telephone-booth in a near-by drug-store.

"Hello," he growled. "This the West Lynne?" It was an up-town bachelor apartment building.

"Yes," answered the pert voice of a boy. "What c'n I do for you?"

"Does Hartley Zane live there now?" Joe was handling the receiver awkwardly. It had been long since he used the telephone.

"Yes, but he ain't here now. He's out at his country place at Oceanside, Long Island. Went yesterday in his car. Anyhow, that's where he said he was going."

Racker started out, glints of satisfaction in his eyes. He had remembered for ten years, as he had promised Zane he would do. He had rather operate on Long Island than in the city. The young bachelor was probably alone there. If so, Joe would take his valuables—and his life.

He hurried back to Orchard Street, saw his pals, and arranged his alibi. They would swear later, if necessary, that he was in their company in town when the country place was entered. He was sure they would never "squeal." He had saved their skins in the old days.

He left them without revealing his "lay."

"It's a crib I'd better crack alone," he told them. "But you'll both come in on the divvy. See you in a day or two."

In the early spring dusk he boarded a train at the Pennsylvania Station. In faded golf cap, blue hickory shirt and rough clothing, even to the stubble upon his sullen face, he looked like a jaded workman. His kit was in a battered hand satchel.

No "bulls" had bothered him since he came out of the prison. Occasionally they slipped up on "tabbing" the boys from up the river.

He left the train at the small Oceanside station. It was quite dark; there were no loiterers about the platform. This was as well.

He set off along the macadam road. He knew this territory. His operations within it had brought him to grief ten years before.

Soon the road swerved, skirting the rock-studded beach of the Sound. The waters, whipped by a raw wind, thudded upon the shale.

The highway was fringed with firs. Ragged clouds drifted sparsely across the face of a cold moon, nearly in full cycle. Here and there were dwindling snow patches. The brown, bare limbs of a thatch of elms creaked dismally.

Racker passed stately cottages that were mansions in size, setting well back from the road in the midst of large grounds. They had the bleak look of mausoleums. They were all shuttered and deserted. Joe knew that nobody was about them except perhaps an occasional watchman.

He met nobody, nor did any automobile or other vehicle pass him from either direction. Nobody but a "nut" like Hartley Zane would be in this aristocratic area, deserted at this season.

As the boy at the apartment-house switchboard replied to his question, Racker had easily guessed Zane's employment at his country place. At Joe's trial Zane had testified he was accustomed to go there, whatever the season, when working out his opening theories on any puzzling criminal case which had enlisted his attention.

Racker's lip lifted in a snarl as he strode on.

He rounded a turn and came to the house, a large white colonial structure, a half-mile behind the sea which growled monotonously beyond the road. It was set well back in elm-bordered grounds. A stone wall ran in front with gates of wrought iron at either end. Graveled driveways led to the house.

Joe's pulses pounded. A lighted window gleamed at the side of the house nearest him. He judged Zane was working in his library.

He was confident, too, that he was alone in the house. When the boy at the apartment-house switchboard told him Hartley was at Oceanside he had sensed his opportunity in a flash of remembrance.

At the trial counsel had asked Zane if he took servants during his unseasonable visits to his cottage.

"No," Hartley replied, "I prefer to be alone. I can concentrate better. I was reared to rely on myself. I stoke the furnace, chop wood if I want an open fire, cook on the gas-range, and there I am, camped out."

So, confident that fate was serving him by yielding his enemy alone, Racker entered the grounds and warily approached the lighted window.

Immediately he stared through the panes, rigid with amazement. A burglar by profession, resuming that work after ten years, it had not occurred to him that somebody might beat him to the game.

Another burglar was at work in the library!

A meanly dressed fellow stood near the end of the room. Grimy fingers tugged nervously at ragged brown whiskers. Blinking little eyes searched the oak-paneled wall in apparent puzzlement. Then the man approached the wall and began feeling carefully along it. Something in the action told Racker that he was persisting in trying to find some guarded secret. His presence required revision of Joe's plan.

Racker, dismayed at being forestalled, furious at the absence of the man he had sworn to kill, interpreted the situation. The man working with the lights switched on pointed to three assumptions.

He was a tyro. He had heard that the wall contained a treasure compartment, it might be for the famed family jewels that Joe had supposed were secreted in New York. He was probably some workman from a near-by village who knew that the cottages were deserted at this season.

Probably he did not know of Zane's casual visits the year round.

Where *was* Zane? The boy at the apartment-house said he had left in his car for his Long Island place the previous day. "Or that's where he said he was going."

Then Joe recalled the comments made in the old days upon young Zane's erratic movements. He was always going off at tangents. On his way here something else had summoned his flighty attention, and—

Still, he might come yet, and if he did, Joe wished to be waiting.

His narrowed eyes swerved from the man inside, pawing at the panels. To find where the stranger had entered and follow him inside; to win the fruits of the robbery he had planned; first—

Angry that Zane was not there—for murder had lain closest to his heart, Joe assayed the man within. He was satisfied he could deal with him by craft or by force. Later, if Zane should chance to arrive—

Racker drew from his bag a black half mask and donned it. His fingers were

trembling. He cursed softly at this phenomenon, wondering at the subdued storms beating in his head, the strange clawing at his vitals. It had not been so in the old days!

He could not have explained the cause for his "rattles." It was the deadly toll of the ten years at Ossining; the unnatural repression; the scrape of a key in a cell door; the scampering of rats in dark nights through cells which held rats of men.

It was fear of the somber pile beside the Hudson that gripped Joe Racker's faculties. Under it, what had been a splendid resistance of nerve force was crumbling.

Pulling his cap over his brows he started to the rear of the house, believing the man had gained entrance from that way. He turned a shadowed corner. Something like the exhalation of a menacing breath chilled his blood. Then he realized it was only a chill breeze muttering among the naked branches of an elm near by.

He found a kitchen window flung up, and with a splintered jamb. A clumsy job; he had rightly judged the fellow a tyro!

He set his kit inside, placed big hands upon the sill. He paused timorously. But it had been more than ten years since—and had intervened the lockstep, the silence, the sullen labor—

Joe crushed down this hateful nervousness. He clenched his teeth, quietly dropped inside. With shaking fingers he removed his shoes. He took his kit. Crossing the dim floor of the kitchen he prowled through various rooms till he looked in at the lighted library.

His throbbing pulses calmed at the reassurance of the light, under which the fellow, with back to him, stood feeling uncertainly along the wall. He reflected that he must switch off the lights after cowing his rival. He noted the position of the switch. He glanced through the window at the deserted highway.

The man in front of the wall cursed hissingly, with a suggestion of some foreign extraction. He dropped his arms and stood regarding the wall with despair, idly thrusting a hand in a coat pocket.

Joe's eyes narrowed through the holes of his mask. Treat him rough; that was the way to deal with the smaller fellow. Now he felt like himself again! Vengeful, too, because the fellow was not Zane!

He tiptoed across deep rugs. He sprang forward like a cat. A big hand clapped over a bearded mouth, stifling a startled yell. The other hand caught a thin wrist as a thick knee ground into a bent back.

Joe wrenched the fellow backward and came down over him upon the floor. He held a hand upon his victim's mouth as he knelt, and the other upon his midriff.

"Got a pistol?" he growled, glaring into small, dull, blinking eyes that were wild with fright at the masked face above his own.

The under-man nodded as Joe's hand relaxed its pressure over his mouth. Joe transferred a revolver from his victim's pocket to his own. His own weapon was in the opposite pocket.

"I'm goin' to let you up," he announced. "One yelp out o' you, and I'll kill you!"

As they rose the other man wailed fear in a high, thin, trembling voice. "*Non!* Mister, you no kill me! *Non, mon Dieu!*"

"French pea-soup, eh?" sneered Joe. "Who are you? Shut up! Tell me *quiet,* or you'll be still for a damn long time.

"Pierre Ribeau, m'sieu'," quavered the man, shrinking away.

"What d'ye do here? You're no stranger to this place. Don't lie, or there'll be a brand new set o' harp-strings in hell!"

The pallid wretch was pitiably frightened, trembling as his gaze implored the masked face. His mouth sagged among his drab whiskers, lank, uncut hair straggled from under the brim of his soft black hat, his little eyes fluttered.

"*Oui,* sir, I am what you call the watch-a-man."

"The watchman, eh?" repeated Racker, now understanding the lay.

"*Oui,*" replied the *voyageur.* "Somet'ing lak dat."

Now to complete the cowing process! Racker seized the brown beard, shaking savagely like a terrier at a rat, setting the *Canadien's* head rolling. Releasing the hair, he sent Ribeau sprawling with an open-handed slap upon the jaw.

"That for tryin' to burgle your kind

master!" he growled with cynical humor. Decidedly, Joe was himself again!

"That pistol I took from you; that his, too?"

"*Oui*," whimpered the scalawag, sitting up and clapping his hand to his jaw.

"Where's Zane now?"

"Me, I do not know. He say he be here yesterday. Then he tell me in the telephone to village, two mile, where I live, he no come till bimeby nex' wik."

"How long you been with him?"

"Two year. He fish up by Quebec. She say: 'Pierre, I give you dam' good job.' Me, I was his guide. And here I be."

"*Robbin'* him!" sneered Joe, in impish mood.

"Maybe! Me, I have little; he has too mooch. But you"—he cringed, with another fearful glance at the mask—"you have you not come, *m'sieu'*, to rob her also?"

"You bet yer whiskers, froggie!" chuckled Joe. "Now we'll rob *her* together. Get up and tell me why you're a fingerin' along this wall."

Prodded by his boot Pierre rose and sidled to the wall.

"Monsieur Zane, he was here last wik. Me, I t'ink sometime she kip money, jewel, the lak o' dat, here. So I watch on window while him at desk. Bimeby he get up, finger wall. Board come out. He tak out rings, necklace, jewel, ev'ryt'ing. Bimeby put 'em all back and go about her business on table.

"When he go, I try once. To-night makes twice, but I have not found it."

"I'll find it for you, and we'll divide, Pierre, my bucko!"

He pulled Ribeau to his side.

"Whereabouts was he feeling?"

"Somewheres along here, *m'sieu'*."

"You stand quiet. If you 'jomp,' I'll croak you!"

Pierre, bungler as Joe's eyes had proved, watched the blunt but skilled fingers traversing the wood in search of the secret spring. At last came a click. An apparently solid panel moved outward.

"Jus' lak dat!" squealed Pierre rapturously.

"You fool!" Ribeau dodged a swinging slap. "D'ye want to yell it to Hoboken?" growled Racker in fury.

"I—forget—"

"Us guys mustn't forget *nothin'!*" admonished the expert. "But w'at do *you* know about our business?"

"Not'ing. Me, I'm what you call—dam' fool!"

"You said it!" agreed the Solomon in crime. Though, under the dulling influence of ten years' retirement from activities, he had forgotten to switch off the lights as he had planned to do after cowing the other!

He whirled to the wall compartment. His eyes sparkled. "*Class!*" he muttered, mentally assaying pearls, diamonds, rubies. Here, then, was the famous gem collection which had belonged to the clubman's mother! A fortune lay under Racker's hands.

Joe began thrusting the jewels into his pockets. As he finished there came a pull at his sleeve. The *Canadien* blinked apishly at him.

"You dee-vide?" questioned the man who had directed him to the hiding-place of the gems. "Feefty-feefty, eh?"

"Sure! Outside," lied Joe, as he closed the panel. "We must get away from here! Through the open back window, and shut it. Get that late train to the city—"

"*Wait!*"

Pierre came nearer. Suspicion had leaped into his eyes. Fear that the masked stranger was double-crossing him rose superior over his terror of him.

"You—what you call—t'row me down?" he cackled. "Eh? After I show you what?"

Racker thought swiftly. If it became necessary to wring this creature's neck, it must be in a different environment. Orchard Street, in Manhattan, would be better. He must be tactful.

"What's eatin' you, froggie?" he croaked, grinning in friendly fashion. "I'll play fair with you. We must get away, I tell you—"

"*Listen!*"

Ribeau hissed the word as he bent forward. Racker caught the sound.

It was the throbbing purr of a motor-car, coming up the drive.

Racker caught his breath sharply, with immediate understanding.

The erratic Hartley Zane had left word the previous day at his bachelor apartment in New York's West Side that he was leaving for Oceanside. Later he had telephoned Joe Ribeau that he would not arrive till the next week. He had changed his mind again.

He was coming now!

While the scared Ribeau shook and blinked, Joe's lapsed initiative returned. He sprang to the switch and turned off the lights. He padded back to where Pierre was flattening against the wall.

" Maybe she did not see the light," whispered Ribeau.

" Shut up!" Racker drew him into a shadowed corner as the motor ceased purring, and a merry whistle thrilled outside. Heels thudded in the driveway.

It was too late to close the library door entering the hall. A key scraped in the outer door.

Racker, holding the quivering Ribeau, stared into the hall. Moonbeams straggled through a window. They bathed a miniature marble replica of the Venus de Milo in an adjacent alcove.

The whistling was resumed. A fashionably garbed figure, in a dark cap and long grey motor-coat, strode past the open door and ascended the stairs. It was a thin, medium-sized, narrow-shouldered figure. Twin devils of memory lighted Racker's eyes. The moonbeams had glittered upon polished lenses; he had noted the tortoise-shell bars extending to the ears. He visualized large pale eyes, staring steadily through the lenses. Here was the man he had sworn to remember!

He stood as if frozen. Faculties merged in icy calculation. There was nothing of the vague fear which had seized him when he entered the house, and before then when the wind in the tree had breathed menace of sibilant human sound. He was coordinated for evil, the Racker of old.

The footsteps in the upper corridor paused. A door opened.

There came the faint sound of water gurgling in a basin. Soon a creaking announced that a body had landed solidly in bed.

" Shall we go now—to ze city?" came a scared whisper.

Racker had forgotten Ribeau at his elbow. Now, as he stared down at him, there flashed to him a fiendish plan.

His fingers flexed about a shaking arm. " He's tired; he'll sleep quick," he breathed glibly. " We'll go up soon an' grab off his watch and wallet for good measure."

" Non! Le's leave by now!"

" Shut up! Do as I say!"

He waited beside Pierre, now silent. He mulled the dark plan which had hurtled to him with Pierre's tentative question.

With renewed awareness of Ribeau's presence had come to Joe remembrance of the two pistols in his coat pockets. One was his own. The other was the weapon Pierre acknowledged was Hartley Zane's.

By judicious use of these two pistols Racker could forever rid himself of suspicion so far as *murder* was concerned. As for the robbery, the panel was closed. Probably nobody but the doomed Zane knew of it.

" I'll remember you!" So he had promised Zane in the moment after he was sentenced, through the young man's deadly skill in sleuthing crime. Zane's blonde aristocratic face had gleamed in his mind through those forlorn ten years. The moment he was released he had started questing revenge; to rob, anyway; perhaps to *kill!* Or—later.

Fate was indulgent! At a stroke he could dispose of Zane, who had robbed him of a decade of sunlight, and this troublesome *Canadien* whose bungling work he had interrupted and who was suspicious about the " divvy." He had only to wait till after Zane slept, then take Pierre up-stairs and act quickly.

His own revolver was in his left-hand pocket. A bullet from this weapon would slay Zane. It would require but one, for Joe was a dead shot. Then he would take from his *right*-hand pocket Zane's pistol, which Ribeau had taken from his employer, and kill Pierre.

He would then, with thoughtful care, arrange the bodies. Zane's rigid fingers

would be found clasping his own revolver. In the hand of the dead Pierre, who would be found curled up on the floor, would be found Racker's weapon. Joe had purchased it that day and it bore no identifying marks.

The story would be plain enough to the coroner—and to the world. Zane had come to his country place for one of his sessions of crime-investigation work. He had wakened to find his trusted watchman robbing him. The result had been death for both. The wallet would be found in Ribeau's pocket, the watch upon the floor.

Joe would never be suspected. His alibi was already framed in New York. He would give his two pals part of the booty. He was safe.

Racker's eyes glowed through the mask as he waited with Pierre in the library. After what he estimated as a quarter-hour of unbroken quiet above, he started for the hall, pulling the *Canadien* with him. He stopped, with sudden recollection that Pierre was shod.

"Take off yer shoes!" he whispered.

"*M'sieu'!*" breathed the fellow imploringly.

"Take 'em off!"

Ribeau bent and complied. Racker entered the hall, dragging him in his wake with a hold upon a thin wrist. Joe glanced out of the hall window. The road was deserted. Everywhere the moon overhung silence, loneliness, safety.

They padded up-stairs side by side. Ungentle snorings directed Joe toward the room where Zane lay sleeping. Here was more luck; the door to the room stood open into the corridor.

Racker, his left hand vised about the wrist of the *Canadien*, stepped into the room. He noted the simple elegance.

His masked gaze flared toward the cot next the wall, the figure curled under covers drawn to the tip of the ear. Chill night air poured through an open window beside the cot. The face was next the wall, but Joe recalled that shock of dark hair.

He needed light for this grim job. Again he glanced toward the highway, visible in both directions, for the room was in the front. Upon it was no sign of life.

He saw the switch, close to his hand. He turned it on, flooding the room with radiance.

Ribeau tugged against his clasp in mounting fright. "What—you do?" he gasped.

Joe's left hand tightened about his wrist. His right hand dipped into the coat pocket, in quest of Zane's pistol.

His mind worked with icy keenness. He must reverse his program. He must kill this troublesome *voyageur* first, with Zane's revolver, then reach for the other weapon and slay Zane as he wakened.

However, the program was reversed in a way he had not expected! As his right hand dipped toward the pocket Pierre catapulted alive. He broke the grip of Joe's left hand upon his wrist with a savage twist, and leaped behind him. Ribeau's clutch, amazingly strong, doubled his right wrist sharply behind his back.

A howl of pain escaped Joe's lips as a nimble foot tripped him. He landed upon his back with the *Canadien* astride him.

While he stared up, dazed, into a scowling, whiskered face, Pierre squawked words of temporary parting.

"*Au revoir, m'sieu'!*"

A solid right fist crashed to Joe's jaw. He quivered and lay still.

After a few moments Joe Racker rallied. Like a crab turned on its back he wriggled to resume a sitting posture. Mysterious hands obligingly pushed him upward from behind.

Joe stared downward, bewildered. Cold steel handcuffs, of the latest model, clasped his wrists prayerfully over his midriff.

His gaze upraised from this disconcerting link between his immediate past and his imminent future. It surveyed the ill-dressed, whiskered, blinking shred who had "flopped" him with the blinding skill of a Japanese athlete.

Joe's mask had been removed while he lay in coma. Amazement deepened in his face while he noted the figure that fronted him.

Pierre was smoking one of his boss's monogrammed cigarettes! Also, his rough *ensemble* revealed at least one foppish ten-

dency. At Racker's order he had removed his shoes down-stairs. Now were visible cream-hued, figured, silk hose!

Ribeau chuckled impishly. "*Sacré!* It is hell, *oui!*"

His voice grew thinner, piercing in rising excitement. "Hell to pull my whiskaire, to knee my back, lak you done. But I knowed I'd get it; I watched you creep lak cat on me down in library; with lookin'-glass held on my hand—so!—den drop it in my pocket. I know I must tak' it; me, Pierre. But I—w'at you call—get hunk. I slam your jaw, *mon ami!*

"It is hell, too, how you remembaire. A long tam, ten year. But you see, my frien', *I remembaire, too!*"

"You—you—" gasped Joe. The blood rushed to his head, to his eyes; the roots of his hair pulled. A deadly prickling ranged his vertebræ. He grew hot, then cold and numb.

The thought was incredible. Why, he had pulled those whiskers; yanked them till the nondescript's eyes filled with tears. And those odd, blinking, little eyes—and he had seen the spectacled Zane passing through the hall and up-stairs while he whistled.

Yet, as he stared wildly at the bearded face, strangely nonchalant after its animation of the past hour, there grew the impression of a different personality, one remembered and—hated.

He recalled his look of hate into large, steady, pale eyes, behind thick lenses, ten years before. Now, with a shock, he recalled that the effect of lenses for near-sight is both to steady and *magnify* the eyes. Too, the skin of the cheeks above the ragged beard was blonde—

He was crazy, to deem this thing possible! That squawking *Canadien* voice—

"*Who are you?*" gasped Racker, his senses reeling.

The bearded lips unclosed. A different voice answered him. It was of basso *timbre*, deep and soft, the enunciation finished. It was the voice which had haunted his bitter dreams for ten years.

Gravely it paraphrased his own words, muttered in passion within a New York court-room:

"*I'll remember you!*"

Joe Racker shook from lips to knees. The impact of the phrase was as if he were bludgeoned. He contrived a hoarse whisper:

"*Hartley Zane!*"

Fear that he had crushed down when he entered this house of stacked cards reentered his eyes, never to depart.

Zane stared at him while he puffed leisurely at his cigarette. About him, despite his mean dress, was the aura of mastery and poise that Racker remembered, and which the years had deepened.

"I remember, too!" had squawked the mimic Pierre. Racker understood now! He realized that Zane had read his eyes, his face, that day in the court-room; had interpreted his motive of murder—and prepared.

The beard and hair, untended for many weeks; the set scene in the library; the cry, "Jus' lak dat!" which had doubtless served as a signal to that mysterious masquerader outside to come with the car, revealed details of the cunning plan swarmed in Joe's brain. Why, he must have been shadowed from the moment he walked out of Sing Sing. A marked deck—

The deep, quiet voice of Zane cut in upon his wild thoughts.

"One might as well catch a criminal at his work as later, when the swag is gone and the owner is dead. Eh Joe?"

Racker only stared. He felt—frightened, helpless, crushed.

"I knew you meant business that day in the court-room. 'Forewarned is forearmed.' I was confident you would visit me first, after you came out. I had a memorandum of the date of your release.

"Society must be guarded. We have you *cold*. Your hands robbed the compartment in the library. The booty which you refused to divide with me, its rightful owner, is upon your person. Officers of this neighborhood are on their way here now. There will be the additional item of attempt to murder.

"You'll return up the river for a long stretch, Joe—and continue to *remember*."

Racker's thoughts again swarmed like bees in his head. He blinked, trying to exclude the vision of darkness, sullen toil,

silence; the scurrying of rats through the cells in the night. He would emerge—perhaps dead, carried to his grave; perhaps living—*old, old, old!*

His hot brain was swept clear of all else than mounting terror, futile rage. He had forgotten the man who had been stretched upon the cot when he entered the room, one of the pair he had planned to kill. Nor did he recall the mysterious hands which had helped him sit up after he recovered from Zane's blow.

"I'll swear it's a frame-up!" he cried in fury. "Where's yer witnesses?"

A soft step sounded behind him. A man walked around in front of him and gazed down at him. He was dark-haired, black-eyed, of average height and thin. He was clad in regal pajamas and bed-slippers. One would have guessed that these adornments were Zane's. He stared placidly at the ex-convict through horn-rimmed spectacles.

"Who the hell are *you?*" demanded Joe.

A rasping, high, thin voice, unmistakably *Canadien,* answered him.

"Who, *me? I am Pierre Ribeau, what you call ze watch-a-man!*"

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ONCE AND FOR ALL

ONCE hadst thou beauty, Phyllis, to mine eye;
Once was thy smile a thing so passing sweet
That all the treasures of the earth laid by
For an exchange for it would scarce be meet.

Once was there music in thy silvery voice,
The like we get from nature's lavish mood
Wherein she grants her cadences so choice
To them that dwell in her enchanted wood.

Once did I find deep set in thy caress
The fullest, rarest joys of heavenly dreams;
It seemed as if the founts of tenderness
Were loosened by thy touch to running streams.

Once, did I say? Once only—and no more!
For I have seen thee only once, my fair,
And since I saw thee first, now years a score,
I've never turned mine eyes to otherwhere!

Not since the day in that fond long ago
When first I glimpsed the treasures of thy face
Have they beheld aught other than the glow
That doth emerge all radiant from thy grace.

Together, or apart—though seas may roll
Between us, still that vision doth enthrall;
And heart to heart, and soul to very soul,
It comes but once and then remains for all!

John Kendrick Bangs.

The Mysterious Quest

by Frederick R. Bechdolt

Author of "Whose Gold?" etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

WILLIAM JASPRO, a San Francisco lawyer, hired Mr. Dolan, a seafaring man without a ship, to take a Mr. Langton and his daughter and a cargo of valuable but mysterious boxes from a lonesome house on the city marshes and get them aboard Captain Wilson's ship, the Dora. Dolan had succeeded in getting the girl and her father out of the house and into a wagon, when he was set upon by two men. He knocked out one of his assailants and eluded the other in time to leap over the tailgate of the wagon.

When he finally reached the lonely dock, where a boat from the Dora was to pick them up, Dolan found a constable as well as the boat. He made short work of the constable, but when he had his charges aboard the ship, the crew began to make trouble. When Dolan found the dead body of the second mate in the hold of the ship, he was prepared for the mutineers, led by one Lewis. Worsted in their first attack, Dolan discovered they were preparing for their next move.

CHAPTER XIII.

COLOSSAL BLUFF.

I DO not know what bloodshed would have followed had it not been for a little accident. How small a weight can turn the advantage one way or the other when men are fighting for their lives. I discovered that accident while we waited in the gangway for the charge.

I fully expected to have to kill a fellow being or two, and I cannot say that I was feeling bad over the prospect. The thought of the girl back there on the companion stairs and what would come to her in case the mutineers prevailed, was making me see red. I was fairly shaking with eagerness to have them come. I knew that they did not suspect the existence of my revolver, and I was reasonably sure that when the first of them dropped, the others would turn and run like a pack of curs. I was hoping to get Lewis, who was their brains and furnished the purpose that kept them going.

I took a look at that automatic pistol which I had acquired from the man with the spoiled eye in Jaspro's office. I lifted it up for closer scrutiny; it seemed to me that there was something unusual in its appearance. It was an old pistol, of European make, and since that time the mechanism has been improved. The delicacy of the movable parts which did the ejecting, reloading, and cocking when they were forced into new positions by the push of the recoil, was the reason for the improvement. I got an illustration of that overfine adjustment now.

When I strove to draw back the sliding jacket I found that it was hopelessly jammed. I remembered now how, in hurrying after the skipper when we went on deck a few minutes ago, I had been thrown a little off my balance by a lurch of the schooner and had knocked the pistol against the bulkhead. Evidently that blow had done the work, and I had been putting my faith in a pound or so of dead hardware.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for October 23.

I swore and tossed the revolver back into the cabin, then faced about. Larson was standing beside me in the gangway with a steel bar which he had brought out from the engine-room; his sleeves were rolled up; his little scalp-tight cap was shoved away back on his head so that his mop of blond hair showed all touseled; his blue eyes were flashing, and he looked like an old Berserker. He glanced at me inquiringly; but even as I was about to tell him my reason for discarding the pistol, the door in the forecastle bulkhead swung open with a bang and the mutineers surged forth.

Then the two of us clinched our teeth and faced round to meet the rush. Larson swung his bar over his shoulder like an ax. I doubled my fists; they were all I had to depend on now. The four seamen were out in the gangway in a scuffling rush. The rays of the forecastle lantern bathed them in a yellow flood, and the light from the cabin fell on their faces. The schooner rocked to the dip of a receding sea and, with the shifting of both lamps, shadows traveled over their heads and shoulders. But the picture which had come with the first full glare remained.

The two putty-faced sailors, who had been playing seven-up on the night of Grey's murder, were in the van, and the one whom I had struck down with the leaden pig while I was fighting in the hold was still wearing his red mask of drying blood; his eyes rolled and the whites showed in startling contrast to that dark film upon his cheeks. He had his sheath-knife in his right hand, and the fingers of the other hand were opening and closing spasmodically. His companion, who was opposite me, was brandishing a belaying pin, and the sick pallor of his features, working as they were in his excitement, was more nasty to look upon than the bloody mask which his mate was wearing. Just behind this fellow came Lewis, crouching, thrusting his ugly head beyond the shelter of the shielding form ahead of him, then withdrawing it again. I could not see his weapon, but I was reasonably certain he was putting his trust in the knife which had come so close to being my undoing a little while ago. The blood from that cut he gave me was sticking to my shirt, and when I moved I could feel the smart of the wound to remind me of what might be now in store for me. Of the other man I saw nothing, save an uplifted arm and a gnarled hand clenched over a bit of steel very much like that which Larson was swinging by my side. I can remember the tatooing on the upstretched forearm, and the fluttering of the shirt-sleeve, torn away clear to the elbow.

To these things which I saw came an accompaniment of scraping feet, the thump of rapid steps, and the curious indistinct mutter of their voices. They came on swiftly with that guttural growl, and we two sprang forward to meet them.

At the first shock of our meeting I held my eyes on the man in front of me with the belaying pin. His lips flew back and he struck a sweeping blow that would have crushed my skull like an egg shell if it had gone home. But he had been too eager about it, and had swung his weapon in too long an arc. I leaped aside, and twisting as I leaped, closed in. The belaying pin came down beside me, and the man pitched forward to meet my own blow with his advancing body. I drove my fist deep into his belly, and then went down before the onrush. The four of them were packed so tightly they came almost as one, and the man did not walk who could have held his feet against them. I got a kick alongside the head, and heard the trampling of feet all about me, and they were on past.

A man was floundering on the planks beside me as I started to stagger to my feet; I saw the fresh blood crawling over the dried red mask which hid his features. The scuffling of heels sounded all about me again; a blur of moving forms blotted out all else, and I was being kicked about like a football among a crowd of boys. Then I found myself bounding up with my legs under me, and everything going round and round; the bulkhead beside me whirled away and reappeared once more. I saw the man who had been struggling beside me just a moment ago, crawling on his hands and knees toward the forecastle, leaving a trail of blood in his wake. Be-

fore him the others were running like a trio of frightened sheep. I thrust one hand against the bulkhead to steady myself, and heard Miss Langton's voice. She was beside me now. I saw the pistol, which I had discarded, in her hand. "Take it!" she commanded, and she repeated the words sharply. The giddiness was clearing away enough to let me think more coherently. Larson was getting to his feet in the cabin doorway; his shirt was almost torn from his body; his eyes met mine, and I could see him smiling. The mutineers were in full flight, not even stopping to look over their shoulders. "Take it!" the girl cried a third time, and then, lowering her voice: "They ran when I pointed it—they don't know."

As I took the weapon I realized how she had done the thing which we two had failed to do, and had done it with that useless pistol—turning the tide of the battle just as they were in the full flush of their success. Her face was as white as paper, and her lips were very tight. And no wonder; she had worked a colossal bluff on those murderers, knowing that if one of them showed the first symptoms of courage under the muzzle of that futile bit of iron, she was lost.

They were fighting one another in their haste to get through the forecastle door at the same time. The wounded man crawled on after them and the door banged shut. I started down the gangway and Larson came beside me. "May as well get those knives away from 'em, don't you think, sir? Now, while the gettin's good?" I nodded; that was what was in my mind when I had started. "Hurt you?" I asked him. He shook his head. "Got a scratch from that fellow's toad-sticker before I laid him out," he answered quietly. "That girl; she saved our bacon all right that time."

We were before the door, and I was about to sing out, ordering them to open when the engine-room gong sounded. A jingle of bells followed. That clamor meant full speed astern. Larson turned and rushed away without a word, but before he had gotten half-way to his post there came a shock which threw us from our feet. I heard a terrific crash. The schooner shivered like a frightened horse.

CHAPTER XIV.

A BUNDLE OF LOGS.

THERE followed an interval during which the engine-room gong clanged one sharp command after the other. The last peal left her lying on the heaving swells, as one who has halted to gather strength and stanch the wounds which have been dealt her. I could hear the gurgle of rushing water in the hold. Captain Wilson came down the companion stairs and through the cabin on a run to where I stood with that impotent pistol in my hand, guarding the closed forecastle door.

"Bundle of logs," he growled. "Must o' been a thousand of 'em, and we come into 'em bows on. Where in the devil was Larson?" I told him how the engineer had been right in the thick of things when the signal came, and I added a brief account of what had taken place between decks. He glanced down at the pistol when I came to the windup, and then with a flash of admiration in his eyes, back at Miss Langton. She was in the cabin beside her father, who had come forth from his stateroom after the collision and was seated on one of the lockers watching us with evident anxiety.

"That girl's the true stuff," the skipper said, "if the old man *is*—" He did not finish; I knew what the word was at which he had hesitated. Thief! I had been on the point of saying it myself, more than once. Her face tightened as her eyes met his. Deep anger looked from every feature. But Wilson was not wasting thoughts on women's feelings now. "We've got to call all hands," he said.

My heart went out to him at those words. He spoke as coolly as if the men were waiting beyond that bulkhead to obey his first command, instead of crouching there with blood on their hands and the lust for further murder in their black hearts. When a man takes things in that masterful way he is going to carry his point. He had hardly finished before he

strode forward and flung open the door. I think that three of them must have been standing there with their ears to the portal. There they were in a tight bunch, and the very precipitancy with which they were drawing back added to my suspicion. The fellow who had fared so hardly in the hold and in the alleyway was holding one hand on the edge of a bunk to steady himself and looking a little sick.

"On deck there, now!" the skipper roared. They hardly cast so much as a fleeting glance at my leveled pistol before springing to the brief ladder that led up through the scuttle. Even the wounded man managed to move with a pretty fair show of briskness, mopping the red trickle out of his eyes with the back of his hand as he went.

Perhaps their alacrity in obeying orders may seem strange to a landsman. But you will remember that these fellows were foremast hands, and had spent their days being kicked about by mates. Taking orders was as natural to them as taking food. If the sight of the boxes had gone to their heads, Miss Langton's pistol had sobered them with a jerk, and Captain Wilson's roar had brought them back to the realities of their dreary life. Moreover, as I have mentioned, the pistol was still in evidence. I caught the wounded man and his putty-faced companion giving Lewis a black look while they were scurrying up to the deck before us, and I knew then that the lathy sailor had some work cut out for him if he hoped to get his conspirators back to mutiny again; but I did not fool myself into thinking that he was unable to do that work.

"Look lively, now!" Wilson barked out an order. While they were bending their backs there in the dimness of the forward deck to carry out the command, he beckoned me out of earshot. "Take Ross below. See what ye can do to patch things up. I'll have them man the pumps, and if ye'll get some planks over that hole, we'll lower a bit of canvas to sheath the bows. Then head her for the land—I'll beach her if there's a living show for it." I handed him my harmless but useful pistol — we were walking aft as Wilson was to take the wheel when Ross left it. Miss Langton stood facing us. "I can use that," she said coldly, and reached for the pistol. "Let me watch the men; that leaves you free to handle other things." Without a word he yielded the weapon, and she walked forward toward the toiling sailors. As her form grew more indistinct in the shadows up there—"Miss Langton," Captain Wilson raised his voice to the quarter-deck roar of the sea bully—"first of those men that lags when I give an order, shoot him down in his tracks."

"Without fail," she answered in a steady voice that carried full conviction. I got one look at her, half hidden in the gloom, with the pistol in her hand, a very little figure on that heaving deck with the long sullen seas enshadowed in the surrounding blackness, and before her the group of men whom I could barely make out, working now as zealously as sailors ever worked. And I thought on how slender a chance her safety depended among those brutal dregs of seaport groggeries, with the ocean waiting out there in the night to swallow the ship and every one of us. Then I beckoned to Ross, and he followed me below.

Langton was still seated on the cabin locker when we passed through; I could not deny him a word of reassurance, and I saw his pallid face lighten as I went on by. If he were a thief he was suffering more of torment than most malefactors have to endure when the law has caught up with them. I had witnessed too many evidences of his great love for his daughter to doubt that in the slightest. And I could not help feeling sorry for him in spite of my misgivings. I had been close to him during our flight to Moss Landing, and I had caught some fellow feeling for him, being myself also a fugitive; moreover I had not the same anxiety for the safety of my ship which Wilson had. Had I been the Dora's master, perhaps those leaden boxes in the after stateroom might have made me hostile to the man who had brought them there to put the ship in jeopardy.

I could hear Captain Wilson bellowing orders, and the tramp-tramp of the seamen's feet on the deck above me as Ross

and I went on forward. Securing several bits of planking, nails, tools, and a lantern, we lifted the manhole cover and I dropped into the hold to alight in water which rose half-way to my knees. By the light of the lantern as the sailor passed it down to me, I took a look around. The incoming flood was making a noise to stop a man's heart, but that flood was not the first thing my eyes lit upon.

Right beside me, huddled against the bulkhead within a foot or two of where I had struggled with Lewis, lay the body of the murdered mate. Even while I looked Ross dropped through the manhole; I saw his heavy face change. He uttered a low oath, and I heard him name Lewis as the object of his curse. Then Larson lowered the planks and we two rushed forward to see what we could do toward stopping the leak.

One of the logs had stove a hole in the bow through which a man could thrust his head. The sea was pouring in like a column from the nozzle of an enormous hose. We fought against the force of that stream while the water spouted over us, bathing us from head to foot, and we wrestled with the stubborn planks, holding them in place. There were heart-breaking moments when it seemed as if the ocean outside were playing with us, as if it would let us get just so far and then— But in the course of time we nailed one plank into place, and after that the second went on more easily. When we had the hole covered after a fashion, and two or three parted seams battened over, I left the sailor bracing our covering with some bits of timber and hurried on deck.

Captain Wilson had forsaken the wheel and was up forward with two of the mutineers, lowering a weighted sheet of canvas before the bows. At a word from the skipper the pair rigged a bosun's chair. I watched one of them lowering his companion overside to nail the sailcloth fast; you would never have thought that these two fellows had been roaring down the gangway, brandishing their weapons as they sought our lives, only a little while ago. The pumps were going with a clank and a thud that was good to hear.

"I'll give Larson a slow bell in a jiffy, now," the skipper said, "and if she can stand it without opening up, we'll go ahead full speed. What's chances, d'ye think?" I told him it looked as if the pumps could now check the inflow sufficiently to keep us afloat until morning.

"We'll beach her, if that's the case, barring bad luck and more logs." We were on our way aft when I remembered Grey's body and informed him of the discovery.

"I'd have ye get him up here as soon as ye can find the chance, for it's in my mind to give Grey a decent burial. It's comin' to him," declared the captain. I got a glimpse of Miss Langton in passing, standing where I had left her, with the revolver in her hand, and as I looked, Lewis turned his head from his labor at the pumps; his eyes lingered on her for a bare moment. I nudged the skipper, but he had seen and was on the fellow's back like a terrier on a rat, buffeting him from side to side with blows that must have made the mutineer's head sing.

"Another look like that, miss, and use that gun. It's my orders," he told the girl breathlessly; she merely nodded, and her lips made a tight line; her eyes were hard. I could not tell whether that hardness was from determination or from dislike of the man who had given her that command.

The water had grown deeper in the hold by the time I dropped through the manhole. The leaking flood was filming the inner surface of the planks up forward for a considerable distance from the stem. Ross stood scowling upon it; his coat was gone; the shirt also; from the waist up he was stark naked, and I saw the slitted rags where he had crammed them between the spreading planks. He cursed the sea in a deep-throated monotone as if it were a living enemy.

We got Grey's body up through the manhole and out on deck. There we hastily sewed it up in a piece of sailcloth and weighted the shrouded bundle with pigs of lead. And then we gave him what the skipper had demanded—as decent a burial as we could.

The engine-room gong sounded its sig-

nal; the ship lay to, and we bared our heads while Captain Wilson raised his hand in silence. He stood there for a moment, bowing as one who prays, and although his lips did not move, I know that he was thinking, as I was, of the cheery-faced young fellow who had given up his life trying to do his duty like a man. Ross and I held the body balanced on the rail. Up forward the mutineers toiled at the pumps. The girl stood at her post, with the revolver in her hand; once she glanced back at us; and then she turned her head to attend to the stern vigil which she had elected. The skipper nodded; and we let the mate's body go into the darkened sea.

A moment later the gong clanged in the engine-room and we were under way once more. And now I wondered whether the rest of us might not soon be enwrapped by the same cold waters which had taken one of our company unto themselves. It was not the first time I had seen death come close to me, but on those other occasions before this cruise, there had been none but men to share the danger. Now there was a woman, and her presence made the whole affair take on a different guise.

CHAPTER XV.

BAG AND BAGGAGE.

I WOULD not mislead any one that this is a tale of wild action against wind and wave. Quite the contrary; we were prepared, if necessary, from the time of Grey's burial, to take to the boats; but that danger passed and we had only to wait for morning and the nearness of the land. When the schooner came to her end she finished her career as sedately as an old lady who winds up her life in bed. The hazards that we encountered were brought by men, whose worst passions had been stirred by that cargo in the leaden boxes.

Inside of an hour after the Dora was headed toward the hidden coast the menace of the logs had completely vanished. The sea was growing calmer every minute, and before long only a low swell, as gentle as a sleeper's breathing, gave us evidence that the ocean was under us. The clank and thud of the pumps mingled with the motor's exhaust; now and then a sailor spoke to one of his mates; the scuffle of their feet sounded plainly in the shadows up forward. Miss Langton had turned the pistol over to me and had gone below.

The loyal Ross was at the helm, and the skipper stopped beside me after a trip to the hold. "She's just about going to make it, according to my reckoning," he said. "Only for you two doing a good job up for'ard, we'd be taking to the boats. D'ye know," he went on abruptly, "I've been wondering about Grey. How the thing happened. Must o' been soon after ye come aboard that evenin'." He pointed to Lewis, who was bending to his toil in the dimness ahead of us. "Aye, there's the man."

I remembered how I had heard that voice in the forecastle putting the accusation to the fellow with the bloodied head and told him of it.

"Like enough, as far as that goes," he acknowledged; "but it was Lewis all the same—he laid out their course for 'em. And give the orders, don't ye forget it. He tried to leave ye ashore, and when he slipped down on that he had 'em get Grey. But how did Grey come between decks there?" He pondered for a moment, and then answered his own question. "'Twas Lewis did that — pulled him on by some play or other, and through the fo'c's'le where we'd not see it. And while Grey was looking—to find what deviltry he was up to—the other dock rat slipped up behind and knifed him. Chances are," he sighed, "there'll be more of us getting the same unless ye take the knives off that bunch right now." There was no trouble in carrying out the order. I brought four sheath-knives to the skipper.

"Never a kick and never a look," I told him. He shook his head.

"Which means they've got others, ye can lay to that," he answered composedly. "Well, deal 'em out—Ross, Cooky, Hanson, and one for yourself. Time's coming when that gun won't work its bluff any longer, or I'm mistaken. Look at that sea lawyer now!" The fellow Lewis was turning his head to watch us as Wilson spoke.

"If I thought I could get away with it, I'd hang that bloody pirate this night, and take my own chances with the courts afterward," the captain muttered.

The schooner was filling slowly in spite of the pumps. The hours went by; and at last the darkness began to wane; I caught the first barely perceptible whiteness to the east. Soon afterward I made out the loom of the distant land. And long before the sun had risen we were straining our eyes toward the coast line of Baja California.

The two boats were ready, each with its store of provisions and its keg of water. Captain Wilson took the wheel and there followed an hour during which we felt our way southward, while I stood in the bows looking for a suitable place to beach the ship. Just as I was beginning to fear that we would have to make a run for it and take our chances with the rocks, I made out a little bay. In ordinary weather, with anything of a sea running, it would have been no better than the stretches beyond, excepting for the fact that there was, in the bight, a moon-shaped beach, perhaps a half a mile in length. The schooner had settled pretty low, and as the skipper brought her about, heading her for the sands, Larson came on deck to announce that the water was ankle deep in the engine-room. "Give her full speed and stand-by for a bell," the captain told him. A few moments later, with a labor that was pitiful to feel, she was making her last dash.

Behind the crescent of yellow beach, sand dunes rolled away toward low hills; the hills climbed to the feet of tall, gaunt mountains. A rocky promontory enclosed the cove to the northward; at the south the seaward cape was backed by a round, rocky knoll. As we came in we passed almost under the shadow of engirding summits, and the last breath of wind died down. The water about us was of the deepest blue. A little fleck of white showed here and there to mark the hiding-place of ugly rocks.

Then, when we were within a half a mile of the land, the Dora met her end. One moment she was panting onward on an even keel, a moving, breathing, living thing; and in the next she was as sad a sight as one can look upon—her masts askew, her decks canted to an ugly angle, one rail buried in the gently heaving blue, the other high above the waters.

It came all unexpectedly. From where I was standing in the bows I could see no sign of the rocks that gripped her bottom; but I felt the Dora shudder at their first touch, and before I had raised my voice in warning, I heard the engine-room gong sounding. The signal was too late to do her any good. The shuddering increased; there came a rending convulsion that went through all her timbers, and she halted so abruptly that I would have gone overboard if I had not seized a stay to steady myself.

The skipper dropped the wheel.

"All hands," he called. "Man the boats, and lively, now!"

As the men scrambled to the rail he apportioned them to the two yawls, putting me in charge of one and Larson of the other.

"I'll stand by on board," he announced quietly, and called two of the crew aft. "And you two with me." There was just a little reluctance about the lathy leader of the mutineers as he obeyed the order. Wilson stepped closer to him.

"You dirty dock's scouring," he said. "Ye don't seem to understand that I'm itchin' to kill ye." He caught the fellow by the collar and spun him round. "Get below, the two of ye, and fetch up the stores. Quick, now!" The pair of them were flying down the stairs as we lowered the yawls.

It was a mercy that no sea was running now, for what little wash there was climbed lazily over the after deck at every undulation of the deep blue surface. Ross and the cook went with Larson's yawl, which was laden down with provisions and baggage. I had the two fellows who had been playing seven-up for oarsmen and took on our two passengers. Langton said never a word from the time he embarked until the passage was over; but his eyes were constantly fixed on his daughter's face, and there was a sadness in them which was pitiful to see. Indeed, I thought a man's

sins do come home to him on this earth; for, in spite of myself, I could not regard him in any otherwise than as a fleeing thief. I wondered whether he was ever going to see Honduras; and if he found that haven of fleeing men, whether he and the girl would taste any real peace down there.

The mutineers rowed with a will; even the fellow with the bloody face was pulling on his oar like an able seaman. The ultramarine water was as placid as a mill-pond, and the golden beach sloped down to it all glistening in the morning sun. Gulls screamed and wheeled overhead. I glanced behind and saw the Dora lying on her stricken side, her masts canted at a sharp angle. And far out to sea I saw the dark line of approaching wind. In another hour or so the swells would be breaking over the schooner. There was no time to lose.

A sleepy surf lapped the gleaming beach of gold, leaving a broken line of white that vanished and reappeared. A schoolboy could have made a landing in a leaky punt this pleasant morning. But I knew that the time was fast approaching when the breakers would be running in like racehorses, and that their booming would fill all the air. I bade the oarsmen pull harder, and presently the yawl scraped bottom. The mutineers unshipped their oars and leaped out; they dragged the boat in, and a minute afterward I lifted Miss Langton in my arms and set her ashore, dry shod as a lady alighting from her carriage. I cannot forget that passing moment while I held her little form and felt the presence of her so close to me. Then I turned away from her and bore her father to the sands.

I threw off my coat and tucked the pistol which had done so much to insure our safety into the waistband of my trousers before we made the return trip to the schooner. Captain Wilson was standing by on the deck; he nodded when I pointed out to sea. The dark line was growing plainer; it seemed to me as if I could make out the presence of rising swells a mile or so beyond the headlands.

"Aye," he said, "we have got to stir ourselves."

He bent his own back helping to lower away boxes and bags overside; we took on every pound we could without danger of foundering, and even the mutineers seemed to have entered into the spirit of the race against the weather, for they sweated like good fellows at their oars. We beached the cargoes, and when we came the next time, "The cask, now, men," the skipper ordered. They slung a line about it and lowered the precious water to the yawl. The sea was rising before we were halfway to the beach with our two cargoes of food and drink, and when we made our landing the surf was rolling in—enough of it to show us what we had to expect.

Wind and wave were both in evidence as we went back to the wreck, and the swells were washing over the better portion of the deck. The Dora was groaning like a wounded being; the sound of rending timbers came from between decks. I saw water dripping from the garments of the two mutineers who were standing by beside the skipper; they were soaked from head to foot; and then my eyes went to the leaden boxes. I knew that Lewis and his companion must have had a hard time of it getting that cargo from the after stateroom, for the wreck had settled until the stern was all but out of sight. Yet there was a fierce eagerness in the faces of that pair which told me that they had been ever so willing to perform the task. Too willing. That glint in their eyes boded no good to any of us. The lathy sea lawyer glanced at me, and I instinctively laid my hand on the butt of the pistol at my waist.

"Lively there," the skipper bellowed; "go to it, or we'll be losing some of 'em yet." They scrambled to their toil, and the boxes came down overside, one after the other. When the last leaden chest was in its place between the thwarts, even Captain Wilson was ready to leave the Dora. Her decks were no place for living men, who had any desire to keep the breath of life within themselves. At his command, Lewis dropped into my boat, and he took the remaining seaman with him. Both yawls put off, and now we saw the white line of the surf unbroken before us; the swells were rolling in so deep already that when we went into a trough we were out

of sight of the sands, which gleamed in the morning sunshine like burnished gold.

Outside the breakers we tarried briefly while the skipper and I watched to choose the most advantageous moment for starting on our final landward rush. I saw ours and gave the word; the men bent to the pulling; the oars swept in rhythm back and forth; we followed an advancing crest and, when it broke, swept on until we came up to the wet sands in the midst of a boiling smother of foam. I leaped out and helped the sailors drag the boat in. Captain Wilson's yawl grounded almost alongside. My heart thrilled with the sight of that finish; as pretty as two horses coming under the wire neck and neck.

Then something made me glance around. Lewis was standing between two of his companions. He must have spoken the news to them, for their eyes, like his, were fixed on me. They were not gazing at my face, but—

My hand sought my waistband as I realized the direction of that concerted look. It groped for the butt of the pistol. And it groped in vain!

When I looked down the pistol was gone. I must have lost it during our work out there at the wreck or in that moment of struggling in the backwash of the surf.

I glanced up again, and I saw the change that had come over the mutineers. All of them were staring at the leaden boxes which lay between the thwarts of the two yawls. Already they had turned their eyes away from me, as if I were not worth the trouble of a passing thought; as if they had these boxes in their own possession now and only needed to pry them open to behold the wealth which had led them to put their necks in danger of the hangman's rope.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE HATCHET IN THE FOG.

THERE was not a doubt about it; the reins of leadership had passed into the hands of Lewis. He stood there on the wet sand with the sea wind blowing his flimsy shirt and dungarees back tightly against his gaunt form, and even while Captain Wilson was shouting orders, it was he who ordered the mutineers to obey.

The skipper caught the change of situation in that same moment. His eyes went to the sailor's ugly face, then came swiftly to mine, and he read there the message of my dismay. He glanced down at my empty belt, pressed his lips tight, and then went on giving the crew directions to carry the leaden boxes inland to the sand dunes; his voice was as steady as if he had never a doubt of their obedience.

And they did obey. Lewis had bidden them to do it, and knew that I had seen him too. He smiled, unabashed at that knowledge, and bent his back along with his fellows; and once, when I had occasion to tell him to move more swiftly—which I did the more eagerly because I was expecting the issue of disputed authority to arise at any minute—he complied with as subservient an "Aye, aye, sir," as the most exacting sea bully could ask.

"That fellow figures to take his own time about it, and to make a clean job of us when he does start," Captain Wilson told me while we were watching the little line of men bearing the packets up the slope of the first pallid dunes. He chewed the ends of his mustache as was his habit when he was perplexed. "I'm afraid we'll have to stand by and wait for the squall to break," he growled.

It was the only thing to do. We had the knives, but even if we were able to carry the day, we would only end by making a massacre of it. And there was the chance that we might lose in case of a hand to hand conflict. We could not afford to take chances at this time.

That was my way of looking at it as well as the skipper's, and we got some evidence to show us that we were not so far out in our surmises in a very short time. The men were busy at their carrying, loyal hands and mutineers alike, trudging from the water-line up through the dry, shifting sands to the cache; but our three steadfast followers, Ross, Larson, and the cook, were left to make their own portion of the procession on every trip. The enemy hung together and hung close. I noticed when

they were making the third pack that two of the leathern sheaths, which they all wore sailor fashion on the back of their waists, were not empty now.

"Aye," Captain Wilson growled when I called his attention to the fact. "They must of rooted up those knives aboard the wreck. Well, we've got to keep our eyes open—and if ye're so inclined ye might pray for some vessel to pick us up before night." As he was speaking, Lewis laid down his burden, which happened to be the last of the leaden boxes. The fellow's face had flushed a little with the work of carrying and the freshness of the wind; now as he stood there gazing down on the packet the color deepened and his eyes lighted. He said a low word to one of his companions — it was the luckless seaman who wore that mask of dried blood—and he clapped the man on the back. Then the other two came up beside the pair and joined them in their scrutiny of the pile of treasure. Their eyes were murderous.

One of the quartette, happening to look up, caught us watching them and dropped his head at once; but his hangdog demeanor vanished as Lewis raised his eyes and smiled right into Captain Wilson's face.

"Come, now," the skipper roared. "Get those stores up. D'ye mean to be all day about it?" But there was no jumping to his order now; they slouched back to the beach, talking in undertones, glancing over their shoulders at the boxes as they went.

"I have been in some nasty fixes in my time," Wilson said when they had gone beyond earshot; "and have clawed my way out of them; but to my way o' thinkin' this here's worse than a lea shore, and the steerin' gear carried away."

But trouble only showed its teeth that morning, and then lay down to bide its time. We were all too busy for the moment in the common good. Mischief developed later in the day. I doubt whether Lewis had made any plans, but he was canny enough to realize that he must carry his campaign through with a rush when he started; his three followers were not the sort to stand fast for long, once they were facing danger. They stowed the stores in one great heap upon the seaward slope of the first dune; and then all hands busied themselves in fixing up a sort of camp. We rigged a shelter for our two passengers out of sailcloth, planting two spare oars in the sand for a support. This done, they gathered driftwood, of which the beach had more than one would naturally expect, considering there was not a stick of timber growing along the coast for hundreds of miles.

Sleeping quarters for the rest of us were made without a word on either side. Then and there the party divided into opposite factions. Five of us stowed our scant bedding in the trough behind the first dune, and the four mutineers dropped such bundles of tattered blankets as they had salvaged from the forecastle at the foot of the seaward slope. They did not propose to sleep out of sight of those leaden boxes.

At noontime we knocked off to snatch a bite of canned beef and ship's biscuit. The five of us messed with our two passengers —silently and unsociably enough, for the weight of that cargo was on every man's mind—the enemy gathered in the lea of that same cargo for their lunch. I watched Lewis from my position near the crest of the first dune. He was sitting on one of the leaden boxes, and now and then, while he was devouring his food, he would slap the little packet fondly with his hand or point to it; and when he did these things, talking the while to his fellows, the faces of those three thugs would blaze with the light of greed.

It was while we were busy with the completion of the camp, some time early in the afternoon, that the sea fog came creeping in across the waters of the little bay, now turned dull gray. The wreck was already hidden under the advancing mists, and the shore line of the two capes was fast vanishing. The sight of gray fog is always associated since that afternoon with the feeling of alarm; and with the sensation of impending peril always comes another which makes my heart go leaping with a thrill of exaltation.

The thing took place when I went at the skipper's bidding to explore the southern cape and arrange a beacon there to signal passing ships. But before I departed on

that expedition a little incident occurred which would perhaps have materially changed all our destinies had it not been for Captain Wilson's obstinacy.

Langton and his daughter had been talking together under their canvas shelter for the last half-hour. While the captain and I were discussing the advisability of making a beacon fire, the sick man came forth from the sail-cloth lean-to and touched my companion on the arm.

There was no concealing the fact that Wilson did not like Langton, and if the latter had been in any doubt on that matter before, he had assurance now. For the skipper turned and eyed him with disfavor. "Well," he said coldly, "what d'ye want?"

The sick man turned color, and I could see that he was deeply hurt. He had been improving since he had come to sea, but he was still far from good health. His voice shook, as is the way with those whom illness has sorely weakened. I noticed the girl standing down below us in the trough of the dunes, watching us; and there was a flash in her eyes which showed me she had witnessed the skipper's bruskness.

"Captain Wilson," Langton said, and pointed to the leaden boxes, "there is something I want to tell you."

The other frowned, and I thought at first he was going to move off, but he seemed to think better of it, for he checked his step.

"You're thinking"—Langton's voice shook more than ever now; but it was with feeling rather than with weakness—"that I'm"—he hesitated painfully, and then the word came out with a gulp—"a thief. Those boxes—all this trouble." He compressed his lips tightly. "Man! I'll have you know, and those fools of sailors—"

The skipper was scowling as he broke in.

"I've told you once," he said curtly, "that neither your affairs nor that cargo's any of my business. And I don't want to hear any more about it either. That's flat." He turned his back on the sick man. Langton stood there for a moment, shaking as if in a chill; then walked down to the girl. I saw her arm steal around him as they went back to their shelter.

"Now," the captain told me, "here's a pretty mess! Us and these murdering foremast hands of ours waitin' for the minute when we're to dig into one another, and Lord help the side that loses. And here comes this fellow trying to make me believe he's an honest man. I'll take my oath he'd think he'd settled all our troubles if he could do that." He spat to show his disgust.

Somehow I could not share his feelings. For one thing, I was not as obstinate as he, and his stubbornness in refusing to listen to Langton rather grated on me; it was the stubbornness of your deep-sea captain who is accustomed to regulating everything himself, whose word is law, and whose mind simply cannot see another man's way of looking at anything.

"I don't understand," I said, "what he was meaning when he spoke of the crew. Maybe he could tell us something after all."

But Wilson shook his head and cut me short.

"I've got no time to fool away with his affairs," he growled. "Bad enough to be mixed up with the whole dirty mess. Boxes!" He swore. "Honduras!" He ripped out another oath. "Mr. Dolan, do ye take my advice and give this passenger of ours a good, wide berth. He has too many secrets, and he has moved about too much in the night to be safe company. And now"—he changed his tone—"I'd suggest ye have that fellow Lewis go along with ye—him and the cook—and see what ye can do to build a beacon on the hill that lies at the landward end of that cape. I'd say take Ross; but that would leave us with the odds against us here; so make the sea lawyer one of your party—if," he added grimly, "he'll see fit to go."

There was no trouble on that point. When I bade the lathy leader to accompany me, he nodded at once, and, after a brisk "Aye, aye, sir," he walked aside with his three fellow mutineers; they drew off toward the beach and stood there in a tight little group, with the sea fog swirling in around them like smoke, while Lewis talked. I could see plainly enough that he was laying out some course of action or other, and they were listening to his plans.

There was in their heavy faces an eagerness which made me resolve to keep my wits about me during our expedition. The fellow who had been hurt had managed to wash the blood from his cheeks, and he had bound up his head with a bandana handkerchief, which gave him more of a cutthroat appearance than ever. To look at them down there between the sand dunes and the line of surf with the wisps of mist drifting past them, you would have taken them for four pirates—and not been so far wrong either, for mutiny and piracy come very close to being the same thing.

There were two hand-axes among our stores, and we had naturally taken good care to keep these formidable tools in our own portion of the camp. I took one and handed the other to the cook, bidding him hang to it as he valued his life. A mild little man, with round eyes like a bird, he had shown himself willing enough to do his part, but he was not made for man to man fighting. However, he was here and must be used, and I knew he was sufficiently afraid of Lewis to obey my instructions to the letter.

The three of us set off along the beach, and before we had gone two hundred yards we were completely out of sight of the camp. The fog was growing denser, and within a short time it became difficult to distinguish the shapes of the dunes while the landscape before us was all a hidden mystery. I kept the round-eyed cook close by me, and Lewis trudged ahead. It was evident that he had some fears of treachery on my part, for every now and then he glanced over his shoulder, and when one of us two behind made a sudden move, he jumped like a scared horse.

The cape was nothing but a nest of rocks and the surf was making a terrific roaring all about the place. There was not a particle of growth excepting the curious little plant which is called " Hen and Her Chickens "; but a goodly quantity of driftwood had lodged among the boulders where high tides had cast it up. At my bidding the pair set about gathering bundles of this flotsam, and when each had a fair-sized pack we climbed the hill at the landward end of the promontory.

This mound was perhaps three hundred feet in height, and save for a little brush, for the most part of the sage variety, there was no more growth here than on the cape itself. We heaped the driftwood on its summit and set off again for more loads. We brought a second pack, and then a third, and the pile was rising to goodly proportions; I bade the cook stand by, and sent Lewis down for another bundle. While the cook was cutting fagots and piling them, I withdrew down the slope a little ways. I was not certain, but I thought that I had heard some one moving near us in the fog.

For a long time I listened to the thudding of the ax which the cook was wielding, and the roaring of the surf from the rocks below. I could catch no other sound now, and I was beginning to think that I must have been mistaken, when here it was again.

Just then Lewis appeared, climbing the knoll. I gave over my vigil and followed him closely enough to watch him as he dumped his burden. He halted a moment to wipe the sweat from his forehead, spoke a word to the cook and started down the slope once more. When he was out of sight I withdrew and hearkened for the footsteps which had alarmed me a moment before.

The barren knoll fronted the sea with a low cliff not more than twelve or fifteen feet in height. This shelf fell away from the very summit, and I had fixed the position for the beacon fire at its brink. The path to this point was like a fish-hook whose long shank extended upward, and its curve looped along the knoblike top to the edge of the little precipice.

The footsteps which I had heard came from a point inshore from the trail which Lewis was using, and somewhere about half the distance down the slope. I felt sure if this newcomer were any of our party he would have been more open in his movements. If he were one of the mutineers, that meant—his life or mine. I had, beyond my natural regard for keeping a whole skin, the knowledge that my loss would sorely cripple our faction; it was no time for taking any chances.

I slipped down the hill as stealthily as a thief in the night, creeping on hands and knees, with the broad-bladed hand-ax in my fist. The fog closed in around me. I moved on downward, enwrapped by a gray mantle, which traveled with me, shutting out all the world. Now I caught the footfall for the third time.

Apparently it was coming up the slope and straight toward me. I halted, but I could see nothing. The climber had paused also, for now I could hear only the roaring of the surf. The cook must have paused in his work, and Lewis was apparently beyond earshot.

The prowler must have caught some sign of my presence, for the silence continued for some moments. I was beginning to feel an almost overpowering desire to make the next move. If it had not been for the gravity of the situation I would have hazarded everything in a rush. But while I was fighting this impulse, my ear caught the tinkle of several little rock fragments right below me.

I half rose, and because the fog thinned toward the summit, leaving me in more tenuous mists than the one whom I was stalking, I came—as it turned out—within that one's sight. There followed another cascade of rubble, and after it swift footsteps. They were descending the slope.

The period of inaction had passed. I did not dare call out lest Lewis hear and the sound of my voice bring odds upon me. Without a word I straightened up and ran down the hill; and now I saw the figure of the other before me—a vague shape of gray a little darker than the enveloping fog. I was upon it in half a dozen leaping strides, and I was in the very act of taking the last one, my hand-ax lifted to strike, when I realized the truth.

Before I could halt I had closed in and dropped my brandished weapon to catch the girl in my arms as she collapsed. It was Miss Langton, and the sight of me bearing down upon her with that hatchet in my hand had so terrified her that she was as near to fainting as a woman ever came without going into an actual swoon. If I had not reached out and grasped her she would have fallen to the earth.

She gave a little inarticulate gasp, and her widened eyes met mine. Then, even as I was about to speak, she mustered up her waning faculties sufficiently to place her finger on her lips.

CHAPTER XVII.

LOVE IN A MIST.

I HELD her in my arms and she leaned all her slight weight upon me. Breathless from running and the shock of a great fear, she was quite done out. Little drops of moisture had gathered in her hair, and they gleamed among her dark locks like a myriad of jewels; her eyes, upturned to mine, were glowing with fierce excitement; but already a faint color came stealing back into her cheeks. While I waited for her to recover strength and the faculty of speech, I discovered a sweetness which I had never known. For my days for the most part had been spent following the sea, and the ways of love had been hidden from me.

The thing had come all in an instant, with the rapture of her clinging arms and the sight of her upturned face. Life moved to a different tune from the moment I realized my pulses were beating as they had never beaten before. I believe that the poignancy of that sweetness was the greater because of the very presence of the dangers which surrounded us. We two were here together on this barren hillside, enwrapped by swirling wreaths of the gray fog, and death was in the offing. I did not even try to put aside the flood of emotion which her presence brought; rather I drank more deeply of that emotion.

I know now that she saw this in my eyes, but there remained a perceptible space of time before she made any effort to support herself.

"You're safe," she whispered. "I came in time!"

"What's wrong?" I was assailed with a score of different dreads as I asked the question, but none of them were near the truth.

"Soon after you were gone," she told me in the same hushed sibilance, "the

others left—those three. They slipped away. No one saw them going, but Captain Wilson came to me when he found they were not there. He did not dare send a man for fear—"

"I understand," I interrupted swiftly. I saw the skipper's point, and he was right. That departure meant open war, and it was better to let me take my own chances along with the cook than to jeopardize the safety of the others by further depleting our forces at the camp which was bound to be the point of attack sooner or later. "So you came. Where are they now? Have you seen—"

She shook her head before I finished the question. "I neither saw nor heard," she whispered, "until I reached this place. And then—" she shivered at the memory of the fear which had come over her.

I picked up the hand-ax which I had dropped when I was closing in upon her. "We must get up the hill before they find that poor fellow." I told her how I had left the cook when I heard her approaching. As I spoke, we began the ascent.

I held her arm, supporting her as best I could. It was slow traveling, for we dared not make the least noise, and we were in constant danger of running on our enemies at any moment in the dense fog. When we halted for breath I listened for some sound which would betray the presence of others on the hillside. The roaring of the surf was the only noise until we made a stop at the base of some big boulders about three-quarters of the distance to the summit. Then a horrible uproar burst upon us as suddenly as an explosion. Out of the mantling grayness it came, drawing nearer rapidly. I seized the girl in my arms, thrusting her between two of the great rocks, and faced about, with the ax in my hand.

Clamor descended upon us. Voices of men as savage as the cries of hunted animals, racing feet, fearful oaths came to us through the fog and the hoarse breathing of one who ran before.

He came shooting out of the mists in the instant, bent almost double, racing headlong down the steep slope, and passed within twenty feet of me. There was a desperation in his posture, as if he were literally flinging himself onward regardless of what might be in his path, thinking only of the death that came speeding behind him. I could not see his face in the dimness of the mists, but when I recall the picture of his huddled form pitching down the declivity, I always see his round bird's eyes filled with horror of the murder that was swooping upon him as he fled.

Then, as the fog was swallowing him, he tripped on something and went somersaulting out of sight, with a scrape and a rattle of rocks and a thudding of his body that was pitiful to hear, out of the upper layers of the mist, Lewis burst upon my vision, his right arm uplifted, and in that hand the hatchet which his victim must have dropped when first they set upon him at his work.

The mutineer was taking it at great bounds with his upflung arm. I heard the other three behind him and I forgot, for one little instant, the presence that had stayed my feet thus far. The surge of rage that mastered me at sight of the murderer was heightened as I heard his cry of savage joy. And, if the life of her whom I loved had hung in the balance I could not have restrained my hand any longer. He was six paces from me, perhaps seven. I hurled that hand ax with all the force I owned, and saw him crumple into a heap.

As he fell the other three came plunging forward, so recklessly that one of them trod the body of their stricken leader under foot, and, as suddenly as they had appeared, vanished again. From the midst of the fog, by whose mercy we were spared the sight, came sounds of a struggle; followed by the thud of blows.

A voice emerged from the grayness.

"Well, we got that one." And then another.

"Who knocked Whitey over the head?"

I gripped the girl's arm and as I closed my fingers: "Come," I whispered. She made no sound, but came forth before I had fairly uttered the command, and we stole away.

"Up the hill," I bade her and cursed my folly for having got rid of my best weapon. I had cherished a fleeting hope

that the blow might have killed the sea lawyer, but now that hope was banished by their voices upraised in a clamor of inquiry as they reached his side. Men of their ilk do not apostrophize the dead.

We climbed on a long slant, drawing off inland from the part of the hill where they were. We dared not go swiftly, even had we been able. I knew that one misstep on the part of either of us would bring them racing upward after us as eagerly as they had rushed downward to do that murder a moment before.

Lewis was talking now. I halted as I caught his voice; the words came plainly through the mists: "Over there at them rocks, I tell ye." He cursed me roundly. "'Twas there he hove it from." Silence followed, and then while we were resuming our flight: "Spread out and look fer tracks." The girl drew a little closer to my side and I could feel her trembling. I had traded that precious hand-ax for the worthless privilege of stunning our most dangerous enemy. Now these four were better armed than our party and it looked as if we were divided without hope of our reuniting. Lewis had played his game more shrewdly than the skipper or I.

I had hoped to pull off inland and then descend the slope, thus reaching the sand-dunes, where we would have a fair chance of regaining the rest of our company. But that hope was dashed within me by a shout.

One of the searching party was announcing the discovery of our tracks. Now Lewis's voice floated upward. "Line out along the side hill. Line out!" And then we could hear them running in obedience to his command. In a minute they were climbing toward us utterly regardless of what noise they made.

"First one claps eyes on him, sing out," the sea lawyer called: "Easy now. Take yer time. Don't leave him a chanct to slip by."

I groaned aloud, thinking of the folly which had led me to hurl the ax away. "If I had only kept it!" I did not realize that I had spoken aloud until the girl answered in a whisper, placing her hand on my arm.

"I would not have had you do otherwise than as you did." Her words held a well of meaning. As I glanced down into her face, I saw the flush that had leaped into her cheeks. But I dared not recognize her emotion, for love had made me diffident.

There was no chance for drawing further inland; the only course open for us was upward and toward the coastline. We took the new tack as fast as we were able without making too much noise; and now, as they came mounting the hillside, we crossed their front at a distance of not more than thirty yards. I prayed that our feet might leave no further traces to betray us. Inside of two minutes they were on a level with us and off to our left; a minute later we could hear them scuffling among the rocks at the very summit. I saw something dark looming before me and recognized it for the low cliff of which I have spoken.

A new dilemma confronted us at this point. For the base of the declivity was strewn with sharp fragments worn off from its face, and one could not move for any distance in this talus without making a racket which would be audible for a much longer distance than that which separated us from the mutineers. We halted with our backs right against the precipice.

And it was well we did so for they were nearer than I had thought. We were not in this place a minute before one of them came walking right up to the half-finished beacon where the luckless little cook had been working when they first fell upon him. I believe I could have seen the fellow if it had not been for the cliff whose height shut him off from my eyes. He stood there for a few moments, then whistled, and presently there came another.

"Well?" the newcomer called as he approached. "Any sign of him?"

"Sign!" The first man swore and I recognized that asthmatic catch in his voice. "Now," he went on aggressively, "what I want to know is how long does Whitey mean to have us playin' goats out here, when we might's well be gettin' our fists in them boxes. Hey?"

"Stow that noise." There was no mistaking that clear tenor and I heard the rattle of little stones as the leader came striding up to the two of them. "Why ain't ye

doin' as I told ye? D'ye want him to get back there to the others?"

"If youse'll take my say-so for it, he's on his way back there now," the asthmatic voice made answer. "One thing's dead sure, he ain't around here any'weres."

"Yes," the third man took the speaker up," and anyhow what are we after? Cuttin' the mate's t'roat, or gettin' a grip on them boxes? I say the boxes if you're askin' me."

A little shower of rock particles cascaded down upon my head and I knew that one of the men must be standing right above me. I slipped the sheath-knife into my hand and held my breath. But the man was probably peering out toward the sea. Presently Lewis said: "Fog's thinnin'. All right, mates, that settles it. We'll get back to camp." His voice receded and we heard them arguing as they went back along the summit. I felt the girl's hand on my arm. Her face was pale and her lips were pressed tightly together. I knew she would be thinking of her father then.

"We'll do the best we can," I whispered. "Perhaps we'll be able to reach camp ahead of them."

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 long, low room was stifling as Sam Tong entered. Below the three lamps that shed an uncertain light among the shadows a thin blue haze was drifting murkily. The beds, rough bunks along the walls, were lost in darkness.

At the far end a flickering yellow light hissed as a gnarled hand appeared from the obscurity, thrusting a slender stick with its dark globule hanging from the end into the half blue light from the oil-lamp.

Sam Tong's unsteady eyes grew hungry as he shuffled forward. His clothes were dirty, and his face, dimly visible, showed hard, unnatural lines on cheek and brow.

Half-way toward his goal he stopped abruptly to confront the diminutive form of a Chinese girl, whose upturned face with the high, black hair, was delicate and warmly healthful despite the sickening atmosphere in which she lived.

"Sam, must the soul of you be drugged again? I know the call is strong when hunger lives, but work is better for a man than pipes of dream." Her eyes were almost pleading as she spoke.

The man laughed harshly as he tried to pass her. "Let be, daughter of aspiration, what have I to do with work? I am too wise in worldly foolishness. Let be, I want the pipe."

She gave way silently, but in her face, not beautiful yet full of charm, pain grew in visible lines, and her eyes fell.

The man went on to pause beside the oil-lamp on a low, square table and, leaning forward, eyed the figure crouched beyond.

"Ho, Ming, to-day again that daughter who is pure despite thy sins offers me work. Three times I have refused the folly of her tongue. What moves the child? Are you too full of stuff to tell the truth?"

The face emerging from the gloom was old, yellow, and wrinkled, as a withered cantaloupe. The voice that spoke was shaking, harsh, and full of Mongolian guile.

"Sit and I'll fill a pipe, Sam Tong. The girl is young and maybe love whispers folly in her ear."

"Love!" And Sam Tong laughed bitterly: "Who loves a half-caste? Hated by white men, cursed by all Chinese, give me the pipe. I would forget the yellow-red of my mixed blood. In dreams at least I can be 'most a man."

He took the proffered opium and sank into the chair near by with luxurious sighs. From his already easier lips his next words fell, less potent with the bitterness that stung his soul. "Who ever knew a Chinese girl who loved? She has no passion in her too old blood. Bah, even your daughter would not think of love when marriage was proposed, but only of advantages, a better home than this low dinge and clothes."

"I knew a tale, a true story of a girl who loved. The half-caste blood that she adored was no less mixed than yours. A burning mountain that she held as God could not destroy her passion. Would you hear the tale?"

"Speak on, I'll dream it is the truth and try again to fancy that I am a man. What is the story?"

A moment's silence reigned before old Ming began, low, even-voiced, and dreamful, with his tale.

Despite the apparent success of her daring, Sootja was uneasy. The faint rustle of the broad-leafed palms became something ominously sinister, the inevitable doom upon her for her great sin. When she spoke there was a troubled note breaking the golden smoothness of her speech.

"My bold one, the anger of all the gods would fall were I to listen. Surely the peace of stars is better than the paradise of love. Best go and leave me here as I am pledged. My brother is a zealous priest and strong."

The girl arose with a swift, graceful movement and stepped across to lean against the parapet. Her dark eyes shone with mingled joy and pain. In the compressed red lips a seriousness, almost portending tragedy, lurked, and from her poised, small head so proudly high, her loose, black hair fell in unwonted carelessness below her waist.

The man, crouching in the shadow of a near-by palm, laughed with defiant pride and stood erect.

"I fear no gods," he said in deep, clear tones, "and were thy brother twice as great a priest I would not leave my child of paradise."

She did not answer him at once. Only within the depth of her soft, luminous eyes the shadows of a growing fear became apparent. With some strange sense born of her Eastern soul it seemed she half perceived the tragic fate already close upon her.

Watching her as she stood against the red tile parapet the man felt something swelling in his breast, a subtle eagerness, almost of pain, as he beheld such loveliness.

"Oh, Sootja, let the gods speak savagely. Let thunder break in flame and all the seas rise to drown out the fire in me, let all the priests of Foo bring hell to pass, I will not give you up, my beautiful, my queen."

"Roger." She spoke his name with quaint, uncertain accent, making it sound like one low ripple of moonlit water. "I beg you, do not speak of things that cannot be. I am a priestess pledged, and love for me lives only toward the great, the awful Foo."

She rested one bare elbow on the parapet, its warm old ivory color overspread with moonlight like a delicate carven mold against the coarse red tile. Her shoulders, too, half visible beneath the folds of silk that gathered to flow down her supple form were touched with gold, and in the radiant night her little face, beautiful as a carven rosebud, was strangely sad beneath the full

moon's sheen. From under the fine lace that hemmed her robe one tiny slippered foot, bejeweled and exquisite, tapped nervously upon the sanded roof.

Beyond her, like a curtain of deep-hued velvet, arched a violet sky set close with silver points of radiance. A full moon cast its effulgence over the village far below, and farther still along the white, broad beach a sounding symphony of phosphorescent breakers rolled endlessly.

The man stepped nearer. Son of a white man and a Chinese mother he knew full well that lingering here was toying with a terrible and most certain death, but his poetic heart was caught in the snare of so much beauty, and he could not go. He was a man of wanderings, a bold adventurer perhaps, but one whose quest had always been for richer, closer, comprehending touch with beauty, freedom, and uncertain life.

"Sootja, have you forgotten what first brought me here?" His voice trembled slightly with the stress of emotion not quite under his control. "I would not have been on the roof of Tido's house had not some one made easy the path to my desire."

The girl stepped farther from him, hands out protestingly.

"I did wrong, Roger, I was such a hungry child. Maybe the gods will overlook my sin if I repent and send you now away."

He smiled into her startled, fearful eyes and, moving quickly, caught her hands in his.

She tried to draw them free, but he was strong, and in the eyes that gazed so steadily a something that she could not understand held her immovable.

He laughed delightedly and drew her close. The perfume from her hair and silken robe was like a potent whisper to his soul. Her lips just parted for protesting speech were yielding even while they would resist.

Holding her tight against him Roger stood, his blue eyes dark with sudden earnestness.

Across the soft, sweet silence of the night from some sequestered arbor in the town rose the clear melody of native love songs and a woman's laugh.

"Hear how the gardens speak," he murmured, "and is their voice not always that of love?"

She trembled in his close embrace. The warmth of her was sentient with young love.

"I—I know," she answered in a frightened voice, "but they, most lucky ones, are not sisters of a sacred priest. Roger, I fear; oh, do not stay."

She struggled free, and timid, yet with resolution in her face, she tried to urge him toward the open stair that led between quaint carven balustrades into the darkness of the house beneath. "I was so lonesome, and so mad," she breathed. "The way is yet unbarred. Go lest it be too late."

She did not know what complex tides were urging her to send her lover out. She had so wanted him to come, and now, tears glistened in her lustrous eyes, he was so wonderful, so strong, and white, but she dared not enjoy the love he brought. His arms about her, the pressure of his lips, had swept her tropic heart with sudden fires, whose very essence was her woman's love. Just conscious of the joy his kisses meant she grew afraid lest he be captured there and death forever end her futile hope. Futile, she knew it was for she could never free herself from her appointed place.

Her brother was a resolute man, and had so long intended her as priestess in the holy temple. He would far sooner see her dead than married to a prince of his own race, and were he to discover that an American, a wandering white man, had defiled the lips that had taken vows of chastity—she shuddered, growing desperate with fear.

The man eyed her uncomprehendingly. "Why tremble so? Are you not happy when I kiss your lips?"

"Happy! Oh, god of all delight!" Her low voice broke in a sudden, tense, impassioned ring. "Did I not send for you and bid you come? Why have I done so much if in your kiss is not the very promise of my life's delight? But, I am frightened. Tido may come here. I am expected at the midnight prayer. To-morrow is my last day of rest before I am the priestess. Go, Tido will be seeking me to talk of sacred things."

Her words poured in a rapid flood of

broken speech, her eyes dilated more and more with dread.

"But, Sootja, you sent for me."

She turned away and ran across the roof in growing fright.

"I was a fool, a weak, selfish child of sin! I did my lover wrong to bring him here." Her speech ended, and intense, alert, she poised to listen, as from down the stair the faint, clear tinkle of a silver bell floated in melancholy calling up to her.

"The incense bell," she moaned and, facing suddenly about, eyes fierce with the excitement that possessed her thought: "Too late to go! I am thy murderess."

The man came swiftly to her, his step as cautious as a stalking tiger's. "I do not die, my own, so easily."

The girl was like some rare old Eastern dream suddenly conscious and alive to pain. Her head was rigid on her slender neck, hands clenched beside her, and her lips half parted, dry and hot.

"Hide me among the flowers on the roof." He took her hand and held it tenderly. "I have been trapped before in less secure positions than your roof."

She showed no sign of hope, but, as though desperate to fight what she already knew inevitable, she hurried with him toward the farther edge, where, overhanging parapet and frames constructed of bamboo, a mass of rich vine flaunted crimson and white blossoms in the night.

"Breathe not at all," she whispered, "till I come again, and may it be not too long hence."

The man caught one swift kiss from her chill lips and vanished in the perfumed greenery.

Sootja turned, hastily composed her face, and smiled with easy languor as the figure of a priest appeared.

He was a man of unusual height, his broad shoulders carrying the robes of his sacred office with attractive grace. In his stern face the rigid character of a fanatic showed, and deep, dark eyes burned with a constant fire suggesting undreamed cruelty in the pursuit of faith. His hands hung loosely at his sides, but every line of them was marked with a supple, tigerish kind of strength.

"Sootja, a priestess lingers too long upon the roof in summer nights for but one cause, her thoughts are not on the god. What keeps you till the incense bell is sounded thrice, and dead?"

His heavy, impersonal voice was like a solid menace.

"I dream of days to come," she answered quietly, her downcast eyes not visible to him, "when I may serve more ardently beside the altar fires."

"Look up at me then, let me see your eyes."

She lifted her proud head with sudden courage and her eyes were steady, calm, and veiled in mystery. Her cheeks were slightly touched with warm, red stain.

"I blush," she said, "to be so scrutinized."

The priest came nearer and his intent gaze never once wavered as he faced the girl.

"How came the garden of the sacred vine to have an open gate? I gave no order."

Sootja stared fixedly at him, her face betraying nothing of the panic that surged within her breast.

"I did not know it was. Surely some word of yours, great Tido, could move that gate, unless a spirit wished to enter in."

Tido's face showed nothing of his thought. Ever relentless, he stared into her dark eyes.

"Sootja," his voice was almost savage and his inflection gave the girl a fearful start, "who lies to Tido never lies again. I see too deeply in a human heart. Why is your hair all tumbled? Speak clearly or I ask the gods to bring truth from your lips."

What Tido knew or what he really guessed, the girl was not capable of discovering. She only knew that what she feared had seemingly occurred, yet when she answered her voice was as clear and even as though she spoke of trivialities. "I sat against the parapet. My hands were restless and I played, childlike, but innocent, with my own hair."

"A whisper came three days ago of one who saw with friendly eyes a white man in the market-place. What sister of my

house dares, after she is pledged to Foo, to look with earthly thought upon a man?"

Sootja's clear laugh was without flaw or force.

"Tido, you talk as lovers seem when jealousy has made them mad with hate. I am no fool to break my oath with god were there no Tido living to safeguard my soul."

The priest turned toward the steps with a swift-darting glance about the roof. "Come down and worship then in humbleness. Together we will ask the gods what thoughts possess a priestess in the night when she is late at prayer."

He was descending the stair and Sootja followed silently. Her heart was beating rapidly, and in her brain a single question throbbed. Does Tido know? She knew that if this sinister brother guessed his words were but a veil to hide the terror of a violent death. The awful savagery of that revenge she could not imagine, but that all the minute tortures of a prolonged barbarity would mark its course was absolute. Roger was still a prisoner on the roof. What did her brother know?

She found her reluctant feet objecting to the path her will commanded, and a dozen times she moved her lips to ask the stalking priest of what he thought, but she did not dare. If he was ignorant, had she deceived his suspicious heart; then, whether she lived or died, there was yet hope that her beloved might escape.

When Sootja disappeared behind her brother, Roger crept cautiously to the edge of his hiding-place, and peered out. The roof was deserted. Standing as the temple did, far above the village, with no other houses near it, he knew that he was safe from discovery unless some one in the house came unexpectedly to the roof. That they were not liable to do so was certain, for Tido made it a fast rule demanding the attendance of all at midnight prayer. He ventured out and stood erect, gazing about for the slightest indication of an unexpected presence.

Still cautious as only his half Oriental soul could be, he sat against the parapet facing the stairway and within easy access of the vines.

He was a strange man, mingling East and West incongruously in his every thought. Born in San Francisco, he had acquired in childhood that easy air of courage familiar to the Western city. The son of an odd character, he had followed his father's business and for years had traveled from place to place in quest of unique or antiquated jewels of the Orient. Such a life had carried him into many strange places. He had hunted among jungle-ridden ruins, and not infrequently his quest, more of delight in the stones than in their sale value, had led him to risk his life to obtain some extra precious carving.

It was in search of a rare old statue whose history had gripped his Oriental imagination that he came to the village here on this island in the eastern seas.

Story located the carving in the house of Tido, and he had made immediate inquiry in the town regarding the priest. His careful and secret information had disclosed the sheer improbability of obtaining what he desired. Not to be so defeated, his Western resolution, forged with Eastern stoicism, had held him to the task.

He smiled, recalling his determination now. Then, moved by a whim, bravado that he was, he lit a cigarette and leaned against the parapet to dream.

In clear detail he saw again his daring visit to the priest's great house. He had learned that Tido spent certain days in fasting far above the temple on the mountaintop.

Taking advantage of such a day he had gone to the temple, hoping there to find some servant whose religious fear would fall before a generous and subtly offered bribe.

The most his gold had done was to induce a withered old subpriest to grant an interview with Sootja, whose presence could be gained in but one way, the gate into the garden of the sacred vine. The priest opened it, and the rest was left to Roger. Unhesitatingly he had gone one evening when Tido was not there and, entering the garden, came face to face with Sootja, sole daughter of a petty house, sister of Tido, and already pledged to sacred life as the one priestess of the great god Foo.

That first glimpse into the startled face of Sootja was like a vision of old Chinese tales. Her eyes had grown wide with wonder, and smoldering with fear. Her little hands had reached in agitation for a veil, but, unsuspecting what had brought a stranger to her arbor, she had not thought to wear a single protection from intruding eyes. Her lips had trembled, and he had hastened to subdue her fear.

Now as he thought of that first speech his smile was more than ever gleeful, for the thought recalled the girl's attempt to hold her dignity. She had been so disturbed and his easy Chinese tongue had come so unexpectedly.

That he had in that moment ceased to think of carven images was not at all strange to him. He shrugged his shoulders with a careless grace. What is the rarest of rare things in stone to such a living flower of maidenhood?

In his lonely heart, always athrob with yearnings which his mixed blood had made unattainable, he knew at once that Sootja held his very life a willing gift in that small hand that toyed so nervously with her embroidered girdle.

That he had not been told of her by his informant in the town was natural. His knowledge of the East made such silence seem in perfect harmony. Sootja was Tido's sister, and a woman pledged to sacred things. No Oriental would have mentioned her had she been only waiting marriage and not holy in her thought.

Now she was at prayer. He knew that only those born in the faith attended midnight service. How he should love to see her kneeling there. Again he thought of that first interview. How exquisite had been her modest fright, fine silks a-tremble over that warm, pulsing heart.

He pleaded with her to see him yet again, and she refused persistently, but in her eyes he read the eager wish that he so ably voiced.

Moved by her beauty, charm, and innocence, he had made bold to whisper that he loved.

She had grown crimson, then turned pale, and in her eyes pain first revealed itself. How dear the half unreality of those few stolen meetings were, when now, sure of his love, he remembered each.

The sudden, swift outstretching that had caught and held her trembling like a captured bird while her eyes lit with golden radiance under the mad delight of his first kiss.

Then she struggled free, and half panic, half bitter, at the fear that tore her from him she had flung back a promise as she ran away. "To one who waits at evening by the jeweler's stall will come a message bringing him delight."

It had come, written in fine Chinese upon a parchment no larger than one-half an envelope. "The great gate to the garden of the sacred vine swings open at full moon, and just beyond red roses mark the path to paradise. He who would tread must leave no blossom on the path he follows."

So, when the moon was full, Roger had crept to the great gate and, passing through, gathered the roses strewn along the path and up the stairway to this garden roof.

Now, Sootja made no pretense that she did not return his love. He tossed his cigarette away and, keeping well in the shadow cast by a line of palms set in old jardinières, he crept toward the open staircase.

The priest and all his house would be at prayer.

Stealthy as when he stalked tiger or lion, he crept down the broad stair, every taut nerve alert to catch the faintest sign of any one who might betray him to the stern priest.

The passageway hung with oddly shaped lamps, in which a flickering blaze burned fitfully, the light just touching gilded paintings on the walls.

He was already on the floor beneath. He paused, uncertain of his best direction, for a hall ran transversely through the house from left to right.

He chose the left, and still intense with caution, crept past closed doors of heavy silken tapestries, to come at last to one from which a perfume blew upon a soft night breeze.

It must be Sootja's chamber he decided and, lifting one corner of the curtain, peered within.

The room was beautifully ornate in every point. A deep divan spread with a silken coverlet, on which designs of magnolias were elaborate, some heaped cushions, delicate and soft, and a great chest studded with crude iron bolts stood opposite. The center of the floor was occupied by a small table, whose inlaid surface held a dozen tiny bottles, a few flat ivory trays, a necklace of great pearls, and several combs set with lapis lazuli and jade.

Upon one wall hung a great tapestry, its silken picture plainly one of sacred import, for before an altar where an idol sat, a bowl was worked and, kneeling over it, a Chinese maiden poured some rare powder from a lacquer vase.

Upon a small three-legged stool lay a robe which he recognized. It was Sootja's chamber then, and half ashamed, he turned to steal away, but down the corridor beyond the stair, a light shone suddenly as a great curtain rose.

Behind the red flare of the uplifted torch Tido's stern face was dimly visible.

Roger drew back, debated swiftly what to do, and then, forced by the situation, slipped hastily into the room, letting the curtain fall. He was an unbidden guest in Sootja's private chamber, and he grew resentful at the folly that had ever drawn him from the roof.

He did not like the situation, for he was not made of stuff that felt at ease in such a case.

Crossing the room he stood before an open window gazing out over a high wall that shut the garden below against the jungle of the lower slope.

There was a faint gasp and, turning with an apologetic smile, he faced the girl. Her lifted hand, the expression of her face, warned him against speech, and silently he met her reproachful eyes.

She crossed to him and, putting up her hand, drew his head down to whisper in his ear.

"Oh, daring and unrighteous one, has all wisdom left you with your still burning kiss? What brought you to my chamber?"

He told her in a whisper, and she shook her head.

He saw that she desired to scold and yet was not quite angry at him, though she knew she should be so. His smile betrayed his thought and her face crimsoned while a strange, sad look crept like a growing dread into her eyes.

"I am not wicked, Foo." Her passionately whispered words were like a lightning vision of her soul, and Roger felt his cheeks grow hot with shame.

Until that moment he had never realized how bitterly and how extreme had been the turmoil of this maiden's soul. She was devout, religious and afraid of her gods. She loved a man when she had pledged her life to temple chastity. The conflict was chaotic, universal, tragic.

A moment's victory of youth and passionate hunger had provoked her letter and her welcoming. Now, coming from the altar, she was once more a priestess—earnest, fearful, abject in the desire to free herself from earthly feeling—and in such a mood she found her lover in her sacred chamber.

Hot shame, resentment, scalding tears and yet, poor little daughter of an old, old race, passions ran through her with primitive power, and she could not scold the man she knew she loved.

He tried to soothe her, but at his first word she silenced him with sudden savage hands upon his lips.

He realized that she was frightened, too, lest he be found with her and both be put to death. That such a fate awaited discovery he had no doubt.

Tido was bold, zealous, and powerful. He could destroy them both and none would ever know.

Turning heart-sad from Sootja as she wept, he studied distances from her window to the ground beneath, the space from thence across the moonlit garden, the wall beyond, and tried to estimate chances of escape.

Whether it seemed advisable or not, he decided at last that it alone could be attempted since he dared not endanger Sootja by going through the halls in an endeavor to get out through some less difficult place.

To his proposal Sootja shook a negative head and looked despairingly through tear-wet eyes.

"I cannot stay, for ever making sad the heart of one I love," he said at last.

Her little hands came up to cling about his shoulders while she smiled. "Nor can I have my life's love slain because he has been rash."

"What can be done?"

She shook her head again.

"Foo will be easier on you if I escape, or easier yet if I am slain," he argued.

Her tensing arms drew him down till their lips met.

"Foo is already angry now," she almost cried aloud. "I have naught else but love before I die. I must confess if I am to be saved and to confess means to be sacrificed."

She stated her case simply, directly and without a pause.

Roger stared at her in a sudden whirl of thought. He realized now for the first time just how difficult, indeed how tragic, was this maiden's position, and it stirred him deeply.

"Then you must fly with me," he said. "I will give love and lawful marriage, Sootja. Come with me."

Her eyes were full of hunger, deep, yearning, passionate. "Come, sweetheart, pearl of my island shell, I love you." He lifted her in his great arms and pressed her close, stepping toward the open window.

"Foo will not allow escape," she sobbed, and tried to pull away, but Roger laughed.

"I am a white man, Sootja. Foo has no power with me, and I will teach you better gods when love has made us free from this Foo's dominion."

He silenced her protest with a kiss, forgetting that he had been speaking boldly, though her wide, terror-filled eyes should have warned him.

"Stop!"

Tido's command was like a sudden shaft of venomous light.

There was no time to leap through the window. Tido sprang the instant that he spoke.

Sootja twisted free from her lover's arms and darted aside while Roger met the great priest.

They grappled in a struggle which meant the life of each.

Sootja stood paralyzed with dread.

Tido's great voice gave one deep cry. The fight was scarce begun when it abruptly ended.

A trick blow from the priest, a rush of feet, and Roger was, with Sootja, bound and tied, while Tido stood above them.

"Oh, base deceiver of a temple's light, foul stainer of pure things!" he raged at Sootja. "Fiend of unholy lusts, a white man in this room and on the eve before you take the vows of chastity. Death is too good for you!"

Roger tried to speak, but his mouth was securely gagged.

There in the midst of luxurious draperies, soft perfumes and a love that had made him feel exalted, proud, the white man faced the passion of outraged piety in a fanatical Chinese priest. His life, he knew, was valueless.

Tido's black eyes were flaming pools of rage and hate.

"I will avenge the gods," he muttered to himself, and then aloud: "Sootja, outcast from virtue, child of sin and death, do you not know that Tido holds the secret of this life, this earth within his grasp?"

Turning troubled eyes upon her, Roger realized the terror that Sootja felt like some chaotic crash within her breast. Torn between love of him and fear of Foo, she was unable to answer Tido's awful words.

"Speak, daughter of black hearts, say what is in thy mind lest speech forever be deprived thy wickedness." Tido stooped over her, a great knife in his trembling hand.

At first Roger thought that he meant to kill, but as the steel fingers reached the awful truth broke like unwelcome light from some fell sun. The priest meant to cut out his sister's tongue.

A shudder ran along the taut-bound frame of her lover as Sootja's dark eyes sought his for assurance of his love.

Tido drew nearer; then, sudden, deep, vibrating like prolonged thunder, a low, tumultuous rumble shook the silent night. The building trembled slightly and stood still again. A priest gave one low cry and sprang toward the door. Tido stood upright, smiled, and in his eyes a great light burned.

"Ah, but the vengeance of the gods is swift," he cried. "Foo speaks in thunder of his will. Thou shalt behold the flaming heart of him thou has defiled, thou and thy half-caste lover, wretched one!"

His order was abrupt and like a snarl. A dozen priests obeyed him instantly. Sootja and Roger were taken up and carried down the echoing corridor.

On through the altar room they went, where high enthroned the statue stood that had first brought the American. Still farther, and down steeply descending stairs the grim procession moved.

The house was left behind, and through a long, low tunnel the bound lovers were carried, while Tido strode ahead, torch flaring fitfully above his head.

What torment of despair and love swept Roger was too complex, too terrible for him to understand. In all his life he had not until now been shaken with that abject fear that thrives when one we love is doomed. For himself he felt only rage at the foolhardy mood which had induced him to creep from the roof.

The look last seen in Sootja's welling eyes was like a burning flame within his heart.

So much of love, so much of dread for him, had spoken in that last deep glance, like some great sacred glory it had shone, and in its sweet devotion all that it promised came to haunt him now with the defeat of dreams.

The procession ascended an incline and came suddenly into the glory of a dimming moon. Around them, like a darkling barrier of perfumed green, the jungle hedged, while here and there great blossoms shed petals on the ground.

For a moment Roger could not realize his location on the mountainside, then he remembered that the village told of Tido's sacred shrine where he alone could go. This must be that retreat around which native fancy wove so many tales. The jungle had made access here impossible save through the cavern opening in the temple far below.

Sootja's dark eyes were on him when he turned his head. In them a new, more terrible dread was visible. Her now cold lips, almost colorless, moved tremblingly, and her low voice was heard.

Tido stopped to listen grimly as she spoke.

"Let me alone pay Foo the death he craves?"

For answer Tido's harsh laugh woke ugly echoes in the tangled green.

Roger was too intent on Tido's action to detect the girl's next pleading words.

The priest had knelt before a monstrous idol standing close against the forest on the upper side of the small clearing. Before the statue a great stone lay flat along the ground. This Tido lifted with his mighty strength and dropped aside. A rush of steam broke with a ghastly sigh upon the night and the priest laughed while muttering a prayer.

His invocation was lost in a second, more ominous rumble from the mountain's heart, and even he grew silent, trembling and awed.

A cloud of gaseous smoke poured from the irregular opening that had been a spring. A small, hot flame came licking up to pass across the idol before it disappeared.

The ground became unsteady, shook, and deeper, louder, yet more terrible the steady rumble rolled into the night.

The men who held the prisoners turned, dropping their burdens, and fled down the cavern which yawned beneath the moon.

Tido paused for a moment to stoop over Sootja.

"Foo," he said, "speaks in a tongue of fire. Thy doom is sealed. I had intended sacrifices here of thee, and thy base lover, but it is the will of Foo that he alone drink up the blood of one who dares defile a temple with adulterous love."

He took his knife and cut away the thongs binding the girl, then, never looking back, stepped into the cavern and disappeared. But his full power was not yet revealed.

Under the girl's quick feet the earth heaved terribly, but she ran to her lover and began untying the strong ropes that held him.

"Who knows what fate holds in the life of love?" she cried, working feverishly.

All trace of fear had left her now. Like

some dynamic force of eager love she worked above the prostrate man.

Her words were all of hope, encouragement.

"I am not yet less pure than I had been were no great love within my life's whole space. My prayer may serve to win thy peace at least, oh, my adored."

She threw aside the thongs and he sprang up, alert, already darting with her to the cavern mouth.

Three feet within they halted, gasped and faced each other with an unspoken dread.

The mountain was like some gigantic animate thing, shaken and rocking with internal pain.

The cavern was no longer open. A massive door barred them from farther flight.

In desperation Roger flung himself against the wood. Again and again he hurled his full weight, shoulder first, against the panel, but without result.

A greater heave of the unsteady earth sent dirt from roof and walls in showers down upon them as they worked.

It had done more, for in the last movement the great door was shaken from its fastenings and the two darted through, hearts cold with agony, for as they ran the entire cavern shook and crumbled in.

Their speed had been that last extremity of human terror and, fighting the cluttering dirt, they gained the stair.

Behind, the tunnel was no longer there.

Through the deserted temple they fled and out to stop a moment paralyzed before running hand-in-hand down the slope.

One thunderous rumbling horror burst the night asunder. The sky above the mountain crest grew suddenly aflare with crimson flame. A tumult of gigantic rocks crashed down among the jungle greenery, then, slow, yet with seeming speed, enormous, blazing, irresistible, a widening flood of molten stone welled over the peak crest and spread.

"We cannot fly too far for Foo's great rage!" Sootja stood paralyzed with dread.

"Sootja, we run a race with molten death. Come." Roger gripped her cold hand and drew her flying down the grassy slope.

The village was half tumbled as they sped along the street. Panic-mad people gathered, screaming, praying on the lava-swept beach.

Almost upon the temple now, the coming flood poured ruthlessly toward the farthest town. Already many of the upper villages were buried in its burning, murderous tide.

The sky was black and no star shone to point a single promise from above. The sea tumbled uncertain, seething, wild, its chaos of foam-capped breakers rolling against the land. The earth was mad with untold violence.

Down the débris-cluttered street, its upper end already touched with the first feelers from that flaming torrent, Tido charged, striking aside the frenzied people who clamored at his feet for safety from their god.

He was a mad man, raving, terrible. His great fists smashed into piteous, upturned faces and his ruthless feet trampled the groveling natives as he ran.

Roger and Sootja stood far down the beach, desperate against all hope, waiting the death that none that night could ever now escape.

Toward them the frenzied priest came, howling demoniac curses on his sister's head.

What had been smooth, unbroken beach was now upridged and heaps of rock lay scattered everywhere.

Upon one of these Tido leaped, to stand a moment gesturing like some grotesque of madness.

Every boat along the beach had been dashed up against the shore and most of them were broken into bits.

What few were left, now loaded to their utmost capacity and beyond, were floundering in a turbid, troubled sea.

A small life-boat drifted near Roger and he dashed into the water, rescuing it, with two long paddles, from the smashing surf.

Tido saw and darted forward.

With a swift leap Roger swung Sootja to the tiny seat in the bow, and shoved the craft into the heaving sea.

It was a perilous attempt, but he had learned as a mere boy in San Francisco how to play in unsafe boats upon a tumbling sea. He made the first rough water, clam-

bered in and, marking time with deft oars, met the oncoming swells with reviving hope.

Baffled, grim Tido stood, while nearer, hotter, fiercer as it came more close, the great red tide of lava flowed into the hissing sea.

The lovers were already out beyond danger and the man paused on his oars before they pulled away.

The horror of the scene was far too definite, and eager to be free he bent again to work.

Some twenty miles away he knew another island stood and there he could secure passage for America.

Sootja sat silent, huddled in the boat, her dark eyes full of mystery and pain.

Long hours passed while Roger plied his oars.

Dawn came at last, placid and silver shod, lifting its fingered glory from a smooth, untroubled sea.

Blue as the sky above, the ocean spread its peace as far as eyes could see. Far, far ahead a darker spot, just faintly green and white, their destined island lay.

Behind, beneath the cloudless sky the smoking, thunderous head of their dread danger flared a gleaming, lustrous red.

Pausing, the man leaned forward happily. All trace of his experience was gone, and in his face great love alone was visible. His deep eyes burned.

"Ah, child of my heart, my jewel of Eastern nights, thy god has blessed our love in this escape!"

The girl's dark head rose slowly, and the eyes she turned to him were brilliant with the flame of her soul's full peace. "I know no Gods, oh, my beloved of men; we have our god between us in our love."

His laugh was rich with happiness that flooded over him like some vast promise of delights to come.

"I said some day I would teach Sootja other gods. How can that be when Sootja is become the goddess and my all of worship?"

"Adored one, dawn kisses us with pearls of whispered joy; we near the island of our life's new dawn. Lean down that, priestess of thy hearth, I may make holy all thou sayest with the first sacred kiss of my new temple, thy heart of Eastern gold."

Together they laughed happily and turned their eyes toward the approaching island while they breathed again their sweet half poetry of Eastern love.

The pipe lay half upturned upon the table. A long, intense silence filled the dingy room. Under the swaying yellow lamps a faint blue smoke floated in vague unformed filmy shadows.

Sam Tong, the half-caste, rose.

His hands were trembling as he moved away.

"What, are you so soon gone? Your pipe is scarcely touched. What moves you, friend?"

The old Chinaman's question went unanswered as the outcast strode along the room.

His brain was strangely clear, then, suddenly, he turned and started back. A loud laugh broke from his dry, hot lips.

"Ming, almost you had persuaded me that life was full. I laugh at my own folly under your smoke-smooth tongue. Had your tale been true the end would not have been so beautiful. The lava would have swept upon the pair and death have mocked their passion. Reality is not so fair and volcanoes do not favor men."

He stood, one hand outspread upon the table. "And yet, by that same god she worshiped, the tale is all of gold."

Silent as spirit feet the girl stepped from the shadows and her little hand rested half timidly upon his arm.

"I say again, Sam Tong, I know a place where work can give you life such as the life you dream."

"Where is this great, good thing?" His voice was potent with a sneering scorn.

"Roger Hampton, dealer in antique jewels, the half-caste prince whose home is rich with Sootja's love."

There was some unseen tension in the room. The half-caste turned.

"By God," he muttered, "I will see the man!"

Without a word the girl followed him to the low, dark door, watching him go, and in her Eastern eyes a new light shone.

What Was That?

by Katharine Haviland Taylor

Author of "Yellow Soap," etc.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HANGED IN EFFIGY.

NEVER in my life have I said a prayer so intensely as I did at that moment; said it in unformed words; said it with a feeling that resolved itself into "please—*please*—" and then I heard another sound. I heard the man mutter: "*Sit tight*—" and another slip of something into water. I had been right; it was a punt, and it was going swiftly.

Soon I heard a whistle, and knew it for Billy's. He came on me as the sun began to make itself felt, and the fog thinned. "Sweetheart," he whispered, putting his hand on the edge of my canoe, "I've been hunting you everywhere—"

"Billy," I whispered, "I've found something new."

"Yes?"

"Yes. I heard it here in the fog. Gloria Vernon and some man—"

"She's in New York."

"She can't be," I protested; "I heard her, not five minutes ago, Billy, right here—"

"Must have been some one else," he answered. "Must have been April. Old Nathan drove her down and saw her off. Gustave saw her off, too. Went down, happened in at the station, accidentally, I suppose, for Nan, who was there looking for a box of books, saw the send-off."

"She must have come back," I said. "I heard her, Billy—not five minutes ago."

"Did you see them?"

"Certainly not," I answered, and then I told the tale. "He called her Vera," I said as I ended, "but I know it was Gloria Vernon. There are not two voices like hers around; it was coarsened, as if she had forgotten to smooth it, or didn't want to; but it was hers."

Billy frowned intently. "Let's paddle up the creek and see if we can see anything. They won't suspect if we look a little sentimental."

I parked my boat and got into his. "Better?" asked Billy, after I'd settled by him.

"A little," I answered.

"I love you," he announced, "even before breakfast."

"Don't—now—" I begged. I didn't want it to be spoiled, and I was upset—not ready for it. I knew when I really began it would take me a long time, and I also knew that we must follow the clue, which was still warm.

Silently we rowed up-stream. Now, I do not like morning, except when viewed from the bosom of a wide, soft bed; but I will admit that, as a morning, this one was a success. The mystery was weighing upon us both and making us wonder. We grew silent. Then we heard a noise from the side of the creek, a sort of a sawing, creaking noise. Billy took out an oar and began to paddle. He didn't make any more noise than he had before. Whatever it was did not silence as we drew near.

"It's that poor Beasley boy!" I said, with a disappointed half laugh as we drew near.

"Oh, drat it!" said Billy, as he put down his oar and began to row again. "Now isn't that anti-climax?" he asked disgustedly. I agreed that it was.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for October 9.

"What's he doing?" asked Billy idly.

"Don't know," I answered, as I looked in the direction of that pathetic, lank creature. But as I looked I grew rigid, and I felt Billy stiffen, too. The noise we heard came from a rope that was swung over a fork in a heavy tree. The rope, crossing the bark, had rasped the tune that we heard, and it continued as we drew near. And on the end of the rope was that trap, and in it, what was left of the hand that had once belonged to Frank Lethridge.

I felt sick, and I saw Billy moisten his lips. "What the dickens made him do that?" he asked, as he looked at the hand swinging up, up and up, and then dropping down to earth again.

"Don't know," I answered, "but they call him the Echo—"

"Lethridge was *drowned*."

"Yes, but what makes this? What has started the Echo doing this?"

Billy signified utter bewilderment by a shake of his head, and then he called a greeting to Hiram Beasley. Hiram looked up, and then, as he sometimes did, ran off, full tear, into the densest woods, and out of sight. And as he ran he clutched a rotting piece of human flesh, from which bones were beginning to protrude; close clutched this, and held it pressed tight to his shabby brown coat, the rope trailing behind him. After what might have been minutes or seconds, I don't know which, the last swirling bit of this chapped over a high clump ofeferns, and all trace of it was gone.

"Hideous!" I whispered.

"Um—" grunted Billy. Again he moistened his lips, and then he turned the boat and we rowed down-stream toward the bungalow. Nathan was out fishing as we returned. I was surprised to see him; I didn't know he ever dallied, for he considered fishing such at that hour.

"Hello!" I called.

"Mornin', Miss Ap*rile*," he responded, and then after a curt "Howdy" to Billy, he answered my question.

"Yassem, she's went to New York," he responded. "I druv her down myself, befin' as Beasley's flivver seems to want to set. Ain't hatchin' nothin' that *I* can see; but there she sets!"

"I wanted her to come down to lunch," I heard myself say. "But—I'll ask her another time. Thank you, Nathan; you saved me a trip—"

"Yassem, yer welcome," he responded, and then with a whir, cast off.

"What the dickens?" asked Billy after we were out of sight of Nathan. He knows my Gloria sentiments, and the idea of my asking her to lunch must have seemed queer.

"Well, if Nathan knows anything," I answered, "I don't want him to know I know, although I know he doesn't!"

"Wait till I digest that," said Billy, and then— "I guess you're right. Silence is best, even if the other fellow is O. K., and you know it. You and I will go in partnership, will we? With no one else admitted?"

I nodded.

"Men shake hands on a thing like that," he said; "but my soul, that's the dickens of a way to fix it! All right if you went in business with an insurgent old maid with flat-heeled shoes; but if you didn't—"

"This has been a horrible morning," I said, "and I don't see any use of spoiling its flavor, so go to it, Billy."

And he did.

Nathan interrupted it. He swung alongside of us without as much as a whistle. "Jest thought I'd tell yuh that Gus Dirks is a waterin' his cows," he announced. "He's settin' over there on the fence."

"Oh, *darn* Gus Dirks!" said Billy, after an awful glare toward something that I had thought was a stump. Then, without a word to Nathan, he rowed on. "Say you love me!" he whispered as we neared the bungalow. "You know—" I began, and then Gustave stepped out on the landing and howled, and at that moment my sympathy for him dried up.

"Your day to swab boats!" he yelled cheerfully. "Come in and get busy. And your day to wash dishes, April. Where have you been? We've been hunting you everywhere."

"I suppose you have walked miles to find us," I said witheringly. "Some people would simply go anywhere to avoid work!"

"So I notice. Where's the 'Jean-Marie'?"

"Up-stream," I replied, a little foolishly.

"Well," said Gustave, "I'll go get that. Good luck to your swabbing, Bill. So-long!"

"I'll come in and wipe them, April," said Billy, as he helped me out. And after he'd wiped out one boat and thrown the sponge in the next one he meant to make tidy, he did; and it took us two hours and thirty-nine minutes to wash and wipe the dishes that morning; there seemed to be so many interruptions!

CHAPTER XIX.

ENTER: RICHARD CODMAN.

GLORIA VERNON *was* away. I wandered up to the Beasley farm late that afternoon, and found Mrs. Beasley sitting on her kitchen steps shelling lima beans. I was surprised at her occupation, as I thought that they were started without wrappers. Hiram helped her.

"He helps me real nice," she said, as I spoke to him. And then, in answer to my question: "Yessum, she went yesterday morning. She's comin' back Friday, I guess. The doctor said we had to have one of them there trained nurses, but it ain't so nice. I'm used to doin' fer him."

I nodded as I sat down beside her on the step—I understood. She had her rut, and Gloria had pushed her from it. Sickness, "doctor's orders," which were holy and unbreakable things to Mrs. Beasley's order of humanity, had made a new soil and a transplanting for a woman who was too old to start new roots. I felt a great deal of sympathy for her.

"I suppose you miss waiting on him," I said, as I picked up a pod and awkwardly tried to unload it. I was surprised, on looking up, at the light I saw in her eyes; it held resentment, and sullen anger.

"Thirty-nine years," she said dully, "I been doin' fer him—doin' all fer him—till now."

"But you have more time to rest, haven't you?" I said, trying to do something to change her feeling.

"Rest?" she said. "I dunno how. I ain't much fer restin'." Stupidly she looked around the barn-yard, and I did, too. Shining milk-pails hung over the pickets of a whitewashed fence—whitewashed by a woman at the order of a man, I'll wager. "Linda, you whitewash that there fence while I'm down in the north field!" I imagine it that way.

Chickens ran to and fro—chickens that had to be fed, cared for, and decently housed; from the direction of the barn I heard thumpings and grunts, and in a field below us the cows grazed—cows that Beasley's woman milked. And their milk Beasley's woman strained, skimmed, churned to butter, got ready for town, carried to the pigs, every day—every day.

I could see it; her patient plodding in one groove until the groove had so worn her to its shape that she could not use another. All the endlessly dull things she had done daily, I saw in her; flat-chested, stooped, her knuckles large and her hands red—the skin of them had that stretched, sodden look that much washing of heavy clothes gives.

She wore a faded brown calico wrapper, which slunk around her heels behind and rose dizzily in front to show worn shoes and thickened ankles. Her hair was knotted up in a tiny tight wad. I had heard that the man who now lay stricken with paralysis had not always been good to her, and that the countryside thought a beating had made the Echo what he was; but I could understand her wanting to care for him. He was a habit. Like her son, she could move with a pattern before her, but without it—I did not think she could or would go on—at that time I entirely doubted her initiative.

"Any news up this way?" I asked.

"No'm, I guess not. I don't hear so much. I ain't one to stand and jaw. I never had no time to, and now—I reckon it don't come natural."

"Whom did Miss Vernon go to see?"

"Her mother. Her mother was took real sick, and Miss Vernon hadda go quick. She had a telegram."

"I see," I said, but I did not. She had told Laurence that she was an orphan;

told him that the morning he drove her up to the Beasley's farm. It had left him maudlinly tender, and only when Gustave frankly eclipsed all his chances did he remember that she was not the only orphan on the map. Nan and I are motherless and fatherless, too.

After a moment more Mrs. Beasley stood up, muttered of going up to "see about him," and told me that she would return. I begged her not to hurry, and not to come down at all if it wasn't convenient. She nodded and disappeared. I heard the stairs' door slap smartly after her, and then the Echo got up and began to poke around among some currant bushes that lined a fence. I watched him carelessly, since I was still struggling with the lima-beans, which were exceedingly loth to leave their nests. Only when Mrs. Beasley returned did I see what he had found.

"It's Jep," she said, going to the spot where Hiram stood, looking down at a dead collie. "It's Jep. Sometimes he roams—I thought he was a doin' it now. He's been gone two, three days."

I got up and went over to stand beside her.

"Was he a good watch-dog?" I asked.

"None better," she answered, in her dull, lifeless way.

"Who's been here lately?" I asked.

"No one but Jedge Harkins; he come up to see my husband Tuesday."

"Was Judge Harkins a friend of your husband's?"

"No'm," she responded. "He says as how he come in to give sympathy. Him and her talked."

"Who?"

"Miss Vernon."

"Were you in the room?" I asked.

"No'm. Miss Vernoon she don't 'low me in none to mention. She says I excite him. I don't"—again something akin to hate flared in her eyes—"I done fer him these thirty odd years. I don't guess I hurt him none jest by *lookin'* at him."

"Was he a good husband?" I dared to ask.

"Good husband?" she repeated. I nodded. Then she plaited a bit of her skirt. "He was my man," she answered dully. I got it, and I saw in it a picture of something that will never fade, no matter who prattles of sex equality, or no matter how loudly. I saw in it the great riddle of human endurance, and one which will never be answered and therefore has come to stay. There are millions of women like Beasley's woman—women who belong to and are worked by their men like cattle, and yet—dumbly accept all injustice and hurts and, if they do not give love to their men, give something curiously like it.

I saw lots of it that summer. It stuck out in those farmers, who were of the older type, and their women, who frankly followed at their heels like watch-dogs. That attitude made the supposition of Nathan about the next affair half possible.

"What killed him?" I asked, looking down at Jep.

"Pizen," answered Mrs. Beasley.

"Really?" I asked incredulously.

"I reckon, ma'm. It looks it." She went on after that to assert her reasons, and I believe it. At that moment the Echo came around the side of the house, where he had disappeared a moment before, carrying a pan of water. This he set by the dog, and then bent above him, crooning queer, unpleasantly, unintelligible little sounds.

"They was friends," said Mrs. Beasley.

"Who could have poisoned him?" I asked.

"I dunno," she answered.

"Could he have gotten into some some one left out for rats?"

"It ain't likely. Every one hereabouts keeps chickens, and they don't dast to use pizen thataway. They mostly uses traps." As she spoke she picked up a spade and began to dig a hole near the house. "Hiram," she said; "Hiram, dig—" An idiotic smile lit his face and he began to scrape at the ground with his fingers.

"No," said his mother, "this way—" and she gave him the spade. He put to, and in no time had dug a good grave for poor Jep.

"I didn't know he understood," I said.

"He helps me real nice," she answered proudly, and then—something snapped in her, and her old dull reticence faded. Just

for a few moments this faded, but long enough to give me more clues, and more avenues for wonderings.

"He talks," she said. "Leastways," she continued, "I heered two men talking that day the jedge called. I crawled up real careful and put my ear to the keyhole. I heered two men a talkin', but when I go in, he won't talk. He jest lays there, like dead, a tryin' to say somethin' with his eyes. I see it. I see it!

"T'other night I heered a man's voice. I got up, and I crep' up to the door. *She* had it locked. I pounded with my hands till they was sore. She opened up and she was white. 'My man,' I says, 'I heered him.' 'You must a been dreamin', Mrs. Beasley,' she says, real sweet and soft, like she does; 'he was a sleepin' nice till you pounded like this'; but—I pushed by her and went in. And he was layin' there, and he was makin' funny noises and tryin' to speak. He wants fer to tell me somethin', but he can't. *She's put a spell on him.*"

"My dear Mrs. Beasley," I said, as I put my arm around her poor, misshapen shoulders, "that can't be true."

"This here's more of her work," she went on, with a look toward the stiff dog.

"Why don't you get rid of her?" I asked.

Mrs. Beasley put a rough, red hand over her twitching lips, and then she looked around. "No'm," she said, half hysterically. "No'm. I can't do that. I'm *afeered!*"

"She couldn't hurt you," I said.

"Have yuh saw the pasture lot where Loucks was stabbed?" she asked. I knew what she meant, and I nodded. "He comes here," she went on in a whisper, "*she* ain't afeered of him. He come here in the dead o' night, draped in white. She leaned outa the winder. *They whispered.*"

"When was this?" I asked.

"Two nights ago," she answered, "when the moon was under and the clouds was low."

I leaned forward, gripped her shoulders, and almost shook her. "Go on!" I said sharply. "Go on!"

"It was a sickenin' night, you remember? Low clouds blowed across a dull sky. I had my wash out, fer it was market day, and what with washin' and fixin' the vegetables, I hadn't had no time to do my work afore. The wind it billowed them sheets and made 'em ghostly. Hiram he got one of his spells and set an' moaned like he does. I put that moan on him, some thinks; one time when he was five months growed, I—"

She stopped, looked up to where a man lay half alive, half dead, and then she was silent. I understood, I saw it; a woman heavy and misshapen with a coming life, being driven too far by work—giving up to tears and hysterical truths, then a heavy hand, a punishment, and silence that was broken by her moans.

"Go on," I said again, but this time not sharply.

"Them sheets billowed," she continued. "Jep howled—it was the night afore he left—the air was heavy and sickish like—and Hiram he set a moanin'. Then the real dark come, and it was heavy. I went up-stairs carryin' my candle, and she was real nice. She says: 'Come in and see him, Mrs. Beasley.' I done it. He lay there tryin' to say somethin'. I says, 'Can't yuh tell me?' and he shook his head. Moved it mebbe half an inch.

"'Tell yuh what, Mrs. Beasley?' she asked. I says: 'I dunno, but it's somethin'; then she says: 'Nonsense!' real sharp, and says he was a going to sleep. 'Time to sleep,' she says, lookin' toward the winder. And she told me to go. I set by my winder an hour. I was tired, but somethin', I dunno what, kept me from sleepin'. After a spell I put out the candle, and then after another spell I seen it. It come sliding in, wavin' its arms. Jep didn't bark none after he let out a few. He sniffed and slunk away. I seen it come closer. I wanted to move away, but couldn't—and then—*she* leaned out, and they whispered. I heard 'em once."

"What did you hear?" I asked.

"He said it," she responded. "He says, real loud: 'To die, that men may live!'"

We talked quite a few minutes after that. I tried to cheer her, tried to persuade her to ask the doctor to get her another nurse, and accomplished nothing. All she would

say was: "No'm, I'm afeered!" and cover her trembling, yellowed lips with her work-scarred hand. After a few more minutes I stood up, asked her to sell me a few eggs, and with these, started home. I was miserably nervous, and somehow the tears started.

Linda Beasley's tale had made me miserable. I was frightfully unhappy as I reviewed our situation, and pretty tear-stained when I went in the house. I found a strange man there, a friend of Billy's. His name was Richard Codman, a name which meant nothing to me then, inasmuch as I didn't know much about detectives.

"Hello, Miss Barry," he said, as I came in. "I have seen about forty thousand pictures of you in Bill's boudoir, and so I recognize you. I have come out here to board. Hear the scenery is guaranteed to wash, and that you are running a nine-reel thriller. Came out here after quiet, didn't you? Now isn't that a joke?"

I agreed that it was, as I shook hands with the man who very soon came to be Dick with all of us. He was short, fat, comfortable-looking, and with eyes that disclaimed all inner, rather, alone thought. What he felt, or imagined, you were sure you knew.

I never met such complete guilelessness. It was cheering. His suit, which was a trifle too assertive in check for good form, added to his every-day, business-man appearance, and I could hardly believe that his was one of those ferreting brains that are able to put nine and seven together and make them total thirteen with absolute logic, if necessary.

"I've been telling Mr. Codman that we're absolute Bohemians," said Midgette, with her most entrancing expression; "but that if he can stand free verse and cold meals, we'll *love* having him." I added my hospitality to hers, and with a little relief. Midgette's resources were something we counted on, and she was beginning to get restive. In this new adjunct I saw a piece of human and much-checked fly-paper that would hold her, and I was right.

"Now this little lady's been crying," said Richard Codman loudly, "and I want to know why? You don't look like the sort who does it easily—tell me about it!"

I found myself doing it. We all found ourselves confiding. I think his great success lay right here: so much himself, confided so genially, he compelled you to tell him all you knew. I sat down and began. He listened without the surprise that would have made me wonder what I was saying. When he went up-stairs I was pumped dry, and Midgette was angry. "Why didn't you tell *us* these things?" she asked. "Why," I responded, "I promised not to tell any one but Billy," and then—only then, I realized what I had done.

CHAPTER XX.

THE TERROR BY NIGHT.

AN hour after that I came upon Gustave, who was sitting in a punt.

As I drew near in the Jean-Marie, which is swift, and makes no noise, I saw first a big Jersey, who raised her head to look at me, and then Gustave. His head was in his arms. Something about the angle of it and the sag of his shoulders made your throat ache. A man is a pretty sad thing when everybody disapproves of him; the hard bravado he puts on is the coat he wears to cover shames; but when he openly despises himself, and doesn't bother to hide it—well, that, I think, is the limit. I tried to kick up a little disturbance with the paddle, but I couldn't wake him to my presence. After a moment I called: "Hi, Gustave!"

He raised his head slowly and blinked. I saw that something had been happening inside of him that had not left him happy.

"We have a new boarder," I announced, simply to make talk.

"Who?" he asked. I told him, and I was extremely surprised to see his expression change, and his color fade and then come back in double force. "He seems nice," I said quickly. "I feel sure you'll like him."

The eyes Gustave turned on me were almost belligerent. "He'd better let me alone," he said sullenly.

"Why, Gustave!" I said. He looked a

little ashamed, and then again anger soared, and he spoke hotly: "Don't think I don't realize I'm shadowed—" he said, a sneer creeping in his voice. "I know I am. I'm not such a damned fool that I can't hear—"

"You're crazy!" I asserted. "What makes you say anything so absolutely mad?"

"What makes you lie? You don't usually—why, only a week ago I saw Jane's dress through the trees, that pink-checked one she wore so much when we first came here; I saw that, and I chased it and—I got a piece. Jane evidently tangled in the underbrush!" He laughed after this, unpleasantly, coldly; looking at me with a "Well-what-can-you-say-to-that?" expression.

"That dress was lost in the wash four weeks ago," I stated. "I know, because Jane had had it only two months and was put out about it. Mrs. Beasley was doing Jane's wash. Jane hadn't the heart to ask her to make good, and so it was a dead loss. Perhaps," I ventured boldly, "your lady-love wore it for a joke?"

Gustave glared at me. "Wrong again," he answered. "She was with me. That's when I'm shadowed." His sneer faded, and he flared. "By God, a man's free!" he said, his voice rough and close to breaking. "I may be—I know I'm a beast, but I'm free! Free—understand?"

"Most certainly you are," I replied, longing with all my soul to paste him an awfully good one.

"Well," he went on, after several, quick-drawn breaths, "then can't—can't you let us alone? It's—it's scaring her. She has some nervous dread of being seen with me. Suppose she thinks Jane might try to even up in some way. She—almost had hysterics the other day when we were together and she heard some one coming. It was Hiram Beasley, I don't know what she thought, but she knows about Jane, and I suppose—"

"Tell her to make herself easy," I said as I made little ripples on the water by flicking the paddle across it, "Jane doesn't want you." And I indulged in something that approached a sneer.

"I suppose not," answered Gustave.

"No one in our crowd is following you," I stated surely. "I know this, Gustave. We are almost invariably together in the evenings, which is the time you are almost always out—"

He looked at me doubtfully.

"Really!" I said. "That is really the truth."

"Then who," he asked; "who is bothering us? I meet Gloria, I can't tell you where, for I promised her I wouldn't, but there's a cabin near here—" He stopped speaking suddenly, as if he regretted having told me anything. "I can't go to see her at the Beasley place," he went on; "you girls make the bungalow impossible, and so—"

"And you feel that you've been shadowed?" I interrupted, to save myself the nausea of listening to anything that concerned the affair.

"*Know* it," he answered. "Why, I've heard it a million times, more times than she has; a stealthy footfall, then a step that snaps a twig; hideous silence until we speak again, then the creeping close and closer—"

"Why don't you face it—him or her?" I asked.

"I can't—it fades. It's too quick for me."

"It frightens Miss Vernon?"

"Almost to death. I—" Gustave's voice faded, and then, after a moment, went on: "Like a drug," he said in a low, shaken voice. "*God*, she's got me!" He met my eyes, tried to answer my gaze squarely, and failed.

I pushed off from his punt, righted my paddle, and spoke of getting on. After I took one stroke, I paused and asked a question. "Since she is in New York, why are you out every evening now?" I asked.

He looked at me and seemed to appeal for mercy. "I can't tell you," he replied, "but it's all right. There's nothing wrong about it. April"—I paddled back to his punt, and he reached out to hold my canoe—"April," he said, his voice strained and anxious, "promise me you won't try to find out. Promise me you won't follow me!"

"Follow you?" I repeated, some scorn in my tone.

"Of course you wouldn't. But—don't

tell of this. Please! I beg of you. It means more than life to me—right now."

"I don't know whether I'll promise or not," I answered. Gustave looked at me, and then suddenly reaching out, clasped my wrist. I felt it begin to sting, then ache frightfully.

His face wavered before me, and I heard him say: "*Promise!* God, April, you've got to—got to—promise, or I'll—"

I set my teeth on my lips, and I think I shook my head. I meant to, but he hurt me so frightfully that I don't know quite what I did. Then he dropped my wrist and covered his face with his hands. I sat still. I couldn't have gone on then. He had sprained my wrist a little; Gustave is very strong.

"Let's see it," he whispered after a little time. I held out my hand, and he did just what an emotionally unbalanced man would do after he had hurt a woman and acted the brute; he kissed it.

"Please stop that," I said, "and we'll call it straight," and then I became aware of some one's gaze, and saw Billy; he sat in a canoe not twenty feet away from us.

"Sorry to interrupt," he said coldly and, turning, made off.

"April!" said Gustave, sensing the thing. "What have I done?"

"Never mind," I answered, "I don't want a husband who asks me what I said to the iceman, and why the agent for the vacuum cleaner stayed so long. I don't want a jealous husband. But I knew I lied, for I did seem to want Billy for a husband, and he would be a frightfully jealous one.

Then we talked a little longer, and because of Gustave's almost hysterical contrition, I promised not to mention his going off or the mystery I found it involved.

I did not see Billy until late that night. I think it was a quarter of twelve when he came in. Gustave was out, and the rest of us sat around the fire talking. Billy flung himself into a chair without looking my way, and he replied to Dick Codman's questions with scant courtesy.

Yes, he had been out. Wonderfully clever, Dick's noticing it. No, he hadn't noticed the moon. Where had he been? To a tea dance, and then he had dropped into one of Mrs. Beasley's little studio suppers: Well, where did we suppose he had been? Walking, of course. Wasn't much else to do, and he was sick of doing it. But walking was better than boating. Sometimes things he saw while boating made him sick, absolutely *sick*—this with a look toward me, the only one he gave me that evening—thought he was going back to New York in the morning. Had to, business.

I knew he lied, and I also knew that in some way Dick Codman was aware that my eyes were dangerously full of tears. No one else saw them, I am sure. Dick Codman saw my wrist, too.

"How'd that happen?" he asked in an aside as we bent over a book of phonograph records, hunting one of the Browne Brothers' affairs to fox to; Billy had rented a Pictrola, and we enjoyed it.

"Sprained it a little, I guess," I said, trying to wiggle it. It didn't wiggle easily.

"U-m—" grunted Dick, and then he said: "How'd you do all that?"

I told him I had caught it between the heavy punt and the pier. I tried to do it carelessly, and I think any one else would have been persuaded, but I felt that he was not. He asked whether I'd been out alone, and I said yes, and when, perhaps ten minutes later, he smoothly directed talk into the boating achievements of the crowd, and they described the one and only occasion when I had poled a boat, and had gone out of it with the pole, instead of releasing the affair I knew that I was caught. I felt myself color, and I avoided looking at him for the rest of that evening.

Just before I went up-stairs, I humbled myself, and asked Billy to dance with me. It was hard to do, and the way he turned me down made me hate myself for being humble.

"Don't feel like dancing," he said, and then—danced with Midgette. And at that something grew hard inside of me, and I made up my mind that I was through with him and would stay so. But I didn't! The thing that so closely followed that evening was so big, so terrible, that there was no room left for little spites.

That night, nervous affair that it was, was really awfully funny, funny in spite of Midgette's hysterics and Laurence's tears. And it was the last time that the ridiculous touched us in that bungalow. Thereafter the tragic close-grazed us all, too successfully sobering us. That night, too, revealed the worst attack of "What-was-thats"; even Dick Codman had them.

In the first place Hiram Beasley elected to climb a huge oak-tree that stands back of the bungalow, and here, where no one could reach him, he began to moan; moaning triumphantly, loudly, gruesomely until one's hair stood on end and little chills one-stepped up and down one's spine.

"What was that?" asked Dick Codman after the first moan penetrated our bungalow. I told him. He said: "Judas Priest!" with a great deal of emphasis. I judged the noise did not appeal to him.

When Midgette was half undressed her lamp burned out, and at that moment one of the chairs on the veranda was knocked over. She screamed, and then shrieked: "What was that!" after which she fell to sobbing as Gustave, who had encountered the chair in the dark, came plugging up the stairs. He was airing some first-rate profanity as he came, the chair having greeted him in the shins, and Laurence took occasion to air his ideas about "cursing." As a reward of virtue he drew some choice bits upon himself. Gustave slammed his door until the walls shook, and locked it.

"Happy family, you have here," said Dick Codman, who was standing at the head of the little stairs that led to the room I occupied when we first arrived.

"Oh, charming!" I agreed, and then hurried on to Midgette, who tearfully entreated that I stay with her. "Can't they stop that boy?" she asked. "He—he drives me *insane!*"

I said I didn't know how one could, that Billy had been out trying to scare him off the rocks, but that he had only climbed higher.

"He might get in here and kill us all!" she went on cheerfully. "You know he can climb anywhere, and sometimes he—he goes killing things. Es-especially after he sees his mother kill chickens. He killed one of Gus Dirks's prize cows last year, after he'd seen his mother butcher."

"We'll lock the windows," I said.

"I have nails driven in the sashes," she said, "they haven't been opened since the first excitement began. I will probably have tuberculosis, but I'd rather die of that than be murdered!"

"All right," I said. "Crawl in." She did.

"Why don't you leave the lamp going?" asked Jane. She had said she wasn't a bit nervous.

"Make you frightfully head-achy tomorrow," said Nan, who at that moment appeared in the door, lugging her cot after her.

"I'd rather have a headache than sleep in the dark," said Jane. I was on her side, although as it turned out, it wouldn't have been sleeping, but staying awake in the dark.

"Refuse to sleep alone," said Nan, "and when April leaves that end of the house I get nervous. I hope you won't snore tonight, Midgette. If you lie on your side don't you think—"

"Never snored in my life!" broke in Midgette hotly, and after a little disagreement, woman retrenchments and soft smoothings, came good nights, and we settled. Midgette was soon sleeping audibly, Nan's eyelids drooped, and she slept. I heard Jane cry a little, and then her sniffs ceased, and I judged she was slipping off. Then I heard the clock in the living-room boom one.

I thought of the afternoon, of Gustave, and then of Billy, and I reviewed, as one does, the whole affair: what I shouldn't have done, what I should have done, how disappointed I was in Billy and—how I cared. Then I heard the clock down-stairs strike two. The Beasley boy's moans were now intermittent, and they were softened by a night wind that had sprung up from somewhere to say that rain was coming.

I looked at the lamp and let the wavering flame hypnotize me, and I felt myself slipping softly into the dream half of life; slipping, slipping; I was on the river, Billy rowed up in a punt that was painted in green and blue stripes. He held up Frank

Lethridge's hand and began to slash it with a long, sharp knife; I saw the blood spurt, and I awoke, horror-filled, shaking, wet with nervous sweat, as you do after a nightmare. Billy's terrible grin was still with me, and I shook myself, trying to wake fully and to relegate that dream to the bin of absurdities.

But—somehow, I could not get my balance. I thought that something more than that dream had startled me from sleep. I was aware, with that queer subconscious knowing which follows certain people even into sleep, that some strange noise had been that should not have been.

I found myself straining every nerve to listen; lying tense, with heavy, sleep-dimmed eyes so firmly fixed on the door that they saw, lurking in the shadows, things that weren't.

Then I became aware that the lamp was dimming and going low. I sat up, breathing fast, and hunted for matches. I found them, safety-matches, and no box to strike them on. Then I remembered that Midgette had taken the box out to the hall to light up the lantern that hung there. I supposed she'd left them on the sill of a high window. Shaking, I put a foot out of bed. It seemed imperative that I reach the hall, call the men, and get lights—everywhere!

Suddenly the light went out, and I really heard the noise, a scratching and a queer wailing—from outside the first burst of rain, and again the loud moans of the Beasley boy, who was still perched high, and evidently vocally renewed. The noise was in the hall, coming closer to our room, that scratching noise. Midgette awoke to scream,—scream loudly and get out her "What *was* that! Oh, girls, what *was* that?"

I heard Jane's quick breathing, a door down the passage open, then the rattle of a tin candlestick dropped from some one's hand; a noise like a thunder-clap from Laurence's room, then a moment's deadly silence, after which came his moans.

Gustave's voice rose. I caught "What the h—" then I heard Dick Codman's reassuringly calm voice saying: "Put out the lamp," and then—it broke loose: it, whatever it was, tore up and down the passage, howling, hissing, wailing; I never heard so much noise. The pitch black of the night, the beating of the swishing rain, and the moans of the Beasley boy helped to terrify us. Midgette began her mixture of sobs and laughter, and then Nan screamed for Laurence—which, even through terror, fanned my sense of the ridiculous. Then there was a lull, and some one stepped in our door.

"Want a light?" asked Dick Codman.

I laughed hysterically; Jane said: "Oh, *please, please!*" and Midgette went on crying. He struck a match, lit a candle, and went out, avoiding any glance in our several directions.

We got up, bundled up in our kimonos, or at least in what we thought were they at the time; it turned out that I had draped myself in a bath-towel, Midgette had put on a garden hat—it did look silly, topping her costume, which consisted of pink pajamas and bare feet—Nan, who is a perfect young telegraph-pole, had slid into my negligee, which about reached her knees, and Jane alone had donned the proper belongings properly.

Thus clad, we hurried down-stairs. Dick Codman was bending over the biggest cat I had ever seen, what had apparently been having a fit. It had frothed at the mouth, and Laurence, who had not recovered from his shakes, suggested that it had been drinking.

"Some one has fed the poor animal beer!" he said. "See it on the whiskers? No doubt Gustave left some out. Perfectly logical; the way it tore around proves that it was drunk. I am *entirely* unnerved! I must say, I think it was *very* careless of you, Gustave!"

"What was that frightful thump?" asked Jane.

Laurence answered with dignity, and was enraged when every one laughed. "It was I," he explained. "I woke suddenly, hearing this horrible noise, and tried to leap from bed. Unfortunately, I had got mixed and leaped into the wall, instead of on the floor. The shock was *frightful!*"

Dick Codman joined our howls. The walls are sealed in that end of the house, and it was no wonder that it had made

the noise it did. Nan, of course, glared at us all and began to mutter little pities over a huge bump on Laurence's forehead. After that Dick said he sympathized, and grew unnaturally solemn, until he caught a glimpse of Midgette, and then again he frankly gave way.

"Wouldn't have missed it for a fortune!" he admitted. "You people are never bored, anyway, are you?" Then he bent above the dead cat and said: "Well, what do you suppose—" and I told him what I knew of the Beasley boy, and at that very moment we heard him outside.

Gustave let him in. He was making unintelligible noises, and laughing; laughing as an idiot would, aimlessly. He fastened his hands on Dick's arms, shaking him to and fro, pounding him, and then—he stood back, only to lean over and kiss his hand.

And then—"The Echo" spoke, and what he said made Gustave turn white, Jane's lips tremble, and the rest of us wonder. What he said was "*Gloria!*"

CHAPTER XXI.

THE FACE IN THE WATER.

NO one went to bed that night, or the following night. Just as we were halfway calm, and after some one had persuaded the Beasley boy out of the tree, and started him off, with a repetition of "Home—home—" and a shove down the road, something else occurred.

"Now," he said, "we can all turn in and get some rest—no cause to be alarmed, you know."

We all agreed that there wasn't, but—all of us had a tendency to look behind us into the shadows, and—to want the lights high. Gustave, who always rose to situations, lit our candles for us, even joked a little, and Laurence said that he hadn't really been upset at all. Then he told Nan that he would protect and care for her, and she bleated out a "Laurence, *you're so cheering!*" and then—it came. A noise of something dropping on the third floor.

Dick went up, five or six steps at a time; Billy and Gustave following. Laurence stayed down with us, and joined our cowering chorus. What they found was a wall torn open, and cupboard heretofore unknown, disclosed. A window that was almost in a pine-tree was open, and into this they thought the intruder had jumped.

There was plenty of stirring around after that.

Gustave, unarmed and alone, went off to find Nathan, whose presence it was thought would prove a help. But he did not come over, for he was in the grip of a bad case of indigestion; so bad it was that he had summoned a physician, who was somewhat anxiously bending above him.

"Bad heart," he said in aside to Gustave, and when I heard it I felt a little mean about what I had thought of the judge for saying the same thing. But—the following day, when I heard that the judge had been seen motoring past the Dirks's place the night before—again I questioned, questioned with a horror and cold loathing behind my suspicions, a shrinking and a fear within my heart.

Billy did not go back to New York that morning. Dick Codman dissuaded him. I heard them talking as I set the table for our breakfast, which was a jolly affair because of every one's nervous, easily started laughter.

"You quitter!" I heard Dick Codman say. Then Billy's sullen "I haven't told you why I wanted to get out—"

"Shucks!" said Dick Codman. There was a good deal of scorn in that remark. And Billy stayed.

That day, until six forty-five, was a fairly calm affair. It was one of those summer days that are weary, and hold in them a hint of fall. The rain of the night before had brought down yellowed leaves, and these had pasted themselves to the landing and porch floor, and in the stream were more being whirled away. The downpour, which had been more steady than ferocious, had colored the creek with the tone of its clay banks, and mud oozed up through the boards where the dock was moored to land. As is often the case, when the rain has not quite decided to stay at home for good, the air was heavy still.

At six o'clock I joined Dick Codman on the landing. He was sitting on a wide seat

of the biggest punt, evidently quite absorbed in watching water-bugs. "Come on out and talk to me," he invited. I joined him, but for the most part we were quiet. The night had left every one tired. I began to feel peaceful and sort of loose-souled, as if my conscience had run down like a watch. Nothing troubled me; I didn't think; I only watched water-bugs zipping across the surface of the creek, making their sharp angles, jerking this way and that so quickly that one thought of lightning.

The shadows on the water, which looked green and slimy, the heaviness of the air, and the quiet, all combined to lull. Dick suggested going out in our motor-boat.

"Oh, no," I protested, "it chugs and smells and invariably stops where you have the very dickens of a time fixing it!"

At that moment I heard a motorful of people come clattering up on the porch, and my decision veered. It was Midgette's week to be waitress, and I'd done it all afternoon since she had gone off to sleep.

"Your turn," I called to Nan, "I'm going out boating."

Dick added a "Come on!" to Billy, who had just appeared in the boat-house door. Billy hesitated, and then nodded. He was pretty well covered with mud, and he looked tired. I was sorry for him, even while my rage soared against him. He ignored me, as he had ever since he had seen Gustave kissing my hand.

"Hot," he said as he mopped his forehead.

"Awful. Been walking?" This from Dick.

"Yes. I tramped over the land near Nathan's place, that spot where the Beasley boy hangs out so much, where we saw him string up Frank Lethridge's hand.

"Probably saw Nathan fixing up a blind for his camera or hanging a rope to work his affair with. Snaps 'em that way sometimes. Quite a mechanic, you know. I thought at first he'd seen some one stringing up Frank, but now I realize that he only echoed something harmless—"

"U-m—" grunted Dick.

Then Billy went on expanding; told what he knew; explained what he thought, and—it sounded logical. We had put off by that time, and were headed down-stream, the down-stream route being a better one for motor-boating. The thing pulled badly, and was hard to steer. I had to give it up, since it took two hands to hold true, and one of mine was not in very good working order.

"What the Sam Hill is the matter with it?" asked Dick Codman.

"Weeds around the propeller, I guess," said Billy as he gave the wheel an immense jerk, and so brought us back to straight going. "Sometimes they tangle"—he talked in jerks; I could see it was beginning to be more than difficult—"around the—propeller. We'll stop down here, find—out."

I smiled knowingly. "Told you so," I said. "We always do stop, crawl out, and get under."

"All right, Mrs. Kill-joy," answered Dick. And then: "Why don't you pull up by the dock the kids built by the bridge?"

"I will," answered Billy. "Darn the thing! I don't see what the dickens is wrong. Well—look at that!"

We looked. Couldn't help it. What he referred to was the constant pull to the right that the boat insisted on giving. "Something big around the propeller," he went on. "Wonder whether that Beasley boy's been fooling with it—" Just then I saw Dick Codman turn white. He had been leaning over the edge of the boat, where now and again I saw something black come up through the water and prick through the ripples our boat's going made.

"You know," he said, turning to Billy, "I think we'd better start Miss April home before we begin repairing this. It may take a long time. Foot-path by the creek, isn't there?"

"Half-way up," answered Billy, "though here's some low land that she couldn't walk to-day—probably under water. She could take the road"—he stopped speaking for a minute since the boat demanded all his attention,—"but," he continued, "this won't take us—long. Darn this thing—I'd *like* to know—here, take the wheel, Codman—"

Dick did, and Billy leaned over the side of the boat, grappling near the propeller. "Got it," he said, tugging hard, "but, my

gosh, it sticks!" and then—he brought *it* up. It was hair—long, dusky-black hair—which curled around Billy's fingers and clung to his hand.

"My God!" gasped Billy.

The boat swerved, and then jerked back into its course. I saw Dick Codman set his chin, and Billy's hand begin to shake. He tried to get rid of the hair, but it clung perniciously. He didn't speak, but I saw his color fade. I felt my lips grow stiff, and those particularly sensitive muscles around the mouth begin to twitch. It seemed as if he would never reach the landing. "April," said Billy as he ran alongside the roughly built pier, "do you want to stay? Don't you think—you'd better leave us—to find—what's wrong?"

"No," I answered, "I'll stay." Dick helped me to step out and tied the boat.

Together they began to pull "it" out of the water.

I looked at the boat and then I looked at Billy. His face stands out as a more horrible thing than that tragedy on which I had gazed. His horrified eyes, his fading color and his futile trying to moisten dried lips, will ever remain for me as the picture of that day.

What he saw was Gloria Vernon; Gloria Vernon, tied and bound, and gagged; Gloria Vernon, with half of her face scraped raw from rubbing against the bottom of a boat. The first layer of skin was gone, leaving little pricks of scarlet; and the water, or horror, had turned her face the green, gray-white that had fixed itself upon her to stay—with death.

Her eyes protruded, and one lid had been torn away—I looked at this, and then quickly turned my gaze on the men. "I won't help by fainting," I thought. "I must not—*must not*—"

The men were struggling to loosen her. Strips of cloth wound around her, were then tacked again the boat; the cloth that gagged her ran back of her neck, crossed, and was taken around to hold her face close against the water-slimed surface of the Lily.

"Pretty well done," said Dick Codman.

"How—" began Billy, and could not go on.

"God knows," Dick answered as he steadied the body while it slipped to the dock. I looked away again. My gaze rested on one of the strips of cloth which had bound her. Dully, I realized it meant something. Jane sprang up in my mind, and then I knew. The pieces, the strips used to bind her, had been torn from Jane's lost frock.

"The Echo?" asked Billy, unsteadily.

"No," answered Dick.

"He's strong as a horse," said Billy, "and after last night—" Again he couldn't finish.

"No," Dick said again. Then he pocketed one of the strips, voiced some directions, and the rigid body of that once beautiful girl was lowered in the boat, now righted and ready to go on.

"The boat wasn't out to-day," said Billy, as we pushed off.

"No," Dick answered. Then he asked how I felt. I think I said: "Very well, thank you," but I am not quite sure. Things surged, rose, and fell around me; the pound of my heart made hearing difficult. I remember going up, seeing some small boys in swimming. So strange how little things fasten. I did not know at the time, that we had seen a soul as we went by, but afterward, all tangled in the memory of sunlight, green-oily shadows of the willow-shaded creek edges, the hot, still air, and the muddy water, were voices—the high, shrill voices of America's youth, saying: "Fellers! There's a lady in that there boat—" and with them, I saw the lithe, small bodies seeking the shelter of the creek.

I think Billy sat by me, I know he did—I seem to feel his arm around me. Dick Codman, or somebody, said I was a sport. I said: "Not at all," quite as one would say "Don't mention it," or "Pray, don't bother."

The day, the hour, stands out indelibly; the yellowed leaves which the rain had brought down, swirling on the faster currents of the creek; water-bugs shooting here and there making their cubist patterns on the still surfaces; green fields that lined the creek, so buoyant, so freshly, cheerfully alive after the long, slow rain; two cows

drinking, and—*in the bottom of the boat*—I did not look, but I saw, saw *everything*, in the faces of those two men.

"They said she was in New York," said Billy.

"Who?" Dick Codman asked.

"Every one. She—did start. She was seen starting."

"When?" Dick asked. They went on talking. I heard them dully. I wondered whether their voices bothered Gloria. I looked down at her, and then hid my face. And then I felt a bump, and knew that we had hit the landing. "In here—" said Dick. I was helped out. I saw them take the body in the boat-house.

"And now," said Dick, "the telephone, and then—the deluge—"

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

THE OLDEST RIDDLE

I GAVE her some roses that day at the fair;
She pinned a Rêve d'Or in her bonnie brown hair,
And so warm was her glance I could truly declare
Never maid was more winsome or kind.
But those same eyes were blank when I met her again
At the Smiths'; she was primly conventional then,
And preferred the cheap chatter of commonplace men—
Or seemed to; but was it a blind?

We lingered one midsummer night on the beach,
Where the foamy-flecked wavelets curled just out of reach;
My heart was too full for the shallows of speech;
Long moments in silence were spent.
But why did she call me a dull-witted chap,
When I gave her the jacket I held in my lap?
She had said it was cold, and had asked for a wrap,
And I thought that was just what she meant!

It is always the same; when my heart-throbs increase
Her signs of emotion immediately cease.
Is it innocent girlhood, or studied caprice,
Or designed with some deeper intent?
She scoffs at sweet words framed to please her alone,
She laughs where no subject for mirth has been shown;
Each change in her mood has a charm of its own;
If I only were sure what she meant!

When I tried with soft nothings her heart to beguile,
When her lips were so close—it seemed almost worth while—
A facetious remark and a whimsical smile—
Gave my pride the proverbial fall.
Am I hunter or hunted, the fox or the goose?
Is she one of the many who play fast and loose?
Or, oh! does she really—? But there, what's the use?
Ten to one, she means nothing at all!

Harry F. Bowling.

BUSINESS was dull. Inactivity pricked the restless soul of Ballantine Belcher with torturing needles—to the ever-calm and placid Cameron Finlock it came as soothing surcease, and lulled him into dreamy, exasperating indolence.

"It certainly must be nice," observed Mr. Belcher, glaring disgustedly upon the tranquil Mr. Finlock, "to hobble your brains and go to sleep for the summer over a newspaper. I wish I could do it—I wish I could hypnotize myself with a few columns of printer's ink. What are you reading—the opium market, or the latest statistics on the morphine crop? You haven't spoken for an hour, and you look as though you were taking a trip through dreamland!"

"What's the use to speak," inquired Mr. Finlock quietly, "when I don't get nothin' but abuse and vilification in return?"

"Oh, come now, Cam," urged the irascible Belcher, "let's get busy and throw out a line or two. Laying around this hotel is driving me batty!"

"Well, go ahead and *throw* out a line or two. If you've got an idea that's worth as much as a sick angleworm for bait, heave your line right in—and see if I care. As for me, I ain't right at the immediate present time got an idea that's heavy enough to sink a hook—and I ain't worryin' about it either. The ideas are bound to come, if you give 'em time and don't rush 'em—and we're loaded with money. Why worry and fret in this hot weather?"

"That's the time to work," declared Belcher, "when we've got plenty of money. You know how hard it is to pump money unless you can prime the well."

"Correct, take the head of the class," agreed Cameron, "but if you ain't got no idea where the well is at, how're you goin' to work?"

"It would help some if you'd put your mind to work, instead of drowning it in that newspaper."

"That's just what I'm doin'—puttin' my mind to work. I'm readin' the country correspondence, and I might get an idea."

Mr. Belcher, now thoroughly nettled, resumed his pacing. Suddenly he was brought up sharply by a gurgle of delight in the fat throat of his companion in crime. Belcher, attired somewhat sparingly and not at all suitably for public appearance, gazed with mingled curiosity and impatience upon the plenteous bulk of his friend, also clad in dishabille.

"And what has little Cameron discovered now?" inquired Ballantine, facetiously. "Is the paper full of pretty pictures?"

Mr. Finlock did not answer. His gogging eyes were fastened upon a certain spot in the outspread newspaper. He passed a

handkerchief over that area of his head upon which the hair was null and void and over his expansive and perspiring face—as though to brush away the filmy clouds of unbelief.

"It's too hot," suggested Belcher, "for the dramatics. If those sappy eyes of yours have wandered onto something good, let's have it—without frills."

This time Cameron Finlock made reply by silently passing the paper to his friend. He laid the tip of a pudgy finger on a small item in a section devoted to rural correspondence. Mr. Belcher read:

> Atlas Shasteen has sold his one-hundred-acre farm on the Clinger Road, four miles east of Valeport, the consideration being seven thousand dollars. Mr. Shasteen stated that he was not in any hurry to invest in another place, and that he would start the first of the month on a prospecting tour through Nebraska before buying. He is a widower, his wife dying five years ago. Mr. Shasteen is one of our most prominent citizens, and Trimble County will be sorry to lose him. Good luck to you, Atlas.

The item had a galvanic effect upon Ballantine Belcher. His slender form stiffened and his nostrils distended as the glamour of the chase infused his veins with bubbling zeal. Two pairs of sparkling eyes gazed jubilantly into each other's depths.

"Ain't it a *beaut?*" breathed Cameron Finlock.

"Made to order," agreed Ballantine Belcher.

"Seven thousand dollars," whispered Cam, hushedly.

"A prospecting tour through Nebraska," suggested his partner.

"A widower," added Finlock.

"And he's in no hurry to buy," supplemented Belcher. He glanced quickly at the top of the paper—at the date line. "This is the twenty-ninth," he reminded sharply.

"And he starts the first of the month," suggested Cameron.

"Where is Valeport?"

"In Trimble County."

"And where is Trimble County?"

"It surrounds Valeport."

"This is a fine time for comedy, isn't it?"

"Then what're you askin' all them foolish questions for?" Finlock had stepped to the telephone. "How do I know where Valeport is, any more'n you do?" he demanded. "What railroad goes to Valeport?" he asked when the hotel desk had answered the telephone. "The Rock Island, eh? All right—thanks. Ballantine, my child, get that Rock Island time-table out of my gripsack!"

And in spite of the heat and the recent irritability of Ballantine Belcher, the gleeful purveyors of plain and fancy confidence games performed a brief, light-footed dance of joy upon the hotel carpet.

II.

MR. ATLAS SHASTEEN stood rigidly in his tracks. About him surged the mid-way throng of the Union Station. It was a delirious scene—crowding, bumping, pushing, shuffling and scooting. Travelers bound for Denver and Salt Lake City stormed the gates of trains headed for Philadelphia and Boston. An old lady on the way to visit her sister in Minneapolis threatened dire consequences to a gateman who stolidly refused to let her board a train for New Orleans.

Mr. Shasteen tried to assure himself that the voice which had brought him up short was nothing more than a trick of his fancy. He had taken but a few steps, however, before he was again aware of the startling call.

"Mistah Shasteen!" bawled the voice. "A call fo' Mistah At-las Shasteen; Mistah Atlas Shast-e-e-n!"

He turned slowly, unbelievingly, and confronted a red-capped station porter. The porter caught his interested glance and instantly divined that there was the man he sought.

"Mistah Shasteen?" he inquired.

"Yes," said Atlas quietly, "I'm Atlas Shasteen."

"There's a call fo' you, suh, in the telephone-booth inside the station. I'll ca'y yo' grip, suh."

Atlas released the heavy suit-case to the obliging attendant and followed him. At the direction of the porter he stepped into a telephone-booth and found the receiver

of the instrument down, awaiting his ear. He adjusted it and called, in a weak voice: "Hello!"

"Hello!" came the reply. "Is this Atlas Shasteen, of Valeport?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I was lucky to catch you, wasn't I? I'm Tillman Kirby, of Lincoln, Nebraska, a friend of Lon Hamer, in Valeport. You know Hamer, don't you?"

"I should think I ought t' know him," answered Mr. Shasteen. "He sold my place for me."

"Exactly," continued the voice. "Well, I was talking to Lon on the phone an hour or so ago—talking about some real estate business—and he told me about you. Said you were on your way to Nebraska, and that it might be of advantage to both of us if we could meet. I'm in the real estate business in Lincoln, you know, and can give you a line on almost any county in the State. Lon told me you were on the train that gets in here at two o'clock, so I took a chance and had you paged at the depot. How would you like to come up and see me?"

"Where're you at?"

"I'm at the Axminster Hotel—room 618. Just inquire at the desk for Tillman Kirby; do you want to take that down? All right—Tillman Kirby; got it? Get the porter there to take you to a taxicab. I'll expect you in a few minutes then. All right, Mr. Shasteen—good-by."

When Atlas Shasteen and his suit-case had been whisked away in a taxicab, the obliging station porter received a five-dollar bill and a smile from a man of plenteous bulk and expansive face, dressed in a manner denoting prosperity, but no particular slavery to fashion. This man had not been very far away from Atlas Shasteen from the time he alighted from the train until he embarked in the taxicab. As a matter of fact, he had come in from Valeport on the same train.

Atlas Shasteen had no difficulty in finding "Tillman Kirby," as Ballantine Belcher chose for the time to be known. He found him in room 618 at the Axminster—found him very affable and eager to oblige an old friend of an old friend.

Atlas Shasteen was kindly disposed toward Tillman Kirby. He had set out upon a long journey and the prospect of advice and perhaps congenial company was not unpleasant. There was about his host a whole-hearted good fellowship which made him at once feel at home. He sat very much at ease, puffing contentedly upon a cigar which Kirby had given him.

"And how is my old friend Hamer looking these days?" asked Kirby. "I expect his nose is as big as ever," and he laughed lightly.

"Yes," Atlas told him, "it is." He laughed, too. He didn't know, of course, that Ballantine Belcher and Cameron Finlock had tarried long enough in Valeport to acquaint themselves with necessary facts and to study, without that gentleman knowing it, the physical characteristics of Lon Hamer. "Lon ain't so young as he used t' be," Atlas volunteered, "but he's good for quite a spell yet."

"Oh, Lon is a young man yet—he isn't any more than fifty, I don't think," and Kirby had guessed about right.

"Just about fifty, I guess," said Atlas.

"He used to be pretty fat," observed Kirby casually. "I remember he and I went over in Indiana once to look at a farm, and it was hot weather—just about like it is now—and Lon got tuckered out before we'd traveled ten miles. Fat men like him can't stand the heat."

"No, they can't. Well, I don't believe Lon's quite s' fleshy as he was—but he's a bouncer yet."

And so the conversation drifted on. There never had been any doubt in the mind of Atlas Shasteen that Tillman Kirby was a friend of Lon Hamer, and the skilful remarks of Kirby removed any possibility of doubt creeping in.

"Where were you going from here?" Kirby asked.

"I cal'lated t' go t' Omaha," said the countryman, "and sort o' get a line on things before strikin' out in the State. Lon, he give me the address of a man in Omaha—a land agent—and I was goin' t' go see him first, before lookin' up some things I got in mind."

"Lon would have given you my address,"

Kirby informed his guest, "if he hadn't thought I was out in Colorado. I was out there, but backed out of a deal and came back before I expected. When I called Lon on the phone to-day he was surprised, and told me about you right away."

"Lon us'ly does all he can t' help a man."

"That's Lon every time. Well, have you bought your ticket for Omaha yet?"

"No, I ain't. I was just figurin' on that when I got your telephone call."

"I don't suppose you're in any great hurry—that is, it isn't a matter of hours—about getting out into Nebraska, eh?"

"No, sir; I ain't in no great rush."

"Then supposing you drive through with me in my automobile. I'm buying a new machine here and am going to drive it back. I'm going to look at some land along the way—but the trip won't take a week. I'm going to start day after to-morrow morning. It will be a fine trip for you and I'll be tickled to death to have your company."

"Well," protested Atlas slowly, "I don't want to cause a man no such bother—"

"Bother? Why, there's no bother about it. Don't you suppose I'd rather have you along than I would to drive through all alone?"

"Maybe that's right."

"Why, certainly—and if things get too slow for you along the road, you can hop on a train. Are you carrying much baggage?"

"No, I didn't bring nothin' but my suit-case that I left down-stairs."

"Well then, what's the matter with your stopping right here in the hotel until we start? I can't finish up my business here until to-morrow, and to-night we'll see a little of the town."

"That 'd suit me," said Atlas, "if it ain't too much bother."

"The only way you can bother me," declared the affable host, slapping his guest on the shoulder, "is to keep repeating that word 'bother.'" They both laughed. "And, remember," Kirby went on very seriously, "nothing I do places you under the slightest obligation. I'll enjoy your company just as much, and probably more, than you will mine—and that's pay enough. After we get out into Nebraska I may be able to help locate you on a place that will be to your liking and to your advantage. If I am able to do that, we'll talk business. If I'm not able to do it, and you can do better through other parties, then we're still friends."

"That's fair enough," said Atlas, "but one thing I'm set on doin' is t' keep up my end of the expenses on the trip."

"Agreed!" exclaimed his host—and they shook hands.

Atlas didn't know just how big an expense account he was to have, if things went to suit his jovial entertainer.

They were in a mood for play. When they returned to the hotel Mr. Kirby was in high spirits and Mr. Shasteen was placid and mellow—very much at peace with the world. The night was warm and they sat, collarless and shoeless, in Kirby's room for a parting cigar.

"D'you know anything about land up in Torrey County, out in Nebraska?" Atlas asked.

"Sure," replied Kirby. He didn't even know where Torrey County was, but a wise confidence man never says no. "There's some good property up that way."

"'Quainted much through the county?"

"Yes, I know several people up there—the Clayton boys, the Wilkins family, Elmer Oakes—" A wise confidence man always has names on the tip of his tongue—names which in reality mean nothing and yet mean ever so much. Mention of names, casually, rings true.

"Did you ever meet Quincy Turgis?" Atlas inquired.

"Turgis—Turgis? Why, sure, I know Quince Turgis. Let's see, he lives east of—of—"

"He lives west of Ripley," volunteered Atlas.

"Yes, I know—west of Ripley, but east of—of—"

"East of Crater."

"Just what I was going to say—east of Crater. That's the way I always drove down into that country—around by the way of Crater. Sure, I know Quince Turgis. Good place he's got there, too."

"Good place, is it?"

"I should say it's a good place!"

Now the particular game which Finlock and Belcher had chosen from their bag of tricks for this occasion depended on keeping the victim's eye upon Nebraska. He must not falter in his determination to go there. If he should change his mind, their game would collapse like a punctured toy balloon. Of course, he would never get to Nebraska —or out of St. Louis—so far as they were concerned, but he must not stop of his own accord. So there was nothing better for Belcher to do than to boost Nebraska.

" I've had some dealin's with Turgis by mail," said Atlas quietly.

" You found him square, I know."

" Yes—so far's I know he's square. There ain't never no money passed between us. He wants t' sell, and Lon Hamer puts me next t' him—but I wouldn't buy till I see the place."

" Let's see," cogitated Kirby, " I've forgotten just how much land Turgis has got there."

" Forty acres."

" Yes, that's it—I knew it was a small place, but a mighty good one. I got him mixed up for a minute with another Turgis I know. What's he got on his place this year?"

" He give up farmin' a good bit ago," Atlas informed him, " and put the place int' orchards and a poultry ranch. He's only a little piece off'n the railroad, you know. That's what I'm lookin' for," and he spoke a bit wistfully. " I'm through with heavy farmin'. I've worked hard a long time now —and want t' get just such a place as I think Turgis has got. Lon Hamer knows about it, and says it's a bargain."

" How much is he asking for it, if it's any of my business?"

" Seven thousand."

" And let me tell you, my friend," said Kirby emphatically, " it's worth every cent of that, too." Here was his chance to keep Shasteen's eye on Nebraska and also to assure him of his own friendly disinterestedness. " It's worth every cent of it—and I wouldn't say a word to switch you away from that place, even though I might make a commission by selling you another place. Why "—and Ballantine warmed to his theme—" that place is a jewel!"

" So Turgis says in his letters—but I cal'late t' see it before I buy. He says there's a good stream runnin' right through it."

Now Ballantine Belcher lived by the smoothness of his tongue. He loved to take the English language and gently press drops of gold from its quivering syllables. His soft-toned, throaty voice came like screened melody from a cloud of cigar-smoke.

" There is," said he, " a cottage on the Turgis place, if I remember right—a cottage hemmed in by spreading maples and setting away from the road, as cool and shady in the hot months as Indian summer twilight. It is always quiet there—at night it is as still and as far away from the troubles of the world as the stars themselves. A dweller there is surrounded by the immensities of the universe; his soul expands, the pettiness and squeamishness of grubbing toil are gone forever—it is a heaven which a man doesn't have to die to reach." Ballantine drew a long, sighing breath. " It is," he added, " just such a place as you'd like to take a wife to, Atlas—and you certainly must be figuring on marrying again?"

" Yes," admitted the countryman, " I am —just as quick's I get a place as nice as what you say the Turgis place is."

And Ballantine rambled onward, wielding the brush of his fancy in sure, deft strokes—delighting in the ease with which words purled from him. Atlas sat silent, stolid.

" Well," said he when his host had drawn a curtain of silence over the entrancing picture, " I expect Turgis has got a right nice place there. But I cal'late t' see it before I buy. Guess I'll go t' bed."

And he did.

Sleep did not come readily to the happy senses of Ballantine Belcher, for his heart was overflowing with joy. In the course of the night he had learned that Atlas Shasteen had in his wallet a certified check, cashable at any bank, for seven thousand dollars!

III.

It was one thirty o'clock next afternoon. Atlas Shasteen sat alone in Tillman Kirby's room. The day served further to swell a warm friendship, and they had been killing time there since lunch. Kirby, at about

quarter after one, had left Atlas, pleading a business engagement. He said he would be back about two o'clock.

The telephone bell rang. Atlas glanced at the instrument and shifted uneasily in his chair. He didn't know whether to answer it or not. The bell tinkled again. He got to his feet and stood uncertainly. He gazed intently at the telephone, still undecided. Upon the third ringing of the bell he lifted the receiver and called "Hello!"

"Hello!" came a voice. "Is this Mr. Kirby?"

"Yes, sir—I mean this is his room, but he ain't here now."

"Do you know where I can locate him?"

"Now I can't say about that. He went out t' 'tend t' some business, but he'll be back around two o'clock."

"Two o'clock, eh? U-m! Well, are you a friend of Kirby's?"

"Yes, sir."

"You can give him this message then. Tell him that Byerson—got it?—Byerson called up, and advised him to look after that option before six o'clock. The Hubbard option—he'll understand it when you mention it. Tell him Hubbard is still at the Greenway Hotel. Also tell him the Fleming people are getting busy, and he'd better close things up. You won't forget that now, will you? All right—thanks."

Kirby returned at ten minutes to two and Atlas gave him a faithful account of the telephone conversation.

"I hadn't forgotten it," Kirby remarked casually, "although it's decent of Byerson to call up and remind me." He glanced at his watch. "I've got until three before the banks close—and until six to see Hubbard. There's no great rush."

At ten minutes after two Kirby again glanced at his watch. "Well," said he, rising briskly, "I guess I might as well go over and clean that deal up. Come and go along—there's nothing private about it."

They went to the Central National Bank. The doors were open and there were a few people in the foyer, but there was a strange absence of customers at paying and receiving windows. Kirby stepped to the lobby desk, pulled a check-book from his inside coat pocket and very carefully drew a check for eight thousand dollars. He stepped toward the row of windows, glancing inquiringly at the lettered designations above them, and chose a window labeled "Paying—G to N."

He found himself confronted by a closed window. He turned, surprised, to an attendant.

"The bank isn't closed for the day, is it?" he asked in alarm.

"Yes, sir," the man replied, "it's after two o'clock."

"The banks certainly don't close at *two?*"

"Yes, sir—two o'clock, sir."

Kirby, blank amazement in his face, slowly folded the check, thrust it into his pocket and rejoined Atlas Shasteen. He was reluctant to quit the bank. He couldn't yet believe that the bank was closed to business.

"What do you think of that?" he demanded as much of himself as of any one else. "I never heard of a town where the banks close at two, did you?"

"The Valeport banks stay open till three," Atlas observed.

"Why, certainly—and so do the banks in Omaha, and in Lincoln, and in Kansas City. But there's the sign—nine until two—I guess there's no getting around that. I wish I had kept the money in my pocket, but I didn't like to carry that amount around." He mused reflectively for a moment. "Well," he decided, "we'll go over and see Hubbard—I can close with him anyway, but I'd rather have the cash."

They found Mr. Hubbard in his room at the Greenway Hotel. Atlas went right along, upon Kirby's invitation. Hubbard was a man of plenteous bulk, with an expansive face and a considerable area upon his head on which the hair was null and void. He was dressed substantially, prosperously—but plainly was no slave to fashion. He gnawed the pulpy end of a ragged cigar, and there was an air of plain carelessness about him which suggested a rough-and-ready ruggedness.

"Well," said Kirby, "I'm ready to make the final payment on that option. I thought I'd be able to take the property to-day, but my clients haven't come to a decision yet—so I'll just close up on the option."

Hubbard's face reflected mild disappointment. There was a tense air of antagonism between the two men, with all their outward politeness. "I'd like to get that thing off'n my hands," said Hubbard. "I could do it easy enough if you'd release it. I don't like to have my money tied up another thirty days."

"But I can't release it. That's the best I can do, Hubbard; close up on the option and hold it another thirty days. I'll do all I can to get it off your hands by that time—but I'm not going to shoulder as big a proposition as that until the turnover is at hand. I'm sorry—wish we could both close out."

"You don't want your money tied up—how about my money?"

"Well," said Kirby, "I've told you just what I can do." He spoke politely and firmly.

"All right," said Hubbard, with a wave of his hand, "there's nothing I can do but take your money."

"I'll have to give you a check."

"It's certified, I s'pose?"

"No, it isn't; it's just a plain check, drawn to cash."

A crafty gleam shot into Hubbard's eye. It was not lost upon Atlas Shasteen. "I can't accept a check," Hubbard announced quietly. "Nothing but the money."

For a moment Kirby gazed silently, penetratingly, upon Hubbard—gazed as though searching his heart. "You know, Hubbard," he said slowly, evenly, waving the check, "that this check is as good as gold."

"I know it—but you've got to lay down the money. That's law, you know." He couldn't restrain a smile of triumph.

"It's plain to me," announced Kirby, rising, "that you're taking advantage of a technicality to squeeze me out. You know this check is as good as the money—you know I'm in a strange city, and known at only one bank. You think you've got me in a hole because that bank is closed. Well, maybe you have, and maybe you haven't. I know Fleming has offered you a better thing if my option lapses—but that option isn't going to lapse; you can jot that down on your cuff! I'm going out and raise the eight thousand dollars in cash." He whisked out his pocketbook and hastily counted out two thousand dollars. "I've got two thousand in cash on me, come to think about it," he pursued. The sheaf of yellowbacks made a profound impression on Atlas Shasteen. "I need six thousand. Come on, Mr. Shasteen, we'll get busy." At the door: "I'm very much surprised, Hubbard; I thought you were a different sort of man than that. You and I are in business in pretty much the same territory—maybe *you'll* be in a corner some day."

"I want everything done accordin' to law," cried Hubbard as they departed.

The door closed and Cameron Finlock stretched his bulky arms. "Now," said he to himself, "Ballantine ought to get that check off'n that chump in the next ten minutes, cash it at the Night and Day Bank in a half an hour and be at the station in East St. Louis in an hour. It's time I was on my way."

Kirby and Atlas Shasteen were in the street. Kirby was straining his brain in an effort to figure out some way to raise six thousand dollars. He was also talking about it—talking very, very much about it. It was now time, in the nature of things, for Atlas Shasteen to mention the certified check for seven thousand dollars he had in his wallet.

But he did not mention it. Kirby hoped he wouldn't have to ask him for it—he hadn't figured Atlas as being as tight a chump as that. So he talked on and on, adroitly—but still the countryman said nothing about his own check. There was nothing for Belcher to do but take things in his own hands. The situation was now at the hottest point psychologically, and it mustn't be permitted to cool in the slightest.

"Say!" he exclaimed, abruptly halting and grasping Atlas by the arm, "you've got a certified check for seven thousand dollars, haven't you? By George! I hadn't thought of that—a certified check is as good as cash in matters of this kind. Here, I'll give you this check for eight thousand, and you let me take your check. That will be one thousand you owe me till to-morrow."

Atlas flushed. He was embarrassed—that was plain. The heart of Ballantine Belcher plumped far down in his quivering

anatomy. With difficulty he restrained a gasp.

"I'm ashamed t' tell it," confessed Atlas, and a trace of humility was in his glance, "but I ain't got that check-no more. I know you'll say I was a fool and ain't got no business sense. But I mailed it away t' Quincy Turgis first thing this mornin' —before you got up. I've bought his place —without seein' it. I know it was a foolish thing t' do—but when I got out of bed this mornin' I couldn't think of nothin' but how pretty a place it was; and what you said about it last night took such a holt on me that I got afraid somebody else might beat me t' it. So I hustled that check right out —and he ought t' get it by Friday."

A westbound train that night carried a heavy cargo of gloom, stored in two dejected hearts.

"I can't figure yet what we're goin' to Omaha for," remarked Cameron Finlock.

"I don't suppose you can," agreed Ballantine Belcher tartly, "because it isn't quite as plain as a poached egg on a plate of browned hash. I suppose I'll have to draw a diagram of it. We're going to Omaha—pay attention now—to get a line on a man by the name of Quincy Turgis, who just stole seven thousand dollars from us. We're going to play *him* now." And Ballantine concluded trenchantly: "We're going to get our seven thousand dollars if we have to steal it!"

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AN IDYL OF IDLENESS

I CANNOT work in the city—
That prison of brick and stone,
Where distraction waits at the outer gates
And speaks through the telephone.

The labors of men only vex me;
The pleasures of men tempt me sore,
And I fret and whine for the smell of pine
And the sound of the sea on the shore.

I cannot work in the country—
There's so much else to be done;
The flowers I've sown see that I am alone
And beckon me into the sun.

The waves roar a hearty welcome;
There is lure in the shade of each tree.
"I could slave," I say, "were I hidden away
With nothing but walls to see!"

I cannot work on the ocean—
It is easy to understand
How that swaying deep rocks the will to sleep;
But I cannot work on the land.

I know I am not an idler—
I could drudge were conditions fair;
But the summer reigns in my tingling veins,
And I can't work anywhere!

Channing Pollock.

(From the French of Pierre Louys.)

ME. ESQUOLLIER came out of the Opéra, followed by her younger sister Armande. When they were comfortably seated in the automobile coupé, she remarked:

"Well? What's your impression?"

"To begin with: as a man he's delicious!"

"Good. You needn't go on. You're captured, my dear. Kiss me. It's all settled."

They embraced tenderly, but Armande protested:

"No, no; you're going too quickly, Madeleine. Suppose he does please me? I've displeased *him*. He spent an hour criticising me, and I, like a ninny, another hour deserving it."

"Hullo. In what way?"

"It seems my gown is too pretty. It's not a gown for a young lady, it's a gown for an actress, if you please."

"What an impertinent youngster!"

"That's not all, my dear. He finds it remarkable that I should be taken to the opera when they give a ballet. His father and his mother attended—from a distance—when they gave 'Zampa' and 'Les Rendez-vous Bourgeois,' one evening; suitable plays, both of them, in his opinion. I was unlucky enough to tell him the story of 'Zampa,' and he stared like a paralytic. Then I told him the plot of 'Les Rendez-vous Bourgeois,' and he grew pale all over."

"But again, why—"

"I don't know. I was limp to the fingernails. He loved me, I felt that. And so I took pleasure in shocking him, that he might love me some more in spite of my faults. But I think I went too far."

"Heavens, what else did you tell him?"

"I showed him the two little actresses near the wings—the Italians. You remember you told me about them the other day. And I confided to him."

Madeleine stifled a peal of laughter between her gloves.

"Child, your young man is a pearl," she cried, dimpling at her sister's dismal expression. "I can't let you lose a husband like that. You shall marry him. He is priceless."

Then, irrelevantly:

"Goodness!" she exclaimed. "We've been driving for twenty minutes. What road are we on?"

Armande rubbed a peep-hole in the foggy window and said:

"I can't see a thing. It is dark."

"Dark? What do you mean? In the Champs-Elysees?"

She bent in her turn, and looking intent-

ly into the darkness, dimly perceived the gray sand of an open road, without a house in sight.

"I—I—" she stammered. "I don't know where we are. This isn't Paris any more. Alexandre is crazy. Let's stop him."

She quickly pressed the button of the electric bell.

But hardly had the clear notes rung out in the silence than a rapid double click sounded from the driver's seat, and the automobile leaped forward with a bird-like whir at the maximum speed.

II.

THE shock threw both sisters backward. They gave a suppressed shriek.

Madeleine bent her head and looked through the front glass toward the driver's seat.

"Good Heavens!" she cried. "It's not Alexandre."

"What did you say?"

"We've been kidnaped. It's not Alexandre driving."

"I'm going to jump."

"Armande, you're crazy — we're doing forty miles; you'd only jump to your death!"

If they had not been together, each of them would have jumped, just the same. But by a feeling similar to one we have at the edge of a chasm, when our companions' danger gives us more vertigo than our own, Armande and Madeleine thought simultaneously: "I could jump safely, but she'd be killed."

Their trembling hands sought one another, clasped, and pressed convulsively against the leather of the cushions.

The speed of the coupé was terrific. As it rushed over a runlet a violent shock jarred the springs and tipped up two wheels which whirled round in space. Everything staggered, rebounded and shivered for a short instant. Then the machine found the road again, smooth and rapid as the flood of a river beyond the break-water.

Huddled and motionless on the floor of the coupé the two sisters lay silent, frozen with terror.

Armande was not ingenuous enough to be ignorant of what was before her, and the poor girl was going mad with horror.

"Ah!" she cried suddenly. "Madeleine! I would sooner jump—it is the better end."

But at the same instant the automobile slowed down, turned, leaped through a gate, crossed a large, deserted court, and stopped in front of a stepping-block.

Madeleine whispered:

"It is too late, little girl."

A man about forty years old, bald, elegant and obsequious, had just opened the door. He bowed.

Armande screamed.

"*Monsieur*, kill me! Kill me!"—adding naively—"but don't—don't come near me!"

"*Mademoiselle*," said the stranger, "I will not come near you in any way. Have the goodness, however, to follow me. Time presses. It is useless to scream—the house is alone in the middle of a wood."

Madeleine was the first to step out. Armande followed, but so unnerved that she missed her footing. She was helped up. A faint moon, just risen, silvered the evening-wraps, the two pale profiles, the coiffures beautifully and modishly dressed. They all entered.

The whole house was lighted up. The stranger, preceding his quarry, traversed a paved hall, two drawing-rooms and a small apartment. He turned into a corridor which seemed to make the round of the whole château, and which confused all sense of direction. At last he opened a final door, waited for the two young women to pass in before him, and locked them in without entering himself.

In the room to which they had been brought stood an old woman, dressed all in black. She, too, bowed to them.

"*Madame. Mademoiselle.*"

Then, without further preamble, her dry voice articulated:

"Permit me to undress you."

"To—to—" stammered Madeleine.

She did not finish. The old woman had already unfastened the clasp of the mantle, withdrawn the belt pins, and slipped off

the outer skirt. With the same dexterity her lean fingers undid the hooks of the corsage and drew the shoulder-straps down along the limp, powdered arms.

"You, too, *mademoiselle*," repeated the same dry voice.

Already quite pale, Armande grew pallid. She threw a despairing glance at her sister, who had cast herself down on a couch, shaken from head to foot by a nervous trembling. Unresisting, with neither strength nor courage left, she abandoned herself like one dead to the fingers that moved nimbly over her person. The old woman threw the two gowns over her left arm, went out quickly, and bolted the door again behind her.

The young girl had remained standing. Sobbing, she fell on her knees before an armchair and began to pray. Weeping, she prayed aloud, her hands to her face, in a frightened, stammering fervor of dread.

She called on the three saints who had always protected her; promised wax tapers to the one, alms to the second, an altar-vase bought at the best jeweler's to the third. She swore to keep a novena, to fast during Lent without asking dispensation; and she made a vow that, if she ever married, she would never deceive her husband.

Time passed. A clock in the room struck four in the morning.

Moving restlessly on her couch, Madeleine suddenly stretched her cramped arms and beat the upholstered cushion with clenched fists.

"I can't stand it! I can't stand it!" she cried. "This waiting is horrible! I'll be dead of fear when they come! To torture in this way two unhappy women! What do the monsters want with us? Why don't they come? Why don't they come?"

And then a burst of tenderness threw the sisters into each other's arms.

"My dear! My Armande! My little Armande! My dear little sister! Don't be afraid, love; I'll defend you; you'll see! I don't matter. But you—they sha'n't touch you—I won't let them touch you. I'll cover you with my body, my dear Armande!"

A step sounded in the corridor.

"Merciful Heaven! Here they are!"

III.

THE key was thrust into the lock with a noise so grating that Armande shrieked.

When the door opened, however, they saw only the old woman, carrying the two gowns over her arm.

The two young women had retreated to the extreme end of the room.

"*Madame. Mademoiselle*," said the dry voice. "Permit me to dress you again."

"What?" exclaimed Madeleine. "But I—but then—"

Their stupefaction made no perceptible impression on the old woman, to whom it was evidently no novelty. Marvelously expert at fastening the hooks as she had been at unfastening them, she restored the gowns as she had found them, draped the *décolletage*, fluttered her fingers through the lace, smoothed the pleats of the skirts and went out again, with a slight bow.

The stranger entered in her place.

He was in evening dress, his head bare, his hands gloved—resembling a head waiter rather than a man about town. But the difference is sometimes slight. Let us say he looked like a public lecturer.

"Ladies," he said politely, "at first I meant to have you taken back to your home with my brief apologies, and without further explanation of the mystery of your kidnaping. But feminine curiosity is an element with which no one can cope. If I do not tell you my secret, you will try to learn it; in which case you will ruin yourselves besides ruining me. I have some interest, therefore, in telling it to you—and assurance that you will keep it."

He closed his eyes, opened them again, and continued with a smile:

"You have on your persons to-night, or rather this morning, the two loveliest gowns in Paris."

"Good Heavens" exclaimed Madeleine, putting her hands to her head. "So it was for that!"

"One of my customers, a young foreigner, saw these two gowns at the opera Mon-

day evening. She wanted both of them, no matter what the price. I could have copied the lines, of course, and whatever else it is that gives them their distinctive elegance; for the glance of a ladies'-tailor photographs with the accuracy of a camera. But your gowns are covered with two designs in embroidery of a most disconcerting fantasy—even to a ladies'-tailor. We could not imitate those, except by laying the skirts and the corsages, *unpleated,* on a cutter's table. So I had to obtain them."

He leaned toward them over the back of a chair, and continued:

"The most simple thing would have been to get them from your maid, by a suitable honorarium. Most certainly I thought of that. But, unfortunately for me, your maid is stupid. In the event of discovery, of summons and trial—for everything had to be thought of beforehand—she would have broken down after five minutes of cross-examination on the witness-stand. Helped by her, I should have been arrested with her—a sad ending for an artist of my rank. So I preferred rather to stake everything, in order to gain everything; and to kidnap the gowns together with what was in them. That, at least, was worthy of me."

The two sisters, stupefied at such audacity, looked at each other without a word.

"I bribed your chauffeur, therefore, and had him replaced by mine. The substitution was made in the Rue Auber during a block in traffic easy enough to foresee, since it always takes place when the opera is over. The same faithful servant—mine, I mean—will take you to your hotel. Two ladies may return from a ball, I hope, at six in the morning, without surprising any one. You are not compromised, therefore. For the rest, it is to your interest, most obviously, to keep absolutely silent about the story. I need not tell you that if you repeat it, your friends will repeat it—with a certain smile."

Madeleine appeared not to hear the innuendo. She was unspeakably overjoyed at her escape from the dreadful nightmare, and she was struck almost dumb before the man's unparalleled assurance.

She leaned toward Armande.

"It is Heaven's own mercy that my husband is away! How fortunate, how wonderfully fortunate that he had left on a shooting trip!"

"On a shooting trip?" said the ladies'-tailor. "I believe I am better informed. It was indispensable that your husband be away on the night of our plan."

"Indeed!"

With a bow the stranger completed his sentence.

"It was that item we found our most expensive."

IV.

THE next morning Mme. Esquollier kept silence, in fact, about her adventure; for she slept till two in the afternoon, exhausted by fatigue and emotion. But when her best friend, Mme. de Lalette, succeeded in passing the incorruptible maid and entering the bedroom, Madeleine yielded to an irresistible desire to bask in her sympathy, and revealed to her the whole dramatic occurrence.

When she had related everything to the last word, she took her friend by both hands, made her swear not to speak of it to *anybody,* explained at great length that she could not invoke the courts because reports of the trial would surely cover her with ridicule and perhaps with scandal; that, if she did not prosecute, it was better to ignore everything, quite, and not tell a living soul what had passed; for people would understand still less why she kept so quiet when the anecdote had made the rounds. In short, she counted absolutely on the discretion of her dear Yvonne.

Mme. de Lalette promised.

Unfortunately the story was too good. Women keep only small confidences, in the hope of deserving big ones—to tell. The same evening Mme. de Lalette found herself in a drawing-room where she counted twelve bosom friends, each as discreet as she—which is saying a good deal. Under the seal of mortal secrecy she told all about the fantastic kidnaping. The tale was sustained with a good deal of art. Not for a moment did she let them suspect that the adventure ended in a comedy. The effect

of the climax was most striking. One or two ladies cried, "Why, that's horrible!" Every one beheld herself carried off in the fantom automobile by the mysterious chauffeur. The impression was so strong that it persisted to the close. A chorus of indignation greeted the final statement—the pronouncement of the infamous ladies'-tailor.

"Really," cried one lady, "one needn't be astonished at anything any more."

"A kidnaping at the Opéra!"

"Paris has become intolerable!"

"We live right among the Apaches!"

An old maid did not fail to observe that the happy conclusion of the affair was due to a miracle.

Another protested that she would not dare to go out without an escort any more, after sundown; and that she would always carry a stiletto in her corsage, a poisoned stiletto, with the word *muerte* engraved on the hilt, since melodrama was now invading real life.

Mme. de Lalette alone said nothing, added not one comment to her finished story.

"And you, Yvonne, what do you think about it?" asked a melodious, incisive voice.

Mme. de Lalette made an indifferent little grimace.

"I? Oh, I think—I think—"

"Well?"

"I think it's going to a good deal of trouble to explain a return at seven in the morning."

An ecstacy of merriment and appreciation transported the twelve bosom friends. But through the hubbub of cries, laughter, gossip and applause came the same clear, incisive tones as before, twittering with delight:

"Ah, you dear—you're simply terrible!"

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WEEPING TIME?

SMILING Time—is infancy
With pleasure running wild,
Beaming joy and esctasy
And heirlooms of the child.

Laughing Time—comes to the youth
And maiden romping free,
Seeing only light and truth,
And life is melody.

Working Time—has most of joy
To those in labor bent.
They know peace without alloy
Who toil and are content.

Thinking Time—the joy at last,
Finds pleasure the best way,
Happy quite in all that's past,
And in Eternal Day.

Weeping Time—but none can say
Just when this time will fall—
Therefore it should have to-day
No place in life at all!

Eunice Walker.

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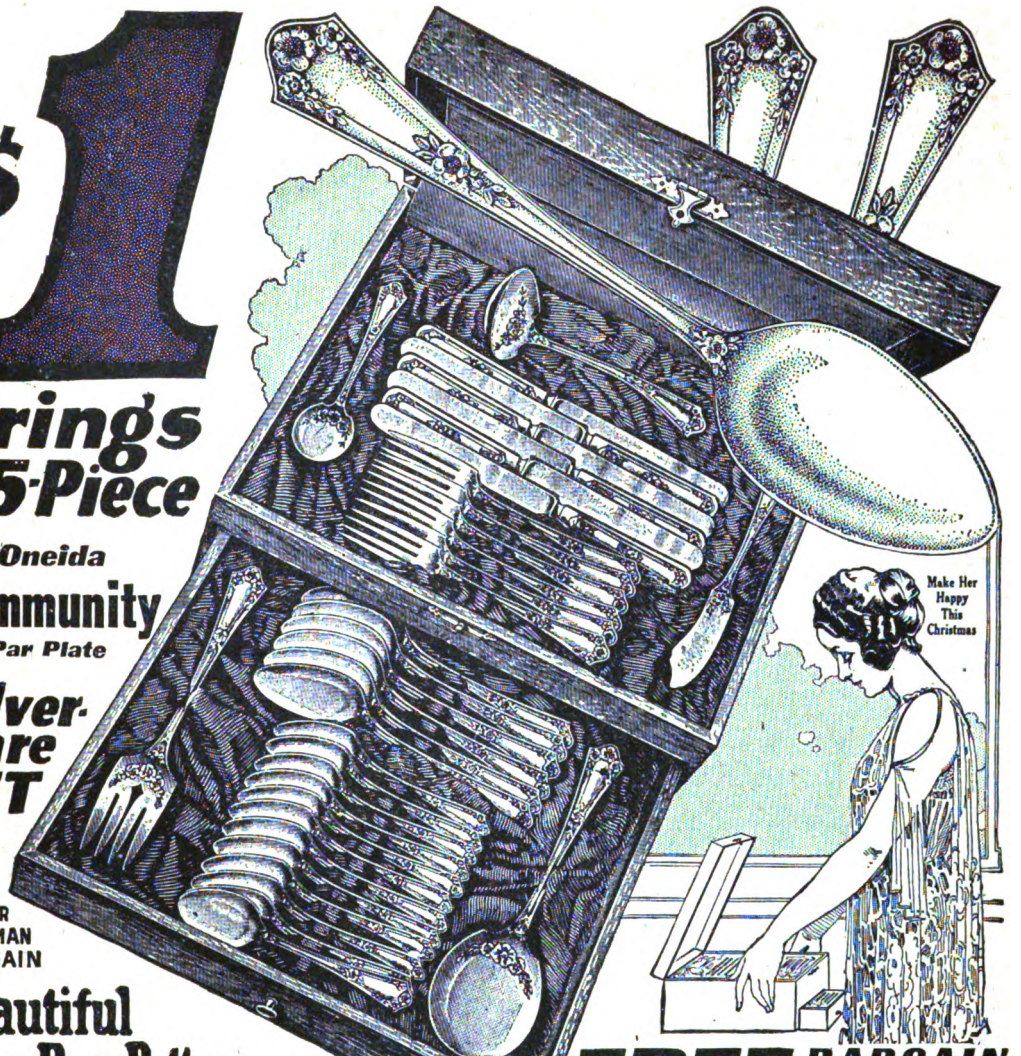

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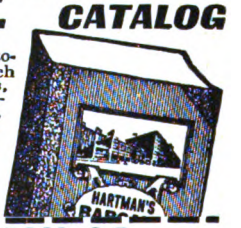

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