

# ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY

## My Lady of the Nile

by H.M.Egbert



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# ARGOSY-ALLSTORY W E E K L Y

VOL. CXXXIII

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NUMBER 4

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## THIS IS IMPORTANT

WE are beginning next week a six-part serial that, for reasons which will be apparent to the reader almost from the first, we are *not* going to *synopsise* at all. It is a "Different" story—a "Super-Different" it might well be called—so strange, so weird, that any attempt to write a brief synopsis would be worse than futile. So do not fail to start it at the beginning and keep the back numbers so you may refer to them. The story is

### THE BLIND SPOT

BY AUSTIN HALL AND HOMER EON FLINT

A "Different" Serial

It is a story that once started you will not be able to put down; that once read you will not forget.

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# ARGOSY-ALLSTORY W E E K L Y

VOL. CXXXIII

SATURDAY, MAY 7, 1921

NUMBER 4

## *My Lady of the Nile* by H. M. Egbert

### CHAPTER I.

#### ABOARD THE NILOTIS.

TEN minutes after the Nilotis had started up river from Berber toward Khartum one of the stewards handed me a telegram.

"I hope it doesn't matter, sir," he said. "The boy threw it on board just as we were casting off."

I tore it open and read: "Appointment cancelled. Wells fired by natives. Development suspended. Expenses paid at New York."

I read it in bewilderment, speedily followed by intense chagrin and disappointment.

I then crumpled the paper into a ball and tossed it into the Nile. I strode to the rail and looked out upon the scene before me, hardly knowing what to do, so keen was the blow.

Berber was already disappearing behind the fringe of date palms along the Nile embankment. The river stretched behind and before, a line of black, ooze-laden water bisecting the even fringes of fields, with

palms and water-wheels and cotton. On each bank the sulky, promenading camels made their march, exactly as in the picture-books.

In the distance were the eternal shimmering sands. The scene, unwarying since the Nilotis had started on her voyage, no longer bore the charm of novelty.

I had been growing more and more impatient for the *sudd*, the reedy jungles, for mysterious Kordofan, in the far west, where the thin advance guard of settlement was already trickling in.

I had been called from my desk in New York, as a consulting engineer, to become adviser to the American Excavation Commission when the outbreak of the Balkan War suspended operations, and, while dreading the return to civilization where I had no ties, I had been invited to take charge of the operations for drilling the new oil wells in Kordofan. And now the vision had gone up in the thinnest, filmiest haze, and disappeared.

I must have stood by the rail a long time, wrestling with my problem, and trying to imagine opportunities for consulting



engineers in Khartum. What revived my spirits was a physical thing—the decline of the sun, and with it, an abatement of the inferno of heat that had kept us on the griddle every day since we left Cairo. I had a thousand dollars' worth of English sovereigns sewed away in the lining of an inner belt, and I was twenty-six—a combination hard to beat, after all.

Then the ship's gong began to beat for dinner, and I forgot my troubles momentarily in the pangs of healthy hunger.

The voyage up the Nile in the large, two-deck, paddle-wheel steamer, had been singularly uninspiring as regards company. There were a few officers of the native army aboard, taciturn, sun-dried Englishmen who kept altogether to themselves, one or two teachers at the Gordon Memorial College, returning from vacations, some Egyptian office-holders, one or two landowners, and a sprinkling of Greek and Armenian traders, who traveled second, but ate, for convenience, in the saloon. There was also a sprinkling of ladies, mostly of maturing age, missionaries, or wives of government employees.

But as I took my seat there came into the saloon a woman who drew all eyes like a magnet.

She was conscious of it, as she passed to her place at the captain's table. Beautiful, young, exquisitely gowned, there was magnetism about her, consciousness of power, usage to social life—all that was evident. There was also a certain worldliness that indicated experiences of more kinds than are considered the mode in Anglo-Sudan society. Perhaps a high class of adventuress.

I don't know how I knew this: at the time my slight sense of dislike was vying with my admiration as my gaze was fixed on her.

I was still looking at her when I heard the man on the other side of the chief officer ask who she was.

The chief officer paused, his soup spoon half-way to his mouth. "Mme. Natalie Caraman," he answered. "Came on board at Berber."

"By Jove, what a stunner! Not English?"

"I see you are not acquainted with the Sudan?"

"No. Why?"

"The Caraman affair happened long ago, but everybody here knows about it. Her father was Russian; her husband took the Russian embassy to Abyssinia some years ago. He was found dead one morning at Adis Ababa. You've heard of Dolgouroffski?"

"The Abyssinian king-maker?"

"That's the man. His name was mentioned openly in connection with Caraman's death. Murder was spoken of. The woman was said to have been in love with him. Most women who ever saw Dolgouroffski were.

"I saw him once—a giant of a man, like a viking, with a great tawny beard down to his waist, and the strength of three or four men, even in his fifties. The Negus was a puppet in his hands. When Dolgouroffski cut loose from Russia and began an adventurous career of his own, Mme. Caraman was said to be his right-hand man—or woman."

"Sounds interesting!"

"Decidedly. He might actually have become Emperor of Abyssinia, if he hadn't made one of those little mistakes such men are apt to make when they lose their perspective. He helped the Dervishes cut up the Branscombe expedition a few years ago. That meant hanging, if England caught him; and England is pretty influential at Adis Ababa.

"So Menelek dispensed with Dolgouroffski, who faded into obscurity, as all his kind do sooner or later. Rumors come through occasionally that he's still alive, and he's said to have taken sanctuary in one of their holy cities; but anyway, he's too old to make any more trouble, though the British government hasn't forgotten poor Branscombe's fate."

"Killed, I suppose?"

"Confound it—no, sir! Tortured and kept alive, like the late Mahdi's victims, and passed on from hand to hand as English power was extended southward. Fancy an English officer grinding the mill in some dirty Arab's home, and—blinded, perhaps, or dragging chains! Faugh!"



"And Mme. Caraman?"

"She left Dolgouroffski when his star began to wane. Several years ago—yes, she must be in her thirties, though she doesn't look it. She bought the government's tolerance in some way, and they let her live in Egypt whenever she takes a fancy to open up her house in Cairo. Rich, handsome—well, she's a dangerous person to have aboard, and her presence here interests me a good deal."

"Yes?" asked the other.

The chief officer dropped his voice. "There are only two places to go to from Khartum. One is Kordofan—and there's nothing to draw her there. The other's Southern Abyssinia.

"There are only two ways of getting out of Egypt into Abyssinia. One is via the Atbara, from Berber. The other is via the Blue Nile from Khartum. Now the north is a hard nut for any adventurer to crack, but the south, the Falasha country—"

He broke off, as if he was afraid of saying too much, and then resumed his story reluctantly.

"Well, you've heard of the Falashas, the Black Jews, who practice a corrupt form of Judaism and claim to have settled the country in the region of Jeroboam? They are in a ferment just now, on account of the expected redemption of Zion, and they have some sort of legend or prophecy that their influential men believe in—"

I could not hear the rest of what he was saying. The talk changed. After dinner I went upon deck, tried out the smoking-room, and was driven out by a godless blend of aromas from the cigars of half a dozen Egyptian financiers, who seemed, from their conversation, to be pooling the world's cotton crop. So, having nothing better to do, I made my way down to the steerage and looked at the natives.

Here, at least, was adventure, life, vivacity. Greek traders, Albanian soldiers quarreled over their cards, Arabs stood in silent groups, watching the shores, as if their eyes strained toward their desert home beyond. And then two figures caught my eye, so queer, so unmatched, that I looked at them in wonder

One was an enormous, gross, hook-nosed

Levantine, dressed in a loud suit of checked flannel, with a heavy gold watch-chain through his waistcoat pocket. A great emerald gleamed in a ring on his forefinger, and a blue-black chin protruded from the stained collar.

The second figure betokened Oriental Israel by the white ear-locks, drooping beard, and skull-cap. Yet there was an incongruous flavor of Americanism about it that puzzled me.

"Well, well, we'll see about that, Mr. Arminius," I heard the old man say, and the Levantine withdrew, gesturing. At that moment an unexpected lurch of the ship sent the old gentleman and myself careening into each other's arms in no gentle manner.

"I beg your pardon," I said, restoring the old man to his balance. "Very awkward of me not to notice. I was thinking—"

"Then you are a very fortunate young man," answered the other, in incisive American. "You should certainly be able to go a long way in these days, with such a gift."

It was apt—yet there was nothing in the least ironical in the old gentleman's intonation. He meant just what he said. I looked into a pair of keen blue eyes, twinkling at me from behind a pair of great horn-rimmed spectacles.

"You haven't a high opinion of young men of the present day I see, sir," I said respectfully, for if ever any one was stamped "professor" all over, it was my new acquaintance.

"I am afraid," answered the old man regretfully, "that I know less about them than I should. I speak from observation, rather than from acquaintance. My youth was spent in learning. I stifled the natural instincts of normal boyhood and sought relief in books, and in the only books allowed me—the Talmud and its copious commentaries."

"A marvellous compendium of religious learning, I believe, sir," I said, inanely enough.

The old gentleman shot a sharp and indignant glance at me over the tops of his glasses.



"Young friend, I said that my boyhood was a normal one," he answered. "I skipped that part. In our great national encyclopedia, which embraces all phases of thought, I studied instead what appealed to me far more, the stories of the great adventurers. For my people had great adventurers in Babylon of old, who traveled far, and brought back, like the Greek Herodotus, in earlier times, tales of wonder not wholly devoid of truth.

"I read of marvels, of strange races and lands; and it was then I registered a vow that, some day, before I died, I would come out of the prison of my soul's captivity and see for myself the fairyland of life."

"And so?" I asked, becoming interested in my strange companion, with the shrewd old eyes and childlike faith in the unknown—a true adventurer if ever there was one.

"And so, when, at the age of sixty-seven, I was granted my Sabbatical Year by my institution of learning, I remembered my vow, my wife being dead, and I a childless old man. For, as the Talmud says, 'Of him who vows unto his god, even though lightly, verily, some day that vow will be required of him.'"

"And so you are on your way to see the world?" I asked. "What is your destination?"

The old gentleman chuckled, looked sly, and then fell into a modernity that almost shocked me.

"I started out, young friend, to make my pilgrimage to Jerusalem," he answered. "It was my intention to spend my whole year there, studying. But the cistern water gave me dysentery, and, needless to say, the fly-screen is unknown. And I am bald. And then there came the great discovery, from my perusal of certain ancient manuscripts concerning which I had received information."

"And that?" I asked.

The old gentleman cautiously drew from his pocketbook a piece of dirty cardboard, covered with what looked like arrows in all sorts of positions.

"That," he said, "is cuneiform, the arrow-shaped syllables of the Assyrians.

The original is incised at the base of the Wall of Wailing.

"Assyriologists differ as to its meaning, but the most commonly accepted translation is, 'In the south seek, and thou shalt find.' Not much of a clue—but the old manuscripts explained its meaning to me."

He peered into my face as if confiding something mysterious.

"The seven-branched, golden candlestick!" he whispered. "But I see that means nothing to you. It meant enough to me to start me on my travels, and three weeks ago, having secured the services of a traveled gentleman, Mr. Arminius, who has been over my route, I left Jerusalem for Egypt."

The professor spoke with an extraordinary blending of naiveness and caution, which seemed to be struggling within him. And, just as he seemed to cease, a burst of enthusiasm carried him away.

"I have never wanted money," he said. "All my life I have been content with poverty. My savings, destined to support my wife in her old age, have been put into this adventure. But money as a means to an end—untold wealth, to fulfil the dreams of Zion's liberation that haunt me in my old age—money— Ah, well, I thank you for a pleasant fifteen minutes," he said.

It was like the "to be continued" of some thrilling serial. He had broken off upon the verge of some fascinating disclosure, and I saw that, at this juncture, wild horses could not drag it out of him. Equally, I was sure, suasion could do it—but not just then.

"Well," I said, trying to mask my curiosity. "I hope we shall meet again and have another chat about the golden candlestick."

"Perhaps," he grunted.

"You see," I said. "you have aroused my imagination."

"A great faculty, young friend," he returned. "Some people call it curiosity."

No, there was nothing more to be gathered at that time. The old gentleman was becoming absolutely sphinxlike in his demeanor. However, when I handed him my card, he, in turn, drew a printed paste-

board square from his waistcoat pocket, showed it to me, took it back again, and was gone without ceremony. I read:

**PROFESSOR S. TOBIAS JONAS**

Hebrew Theological College  
Columbus, O.

## CHAPTER II.

### A FIGHT—AND A QUESTION.

IT was a three-days' run from Berber to Khartum by the Nilotis. During the following day I came to the conclusion that Natalie Caraman had some definite purpose aboard the steamship other than the mere journey.

I imagined, also, that some sort of acquaintance existed between her and the Levantine Arminius, though this conclusion was the result of instinct only.

Two of the missionary ladies were always in and out of the women's quarters on the lower deck, but Natalie Caraman was certainly no missionary, and I saw her go in and out on two occasions. But I was quite unprepared for the dénouement of that afternoon.

Professor Jonas was traveling second, but his favorite place seemed to be on a coil of rope near the galley, where I had seen him seated for hours, a huge book on his knees, from which he was reading in evident oblivion of his surroundings. The passing Arabs looked at him curiously, but with all the native admiration for a learned man.

I had gone down into the steerage with the intention of trying to draw out the professor, if he was in the mood. When I drew near I saw that the volume was printed in fine Hebrew characters. It was no doubt the Talmud, and probably one of those parts that the professor had not skipped in boyhood, for he was muttering as he read, and there was a rapt look on his face.

As I approached him he looked straight up at me without seeming to see me, clenched his right hand dramatically, and

brought it down with a thud upon the faded cover. Then he resumed his reading.

I hesitated in uncertainty, not wishing to disturb the old man, and yet becoming more and more consumed with curiosity. What was the secret that had so fired Professor Jonas's imagination, and whither was he bound?

As I watched him there broke out a sudden diabolical pandemonium behind me. Wheeling swiftly, I perceived what looked like a preconcerted and murderous rush toward a tall Arab wrapped in a gold-braided burnoose, whom I had noticed standing alone by the rail and looking eastward toward the desert.

In an instant the peaceful crowd was transformed into a horde of furies. They came running up from every part of the steerage, brandishing murderous knives, and the tall man's life seemed worth about two seconds' purchase.

But with a gesture as fierce as any, he swung upon his assailants and whipped out a businesslike automatic from his robes. The foremost fell back, cowed by his grim determination, and the mob surged to and fro uncertainly, gesticulating and shouting. The only disinterested person was Professor Jonas, who went on calmly reading upon his coil of rope.

The Arab had backed against the rail, facing his assailants, the automatic rigid in his unswerving hand. His hood, which had fallen back, revealed the face of a man of some thirty years, distinguished, even captivating, and as white as a southern European's.

As the Arab faced the mob, I perceived a figure, wrapped completely in a burnoose, gliding stealthily toward him from behind. The point of a knife blade gleamed between the fingers.

In the moment of intense expectancy that followed, every one was aware of the impending thrust. The mob glanced sideways toward this new assailant, while menacing their victim to distract his attention; there was not one who would have stayed the murderer, and the hate seemed like some overpowering perfume, cloying one's senses.

It was as real a thing as the knife or the



automatic; and a sort of paralysis came over me as I saw the hooded figure come crouching on, lithe and catlike, until it was within stabbing distance. Then the hand shot back, the blade gleamed—and I sprang forward.

My fist caught the arm of the intending murderer with a sliding, upward blow, and dashed it aside. The knife clattered upon the deck. I drew back my left, aiming at the point of the chin, or, rather, where I imagined the chin to be, under the hood.

But the blow never landed. For, under the shifting headpiece of the burnoose, I saw the face of a woman, faintly outlined beneath the muslin inner veil.

As I stepped back in amazement, swift as a shadow she had glided into the women's quarters, while the crowd gave way before me.

I stepped to the tall Arab's side. He looked at me with a grave smile. There was comradeship in it, with all its equality and frankness.

I turned and faced the muttering mob. But then came a half-dozen of ship's stewards, carrying the cutlasses that are a feature of Upper Nile steamships, and laid about them with the flat of the blades.

Yielding to the white man's law, the mob broke up and dispersed.

The tall man held out his hand to me and spoke a few words in a tongue that I had never heard. It lacked the harsh gutturals of the Arabic; it was more like a Romance speech, and yet bore no resemblance to any. Nor was it Greek; of which I had picked up a little.

At that moment there came supreme authority, in the presence of the captain, in uniform and gold braid.

"What's all this trouble?" he asked me.

I told him that I had seen the man suddenly attacked by a mob of Arabs. I said nothing about the woman. His eyes fell on the knife; he picked it up, and the flicker of a smile came on his lips. He called two of the stewards.

"Put this man in the second saloon," he said. "Lock his door and see that he doesn't come out." Then he turned to me again.

"Some tribal trouble," he said. "Noth-

ing out of the way. Mr. Ross, but I'm obliged to you. Only women carry those daggers. You needn't tell me anything, but I'd rather carry a shipful of Dervishes than these Arab ladies. Regular hotbeds of conspiracy, the women's quarters on shipboard—or anywhere, I suppose.

"It might have made a lot of trouble for me. That man's life would have been worth just a few minutes' purchase after I'd gone, if I hadn't run him out of the steerage."

We went down the deck together, toward the companion.

"The fact is," he continued, "that fellow's an Abyssinian. There's been trouble brewing over in those mountains since the old Negus Menelek died. Fine old chap he was, and kept his provinces in order, and after he wiped out the Italians at Adowa there was nobody to dispute him.

"Now all the asses are fighting for the lion's skin. We've had the tip from the government to look out for any of the exiled feudatories who are swarming back to seize the throne. I don't know who that fellow is, but I'm going to keep him pretty tight until I hand him over at Khartum. You see, the British Government has its own interests to consider.

"Queer country that," he mused, as we reached the upper deck. "Not more than half a dozen Europeans have ever been outside the caravan routes. Independent since the dawn of history. Civilized, in a way. Christian—and that's no lie, for their rites trace back to the first century, and there's a Jewish substratum that goes back to Solomon."

"Wasn't the Queen of Sheba—" I began.

"An Abyssinian? They claim descent from her and the Jewish king. Some day I mean to take a trip there."

He halted in front of the wheel-house. "Thanks again, Mr. Ross," he said. "I've been nervous this trip. We've other queer characters on board the Nilotis besides that fellow."

"You mean Mme. Caraman?" I asked bluntly.

"Well—er—yes, I do. If she's planning to winter in Khartum, she's going to

find the social life there more rigid than in Cairo."

He disappeared within the wheel-house. The gong began to sound for dinner. I went down, but, as I was about to enter the saloon, I saw Natalie Caraman making her way along the outside of the state-rooms toward the saloon entrance. So I stopped and waited for her; there was nobody near us.

She certainly looked stunning. I can think of no other word to describe her. She was dressed in a superb evening gown, and she raised her eyes to mine in polite inquiry as I stood there, with just a touch of mockery in them, I thought.

"Good evening, Mme. Caraman," I said. "Why did you try to kill that Abyssinian?"

### CHAPTER III.

#### MADAME CARAMAN.

HER eyebrows arched. She broke into low laughter. "Why, what a queer idea, Mr.—er—Ross?" she answered. "It is no function of my life to kill Abyssinians."

"I am asking you," I answered, "because I am the only person who knows, and as yet I have told nobody."

"I think, Mr.—er—Ross—you had better go back to your friends," said Mme. Caraman.

I felt a little bewildered by her coolness, and yet I knew that the face of the Arab woman had been the face of Natalie Caraman. Yet there was nothing but well-bred surprise upon it now.

"Of course it is not my personal business," I answered, "but it is my duty to give information to the captain."

She did not say anything to that, but fingered a heavy, beaten-gold bracelet with fringes on her right arm.

"And if you were arrested," I continued, "you are aware that you would not be able to carry out your purpose in coming to Khartum."

A shot at random, and it hit. For the first time she lost her coolness.

"Really, Mr.—er—Ross, this is past a

joke," she answered angrily. "Will you kindly step aside, or must I call for assistance?"

Her eyes wavered a moment; I looked down and saw, under the bracelet, a reddening bruise on her right arm, where my fist had struck her. She caught my glance, and made an involuntary movement to put her arm behind her back, which betrayed her.

"Mr. Ross, you seem to be an intelligent young man," she said. "But it is perfectly evident that you know nothing of the East."

"Take a word of advice from an old traveler. In these parts everybody minds his own business. Take another. Don't worry yourself about Abyssinians. They're only vermin. I've strangled one with my own hands."

Her breast began to heave, as if, at her own words, some stormy memories began to rise. She had thrown off her mask of indifference, and spoke with great vehemence.

"And take one more," she continued. "Don't bother about Professor Jonas. He is a harmless old eccentric who can poke his nose into other people's business where most of us can't. In the East people are labeled and ticketed."

"Go back to New York, and the next time you get an offer from Kordofan go straight there. Now, will you kindly stand aside?"

I stood aside, and she swept past me; and yet, as she did so, she cast an appraising look at me, as if to demonstrate her power, and to discover whether I was worth its exercise. Natalie Caraman was evidently as calculating as she was cool.

A dangerous woman! With her fierce passions, her stained past, her ruthless hate that did not hesitate at murder, the most dangerous imaginable. She knew her business and had challenged me to keep out of it.

I was tramping to and fro upon the deck after dinner, and my thoughts raced on as the gigantic veil of the night raced across the heavens. The captain's words had given me a new interest. Everything seemed to point to Abyssinia, the land of



the fabled Prester John, of feudal chiefs, monasteries, Moslems, Christians, pagans and the Black Jews, medievalism's last stronghold in this working world.

The furious heat, that dried the very marrow of one's bones, had yielded to a refreshing breeze. On the morrow we should reach Khartum. Then—whither?

I must see Professor Jonas and learn what he meant to do. I was keen for any adventure, and I suspected that his purpose was well known to Natalie Caraman.

I had halted near the first stateroom aft of the stairs when I caught sight of the Levantine Arminius, his head thrust forward, his mouth and eyes against the shutter. At first I thought that he was spying on some one; then I felt a conviction that he was talking to Mme. Caraman within.

As I passed he started away, scowled at me, and then came forward.

"Fine evening, Mr. Ross," he said suavely, in good English, but with an intonation that seemed a blend of East End London and East Side New York.

"Pleasant and cool." I answered, measuring the man as he stood there.

"Excuse me, Mr. Ross, but I happened to see you talking to the professor yesterday afternoon."

"Well?"

I moved a little away, for I was convinced that Mme. Caraman was listening behind the shutters of her stateroom, and he followed me reluctantly.

"What did he happen to be saying to you?" he persisted. "Excuse me, but I was wondering, because the old gentleman's a little—you know." He tapped his forehead with his dirty finger significantly.

"He's started out to see the world—at his age! Well, there ain't nothing to the world. I've seen it—London, New York, Paris—all of it. And he's got a pack of crazy schemes up his sleeve.

"I've written to his friends in Columbus about him, and I'm taking care of him till I hear from them, and humoring him. I thought, maybe, if you feel friendly toward the old gentleman, you'd be glad to know. But I wouldn't listen to none of his crazy talk, or encourage him."

"No?" I asked.

"No, sir," said the Levantine, adopting a bullying demeanor as he thought he had impressed me. "I wouldn't like it, so it wouldn't be wise. I'm taking care of him. In these parts we don't meddle."

He must have got that from Mme. Caraman, I thought; evidently they had been putting their heads together. "Human life here ain't worth what it is in New York," he added. "So best keep away from him—you understand?"

He thrust his blue-black chin forward aggressively, and shook the finger with the emerald ring under my nose.

The man was a common type, to be found anywhere in the world where men live upon men by serving their baser needs. Its variants are of many grades, from the race-course tout and heeler in the West to the depraved eunuch of Oriental cities. But the type is the same, and I knew Mr. Arminius as well as if I had just risen from a game of cards with him.

I realized that it might be of inestimable advantage to give him a wrong opinion of me. For, besides my dawning sense of responsibility toward Professor Jonas, I felt dimly that much bigger things were at stake, which I could as yet sense only dimly. And the fellow was too gross for me to feel affronted, or to have more than the passing impulse to thrash him.

"I'll think it over," I said quietly.

"That's better," he nodded.

And, as he spoke, I heard a splash beyond the droning paddle-wheel.

"Man overboard!" shouted the wheelsman.

The cry was taken up throughout the ship. Arminius left me and ran toward Natalie Caraman's cabin.

In a moment a jostling crowd was lining the port rail. Astern of the ship I saw a white patch on the water, an Arab's bur-noose.

But the wearer was not swimming toward the ship, but in the direction of the shore.

The Nilotis was slowing down, her paddles churning up great funnels of foam. Life-belts were flung, and a boat crew was already being slung down from the davits.

I saw Arminius and Mme. Caraman beside me. He was gesticulating wildly in the direction of the swimmer, but her face was impassive as she looked toward him. The captain, on my right, uttered an expletive and shouted in forceful Arabic to the boatmen below.

He turned and recognized me. "Well, it's our friend," he said grimly. "I should have put the guard in his cabin instead of outside. Made a flying leap through the port-hole. Don't know how he got through. They're as slippery as eels, damn them!"

The Nilotis had stopped. Far away I could see the speck of the boat, nosing into the darkness. It disappeared and appeared again.

The Arabs in the steerage set up a long, derisive cry as a patch of white appeared in the boat's bows. But, as the oarsmen came into clear view, one of them stood up and shook out an empty, wet burnoose.

Then a pandemonium broke out below. The captain raged.

"Left them his shirt and got away under water naked!" he stormed.

I felt Mme. Caraman's eyes on my face, and turned, to see her watching mine intently. There was a menace in her eyes; but then, turning away without a word or sign of recognition, she went to her cabin.

## CHAPTER IV.

### IN KHARTUM.

**T**HE Nilotis docked at Khartum soon after noon the next day. I had had no opportunity to speak to the professor, and I suspected that Arminius had purposely kept him in his cabin. And in the bustle of the riverside mob I lost the pair of them.

Fighting with a score of Nubian porters, who precipitated themselves upon my baggage, struggling with a half dozen cab-drivers, each of whom, like the man going to St. Ives, had, in turn, half a dozen passengers held up by his amazing importunities, I had only a glimpse of the two being driven away.

I registered at the European, and set out to beat the city, resolved to find the professor if I searched every hotel and boarding-house in Khartum.

I "did" Khartum that day as it had never been done before, assailed by flies, beggars, and guides. By nightfall I had been to every hotel of even tolerable respectability, and in vain.

Khartum, for all its size, is an easy city to cover. I learned it by heart, from the Sudan Club, on the east, and the Memorial College, to Mudiria House and the Zoological Gardens. The statue of Gordon on his camel became an old friend of mine.

I blistered my heels on the two miles of river esplanade, I even visited the model villages of the native tribes on the outskirts. And I became alarmed.

If Arminius had meant what he said, it was his design to keep the old man a quasi prisoner not until he heard from his friends, for that was hardly credible, but until some purpose of Natalie Caraman's could be fulfilled without what I imagined to be the uncomprehending interference of the old dreamer.

I had been back to my hotel and dined, and at nightfall found myself near the entrance to the Gardens, perplexed, bewildered, and beginning to regard the search as hopeless. I even doubted the wisdom of my search.

The whole complexity of the Abyssinian affair I had begun to attribute to coincidence. The hot fit had been succeeded by a cold one. And I was half decided to forget all the fantastic folly of my imagining, and to regard it as a day-dream.

Then I became aware of a figure lurking near me on the other side of the colossal ram of Ammon.

There was in this no cause for either suspicion or fear. It was an early hour, the Gardens were well lit, and by no means empty. Yet, being still under the disturbing influence of my thoughts, I started and turned swiftly upon it.

What was my surprise to see a girl of about twenty years! Though the law recognizes no slaves, she was of the slave class, for her face was unveiled. And she



was a Christian, too, for she wore a smock with loose sleeves, and a skirt, instead of the Moslem trousers, and her dress was all tattered and stained, and her throat burned, as if she had come a long distance.

Yet the weave was of the finest silk, and the remnants of a silken sash hung from her shoulder. Her shoes, of untanned skin, were mere shreds of leather about her feet.

But what amazed me even beyond her beauty, dignity, and bewilderment, was that she was as fair as a fair European or American; and the heavy hair, tied up in a great mass at the neck with a large pin of native gold, gleamed bronze in the starlight.

She came toward me in a hesitant way, making a groping gesture with her hand, as if she did not know where she was. I saw that the palms and finger-nails were stained with henna, and, though she wore the attire of a slave, were unroughened with work.

So she stood looking up at me in fear, and murmured in strangely halting English.

"Save me! I do not know—I do not know where I am. I took the wrong road to meet the Ras Abouna. Once I was here before!"

Had I obeyed my impulse to take her either to the house of the Anglican rector near by, or else to the mission, all the future would have been different.

Perhaps it was some gesture of hers that made me hesitate, or the unreality of the situation. Perhaps there ran in my head the recollection of some of the stories current in the East of the escapades of inmates of Arab harems. You may discover them for yourself in the "Arabian Nights."

It may have been both, in part: for I was as utterly bewildered at the sight of her as she seemed to be as she stood before me. And, combined with all these things, it was the smoothness of her hands made me suspect her. I shook my head, and made some movement that must have frightened her, for she turned and went hastily away out of the Gardens entrance, keeping to the shadows of the houses.

Then curiosity and wonder whether I

had done the wrong thing impelled me to follow her. Follow her I did, for what seemed an interminable distance, the girl hurrying along unfrequented ways toward the native quarter, and never looking back, until at length we reached the region of the wealthy Arab merchants, that has grown up about the new city.

Great blocks of low buildings lined the roads, mansions of traders, surreptitious slave-dealers, each with its spacious interior court of palms, and its concealed mysteries. I caught fugitive glimpses of veiled women behind barred windows. And then, as if she knew I had followed her, the girl turned and came running back to me, and kneeled down at my feet.

"Save me!" she pleaded, in her queer English.

Before I could answer I understood the cause of her sudden panic. She had not recognized me. But two huge, coal-black Nubians—at least I thought them so then—came out of an archway and grasped her in their arms.

She struggled and screamed, and, as she looked at me in wild appeal, I sprang forward to aid her. I dashed my fist into the face of the great brute who held her.

He dropped her with a grin, and, spitting the blood out of his mouth, pulled a bludgeon from his burnoose and brought it down on my head with a force that made the street whirl about me. His comrade seized the girl, and, lifting her in his arms as if she were an infant, carried her through the archway.

The man who had struck me followed, thinking that my intervention was at an end. But I staggered after them, hardly knowing where I was, and focussing my consciousness upon my purpose of saving her, to keep its scattered fragments together.

What happened next I do not know. There was no hiatus in my whirling thoughts, but I must have fallen, after a wild and delirious pursuit, for I found myself in the inner court of the mansion, lying against a palm tree that grew beside a pool of clear water in a tiled hollow.

And then the cold fit came on me again, for I realized my insensate folly. The girl

was probably the runaway wife of the owner of the palace; my presence there entitled me to death, even with the law's connivance.

A hundred barred and dark windows surrounded the courtyard. I began to grope my way around it, searching for the entrance through which I must have come. And at last I saw, through a low, dark archway, an outer court, and, beyond it, what I imagined to be the arch under which I had entered from the street.

But as I made my way toward it in the darkness, my outstretched hands came in contact with the grille of an iron door. It had evidently been closed since I made my entrance, and it was securely locked.

I knew there was no other exit. My only chance was to lurk behind the grille till morning, and then to overcome the eunuch who unlocked it, and make my escape into the street.

But as I lingered in the archway near the courtyard I heard a low whisper from one of the barred windows. I went toward it. I saw a veiled woman behind it. I heard a little ripple of laughter from one or two female slaves.

"She whom you seek is with the master," whispered the woman's voice in Arabic. "He does not know you followed Hassim and Isas, or they would have killed you. You are brave, Englishman!"

I had enough acquaintance with the Orient to understand that she would be willing enough to help me remove her rival from the power of the patriarch of the palace.

"Come this way, and I will show you a way out," the woman whispered. "Another time be more lucky, Englishman!"

She bent forward and, to my surprise, twisted away the strong bars of the window, as if they had been set in putty. It was a commentary on Eastern life, but I did not think of that then. I set my foot upon a projecting stone and, in a somewhat undignified manner, scrambled into a dark room.

There was a faint scent of perfume, and I was conscious of two female slaves stretched out at the feet of their mistress, waving large palm fans, who laughed and

looked up at me in subdued excitement. Of the veiled mistress I could see nothing.

She took me by the hand and led me toward the curtain that hung before the entrance. Behind me, as I went, I heard one of the slaves replacing the iron bars.

The mistress raised the curtain and stood still, watching me through the filmy fabric of her veil.

"She came here from a far country," she said. "You are in great danger, Englishman. Better go back. Yet, if you will not, wear this, lest you meet any one."

She picked up a burnoose and hung it about me. I drew the hood over my head.

"May you be fortunate," she said, raising the curtain again. "At the end of that passage is the door giving upon the women's baths. Turn to the right, and you may come upon our lord's audience-room."

"On the left is the door giving upon the women's baths. The little court is empty. Beyond it are the eunuchs' quarters, on the left, and, immediately in front, the kitchen. If you are in danger go through the kitchen and you will come out into the street by the tradesmen's entrance."

"God be with you, *hanum*," I returned.

I left her, feeling unaccountably cheapened by her kindness, for she had showed unmistakably that she herself was not averse to an adventure. I was relieved when the turn of the passage concealed me from her.

I saw a little window in the wall, and, through it, a little court, evidently the one she had spoken of. And I was half minded to let the adventure go; yet, I could not rid myself of the idea that the slave girl was no Arab, but of my own race.

As I hesitated I heard the faint buzz of voices coming from somewhere along the passage to the right. In the distance a single oil lamp, that hung from a chain, was burning. Behind it was a hanging curtain of camel's wool. I thought I heard a woman's tones amid the babble, and went toward it.

There was no one in the passage, nor were there any doors along the wall save this one. I reached the hanging curtain and slightly raised the edge.



I was looking into a large room, and to my surprise I saw that the farther door, which stood wide open, communicated with the outer court and the archway which I had first seen. Through this was one of the main avenues of Khartum, and the street lights, and pedestrians, with ass and camel traffic.

Inside the room, seated upon a high, ample chair, which had the appearance of a throne, was the most extraordinary figure that I have ever seen. It was an old man, coal black, with a cascade of white beard tumbling over his breast, where was a strange breastplate all set with queer, great gems that flashed in the light.

On either side of him stood one of the two eunuchs who had seized the girl in the street less than an hour before. In front of him were half a dozen Arabs and men in European attire—I could not see whether they were actually white men—and others were coming in from the street and others, again, leaving, as if the old man were holding some informal reception.

But among the half dozen before him the liveliest argument seemed to rage, and the patriarch sat motionless in his brocaded chair, listening and saying nothing, while, when any addressed him directly, it was with a deference that was almost cringing.

As I watched, fascinated by the sight, I perceived that the argument seemed to range around a man who stood humbly at no great distance from the chair, his hands clasped in front of him, and what looked like great ivory bracelets upon his wrists. As I looked I saw the man start forward and raise his hands above his head in mute appeal.

Mute, for, impassioned as his gestures were, not one word emanated from his mouth.

His features were European, and the hair upon his face, and the raggedly clipped locks that hung about his ears were brown, not black, but his skin was the color of tanned leather, and his bare arms, as he raised them out of the tatters of his rags, were nothing but muscle and bone.

I have never seen such arms in my life. For, if a man gave each hour of the day to a certain exercise, one might surmise that

a set of muscles would develop at the expense of all the rest. So it was here; a great rope of steel-like sinew rippled under the parched skin from scapula to elbow, and the biceps was a hollow arch like a bow and the rest all bone and withered skin.

Then, as he raised his hands into the glow of an oil lamp, I saw, to my horror, that what I had taken for ivory bracelets were no bracelets at all, but perfectly rounded ridges of dead flesh, white as a leper's, ringing the wrists.

And I forgot even that as a figure which I had not perceived came from behind the old man's chair, and I saw Natalie Caraman.

Her eyes were blazing with fury. In one hand she carried a little whip. She twined her fingers round and round in the lash, and she addressed the old man in the chair with ringing scorn, but in a language totally unknown to me. I fancied it was the same as the tall Arab or Abyssinian had used—presumably Amharic.

As she spoke she extended the stock of the whip toward the tattered man, her fingers working furiously in the lash, and it seemed to me that she was denouncing some plan respecting him, challenging his voiceless plea, which had been debated.

One or two of the men before the chair uttered cries of approval: one or two were silent. The old man turned for the first time, looked at her, and said something in an almost inaudible voice that seemed to sting her to madness.

For at his words she leaped forward, raised the whip, and brought the lash swishing across the tattered man's face. As he staggered back she rained blow upon blow on his head and shoulders, while he only raised his lean arms to protect his face, and uttered not a word.

She drove him to the door. He stopped there, looked about him in a bewildered sort of way, and, apparently recognizing that his plea had failed, turned and stumbled out into the street.

I saw Natalie Caraman turn toward the old man in the chair and speak in impassioned accents. But I waited to see no more. I was convinced that the girl was

not there, and I resolved to lay the facts before the authorities at the earliest moment. Khartum was not New York, but it was clear enough that some foul work was afoot, and that Natalie Caraman was at the bottom of it.

So I turned to make my way toward the door leading into the baths. I had nearly reached it when I heard footsteps on the flags without.

Through a tiny window beside it I saw a great black Nubian, with woolly hair and prognathous, animal jaw, shifting his feet upon the stones and humming a chant, while in his enormous hand he dangled a Turkish saber.

And, as I was debating whether to leap on him and take him by surprise, he turned as if to enter. There seemed my opportunity. But the next moment I heard an outer bolt shot in its groove. And now the only exit seemed to be back through the room by which I had entered.

That way I could not go. I suppose it was shame at reliance upon a woman who had already endangered herself for me; more, it was an impossibility after I had rejected her approaches. But there might be other exits, for the great palaces that I had passed had seemed to stand quadrangular upon four streets.

Looking cautiously through the little window again, I saw a flight of wooden stairs that seemed to lead down from an upper balcony into the right of the bath-yard, near the kitchen.

I started down the passage again, and now, my eyes being accustomed to the obscurity, I observed a little winding stairway on my left hand. I continued going up, until I stood on the upper story of the palace.

Here was another corridor, but the soft pile of the carpet on which I had been treading had given place to a cheap English tapestry, and from the great number of doors I imagined that the patriarch lodged his retainers here.

Bearing the location of the stairway in mind, I went toward the door which, it seemed to me, must give upon the balcony. It was closed but not hasped. Very softly I began to open it.

There seemed nobody inside, and in front of me I saw a window. But there was a silhouette against it, a head and shoulders, and the back of a chair, outlined in the light of a reading lamp upon a shelf. There was somebody inside.

It was Professor Jonas, the Talmud upon his knees, studying intently.

## CHAPTER V.

### AN ADVENTURE.

THE incongruity of the harmless old man's presence in that house of iniquities shocked me as well as giving me the surprise of my life. Professor Jonas had not been in my mind since I had met the slave girl, although I had originally started out to find him. He was the last person on earth whom I should have expected to find there.

As I entered he came to the end of a page, turned the leaf, and then looked up and saw me.

He laid the book aside and raised his spectacles. "My dear friend, I am delighted to see that we are staying at the same hotel," he said.

I am ashamed to say that my first suspicions were wholly unworthy ones. I had the transient idea that Professor Jonas was much deeper and more worldly than I had suspected. But a glance into the old gentleman's twinkling, childlike eyes made me ashamed.

"Can you tell me the name of this hotel, professor?" I asked.

"I'm afraid I can't, Mr. Ross," he answered. "If I had to bother about things like that I shouldn't have hired Mr. Arminius."

"So he brought you here?"

The professor nodded. "There's nothing the matter with the place, is there?" he asked, a little anxiously.

"I'll tell you when I get you safe to the European," I answered.

I went to the window and looked out. I was surprised to see that the room faced the outer court instead of the inner one. I had miscalculated the twist of the stairs by ninety degrees. It was not a danger-

ous drop to the ground, and it looked as if it would have to be made.

"Don't tell me Arminius has brought me to a disreputable place," said Professor Jonas anxiously. "I was so absorbed in my reading I hardly noticed where he was taking me.

"Really, I began to distrust the man at Suez, when he showed himself a very worldly character. He wanted to take me round the town. And yet I was looking forward to my camel-ride this evening."

"Your what, professor?" I exclaimed.

"Why," he said, with an apologetic laugh, "some of the guests are going camel-riding by moonlight, and they were kind enough to include me in the party. They say there is a wonderful view to be obtained from the north of the city."

Even as he spoke I heard a surly grunting below, and, looking out again, I saw four camels being led into the yard. They were more correctly dromedaries, for they were built for speed, and two of them carried on their backs the kind of enclosed boxes used for Moslem women. The remaining two were saddled for men.

I saw the wretch Arminius's design. He thought that the professor had cut loose from respectability on his Oriental trip, and meant to bait his trap with two of the harem inmates. Perhaps he was wise in his estimate; I hope not, but I was sure he had misjudged Professor Jonas.

I took the old gentleman by the arm. "Listen to me now, please, professor," I said. "Your instinctive appraisal of Mr. Arminius at Suez was a correct one. The man is an unscrupulous blackguard. This isn't a hotel, it's the house of a native, and probably a slave dealer.

"Also, he's black, and it isn't fit lodgings for white folk like you and me. Arminius and his confederates have lured you here in order to get you into their power. That camel ride is real enough—only you won't come back. At least, you won't come back to Khartum.

"They want you out of the way—or else they want something that you've got. You understand me?"

"It—it sounds like the beginning of an adventure," said Professor Jonas, looking

at me hopefully. And, unless I was very much mistaken, it was not fear, but elation that shone in the professor's blue eyes.

"Didn't you tell me that your journey was connected with the inscription you found at the base of the Wall of Wailing?" I asked. "It wouldn't be that they want?"

"No," he answered. "Everybody knows about that."

"Well, they want something of yours, and they want it badly. And now listen! There's a girl held here against her will—a runaway slave, and I believe she's a white woman. She appealed to me for help outside, and I tried to save her, but a couple of blacks got her away from me.

"I don't know how I got in here, but I want to get out and lay the facts before the authorities. And I've got a notion in my head, which I can't justify, that your presence here has some bearing upon her presence here. Am I clear?"

The professor nodded. He was breathing hard with excitement, and his eyes bored me like gimlets. There were patches of color on his cheeks. He was beginning to smile. I never saw a man enjoy himself so much in such an extraordinary way.

"Then here's my plan," I said. "You're coming back with me to the European. I think we can make the jump from that window, and once outside that archway we're safe in the street.

"First I'll just have a look inside those camel boxes on the bare chance the girl's there; but I don't expect to find her. I think they're empty. And I believe that there are big things obscurely depending upon all this—very big things indeed, and all hinging upon some clue you hold. Will you do as I say?"

"I certainly will," answered Professor Jonas, chuckling. His equanimity was extraordinary. I don't believe the reality of our danger came home to him at all. It was like one of his adventure stories.

"You don't happen to have a spare revolver on you, I suppose?" he inquired casually. "A nice six-shooter?"

"Six-shooters are out of date," I answered. "No, but I mean to get a couple of automatics at the earliest moment, if ever we get out of here."



"Well, I'll make the jump first, and you can land on me," I answered, going toward the window. And then I stopped, for there was the Talmud to be considered, and I knew the professor would never be parted from it, nor yet feel keen on flinging the heavy volume into the court.

The grunting in the courtyard had risen into a surly protest, intermingled with the shouts of the drivers. The stench of the beasts filled my nostrils; that queer smell, mainly camel, that predominates over all north Africa. And suddenly I heard footsteps running up the stairs.

The door burst open and Arminius and one of the blacks came leaping in. The Levantine yelled; the black came at me, a gleaming poniard in his hand. I caught up the heavy chair and thrust it forward, we grappled, and a lucky blow sent the dagger spinning out of his hand. I snatched it from the ground, and the Nubian ran from the room, screaming.

In the little mirror behind me I saw the reflection of Arminius aiming a pistol. Then I saw the professor's foot shoot out and catch the gross beast in the pit of the stomach; and, as Arminius rose, writhing and groaning with fury, Professor Jonas, brandishing his Talmud like a club, dealt him an awful buffet across the side of the head with it that sent him down, unconscious, or feigning to be so.

The screams of the black eunuch resounded through the house. I heard a tumult below. I pulled Professor Jonas toward me and, swinging from the sill, let go, tumbling into the yard, but escaping injury. Then a heavy object fell upon me and almost knocked the wind out of me.

It was the Talmud, clenched tight in Professor Jonas's hand.

The professor pulled me to my feet. We rushed toward the archway. The drivers yelled, I saw a white hand come out of one of the *howdahs*, and ran toward it, pulling the curtains aside.

Inside, comfortably curled up, I saw, not the slave girl, but Natalie Caraman, a cigarette between her lips. The mocking taunt upon her face was like the sting of a lash.

I ran to the second *howdah* and pulled

the curtains apart. There was nobody within.

"Come on!" gasped Professor Jonas, as a shouting mob of Arabs, blackamoors, and servants began to swarm into the courtyard.

I ran with him through the arch, and we pulled up a moment later in a main thoroughfare. Instantly the din behind us was hushed. We went on more slowly, and soon found ourselves in the European quarter. Ahead of us was the Embankment, not far away the European, and the statue of Gordon on his camel came into view.

"My dear friend, you have given me the most enjoyable evening of my life," panted Professor Jonas. "What a scoundrel—a regular bad man, Mr. Ross. My reputation in Columbus would have been ruined if anybody had known that I went to such a place as that."

## CHAPTER VI.

### A PLEDGE.

AT the European I engaged a room for him. Fortunately Arminius, in his hurry to get hold of the old gentleman, had not waited for his trunk, and I telephoned to the wharf to have it sent to the European. Then we talked things over together.

"It is my opinion," I said, "that you have engaged in a very dangerous enterprise, professor. It is perilous in itself, for I know you mean to go exploring somewhere; but, in addition, you happen to have become involved in a many-sided conspiracy, for which you are not responsible.

"That rogue Arminius has got wind of some secret of yours, and he and Mme. Caraman want it. My advice to you is to go back."

And I sketched the outline of affairs as I understood them, supposing that he was on a treasure hunt, and dilating upon the dangers, with the object of dissuading him.

But I took the wrong tack, for the old man sat back in his chair, watching me with eyes that grew wider and wider, until his spectacles seemed too small for them. When I had ended he took out his handker-

chief and blew his nose with a challenging, belligerent blast.

"My young friend," he chuckled, "this is just such an adventure as befell the sage Jehoiachin when he rescued the beautiful Princess in the Land of the Immortals. I have never read of any adventure that began more auspiciously."

"You won't be dissuaded, then?" I asked.

"Not by a long shot," he replied, lapsing into his disconcerting modernity, which fitted him about as well as a baseball mitt on a lady's hand.

"Then," I said, "you will have to take me into your confidence, professor."

"It was my intention to do so, my young friend," he answered. "When you told me you were in the habit of thinking—"

"Well, let us begin with the candlestick. Am I correct in supposing that you refer to the candlestick of the Jewish Temple?"

The professor looked at me in great surprise. "You certainly are," he said. "But may I inquire how you came to that conclusion?"

"Well, I've read a little. I know that Titus carved it on the Arch of Triumph that he set up in Rome, to commemorate his capture of Jerusalem, and that it is still to be seen there."

"Yes, you are right," said Professor Jonas in some excitement. "And what started me on my investigations was the fact that he must have seen it, or at any rate, the sculptor must have done so, for the representation is perfectly in accord with the traditional form of the candlestick, as it has come down to us from purely Hebrew sources, to which Titus could never have had access."

"Yet the candlestick was never brought to Rome. Had it been, it would have been preserved there for several hundred years, until the plunder of the Imperial City by the barbarians. Now, not a single one of the classical authors makes any allusion to it, nor any of the Jewish writers, many of whose works have come down to us."

"The supposition is," I said, "that it was destroyed in the destruction of the Temple by fire, against the express orders of the Roman general, from a firebrand

thrown by a soldier, as Josephus tells us. Yet how could the candlestick, so rigorously preserved and hidden away, have been destroyed and yet seen by the sculptor?"

"It was not destroyed," answered the professor. "And here is the story, known to us by legend, and confirmed by me in the manuscripts that I unearthed from the crypt of the Great Synagogue in Jerusalem. The candlestick was actually taken by the Romans in their assault upon the inner city."

"Josephus tells us that they were driven out by the Zealots in a furious hand-to-hand encounter. On that same night a band of faithful Pharisees, seeing that Jerusalem must fall, secretly removed the candlestick and other treasures from the Temple, and carried them out of the city, along a secret track known only to themselves."

"Where to, sir?" I asked.

"Where should they take it? Almost all the world was Roman at that time. North were the Samaritans, the Jews' bitterest enemies. East were the hostile Arabs. West was the Roman sea."

"Only southward was there a refuge—in Egypt, then a Roman province, but a rebellious one. They carried the candlestick and treasures to Egypt first."

"And then?"

"The Romans sent a cohort after them. There was a fight at an oasis. Of the fifty who left Jerusalem, only twelve survived. They made their flight into Nubia, carrying their treasures on camel-back, bent upon placing them in the care of their nation's only friend, bound to Judea by immemorial ties of blood and friendship."

"Abyssinia!" I cried.

"They fled to their ancient ally, Sheba—"

"Dead a thousand years before, professor," I submitted respectfully.

"Listen to this!" answered Professor Jonas. And, opening his great Talmud, he read from the volume, translating as he went:

"'Be it known,' he intoned, "'that certain of the Temple treasures were also delivered unto Sheba, Queen of the South,

and are guarded in the dead city of Thoth, in the Land of the Sun, once, indeed, the capital of a flourishing kingdom, but now, for its sins against God, empty, save for demons and the white queen who guards it. She, though named Sheba, is not that queen who came to Solomon to learn his wisdom, but another, chosen by certain priests from among captives, and brought thither, to guard the treasures with the aid of the legion of captive demons who are assigned to her. And there these treasures shall remain, until the day of Zion's liberation, and none shall find them, save him who understandeth the words on Zion's wall, for the bones of those who have sought them strew the lion-haunted ways.' "

By George, that was graphic! I drew in my breath. Then:

"You don't mean to say you are on your way to Abyssinia to find them, professor?" I asked.

The old man slowly closed the book and looked into my face intently.

"The day of Zion's liberation is dawning," he replied.

"You're going on this wild adventure to find the candlestick and treasures? You, a professor from the modern, practical city of Columbus, Ohio? Why, no sane man would dream of it! I—I'm coming with you!"

A pause, a long pause followed. A searching scrutiny, which might have been called the measuring span of two souls. We sized each other up. And I saw through the exterior of Professor Jonas, saw something of the great soul of the man, cramped by the surroundings of the modern world, but held true to its course by child-like faith, which, after all, is the greatest of all things.

"All right," said Professor Jonas simply.

We shook hands, and the professor became businesslike.

"I hope you are a prudent young man," he said. "We shall have plenty of adventures, but we must be practical. Now I had given Mr. Arminius to understand that I am interested in mineral speculations in the interior."

That did not seem in the least practical to me. It was extremely probable that the

Levantine had guessed something of the professor's purpose from the beginning. It would have been hard to find any one less like a speculator in minerals than Professor Jonas.

"I think Mr. Arminius guessed your destination from the first," I said. "And I do not doubt he hoped either to frighten you away or, more probably, to use you in Mme. Caraman's schemes. The question is, what have you that they want—supposing my supposition to be true?"

Professor Jonas smiled triumphantly, and, taking a pen, began to make a rude outline upon a piece of paper.

"This is the road to Thoth," he said. "The plans are in my trunk."

"Wait a minute!" I cried. "You didn't have your pocket picked this afternoon, or your clothes searched?"

"I don't think so," replied the professor, dipping into his pockets. "Mr. Arminius helped me off with my coat while I washed my hands."

"And went through your pockets. Luckily you didn't have the plan."

"Why, the plan is no secret," answered Professor Jonas. "You take a native boat to the sources of the Blue Nile, and then strike south through the mountains toward the Kaffa country. Mr. Arminius has been there. I made him think"—he chuckled—"that I had the location of a gold mine."

"Yes," I said satirically. But he did not see my meaning.

"No, young friend, I think I can explain the meaning of our enemies' maneuvers," continued Professor Jonas. "It is a legend that the inscription on the Wall of Wailing is only half the clue to the sacred city. For, though its site is known, it is simply a vast rubbish heap of brick and stone.

"Somewhere within this, at the end of a secret way, lies the treasure, known only to the High Priest, the Queen, and her attendants. Now in Thoth lies the other half of the clue, probably in the Assyrian cuneiform also. Yet the two must be read together before the secret is revealed."

"They must be in possession of the hieroglyphic on the Wall of Wailing," I suggested.

"The cuneiform," he objected. "Hieroglyphics are Egyptian. Yes, but it is no easy task to solve cryptograms in Assyrian."

"And so they mean to capture you and make you do it, professor, eh?" I interposed. "Well—"

"Well," said Professor Jonas brusely, "they haven't got me now, so we need not speculate about what they would do if they had. In the Talmud it is written, 'Seek not thy friend, for he whom God hath chosen for thy friend is even now upon thy road.' So be it!"

"Then," I cried, "we'll stand by each other through thick and thin until we've found the treasure and the candlestick! So be it!"

And we shook hands again.

## CHAPTER VII.

### UP THE NILE.

WE spent the next days making our preparations. I talked things over with the professor, whose deft flooring of Mr. Arminius had much increased my admiration for him. Though often impossible and childish, he had also a good deal of shrewd sense, and we agreed that it would be folly to make any further effort to rescue the girl, since this was impossible, and to communicate with the authorities would merely draw down suspicion upon us.

I gave out that we were planning a hunting expedition, and we decided to take passage on some native vessel up the Blue Nile as far as the Abyssinian frontier. There we would pick up camels and guides. We meant to travel as light as possible, and, beyond a minimum of luxuries in the way of food and tobacco, invested in little more than the following: a small tent, with blankets, waterproof sheets and mosquito netting, two good thorn-proof canvas suits, and firearms.

The latter, in whose purchase the professor evinced all the interest of a school-boy, consisted of a pair of good automatics, and a double-barrelled combined rifle and shotgun apiece.

I had reluctantly put the girl out of my mind, and managed to convince myself that she was merely some harem inmate on an escapade. Yet, though my knowledge of the Orient had been extensive enough to teach me not to meddle in such matters, I was still troubled by the fear that the girl was of my own race.

This, if true, would make her rescue a matter of principle. So I looked forward to our departure, which would finally settle the question.

It was on the very day after our adventure that I came to the conclusion that we were the subject of a good deal of interest in Khartum.

Certainly it was impossible to leave the hotel at any time without the consciousness of being followed. Always, some fifty paces or so behind us, there was a Nubian, who might have been merely bent upon some honest errand. Yet the consciousness remained—that indefinable sense of primitive man, awakening in me. And we were watched—there was no mistaking that.

For on that same day the Coptic clerk at the hotel leaned over the desk and asked me, in a constrained voice, how long we intended to remain at the European.

Somewhat nettled at the question. I asked him sharply whether the management was in any hurry to have us go.

The man's sallow face flushed. "Why, you see—we've rented most of our rooms in advance for next month," he said.

Next month! The tourist season was practically over. The sense of some overhanging mystery enraged me.

"Now let's have this out together!" I said. "Why don't your people want me?"

He hesitated and stammered. "We've always catered to the tourists," he said. "A wire has come from Frankel, the proprietor, in Cairo. I don't know what it means. Look!"

He produced the telegraph form, which instructed him, in the curtest manner, to have our rooms vacant at the earliest moment. The message mentioned both of us by name.

"You see, sir," said the clerk, "we never catered to the politicals."



I leaned across the desk—there was nobody in sight except a coal-black hall boy—and took him by the shoulders.

"You said you didn't know what it means. You were lying," I said. "Our rooms will be vacated in a day or two, when we're ready to go, not before. Now, what does it mean?"

His voice dropped. "It's the High Priest Amos," he answered. "He's a big power just now. You've offended him. I don't know anything about it.

"I don't want to know, sir. It's Mr. Frankel, not me, who's doing this."

"Who is the High Priest Amos?"

"Indeed, I don't know, Mr. Ross," he whined. "One of these Dervish leaders, I suppose."

That was all I could get out of him, and I judged it unnecessary to worry Professor Jonas about it. The old man would have advanced some childish plan to deal with the situation. He was obstinate, too. I was turning away from the desk when a name flashed into my mind, spoken by the slave girl.

"Who is Ras Abouna?" I asked.

He seemed quite eager to answer my question, as if he felt ashamed of his incivility.

"Oh, he's one of the Abyssinian princes," he answered. "'Ras' means 'prince.' He led the last confederation against Menelek, was betrayed by a woman, and tortured in prison. Then he managed to escape.

"That was several years ago. He's supposed to be living in the Dervish country."

"A woman betrayed him?" I inquired. "An Abyssinian?"

"No," he said. "A European named Caraman, who had considerable influence at the Abyssinian court in those days. That was in the time of the king-maker, Dolgouroffski."

He would have told me about him, but I waited to hear no more, for of a sudden I had the key to much that appeared insignificant. So Natalie Caraman had recognized some old enemy in the tall Abyssinian aboard, hated, too, by the Arabs! And the slave girl—

She was to have met Ras Abouna some-

where, and had taken the road to Khartum instead. Then—big events were impending in the political world eastward across the mountains. And the chance encounter in the Gardens had been fraught with tremendous significance!

I felt helpless, and I felt as if something I prized had been snatched out of my hand. I tried to think it all out as I went down to the wharf to arrange our passage. There were half a dozen native craft to leave that week, and any would leave at a few hours' notice for a few pounds additional, since they were only staying on the chance of picking up some cargo. As I went toward the river I saw the usual solitary Nubian trailing me, but I had grown accustomed to that.

Each of the half dozen Arab captains to whom I spoke flatly refused to take us. Some had one reason and some another, but all were palpably insincere, lying, and regretful.

I went back, hot with rage, chagrined beyond measure, and, at the very door of the hotel, was accosted by name by a fair-haired, brusk-mannered young man of not much more than thirty years, who seemed at once frank and dissembling.

"Good morning, Mr. Ross," he said. "I'm the assistant chief of police here. I understand you have cancelled your Kordofan journey, and are making purchases for a hunting trip. What are you going after, and where are you going to get it?"

"I hear there's big game along the upper reaches of the Blue Nile," I answered.

"So there is. Elephant, giraffe, hippo. Do you know your lives won't be worth anything mentionable in the rainy season?"

"I've had two years of lower Egypt and Palestine," I answered.

"Lower Egypt isn't Upper Egypt, and the Palestine rains are summer showers compared with ours. You'll be dead of fever in a month. You'd better stay in Khartum till the rains are over."

"Is that an order?" I asked, a little annoyed by his attitude of tolerance, as if he were dealing with a lunatic.

"I haven't the power to give an order," he admitted reluctantly. "Shooting is al-

lowed. You've got your permit for elephant, I suppose? No?" He arched his eyebrows. "Better get one; the fine's pretty stiff.

"But you can't get over the Abyssinian frontier. The customs police have orders to turn back all travelers except bona fide inhabitants. There's going to be trouble in those parts, and we don't want to have to send an expedition after you."

"So you've been told we're going to Abyssinia?" I asked.

He smiled in his irritating way. "I'll walk with you," he answered, and we started down the avenue together. "Professor Jonas is looking for rock inscriptions. Better shift him off to Arabia Felix, where archeologists are held to be sacred, especially elderly ones. You had an experience your first night in Khartum with one of these harem suffragettes—"

"Look here," I interposed quickly. "you've evidently heard some story, and you've heard it wrong. I did think of going to the police and then I thought better of it. Now I'll tell you what happened."

And I told him in outline, voicing my suspicions that the slave girl was a white woman held in captivity. He listened in his tolerant, half-insolent manner, chuckling quite audibly now and then, and, when I had finished, smiled derisively.

"As old as the hills, Mr. Ross," he said. "You see, these women really do have a pretty tough time, and now that the missionaries have got access everywhere, and they see our women walking the streets unveiled, and enjoying themselves, envy stirs in their very human hearts.

"That white captive game to obtain sympathy is a favorite dodge of theirs. Lots of them are white, as white as you and me. Georgian mothers. Where was this house, anyway?"

I had been unconsciously walking in its direction, and it was not far away. I volunteered to show him, and in a few minutes more we stopped in front of the archway.

The long front loomed up above the courtyard, which was thick with dust. Imprinted in this were the tracks of the

camels' feet. But every blind was drawn, and the place appeared deserted.

The young man looked at me queerly, and I saw a sudden hardening of his face. Then he went quickly through the archway and hammered upon the knocker. After a long interval an aged, cringing Nubian woman opened the door.

I could not follow their conversation, but through the open door I saw that the corridor and a room opposite were now carpetless, with the furniture sewn up in Manchester cloth.

The chief's irritating smile maddened me; and then his expression became grave.

"Do you know whose house that is?" he asked me. "Well, you've had the narrowest squeak of escaping from being chopped into little pieces there, and involving us, too, if the affair had been found out, which isn't likely. You'd be earnestly advised not to let your misguided sympathies gain the better of your judgment in future."

"He's gone—" I began.

"Yes, he's gone. Being rich, he can afford to open up his places whenever a whim, the purchase of a pretty new wife, or politics, takes him into any city in which he has a residence. The owner of that house is the High Priest Amos, of the Falashes, and he's a man we're particularly anxious to conciliate just now."

He had an appointment somewhere farther on, and we parted at the archway on pretty poor terms, for I refused to commit myself to his repeated warning, and I think he looked on us as a pair of meddling amateur politicians. I was still standing near the arch when out there came hobbling the black crone, who sidled up and cringed before me with a propitiating, toothless smile.

"I have a message for you, Effendi," she mumbled in Arabic. "The Effendi understands?"

"What is it?"

"Do not fear for your boat, Effendi, since your friends will provide one. Only watch carefully for enemies, and at the Wells of Karkoj one will meet you and your precious freight."

"Who gave you that message?" I demanded. It sounded like some trick of

Natalie's. In fact, I connected her with the espionage, and with our difficulties at the hotel. I believed her as keen to be rid of me as she was to get the professor into her hands.

However, the old woman returned no answer, but hobbled away across the court at a surprising pace, without looking back, and when I reached the archway she had already disappeared within the house.

I went back to the hotel in a very dubious state of mind. I was getting into deeper water than was altogether pleasant. Then there was Professor Jonas.

Would he not be more a burden than an assistant in any emergency? Had it not been for the reemergence of the slave girl out of this troubled vortex I could have looked forward single mindedly to our expedition. Now she seemed interwoven with the whole baffling conspiracy.

I entered our rooms to find a shambling, ungainly looking Copt standing there, attired in the gaudy attire of a boat captain, consisting of a cast-off naval uniform, with a red sash and decorations, a steward's cap on his sleek head, and patent-leather shoes with pink silk socks.

"We're in luck, Mr. Ross," said Professor Jonas cheerfully. "This gentleman is sailing up the Blue Nile at nine o'clock this evening."

"Yes, sah," said the captain, favoring me with a furtive look. "I heard at the wharf that you two gentlemens is looking for a ship up the Bahr-el-Azrek."

"Who told you?" I demanded.

"The wharfmen tolds me, gentlemen. I have just reach Khartum from Dongola. I have my freight and do not stay. A fine cabin not occupied—like the P. & O.

steamers, only much better and larger. Everything's first class lovely."

"I have already taken our passage," interposed Professor Jonas. "Twenty-five pounds apiece. The captain says it is a reduction."

"Yes, sah. Forty pounds is my usual price, but for two gentlemens it is less. And you go as far as you like, right up to the frontier."

The professor, who had no more money sense than a child, had, in fact, stupefied the captain by accepting his exorbitant demand without haggling. The price was enormous; it represented one-eighth of our capital. I hesitated. But I could not afford to lose so much; and I was not disposed to set the old woman's words against our chance of getting out of Khartum.

"All right," I said. "But see here, my friend! I want to know who sent you to me."

"The wharfmen tolds me, sah. If you don't want to come, get another boat next week, next month, maybe. Passenger traffic business is brisk, sah, brisk."

He had the impudence to hold out the money in his hand. I saw his eyes searching mine in his furtive way. I knew that at the first sign of acceptance on my part the fist would close. And I was not going to be bluffed by a Copt.

"We'll be on board at nine," I answered.

An hour later the porters were ambling away under our loads, while we followed—and the eternal Nubian followed us, and watched us from the wharf all the time we were in dock.

A little before midnight, her lateen sails bellying in the rising wind, our ship circled out into the Bahr-el-Azrek, or Blue Nile.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)



## THE KEY

THE man who works with loving heart  
Has found the secret key  
That opens all the doors of joy  
Unto eternity.

*Grace G. Bostwick*

# Making a Martyr



by George J. Brenn

## A "TELEPHONE DETECTIVE" STORY

"IS this Mr. Fenwick, the well-known Phonic Criminologist?" inquired a bantering voice over the telephone.

"Of course," admitted Fenwick, who sat at the wire chief's desk in the terminal room of the Springfield central office. His blue eyes twinkled as he realized that the calling party was intent on arousing his curiosity.

"What can the telephone be used for, in addition to the detection of crime?"

"Talking," answered Charlie.

"Dear me, yes," murmured the voice, apologetically. "Strange that I should overlook *that!* What else?"

"Anything," responded the young wire chief promptly.

"Will it make the crops grow?"

"You can use it to order fertilizer, which in turn will make the crops grow," reminded Charlie, grinning expansively.

"True enough. What else?"

"It's the speediest and best little agency for gathering news that a newspaper ever had."

"You've got me," chuckled the voice.

"Took some time for you to recognize my voice, though."

"That's because you don't call me more frequently, Mr. Pierson. But I suppose the proprietor and editor of the Harkness *Daily Chronicle* hasn't any time to call the Springfield wire chief."

"I call on people as I need them," retorted Pierson. "What's the good of having friends if you can't use them!"

"That sounds ominous," observed Charlie. "What's on your mind?"

"I want you to evolve a new use for the telephone."

"Why not go to the wire chief in your own town?"

"He hasn't enough imagination," objected the editor. "Will you have time to visit Harkness this evening?"

"Yes."

"I'll stay at the office and we'll have a little conference. What time can you reach here?"

"Will eight o'clock do?"

"Fine," agreed Pierson. "I'll expect you. Good-by."

Punctuality was one of Fenwick's virtues, and it was just eight o'clock that evening when he swung off the trolley in Harkness and entered the low brick building which housed the Harkness *Daily Chronicle*. In the editor's office he found Pierson engaged in conversation with Gordon Fielding, the mayor of Harkness.

"I believe you know Mayor Fielding," said Pierson, arising as Fenwick entered and shaking hands with him.

"Yes, indeed," murmured the mayor.

"How do you do?"

Fenwick greeted both men, took the chair



Pierson designated and, accepting a cigar, waited for the editor to speak.

"We want to use you in politics," smiled Pierson.

"I'm afraid I shall have to disappoint you, then," Fenwick gave notice. "I don't vote until next year. I haven't attained my majority as yet."

"I know that," nodded Pierson. "We don't want your vote; we're seeking advice. You'll have to let me sum up the political situation in Harkness, so that you can understand things. Incidentally, I may say some things about the mayor that nothing but our long friendship will excuse. Gordon won't mind; we went to school together and have always been perfectly frank with each other."

Fenwick nodded and Pierson continued.

"Fielding is the best mayor Harkness ever had. I want him to have another term. There is pretty stiff opposition, however, and we'll have to resort to heroic measures to win."

"Why, I thought Harkness was a democratic stronghold," observed Charlie.

"So it is, but Samuels, our esteemed democratic boss, prefers Meighan, the republican, to his own party's candidate."

"Why?"

"Samuels is president of the Power, Light, and Traction Company, and has learned in the last two years that Fielding knows the value of franchises. He has learned that Fielding can't be bought. Rather than fight Fielding at the primaries he allowed him to get the nomination, but has arranged to fight him within the organization, at the same time supporting the rest of the democratic ticket."

"Can he swing the voters?"

"I'm afraid he can. There are about eighteen thousand voters. Of these seven thousand are republicans. If Samuels can swing more than two thousand democratic votes to Meighan, we lose."

"Any weak spots in Fielding's administration?"

"Yes—one big one! Modesty! Fielding has given the city a first-class business man's administration. He has devoted himself whole-heartedly to effecting improvements, eradicating evils and giving the tax-

payer full value for every dollar the city has spent. But he has worked quietly in accomplishing things, hasn't advertised his exploits, and has made some really spectacular victories appear commonplace by reason of his diffidence. Fielding is not a politician in the ordinary sense of the word; he doesn't know how to shake hands and pat a man on the back."

Pierson paused for sheer want of breath.

Fielding sat back in his chair, amused.

"Go ahead," he encouraged. "Tell him *all* of my faults."

"Haven't I told the truth, Gordon?" appealed Pierson.

"You sure have, Bill," the mayor agreed.

"What the public of Harkness likes is a man who shouts from the housetops regarding everything he does. A man who, instead of quietly winning over his opponents by a few minutes of personal and persuasive conversation, will carry a fight to the Council Chambers and make it look like a pyrotechnic display. They like aggression and familiarity. In Fielding's case they don't recognize aggression, because they can't see it. As for personality, perhaps Fielding appears to be too much of an aristocrat, although I know how far from the truth that is. The fact remains, however, that when J. L. Lenox was mayor of Harkness the voters called him 'Jake,' and elected him three times. No one calls Fielding 'Gordon.' He doesn't impress the public that way."

"I understand," nodded Fenwick.

"Harkness isn't much of a campaign town," continued Pierson. "The election is a week from to-morrow. Fielding's held two meetings, but has aroused very little enthusiasm. The other side has been pretty quiet, too, which may be a sign that they are up to some deviltry. Samuels owns the *News*, which has openly championed Meighan's cause, and I've just about managed to break even in the newspaper fight. But we've got to do something almighty quick if we want to win!" Pierson pounded the desk to emphasize his point.

Fenwick was frankly puzzled, for he could not think of any possible service he might render Fielding. The irrepressible editor resumed his explanation.

"I feel sure that Fielding would swing seven thousand votes if the election were held to-morrow. The same number would probably vote for Meighan, leaving about four thousand on the fence, slightly inclined toward Meighan. We've gotta swing 'em our way, and have a week in which to do it. It's my guess that the best way to do it is to create mob sentiment—to make votes by a huge wave of popular enthusiasm. We've got money to spend, but not as much as Samuels and the Republican organization combined. We've got to make every cent count. And we're going to gamble big. Know how?"

Fenwick confessed his ignorance.

"We're going to give Harkness the biggest campaign meeting the town ever had. We're not going to do it until a week from to-day—one day before the election. And it's going to be a hum-dinger. That's where you come in."

"How?" inquired Charlie, more puzzled than ever.

"I'll tell you. The meeting is to be held across the street from here, on the public square. I'm having a speaker's stand built. I'm having bunting galore spread about for decorations. We're going to have a military band. I've hired seating facilities from a circus to accommodate seven thousand people. We're going to give 'em moving pictures—part entertaining, the rest instructive. But we've got to get the people to come, and we've got to make them know they are wanted. Newspaper advertisements and lithographic eight sheets won't do it. They're too impersonal. Circular letters won't do it, because everybody throws campaign literature away without reading it. What kind of an invitation will carry more weight?" Pierson paused for a reply.

"The telephone!" announced Charlie, suddenly realizing the trend of Pierson's remarks.

"Exactly," beamed Pierson. "I want telephone facilities installed in Fielding's headquarters to handle the job. This town has unusual telephone development. In many instances there are two or more voters living at a residence in which there is telephone service. I want you to determine

what equipment we'll need, get it installed for me, and suggest a plan for handling the work. We'll foot the bill. Can you do it?"

"Certainly," agreed Charlie, now thoroughly at home. "We'll have a switchboard, three or four lines and a couple of instruments. If you pay well enough I can probably get three operators who are on vacation to do the work—girls with brains."

"My secretary, Miss Winthrop, can assist them," suggested Fielding.

"So you have a young lady as a secretary? So much the better. We'll engage the operators as secretaries, too, in order to keep strictly within the bounds of truth. One girl will operate the switchboard, calling the numbers as they are listed in the telephone directory, and checking them off. When the parties answer she will say, 'Mayor Fielding's secretary wishes to speak with you,' and will connect them with the desk telephone at which the other two girls will sit. These girls will do the actual inviting."

"Great stuff!" enthused Pierson. "That injects the proper personal element into it. The average person will be tickled to death to be able to say 'The mayor had his secretary call me up to-day and invite me to be present at the meeting Monday night. He told her to say that he wanted all his personal friends and supporters to attend, because it is going to be a very unusual meeting.' How about it?" He slapped Fenwick gleefully on the knee, his face wreathed in smiles. Fielding reflected Pierson's enthusiasm.

"Fine," he agreed. "You should be running for office instead of me, Bill."

"Nonsense," growled the editor. "I'm a newspaper man. Got ideas—that's all. Here's one." From his vest pocket he produced a brown capsule such as is used for medicinal purposes. It was about half an inch long and one-quarter of an inch wide, and bore a tiny strip of paper on which was printed: "What's in it for me?" The capsule was made in halves and, pulling them apart, Pierson extracted a little roll of flimsy paper. When this was unrolled and smoothed out it disclosed the words, "Come to Monday's meeting on the square and learn what's in it for you!"

"Get the idea?" queried Pierson. "These are going to be mailed to the voters this week in little pill-boxes. A circular letter would never be read, but every one who gets one of these will open it to see 'what's in it.' Am I right?"

"Good psychology," commented Fenwick.

"That's it. And the movies and stereopticon slides! Wait 'll I show you!" The editor rummaged through desk drawers and finally produced a series of negatives. "See here: this is Front Street before the storm-sewer was built."

Fenwick inspected the negative, holding it to the light. It pictured a flooded street with no sign of sidewalk, boys up to the waist in water, pushing improvised boats and rafts about, while people stood at the entrances of their homes, unable to leave them.

"We'll throw that on the screen," explained Pierson, "and then we'll show 'em this!" The negative he handed Fenwick showed a neat, tree-bordered street, well paved and graded.

"That view was taken half an hour after the worst rain-storm in recent years. Fielding put through that storm-sewer over the protests of half the city council, and no one can be found to-day who will stand up and say it should not have been built. Oh, we've got a lot of 'em; the old, ramshackle City Hospital and the modern one, the old dumping-ground for garbage and refuse and the beautiful park now located on the same site, and a picture of the scientific incinerator where garbage is now consumed.

"I've got another that's a beaut! Remember the time the trolley full of high school students was hit by the express train at the Center Street grade crossing? Nine killed and twenty injured. I've got a movie reel of the scene just after the accident. Got it from a film company. And I've had another film made showing the express train running through the town with the tracks depressed, and the trolleys running overhead. The railroad company figured on postponing action five years by pretending it was difficult to determine whether it would be best to elevate or depress the tracks to cut out the crossing at grade. Soon

as Fielding took office he said, 'Depress at once!' They did; so did their spirits," chuckled Pierson.

Fielding fidgeted at this unwonted praise.

"Don't be so goldarned modest, Gordon," reproved the editor. "We're goin' to give the voters evidence of the things you've done for this town, and we're gonna throw it right in their eyes! Playgrounds, better schools, free milk and ice stations for the poor, clinics and library. And I'm going to write the snappy little messages—the titles and subtitles—that will be thrown on the screen. We'll give Mr. Meighan and his friend, Mr. Samuels, the time of their lives!"

"I feel like pitching in and helping you," confessed Fenwick, "but you've got this thing worked out so completely that I hardly see what I can do."

"You just take care of the telephone end of it for me, and you'll be doing your bit," returned Pierson. "I'll let you know how we're making out from time to time, and if I can use you for anything else I'll let you know. I guess that's all."

Fenwick obtained the necessary details regarding the place at which the equipment was to be installed and returned to Harkness. The next day he arranged for the immediate installation of the facilities through the Harkness wire chief, engaged three girls to handle the operating, and late that afternoon was advised by Pierson that the scheme was working fine.

During the remainder of the week Pierson called him on the phone several times to let him know how things were progressing. Aside from this he had taken no further interest in the campaign, but on Friday afternoon, three days before Fielding's big meeting, an event occurred that resulted in his active participation in almost the same degree as Fielding and Pierson.

Fenwick was busy handling "trouble" reports, one of the important duties of a wire chief. He had disposed of several minor cases of trouble, and the next one he encountered was on a coin-box public telephone line, Springfield 1843, and was marked "C. H.," the abbreviation for "Can't hear." Fenwick pressed a key on his desk which connected him with the test

operator's position and ordered the line up on a test cord.

"The line is busy," the test operator advised.

This was not unusual, since "trouble" is often only temporary, or may be intermittent. To satisfy himself that the transmission was good he "listened in" on the conversation.

"—and we'll tell Fielding where he can find his car," he heard. "When he comes down we'll grab him, tie him up and keep him in the old boat club until after election day. How about it?"

"When will you—ah—take his car?" demanded an authoritative voice.

"About three o'clock on Sunday, if he follows his usual custom," answered the first speaker.

"Don't handle him violently," warned the other, "and make sure he doesn't recognize you."

"Don't worry! I'll only supervise the job, and the men I've got are from out of the State."

"All right—but be careful! Pull this job off without a slip and I'll make you county prosecutor! I guess that's all."

"All right, Mr. Samuels. Good-by."

Fenwick whistled. It seemed incredible that Samuels, president of the Power, Light, and Traction Company and party "boss" in Harkness, should lend himself to such a questionable undertaking. Still the fragment of conversation did not permit of any other interpretation than that plans were under way to kidnap Fielding and so prevent him from addressing the voters at the big meeting which had been arranged.

Fenwick's card record showed that line No. 1843 was located at the North Springfield railroad station. He called the number and after an agonizing wait the station agent answered. He was unable to furnish any information regarding the person who had used the telephone, however, as he had been on the train platform handling freight.

Charlie sat at his desk and reflected. Ethically, he could not divulge any information he had acquired by "listening in" in the performance of his duties. On the other hand, the conversation referred to proceedings that were undoubtedly of a

criminal character, and as such was illegal. It was necessary to proceed with extreme caution.

He called Pierson on the telephone and invited him to visit Springfield at once. Half an hour later the editor entered the terminal room.

"What's the row, Charlie? Have you heard the same news that I have?"

"What's that?"

"Oh, the Samuels-Meighan crowd intends to break up the meeting. Got a bunch of roughnecks together and mean to shout the speakers down and perhaps handle them roughly."

"They mean to do worse than that," warned Charlie, and recounted the conversation he had heard. Pierson listened, amazed and sober. The conclusion of Charlie's tale found him serious and thoughtful, and there was a profound silence for a while.

"See if I've got this straight," he appealed. "They are going to steal Fielding's car, entice him to the abandoned boat club on the promise of telling where the car is, and then hold him there until after election. Samuels will undoubtedly play the thing up in the columns of the *News*, hinting at scandal and throwing mud generally. Well"—this decisively—"we'll have to stop it!"

"Is that good policy?" queried Fenwick.

"What else can we do? What have you in mind?"

"Simply this: The public likes a martyr. Why not give it one? Let them get away with it, up to a certain point."

Pierson reflected.

"I believe you're right," he assented finally. "We know what's doing, and they don't mean to do Fielding physical injury. We could go down to the boat club at the last minute, get Fielding away from 'em, bring him back to the meeting and let him tell the whole story."

Fenwick smiled.

"Why not keep him away from the meeting?" he suggested.

"Oh, no," disagreed Pierson. "I want the voters to hear his speech. I wrote it myself and it's a good one. Why"—with a touch of pride—"if Fielding had per-



sonal magnetism, that speech would insure his election."

"We'll let him make the speech," asserted Charlie.

"I don't get you," came from the bewildered Pierson.

"Let him make the speech from the boat club."

"What the devil—" Pierson shouted, and then his voice subsided to ordinary tones and he grinned. "Come on; you've got a plan! Let's hear it."

"Were you in New York at any time during the Victory Loan campaign?"

Pierson nodded.

"Were you up on Victory Way listening to the speeches?"

Again the editor nodded, and a beatific smile of comprehension illuminated his rugged face.

"I get you! Can it be done?" he asked eagerly.

Fenwick smiled at the display of enthusiasm.

"It can—provided Fielding will stand for it, but it will be somewhat expensive. I can get the necessary equipment from New York. It will be consistent with the rest of your meeting, too, because it will be novel. Harkness has had no experience with such equipment. And it will emphasize the villainy of Samuels's tactics and minimize Fielding's lack of personality or magnetism. I'm inclined to believe that the mayor will make a better speech than if he were face to face with the crowd."

"You're absolutely right, Charlie boy! Let me use your phone."

Pierson telephoned Fielding. The mayor was astounded at the news of Samuels's rascality, and when Fenwick's plan was described, gave it his unqualified approval. At the conclusion of the conversation Pierson turned to Charlie.

"Fielding says he usually goes out to the Country Club in his car on Sunday afternoons. That's where they mean to steal the machine. How shall we arrange this thing?"

"Let them steal the car—we'll have some one watch and recover it. Then have Fielding fall into the trap when they seek to entice him out to the boat club. I'll es-

tablish telephone service there to-morrow morning. To-morrow night I'll install facilities on the public square. Monday afternoon I'll go down to the boat club with a couple of men. We'll overpower the guards, free Fielding and wait until it is time for his speech, and he'll be ready to talk to as big an audience as you can gather."

"Fine, Charlie. I'll stay in Harkness and run the meeting. Oh, boy—won't we give 'em hell!"

"We will," laughed Charlie with evident relish. "You'd better get back to Harkness and do whatever is necessary. I'll call New York at once and have a man bring in the stuff I need."

Fenwick's plan was followed in its entirety. On Saturday morning he rode out to the abandoned boat club on a motorcycle, accompanied by an installer in the side-car. The boat club was a relic of the heyday of aquatic sports, when there had been great rivalry on the river between the crews of various four and eight oar shells. In later years the river had been polluted by the factories along its banks, and boat-racing had fallen into disfavor.

The boat club was situated six miles outside of Harkness, on a small promontory directly on the bank of the river. Behind it was a little valley, at the head of which an old dam impounded the waters of Harkness Creek. On the further edge of the valley ran the Harkness branch of the U. V. O. railroad. The valley narrowed at a point near the boat club and the railroad-tracks were laid on a short trestle bridge at this point. A pole-line, used jointly for the wires of the railroad, power, and telephone companies ran along the railroad, and the trestle resulted in the tracks being about on a level with the wires. It was at this point that Fenwick and the installer began work, picking up two idle circuits and connecting them by means of two pairs of wires to the boat club.

The engineers of public utility companies found it necessary, several years ago, to adopt standard rules governing the joint use of the poles, in order to minimize the danger to linemen and to insure uninter-

rupted service. These rules require that electric light and power wires be placed *above* telephone wires, and that the voltage of power wires must not exceed certain specified limits of safety. In accordance with these rules, the power company's lines were strung on the top cross-arm of the poles, the railroad company's signal wires were on the second cross-arm and the telephone wires, with which Fenwick established connection, were on the lowest cross-arm.

The doors of the boat club were securely locked, but Fenwick and his assistant managed to enter through a window. Within they found no evidences of recent visitors. They brought the wires in at points on the upper floor which would attract no attention. To one circuit Fenwick connected a microphone transmitter, while his assistant connected an ordinary instrument to the other. These and the bell-box they concealed beneath a loose board in the double flooring and nailed the board in place.

"Looks like a sure enough storm," remarked the installer as they started back to Harkness.

"It's been threatening to rain for several days," answered Fenwick.

Upon his return to Harkness Fenwick conferred with the local wire chief, and the afternoon was spent in improvising a control-room in what had previously been a storage vault in the Harkness central office building. Amplifiers contained in iron boxes were attached to the wall of the room by means of rubber cables. Automobile storage-batteries and dry cells were used to supply current to the amplifiers. The circuit in the boat club which Fenwick had equipped with the microphone transmitter was connected with these amplifiers which were capable of amplifying the voice energy which would come over the wire millions of times.

Late at night Fenwick and the local wire chief installed some instruments which looked like megaphones in the public square. They were suspended from a wire and hung in the air twenty feet above the seats which Pierson had provided for the audience at Fielding's meeting. These instruments were wired to the circuit connected with the amplifiers. Charlie draped them in hunting,

so that they appeared to be a part of the decorations.

Fenwick advised Pierson that an additional circuit had been equipped with an ordinary instrument at the boat club to enable Fielding to keep in easy telephonic communication with the meeting, since ordinary conversation would not be possible over the loud-speaking circuit. He furnished Pierson with the telephone number of this circuit for use in emergency, and advised him that an instrument would also be available for use on the speakers' platform.

"You will call Fielding over this standard line," he explained to the editor, "and let him know that you are ready for his speech. The mayor will then change to the special circuit, the wire chief will throw a switch connecting the line to the control-board, and Fielding's speech will be heard as distinctly as if he were on the platform instead of six miles distant. Since there are definite limits to the range of the human voice out-of-doors, it is certain that the use of the loud speakers will result in *more* people hearing the speech, as we have placed them to advantage over the entire square." Pierson grinned like a schoolboy and slapped Fenwick on the back with enthusiasm.

"Some stunt!" he chortled.

On Sunday afternoon Fielding's car was stolen from the spot where he had parked it near the Country Club. Half an hour later a small boy volunteered to show him where it was. Fielding accompanied the boy to a spot a mile from the club, along a country road. Here he was seized from behind, bundled into a car, blindfolded and taken to the boat club.

Pierson acquainted Fenwick with these facts on Sunday evening. On Monday morning he called Fenwick again to say that true to his prediction, the *News* had published a morning "extra" edition covering Fielding's mysterious disappearance and hinting at marital discord in the mayor's family. Pierson had countered with an extra edition of the *Chronicle*, flatly attributing the disappearance to foul play, intimating that officers of the law would soon clear the mystery and promising sensational

revelations concerning a prominent lawyer and the "boss" who had bought him.

"We know the fellow is a lawyer," observed Pierson, "because Samuels promised to make him county prosecutor. It's up to you, Charlie, to find out who he is."

At noon, the threatened rainstorm had not appeared, although the sky was still overcast with ominous, black clouds. Fenwick and two husky telephone men, Tom and Ed by name, started for the boat club on motorcycles. Shortly before they reached the building they abandoned the motorcycles and proceeded on foot, for the road was none too good and the sound of the motors might have attracted attention. Fenwick carried the special type of telephone instrument, while Tom carried a large hamper of food, for they were not sure that Fielding's captors would be considerate enough to feed him.

At the frame building the three cautiously edged up to the window on the side toward the railroad, and peered in. No one could be seen, but a murmur of subdued conversation could be heard, evidently coming from the upper floor. Fenwick left the others and approached the entrance facing the river. Finding the door locked, he rapped on it violently. For a moment there was silence, and then two men came down the stairs and stopped at the door. Again Charlie pounded.

"Who's there?" challenged one of the men.

"Open the door; Samuels sent me," replied Charlie.

The door was thrown open and revealed two of the roughest looking specimens of unshaved rascality he had ever encountered.

"What d'ye want?" demanded one fellow, aggressively.

As he spoke, Tom and Ed burst through the other door. The kidnapers turned at the noise, and Fenwick leaped at one of them instantly. The element of surprise was so great that there was not even the semblance of a struggle, for Charlie's companions grasped the other fellow and both were soon handcuffed and herded up the stairs.

Here they found Fielding, still bound. About the floor were crusts of bread, empty

cans which had evidently held food of sorts, and two whisky-bottles, one empty and one half full. Fenwick freed the mayor, who heaved a sigh of genuine relief and walked up and down to relieve the cramp produced by his bonds.

While they talked over developments the storm broke in all its fury. Torrents of rain, deafening peals of thunder, vivid flashes of lightning and blasts of wind that shook the flimsy old structure to its very foundations lent a ghastly atmosphere to the room. Over in one corner, on the dusty floor, lay the two ruffians who had abducted Fielding. The roof was far from watertight, and leaks developed in half a dozen places.

"That settles the meeting," observed Fielding ruefully.

"Only a thunder-storm," cheered Fenwick. "I doubt whether it strikes Harkness at all, and it may be over in an hour or so."

He extracted the nails from a board in the floor, and to the amazement of the two prisoners pulled from beneath the board a telephone set on which he called Pierson. To him he described the manner in which they had succeeded in freeing Fielding, and permitted the latter to talk to Pierson. After a few minutes of conversation Fielding asked, "How's the weather?"

"Great," reported Pierson. "We had a storm for five minutes, but it passed over, headed in your direction."

"We've got it, all right," advised Fielding, "and this isn't exactly the place I'd chose for shelter." As he spoke the storm appeared to grow more furious.

"You'll be back here to-night," reminded the editor. "Cheer up. I'll call you if anything happens."

As Fielding hung up the receiver, a noise as of a distant explosion was heard, followed by a low rumbling that grew in intensity. The men jumped to their feet, and Fielding ran to a window facing the railroad.

"Good God!" he shouted. "The dam has burst!"

The others joined him instantly, and the sight that met their eyes was awe-inspiring. The little valley along the railroad-track had become a raging river, swift as a mill-

race. Thousands of gallons of water rushed by, and more thousands. Foot by foot and minute by minute the water advanced.

"If it ever hits this place we're gone," muttered Tom uneasily.

"We're on pretty high ground," reminded Fenwick. "Besides, it will soon clear a course to the river and will eventually subside. That trestle bridge seems to be standing the strain well."

During the next fifteen minutes the water continued to rise perceptibly, but the rain almost ceased. They sat about on empty boxes, talking and smoking. At intervals a member of the group would go to the window and look out. The ground about the clubhouse had become an island, and was completely isolated. There was no way of returning to Harkness had they desired to do so, and the treacherous river current made escape by that route impracticable as well, even if a boat were available.

Fenwick turned his attention to the prisoners, quizzing them in an endeavor to learn who had engaged them. They stolidly refused to confess, however, and were alike immune to bribes or threats. At the end of an hour Fenwick apparently gave the job up in disgust. He had noticed the anxious glances that one red-nosed, bleary-eyed customer directed toward the half-filled bottle of whisky, however, and decided to make another effort. Appropriating the bottle, he uncorked it, smelled of it, and then held it under the prisoner's nose.

"And now," said Charlie deliberately, tilting the bottle ever so gently, "I think I'll dump this fire-water on the floor."

The man's nostrils had fairly quivered at the smell of the liquor, and as Fenwick uttered his threat he gave a cry of torture.

"Don't, boss! Please, don't," he shouted. "It's good lickin'! Give it to us, will ye?"

"I'm going to spill it unless you tell me who hired you." He paused impressively.

"Demarest," muttered the fellow sullenly, refusing to meet Fenwick's gaze.

"Sure?" queried Charlie.

"Ah—sure. You got us dead to rights, didn't you? Demarest, the lawyer over in Springfield, hired us. He's workin' for Samuels. Gimme the booze."

"Here," grinned Charlie, placing the bottle in the prisoner's manacled hands, "Drink yourself to sleep."

The confession confirmed his own suspicions, for he had thought of Demarest the moment Pierson had pointed out that the person who had talked to Samuels over the telephone must be a lawyer. He determined to let Pierson know of the confession at once.

He picked up the telephone, but was unable to get the operator to answer. Suspecting that the cords had become wet from a leak in the roof, he investigated thoroughly, but was unable to find anything of the sort. Then he went to the window.

"Sun's out," he announced, after a brief glance at the sky.

The other joined him at the window.

"And there's a rainbow," pointed out Fielding. "I sincerely hope it's a bow of promise."

Fenwick noted that the water had ceased to rise, although he could see no evidence of it receding. Then he groaned. A portion of the telephone circuits on the pole nearest the building and paralleling the trestle was submerged, grounding the wires. The rest of the wires were barely above water.

"There'll be no telephone service as long as any portion of the wire is submerged," Fenwick explained. The two kidnappers laughed derisively.

"Can't you fix it?" asked Fielding, greatly perturbed.

"I brought no material with me," he answered. "Even if I had, I couldn't get out to the poles."

The little party became a gloomy one. Tom and Ed sat on boxes, talking in whispers. Fielding paced up and down the floor anxiously. Fenwick maintained his place at the window, vainly hoping that the water would recede. The sun was fast sinking in the west, and night would soon be upon them.

He reproached himself bitterly for having suggested the plan. In two hours the meeting was to begin and Pierson fondly imagined that Fielding was to make a speech that would be unique in the annals of Harkness politics. With the equipment all installed and the plans perfectly worked



out, the hand of Fate had intervened at the last moment and left them as completely isolated as though they were on another continent.

As he surveyed the submerged length of wire he suddenly noted that the ground on each side of the trestle formed an up-grade, so that the poles were slightly higher than the one nearest the point where the line was grounded. He left the window immediately.

"Mr. Mayor, I'm going to leave you with the prisoners," he announced. "I want Tom and Ed to come with me."

Accompanied by his friends, Charlie went down the stairs and out in front of the building.

"Boys, how are you at throwing stones?" he asked.

"Why?" queried Ed.

"See those glass insulators on the lower cross-arm of that pole?"

They nodded.

"Think you can hit 'em?"

"We'll try," announced Tom.

Off went their coats and they set about gathering missiles, a miscellaneous assortment of rocks, clubs, and bits of metal. When they had gathered all that was available into a pile, they started throwing. Unfortunately, the circuits with which the boat club were connected were on the insulators farthest away, and consequently more difficult to hit, as the other wires interfered with shots that were extremely accurate.

Tom proved the prize marksman of the three, accounting for half of the insulators. It was growing late, and they realized that with the approach of darkness they could not hope to meet with any success. It was exhausting work and their arms soon grew numb from the exertion. Finally a cheer arose as the last coveted target was smashed by a well-directed shot.

*As each glass insulator was broken into bits, the tension on the wire made by the up-grade on each side of the trestle pulled the line clear of the water and against the upper cross-arm of the railroad wires!*

"Whew!" whistled Fenwick, exhausted but happy. "I'll bet that's the first time 'trouble' was cleared in that fashion."

They returned to the upper floor to find

that the telephone was ringing. Fielding lit an oil-lantern that smoked and gave forth more odor than light. Fenwick answered the telephone. It was Pierson.

"Where in thunder have you been?" roared that individual, at the same time giving vent to a sigh of relief. "I've been trying to get you for two hours and had just made up my mind to start out in a machine."

"You wouldn't have been able to get within a half-mile of the place," advised Fenwick, and described the situation.

"Guess you fellows will have to stay there overnight," he chuckled. "Set your watch by mine, Charlie—I've got seven thirty-five. I'll time the meeting exactly, and at eight forty-five we'll be ready for Fielding's speech. The crowd is beginning to gather rapidly. Samuels and Meighan are in automobiles, parked on opposite sides of the square and trying to remain inconspicuous. I'm having a couple of plain-clothes men watch Samuels, and I'll take care of Demarest if he shows up. I must hurry back now. So-long."

For another hour Fielding paced up and down, nervous and impatient. It was twenty minutes of nine when Pierson called again.

"The meeting's a knockout," he announced. "President Harrison, of the common council, made a rousing speech and folks are still cheering the movies and lantern slides. We've practically got 'em beat now. I've announced that Fielding's going to speak next, and the Samuels's crowd is wondering how I'm going to make good. Tell the mayor that in my introductory remarks I'll describe the means by which he is to make his address and the reason that compels it. He can begin by stating the facts. I've got Demarest spotted. Now, get busy on the special wire. You can hold the connection on this one; perhaps you'll hear something."

Fenwick delivered the message to Fielding, at the same time producing the special microphone transmitter from its place of concealment. He then talked to the wire chief for a moment to test the wire, directed him to throw the switch, and handed the instrument to Fielding.

From the moment that Fielding began

with the words "Fellow Citizens of Harkness." Fenwick realized that the speech would be a good one. Fielding had lost all traces of nervousness, and was talking easily and distinctly. In good Anglo-Saxon words of one syllable he apologized for his inability to address the voters from the platform, graphically described the plot to kidnap him and the manner in which it had been frustrated, painted a vivid word-picture of the storm and the bursting of the dam, and dramatically demanded the immediate arrest of Samuels and Demarest on a charge of abduction!

The cheers and applause as well as other evidences of excitement which came to Fenwick over the ordinary wire clearly indicated that he had a sympathetic audience. It was ten minutes before the noises ceased and Pierson spoke to Fenwick again.

"I have to report, Mr. Mayor, that Messrs. Demarest and Samuels have been taken into custody by the police. Your friends and neighbors are anxious for you to proceed with your speech." Fenwick repeated the words to Fielding.

"I have no speech to make, folks," resumed the mayor. "You have seen on the screen evidences of the fact that as chief executive of the city of Harkness I have not been idle. My only campaign promise is that I will continue to be busy with the affairs of our municipality and to conduct them as my intelligence and conscience dictate, if you see fit to reelect me. That is a promise, not a platform. Political platforms are like the platforms on Mr. Samuels's trolleys: They are not meant to *stand on*, but only to *get in on*! I should like to know

that I have your confidence. Were I addressing you from the platform I would ask those who favored my candidacy to arise, that I might judge your feelings, but I am unfortunately placed in a position where I cannot see you. I can hear, however, and so I ask that if you want me to be your mayor, and will vote for me tomorrow, you will please indicate it by saying 'Yes.'"

The word was unmistakable, as it hurtled over the ordinary wire the combined vibrations of thousands of voices. Then cheers, snatches of music, and finally a sort of concerted refrain that resolved itself into repetition of "Fielding, yes, yes, yes," assailed the ears of the little group in the upper room.

In a few, well-chosen words Fielding thanked the audience and said good night. Almost instantly Pierson was on the line.

"We'll come up the river in a motor-boat early in the morning," he said, "and will take you fellows away. The election's gonna be a walk-over, Gordon."

"Thanks to you, Bill," acknowledged the mayor.

"Thanks to me? Not on your life! Thanks to Fenwick. He's a real psychologist. While you were describing the kidnaping, folks were whispering 'Poor Fielding.' When you told about the rescue they cheered. The people sympathize with the underdog and like to see him come out on top. They wanted a martyr and Fenwick gave 'em one! And then, too, when you're up against crooks you don't need an editor; you need a detective. Thank Charlie Fenwick, for you owe everything to him!"

## THE PASSER

SWEET Spring trips by my door,  
I see her go;  
The blossoms in her hands  
Are white, like snow.

Her smile hath that warm gold  
The great sun hath;  
It sheds a wonder light  
Along her path.

And, oh, her peerless eyes,  
How blue they be!  
As fathomlessly deep  
As the deep sea.

"Stay!" unto her I cry;  
In vain! In vain!  
I keep my heart until  
She comes again.

Clinton Scollard

# The Fairest Flower

by John Charles Beecham

Author of "The Argus Pheasant," "Koyala the Beautiful," "A Daughter of Borneo," etc.

## PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

**T**AMA KWAYANG, Kayan of the hill country of Borneo, while on a visit to the coast fishing, finds the wreck of a big steamer on a reef, and on it a dead woman and a live baby girl.

His wife, Sababa, insists upon adopting the child and brings it up as her own, but on her death-bed turns over to her a necklace and two rings taken from the dead woman which she has saved so the child may have something to identify her when she returns to her own people. After Sababa's death Rambuta Mas, the "Golden One," as the girl is called, fares badly at the hands of the jealous women of the tribe and is finally sold by her "father," Tama Kwayang, to Rolf Borgeson, a vicious and brutal trader who, with his Arab henchman, Seriff Massar, is visiting the village.

Meantime in New York, Bruce Westfield, disappointed in a youthful love affair, enters into a wager to go to Borneo and return within a year with the rarest flower ever discovered. His uncle, by adoption, who is also his attorney and was, until he became of age, his guardian, volunteers to accompany him.

The day after the sale of Rambuta, Borgeson starts for the coast, taking the girl with him after making many fair promises to restore her to her own people, but that night his true nature reveals itself and, seizing her despite her screams and struggles, he starts to carry her to his tent.

## CHAPTER VII.

### RAMBUTA'S FLIGHT.

**B**ORGESON forgot that it was no grisette, no waif of the docks, with whom he had to deal. Rambuta had gained her education in a school where every means of defense was justified. As he bent low she saw her opportunity. Launching forward with the swiftness of a striking cobra she fastened her teeth into his throat. The sharp incisors tore the skin like a dog's fangs. Maddened with rage and pain Borgeson let go his hold. An eel-like twist and she was free. Leaping down from the platform she darted toward the forest.

"Stop her!" Borgeson roared.

The gigantic figure of the Malay rose between her and the friendly shades. Whirling, she sprang out of his reach. His outstretched fingers closed on her chawat, tearing it from her body. She did not stop or

hesitate. Plunging on through the cane and sedges, she gained the borders of the durian grove. Her eyes, accustomed to tropic darkness, discerned the faint trail through it, her sure feet made no misstep. On through the grove she sped until she came to the border of the unclaimed jungle where long creepers sent down friendly coils. Catching one of them she swiftly climbed out of sight among the trees.

Pursuit was not far behind.

"A hundred dollars to the man who brings her back," Borgeson shouted, the moment he saw her evade Seriff Massar and gain the fringe of thicket.

The Dyaks were his men, every one of them. The fate of a girl meant little or nothing to them. A hundred Spanish dollars guaranteed a month's spree on the coast. They raced after her at top speed and followed the trail through the jungle grove with senses scarcely less acute than

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hers. Meanwhile Borgeson, mad with pain and fury, abused his Malay lieutenant with all the foul and violent language that the picturesque *lingua franca* of the East Indian coast affords.

Fortunately for the girl, none of the Dyaks knew that she was tree-bred. Dwellers of the coast, they did not live the tree life of the people of the interior, who frequently have no other highways than the treetops. Consequently it did not occur to them to look above.

For hours Rambuta Mas, frantic with terror, and scarce able to maintain her precarious perch in the top of a tall kenari-tree, listened to the movements of her pursuers below. Through the thick greenery she glimpsed torches moving to and fro, covering an ever-widening area, as they searched every bush and cane-brake in their vain quest. Presently she heard Borgeson's voice, directing the search with lurid profanity. She shivered at the thought of the narrow escape she had had.

"She can't have gone far," she heard the trader say to Seriff Massar. "Not in this cursed blackness. Those skulking scoundrels must have missed her, if they're not hiding her. But daylight will show her up. I hate to lose a day, but, damn it, I'd rather lose a month than leave without that sharp-toothed imp of hell."

The faintest streak of gray, breaking the black gloom of night, saw Rambuta Mas astir. Not daring to venture below, for she knew that she must inevitably leave a trail, she swung along the treetops like a monkey. The gibbons shouted, "Wah! Wah!" at her, the proboscis monkeys scolded insanely, and a mother orang, with her infant clinging to her breast, stared with curious eyes. Fearless of crouching leopards, fearless of skulking pythons hidden among the thick greenery, fearless of the thousand and one perils of the jungle, she sped on into the wild and untraveled interior. For behind her, she knew, was a danger more to be dreaded than any form of sudden death.

Far behind, on the banks of the bayou, Rolf Borgeson curiously examined a necklace of gold, containing the almost obliterated features of a handsome young man,

and two rings, which Seriff Massar had given him after finding them in the lost captive's chawat.

"W. E. to L. W., June 20, 1901," he read. "There's some mystery in this. Wonder if it could be the girl's folks. From the looks of this trinket they ought to be worth a pot of money. Guess I'll hang on to it for a while. There's no telling what it might lead to."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE ORCHID HUNTER.

THERE was a moment's strained silence in the library of Homer Westfield's sumptuous home. Bruce Westfield, hope of the family, had just announced his independence from apron-strings and his determination to go on the wildest and most fantastic adventure that had ever come within the borders of his mother's imagination. She, was a bit of a dowager, as Homer Westfield's wife had been required to be in order to manage him, and this sudden rebellion of one whom she had always esteemed as the most docile of sons, was a bit upsetting. It left her without language, so to speak: her powers of cajolery and command were temporarily atrophied.

Bruce glowered at a bear-skin rug. His sister, Janet, a petite miss of seventeen summers, alternated between an ecstasy of hope and profound despair. She suddenly found courage to voice her desire.

"Can't you take me, Bruce?" she fairly shrieked.

The young man looked up startled. At his scowl his sister's face fell in bitter disappointment.

"Confound it, sis," he exclaimed irritably—he may be pardoned the irritation after the parade of his deficiencies for the enterprise just made by his mother—"can't you understand? This is to be no pleasure tour. It isn't to be a yacht trip, with an orchestra on board and dances every night, and stops at picturesque towns to see Thingumbob's mausoleum, or temple, or bridge. We're going into an absolutely unexplored country, where no white man has ever been before. We'll pass through a trackless

jungle, where we will have to hack a path every foot of the way, among wild animals and whatnot. We may have to make long portages, and carry our packs on our backs, and endure all sorts of hardships. It would be suicide for a girl."

"I think I can endure as much hardship as you can," Miss Janet retorted tartly. "I want you to remember that I trimmed you handsomely at tennis last week, and that my game of golf is within two strokes as good as yours."

"But this isn't like golf or tennis," Bruce rejoined helplessly.

"We were speaking of endurance," Janet pointed out primly.

Mrs. Westfield summoned her lost vocal powers.

"You may be murdered by savages!" she exclaimed sepulchraly.

"Eaten by cannibals," Janet supplied with malice, eager to revenge herself for her disappointment.

Mrs. Westfield shuddered. "I cannot conceive what brought this mad idea into your brain."

"Well, as I told you, mother, we were discussing the subject, and I made the bet with Jimmie Allemann."

"I shall cut Mr. Allemann from the list of my friends," the dowager asserted with the air of a judge pronouncing sentence.

A servant entered. "Mr. Erskine is here, ma'am," he announced.

"Hello, uncle," Bruce shouted, glad of an ally. He dashed toward Erskine and pulled him into the room, while his mother stood aghast at this additional shattering of her conventions.

Erskine was quick to perceive that something was amiss. His eyes sought Westfield's with a quizzical glance. A smile broke through the corners of his mouth at the answer he found there.

"Have you heard of this utterly insane project that Bruce is contemplating?" the dowager demanded, turning toward the family adviser.

"I hadn't any idea Bruce was contemplating insanity," the lawyer rejoined with a twinkle at Westfield.

Mrs. Westfield chose to ignore Erskine's frivolity.

"I am referring to his proposed trip to Borneo."

The lawyer was silent a moment while he selected a very good cigar. He enjoyed privileges in the Westfield household.

"Yes, I'd heard Bruce was going to Borneo," he acknowledged quietly. "In fact, I rather suggested it."

Had the marble replica of the Venus de Milo suddenly darted in and executed a modern dance Mrs. Westfield could not have been more amazed. She started back, gasped, and stared at the lawyer. The Swiss clock ticked off a full minute before she found voice.

"You?" she exclaimed.

Erskine carefully lit the cigar.

"Yes," he acknowledged. "Fact is, I'm going with him."

He smiled pleasantly at his hostess, and rose. "There's a matter I wished to discuss with you this evening, Mrs. Westfield. You'll excuse us, won't you?" he asked with a sweeping glance that included both Janet and her brother. Bruce was positive he saw the lawyer's right eye twitch.

Mrs. Westfield had recovered from the initial shock of surprise. She was not the type that creates scenes. Rising with a frigid grace she led Erskine into a side parlor. The door closed behind them.

Brother and sister looked at each other. Janet had the manner of an offended duchess, though the eager curiosity sparkling in her eyes belied her stiffly squared shoulders and uncompromising chin. Bruce stared glumly at the rug. It is not pleasant, at twenty-four, to be made to feel by your maternal parent that you have the irresponsibility and lack of judgment of a youth of seventeen.

The silence was more than Janet could endure. She was bursting with questions. Her brother's proposed expedition seemed the most thrilling adventure in the world to her. His description of the perils to be undergone had heightened rather than lessened her interest. She was of the age when romance makes its most powerful appeal, and her vivid imagination pictured the most fascinating experiences in store for him. Her resentment at his fancied selfishness in refusing to take her grew.



"Bruce Westfield, I think you're perfectly horrid!" she exploded, turning the batteries of her wrath full upon him. Her dark eyes flamed with indignation.

Bruce lifted an imploring face.

"Now don't you turn against me, sis," he beseeched. "I've got a hard enough job ahead of me to win mother's consent. I've tried to cater to her wishes, and make myself socially agreeable without doing anything in particular, though I've wanted to break away and do something worth while. Now that I've created the issue, I've got to stand pat or I'll never amount to anything. Don't you see?"

The blood of revolutionary forefathers flowed in Janet's veins. She had secretly chafed at his seeming lack of independence and his complaisance with all their mother's wishes. His frank appeal, therefore, won her heart completely.

"Of course I'll stand by you, goose," she cried impulsively. A bargaining instinct asserted itself. "But you've got to promise me something."

"What is it?" Bruce asked cautiously, knowing from experience that there was no telling to what fantastic lengths his sister's demands might go.

"Promise me that you'll tell me everything you're going to do," Janet demanded eagerly. "I want to know just where you are going, what you will do there, what you propose to take along, every little detail of your plans. Then, when the time comes, I can say each day, Bruce is here, or Bruce is there; he's doing this, or he's doing that."

"Vicarious participation," Bruce laughed. "I don't see why I shouldn't. It's a lot better than taking you with us, and having you gobbled up by an orang-utan, or abducted by a Malay pirate chief."

"Orang-utans don't eat human flesh. You'd better improve on your natural history, Mr. Bruce Westfield, if you expect to make much of a success of your orchid hunting." She lifted her chin with an affection of prim disdain.

Bruce chuckled.

"I'm going to make you another promise, little sister," he declared teasingly. "I'm told there are some wonderful rubies in some of the mountain streams of the in-

terior. I shall bring you back the biggest, reddest ruby I can find for your particular own. How does that appeal to you?"

"Bruce, you darling!" She sprang upon him and crushed him in a sisterly hug. But when she released him there was a look of mingled mischief and reproach in her eyes.

"I'll bet you're wishing right now that I was Julia Langholme," she accused.

Bruce's face tautened with pain.

"Sit down," he replied quietly, "I'll sketch you as much of our journey as we have planned."

Brother and sister curled up together in a big arm-chair, poring over a rough sketch of the island of Borneo drawn by Bruce—this was the tableaux that presented itself to Mrs. Westfield and Erskine when they returned to the library. The lawyer smiled with friendly affection. Then an odd spasm of pain crossed it, to vanish instantly.

"Your mother has agreed that there is no serious objection to your going to Borneo, Bruce," Erskine announced. "Janet ought to have a year of Europe. Autumn's coming on, winter will soon be here. A winter on the Riviera is an unforgettable experience. They can accompany us as far as Naples, say. That would quite compensate Miss Janet for the misfortune of being excluded from our party, would it not?" He smiled at the young lady quizzically.

"Uncle, you're a dear!" she declared with conviction. Quite shamelessly she kissed him. She did not see the tautening of his lips as he straightened after her kiss.

"Now I have another announcement to make," Erskine declared after the babble of conversation had begun to quiet. Janet was aglow with excitement, and Bruce nearly as much so. Even Mrs. Westfield had mellowed under the ardent gratitude in her son's eyes. All three turned expectantly toward their friend.

"There is another member of our expedition, Bruce, to whom you have not been introduced as yet. I have taken the liberty to invite an old acquaintance of mine to accompany us. He's a naturalist, like yourself, an orchid-hunter by profession. He knows more about orchids, I presume, than any man on the American continent. You'll

find him a bit eccentric, in some ways—he's ultra Dutch—but I am sure you'll like him. His name is Kobes Kantoor, and I have requested him to join us here to-night—" Erskine looked at his watch. "He's due now."

Kobes Kantoor arrived with pleasing punctuality. Mrs. Westfield welcomed him cordially. Having surrendered—largely because of the fear that Julia Langholme might yet repent—she entered upon her children's plans with all the enthusiasm that a naturally austere nature would permit.

Erskine's description had led Westfield to expect a long-whiskered habitue of the tropics, dressed in rude but picturesque garb, like the fictioned traders of the South Seas. Kantoor disappointed these expectations. He was a small and birdlike individual, half hidden behind a pair of tortoiseshell glasses. He was very erect, thus giving him an appearance of dignity in spite of his diminutive height, and quite faultlessly dressed. He bowed low over Mrs. Westfield's hand, in the extreme of the Continental school, and kissed the tips of Janet's extended fingers gallantly, much to that young lady's embarrassment. It was quite apparent that he was entirely at his ease, a well-bred gentleman of the old school who could fit himself to any circumstance or place. Erskine smiled faintly at the surprised and mystified glances thrown him.

"Mr. Kantoor and I met each other years ago in the east," Erskine explained briefly. "At Soerabaya, I think it was."

"In a *suker fabriek*," the little man chirruped. "You represented an American firm that would buy our sugar."

Kantoor talked the precise English taught in continental schools, Westfield noticed. His voice was pleasing and carefully modulated, the voice of a gentleman.

"Mr. Kantoor was manager of a large sugar-factory in the Soerabaya, Java, district," Erskine explained. "I spent several months with him at one time, when I was in the Orient."

"I didn't know you had ever visited Java," Bruce observed.

"I spent most of two years in the East Indies," Erskine replied quietly. "That was sixteen or seventeen years ago."

"We climbed the Keloetberg together," Kantoor supplied. "And we promised each other this trip to Borneo, which we are now about to take, after all these years."

Erskine made no reply. Bruce saw a sudden look of understanding flash in the little man's face and a swift flash of sympathy. He puzzled over it. There was some mystery, he perceived. But Kantoor swiftly changed the course of conversation.

"Have you decided when we sail?" he asked them collectively, and Erskine in particular.

"We shall let Mrs. Westfield fix the date," the lawyer declared with a gallant smile.

"I had not planned on going to Europe this winter—I'm really not prepared," Mrs. Westfield declared hesitatingly. "Would a fortnight hence delay you too much?"

"It will take me the better part of three weeks to arrange my practise and get my equipment in shape," Erskine declared. "Bruce will probably need as much time." He paused, smilingly. "I had anticipated that you would require a month at least, Mrs. Westfield. Your promptness is quite amazing."

"The comic fiction about a woman never being ready has been repeated so often that men have come to accept it as truth," Mrs. Westfield returned good humoredly. "I have always insisted that women, as a sex, were as punctual, if not more so, than men."

"*Precies!*" the little Dutchman agreed heartily. "When a busy business man wants something done promptly and efficiently, to whom does he delegate the task? To his assistant. And who is she? Nine times out of ten, a woman."

The talk veered to the equipment to be provided. The discussion was largely between Erskine and Kantoor, for both were familiar with the tropics, although Kantoor, Bruce soon perceived, spoke with the greater authority. The guns, it was decided, were to be bought at home. Much of the other equipment, on Kantoor's recommendation, was left to be purchased at Singapore and Batavia. This would enable them to avoid looking after a large amount of baggage *en route*. Presently Bruce made the inquiry that had been on his lips all evening:

"What part of Borneo should we visit to search for orchids, Mr. Kantoor?"

The little Dutchman's eyes gleamed through his tortoise-shell glasses.

"I am glad that you ask that question, Mynheer Westfield. It shows that you have some comprehension of the greatness, the immensity of our Borneo. People think it is an island, a speck in the ocean. They do not realize that it contains more territory than any European state except Russia. Borneo is dwarfed by Asia and by Australia, which is a continent and not an island. Yet it is over eight hundred miles long and over six hundred miles wide. You could drop all your North Atlantic and New England States in its jungle and lose them there.

"Part of it is explored. But there are leagues upon leagues of jungle where the foot of a white man has never stepped. Rumors tell us of great mountains and huge lakes which no explorer has ever witnessed. The Sea Dyaks tell us of a people in the interior who have tails. Nobody has ever seen them, yet the natives say they are there. Perhaps they are the missing link. Who knows?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"The wildest and most inaccessible part of the island is the northeastern portion, in the sultanates of Sabah, which is British, and Kotei, which is under Dutch protection. Little is known about that country except that the jungle is so thick that even the natives cannot pass through it and live on the water courses exclusively. Yet it is a wonderful land. I have been at Sandakan and in Labuk Bay, and I have seen the jungle rise, sheer and impenetrable. That is the country to which we will go!"

His eyes gleamed with the light of an enthusiast, the words had fairly rolled from his lips. It was quite evident that love of that country held him in its grip.

Late that night, when their conference was ended, Kantoor, in a burst of confidence, folded his arm around Westfield's waist.

"When we get there, my boy, I will show you orchids, orchids like a scarlet flame, orchids more velvety black than a black pearl, orchids beside whose fragile pink the pink of the rose is a courtesan's

blush, orchids that have stolen the blue of the sky. Orchids such as you have never seen before, never dreamed of before. I will show them to you, growing high on the tops of the tallest tapangs, where only the birds and He who is above can witness their gloriousness. Ah, my boy, I am glad I have found you, for I know that I shall teach you to love orchids as I love them myself."

## CHAPTER IX.

### ALONE IN THE JUNGLE.

IT was nearing noon when Rambuta Mas felt herself safe from pursuit. Inured as she was to the hardships of jungle life, she was exhausted by the terrific pace at which she had traveled. She had covered nearly fifteen miles since dawn, an almost incredible journey in the Bornean jungle fastnesses. The impenetrable maze of cane, creeper, and undergrowth stretched in every direction around her, a surer protection against her human enemies than moat and castle walls.

Rambuta had no clear perception where she was. She knew that she had traveled steadily farther into the interior, bearing away at an acute angle from the Kowang River, which trended northward in a direct line toward Mount Kini Balu, where it probably had its source. It was this conjecture that had led Borgeson to stick to the river, instead of holding to his original purpose to strike overland from Tama Kwayang's village. She knew that somewhere, in the general direction in which she was traveling, lay the mysterious Lake Kini Balu, a large body of water of which she had heard, but had never seen. It was walled in by morass and a jungle of low-growing scrub, screw-pine, cane, and sedge, with clumps of nipah and tree fern, too thickly intertwined to admit human passage, too scrubby to make travel through their tops possible. That is why few Dyaks, even, ever visited Lake Kini Balu.

She hesitated. Behind her lay the sea and untold horrors. The sea-coast was the home of the white man, the *orang blanda*, to her now the most dreaded and loath-

some creature on the face of the earth. She would die rather than fall into the hands of a white man again. Northward lay the Kowang River, and Borgeson. South and east was swamp and jungle.

Between the two evils her choice was quickly made. Climbing the first tapang tree that she came to, she made a long survey of the country ahead of her. There were absolutely no landmarks. She was as utterly lost as a mariner in an untraveled sea, without chart or compass. Somewhere, in the interminable stretches of waving green ahead of her, she knew, were Dyak villages, like the long house of Tama Kwayang which she had left. But only chance would enable her to locate them. She might pass within a half-mile of one and not know it. The jungle covered everything.

To the danger that lay ahead in the pathless wilderness she gave no thought. There were tigers there, leopards doubtless, other jungle cats. Pythons lurked in the trees. The fens were infested with poisonous reptiles. Crocodiles hid beneath the muddy surface of the water in rivers and bayous. Wood-leeches and a myriad stinging insects would make life a constant torment. Yet all this she held to be an infinitely less evil than to fall again into the hands of the white man and his Malay lieutenant.

Digging certain succulent fern roots and supplementing this with plantains, she ate a frugal meal. A pitcher-plant supplied her with water. *Nepenthes* grew thickly in the forest shades, she had no fear of succumbing to thirst.

Lunch over, she climbed into a comfortable perch in a tall tree, lashed several bamboos in place with rattan to prevent her from falling, and curled up for the customary siesta. A few moments, and she was asleep. Perils past and perils ahead dropped from her like a discarded garment and she slept the sweet sleep of innocence. A few monkeys, chancing by, stopped to peer at her lovely form, cradled among the tree-tops, but they did not disturb her. Birds, flying high overhead, may have seen, but they tell no secrets.

It was mid-afternoon before she awoke. Adjusting the girdle of woven palm-leaves which she had fashioned to replace the

missing chawat, she resumed her journey into the interior. The loss of the chawat itself meant little to her—supremely innocent, she found nature's covering an ample garb and protection—but she keenly regretted the loss of the heirlooms.

Her plan was definitely formed. She would skirt the shore of the great and mysterious lake, traveling around its eastern extremity, and then swing north toward Mount Kini Balu. The lofty peak itself would be sufficient guide once she had rounded the lake. In this way she would approach the mountain from the opposite side on which the trader approached it, and would not be required to climb the towering heights to reach the hermitage of Laki Sadahana Worung, the ancient maker of magic, whose fame was known to all the Kayans of Borneo. There she would find sanctuary, her foster-mother had assured.

Her thoughts recurred to Sababa's parting words. Her mother had prescience of what was to come. The occurrence the latter feared had occurred. She well knew Tama's greed. Her foster-father had sold her, the white man had tried to harm her, but now, thanks to Sababa, she was not left alone, bewildered, friendless, with no place to go. Another home across the jungle wastes and mountain wilderness was open to her, provided she had strength and courage to reach it. Rambuta mentally resolved that she would not falter by the way. A deep thankfulness toward the brown-skinned woman who had mothered her filled her loyal little heart. She realized now as never before the debt that she owed Sababa.

Rested and refreshed, and sustained by high resolve, she boldly, almost joyfully, plunged again into the well-nigh impassable labyrinth of matted cane, creeper, and tree-trunk, fighting her way through obstinately. Jungle-bred, she found openings in the maze where one not so nurtured would have believed himself wholly walled in.

Her progress was necessarily slow. She had neither *parong* nor knife, the inseparable companions of the Dyak. Where a white man would have hewed his way in a straight line, she curved and circled, sometimes traveling on the ground, and some-

times high among the treetops. In this way she walked and climbed rods to make a gain of yards, breaking through the heavy growth, with creepers constantly snaring her and thorny vines and briars lacerating her face and body. When night fell she was little more than three miles from the morning's starting-point. She perceived with a sinking heart that the journey would be far longer and more severe than she had anticipated.

Her evening meal strengthened her, however, and restored her confidence. Luck was with her, for she chanced upon an ocellated pheasant caught in a snare of nature's own devising. Wringing its neck, she camped on the spot and proceeded to build a fire.

A short, dead cane of bamboo, a few strands of tough, long-bladed *alang-alang* grasses, and a stout, pliable sapling were all the implements she needed.

She broke off a section of bamboo near the base and filled it half full of soft inner pith. Into this she thrust the point end of another section of bamboo that fitted snugly. Holding the cup between her knees she twisted the bowstring about the point stick and began to revolve it rapidly. The friction thus generated soon caused the highly inflammable pith to smoke and glow. A few moments later she had a roaring fire in which to bake her bird.

It was a most delicious and appetizing morsel, particularly to the half-starved girl. Knowing that famine oft follows plenty in the jungle she saved half the meat for the next day's journey.

Resting that evening in the wide-spreading branches of an old waringin tree, with a family of great-helmeted hornbills for company, she meditated on the fact that she was weaponless. She had lost her *pisau* or knife when she lost her chawat, for it lay in its sheath, attached to that article of dress, when Seriff Massar snatched the garment away. She realized that she must have some weapon, if not for protection, at least to supply her with food.

A bow, she perceived, was of little value in the jungle. The maze of undergrowth was apt to deflect the arrow, and the bow was awkward to carry, particularly in swing-

ing from limb to limb. She promptly rejected it as unsuitable.

There remained the *sumpitan*. It was but little more difficult to construct than a good bow, although she was sorely handicapped by lack of a knife and the other necessary tools. The material for both the blow-pipe and darts were close at hand, in every clump of bamboo. She promptly resolved to devote the next day to making the weapon. Time was of little consequence to her now that she was safe from pursuit, all of life stretched before, and she was free as the wild things of the forest.

Early the next morning she went into the cane and selected a straight and sizable shoot, breaking off a length of about six feet. Hollowing this out was a task that took some time, and was finally accomplished with the aid of a smaller shoot, fitting into the orifice of the first. She then selected the sticks that were to make her arrows or darts. But the fashioning of these was a difficult matter. She had nothing to work with save splinters of bamboo, whose cutting edge was practically valueless. There were no rocks or stones in the dense, alluvial jungle country, buried deeply under centuries of leaf and vegetable mold. \* Dusk was approaching before the first arrow was completed, a rude makeshift whose efficacy she sorely doubted. She threw her work aside in despair.

Supper was a frugal meal, composed largely of roots. The last of the pheasant had disappeared at noon. Rambuta devoutly hoped that one of the snares she had set that morning, when it became apparent that the task of reducing bamboo shoots to arrows would be far greater than she had anticipated, would trap a bird or small ground animal.

She wandered a little distance into the jungle in search of a pitcher-plant. She had found what she sought and was quenching her thirst when a sound foreign to the customary jungle noises reached her ears.

She threw the pitcher-plant away in startled affright. Her body stiffened, her eyes widened in sudden terror, her ears strained to hear a repetition of the sound. It was the faint swish of a paddle touching water, and it came from a little creek not far ahead.



Rambuta darted back to the scene of her day's work. She caught up the half-completed *sumpitan* and the crudely fashioned arrow. A huge creeper dropped an inviting arm below. She caught it, swung herself upward with the agility of a monkey, and disappeared into the leafy tangle above.

The swish of the paddle was more distinct now. She cautiously made her way toward the tree, being careful to make no betrayal of her presence. The absence of voices encouraged her and calmed her panic. Borge-son, she knew, cursed incessantly. Trifles irritated him and his Dyak bearers were veritable slaves that cringed before him.

Nearing the creek she hid herself behind a giant tree and carefully peered through the fronds of a tall cluster of ferns across the narrow strip of water. The *tambangan* or dugout, whatever it might be, was very near now. It was making a laborous progress along the narrow, tortuous channel, clogged with mud-banks, on which grew in rank profusion the omnipresent water hyacinth.

The nose of a *tambangan* glided within her range of vision. The vessel contained but a single occupant. He was poling his boat along, rather than paddling it, and his face was averted from her. But she recognized him instantly by his blue chawat, bordered with broad stripes of red and white, his gold-laced turban, and the curved ebony handle of his *parong*.

"Molo!" she shrieked in an ecstasy of delight.

The Dyak whirled about, almost falling out of his canoe. His face glowed with pleasure, his eyes darted eagerly from shrub to shrub in search of her.

"Rambuta Mas?" he cried exultingly.

She stepped out boldly. A single thrust and the Kayan sent the nose of his *tambangan* crashing into the bank. The next moment he was at her side.

"Now Djath be thanked that I have found you," he cried. "I have followed you all of these two days fearful lest I should miss you and that the jungle had swallowed you up."

"But, Molo, how did you know? What brought you here?" she asked bewilderedly.

He looked at her aggrievedly.

"Did you think I would desert you?" he asked in a low voice. "Did you think I would leave you to the mercy of the *orang blanda*?"

"But how did you know--" Her voice faltered. Color flamed in her cheeks as the thought suddenly occurred that he might have been a witness to her narrow escape from shame.

"When you danced the head dance I sat by the fire and saw the evil in the face of the *tuan*," he explained simply. "I knew then what was passing in his mind. I knew, too, what Tama Kwayang would do, for I know his greed and his lack of love for you. So I got my weapons and canoe in readiness, and waited. When you paddled up-stream with the *tuan*, I was not far behind.

"I nearly missed the bayou where you camped that night, but the sound of their voices betrayed them. I heard the *tuan* call to you when the fires burned low. I suspected what was in his heart and crawled under his tent. Had you not escaped, Karen-child, the head of the evil one would have been separated from his body before he could have harmed you. But I let him go because I did not deem it wise to let him know that you had a friend in the jungle. For I knew that if he thought you were alone he would the sooner give up search for you, thinking that the jungle madness would come upon you, and you would be glad to return to him to escape the awful solitude."

"But how could you follow me here?" Rambuta demanded, still mystified.

"Years ago, with my father, I paddled up the Kowang River," Molo replied. "I remembered this creek, which flows far eastward and has its headwaters, if I mistake not, in Lake Kini Balu. Knowing the direction of your flight, for I followed you for a way, I hastened up the creek in the hope of cutting you off before you crossed it. I had about given up in despair when I heard your voice."

"Have you supped?" Rambuta asked with a woman's practical sense. The young Dyak acknowledged that he had not.

"Give me your *sumpitan*," she directed, and promptly helped herself. "You will

find my camp close by"—she pointed out the direction. "While you build the fire I will find game."

Molo obediently secured his *tambangan* and trotted away. Rambuta scurried lightly and silently into the jungle. Her heart was singing, the thought that she had one friend in the world who was willing to undergo any danger for her relieved the depression that her apparent absolute friendlessness had brought upon her.

Good fortune came not singly. A crested partridge rose at her approach, only to be transfixed by one of the darts, for she was an expert in the use of the blow-pipe. A flying squirrel was her next victim. She was returning to the camp with these when a small pig suddenly broke out of the thick cover. He was as surprised as she, and started at her curiously, but his curiosity was fatal. A dart entered his throat, piercing the vein. Laden with these trophies of the chase she returned to camp to receive Molo's admiring plaudits. Never had they eaten a more delicious meal.

Presently their fire burned low. The jungle gloom lay all about them. Rambuta gazed steadily at the coals. After a long pause her lips tightened with resolve. A bit of color that was not entirely due to the heat cast by the dying flames suffused her cheeks. She lifted her eyes and stared bravely at her companion.

"I cannot marry you, Molo," she declared in a low voice. "You must leave me to-morrow and let me journey alone."

He met her glance unflinchingly. His savage, tattooed features were ennobled by a look of supreme renunciation.

"I know, Karen-child," he told her softly. "Sababa told me. Thou art a daughter of the ancients, sent us by the gods. I am only a *mardaheka*, a freeman of the Kayans. Thou art not for such as me. But I can serve thee, with my life if need be. It is not good for a woman to be alone in the jungle. Therefore I will go with thee until thou hast reached the house of Laki Sadahana."

Rambuta dared not reply. Such friendship, after all that she had endured from the Kayan women, her foster-father, and Borgeson, overwhelmed her.

"It is well," she finally whispered. Had they not been alone, she would have thrown herself on his breast and wept.

## CHAPTER X.

### MOLO'S SACRIFICE

EARLY the next morning the two children of the jungle stepped into Molo's *tambangan* and continued their journey. There was music in their hearts. The morning was perfect, clear and still, the calm of the jungle lay upon them as a benediction. The creek twisted deviously through a shaded tunnel in which the glare of the tropic sun was softened and refined by countless reflections till all its harshness was passed away.

All the charm of the deep and untrod forest was unfolded to them. They saw gavials, lazily sunning themselves on the mud-banks, that stared unresponsively through half-closed lids at them as they floated by. Troops of krah monkeys and the curious proboscis monkey, with its extraordinary nasal appendage, swarmed in the treetops and held noisy conversation. The rare *tingeling*—*Manis Javanica*—a much-sought prize of naturalists, was not at all rare in this little-visited region. Civet cats snarled at them from the trees, and, as if to make up for this incivility, Malacca parrots gave them a vociferous welcome. Gapers made melody.

Their progress, although more rapid than Rambuta had been able to make overland, was necessarily slow. The creek was full of shallows which could only be traversed by stepping into the water and pulling the *tambangan* after them. It was necessary to keep an alert eye for crocodiles, for they fairly swarmed in certain portions of the stream.

At noon they lunched on roast pig and what was left of the partridge. Their evening meal was largely similar. Each carefully selected a tree, constructed a rude shelter, and went to sleep with the same calm security as the average city resident living along a well-policed street.

The next two days were largely similar. Then the character of the country began to

change. At first they came to a sandy stretch where the nipah palm gave place to the arroorree tree, and the giants of the forest sensibly diminished to a low, thorny scrub which their unprotected bodies were unable to penetrate. It was a most depressing country and both were happy when they left it behind to enter a more promising region of low upland broken by swamp.

The upland swiftly receded, the swamp gaining ascendancy. Molo had never ascended this far up-stream, but Rambuta was satisfied, from the character of the country, that they were entering the great belt of morass that skirts the south side of Lake Kini Balu. She had heard old hunters tell of it, tales of horror, of unbroken wilderness cut up by a network of canals and bayous that formed an impenetrable maze in which men might wander for years without finding an outlet. They had told her that this portion of the *rimboe* was haunted, that it was a *negri* whose *hantu token* reserved it for themselves, barring all mortals, and leading those who entered to a terrible doom.

As she watched the gloomy avenues thicken, her heart began beating more rapidly. The superstition that is an indispensable part of Dyak training was upon her. In fancy she saw spirit eyes watching them from the thick undergrowth and heard spirit voices discussing the punishment that should be visited upon them for their presumption.

She looked at Molo. The young Dyak was ashen-gray under the brown tan. His eyes flitted wildly from bank to bank. It was apparent that he quaked with terror.

"Molo," she called. He jumped as if hit with an arrow.

"You are frightened, Molo," she accused. "Why?"

"The *hantu token* of Lake Kini Balu," he gasped.

"Shall we turn back?"

He looked at her. His quivering lips tightened. A look of desperation came into his eyes.

"I will go where thou goest. Karen-child," he declared courageously.

"I know, Molo," she replied softly. "I must go to Laki Sadahana. And there is no other way but this."

She meditated. Her glance fell on the remains of the roasted pig and other edibles they were carrying with them into the wilderness as a precaution against starvation. Near them lay Molo's spear, knife, and a *sumpitan*.

Bending swiftly forward she threw both food and weapons into the stream, retaining only the knife.

"It is a gift to the *hantu token*," she declared, in answer to Molo's amazed remonstrance. "Now their wrath will be appeased."

That night they slept in the *tambangan*, each curled up at an end. They slept fitfully, with many starts to wakefulness, for all night long bull gavials roared their hoarse challenges, leopards screamed in the forest, and once they heard the death cry of a stricken deer when a tiger made his kill. When dawn came Rambuta awoke to find a huge *mias chappin* swinging down from an overhanging branch to the roof of their *kadjang*, and her startled scream caused Molo nearly to upset the canoe. The orangutan swung swiftly upward out of reach.

They were glad to leave the place. At the same time each looked forward with secret dread to what the day might bring forth. It was evident, each felt without admitting it to the other, that the *hantu token* were not yet appeased.

The wilderness continued to thicken. The creek dwindled to an almost unnavigable canal. A succession of canals and bayous cut it, stagnant pools of water emitting an unsufferable odor of decaying vegetable and animal matter. The bed was largely liquid mud, through which it was equally impossible to pole or paddle. Had it not been for the overhanging growth they would have been left helplessly stranded.

What frightened Rambuta the most, however, was the almost total absence of game fit for human food. The colonies of monkeys had long ago been left behind. They saw no more mias. Flying squirrels and creatures of their ilk had apparently vanished. Of course there were no ground animals or birds, and creatures of the semi-aquatic type proved elusive. Rambuta looked in vain for a turtle.

When noon came they tightened their belts and went on without eating. There was nothing else to be done. Evening found them as illy supplied with food. Rambuta bitterly regretted the prodigality with which she had thrown all their little reserve on the waters of the creek, reflecting that the *hantu-token* had shown little appreciation of her sacrifice.

That night they remained, as before, in the *tambangan*. Crocodiles thrashed around them, occasionally nearly overturning the canoe. It was a night of constant terror and sleeplessness. Thoroughly exhausted, they prayerfully welcomed the coming of the dawn.

The next day was a repetition of the one before. Once they saw a turtle, sunning itself on a bank, but it slid into the mud before Molo could reach it. In her bitter disappointment Rambuta sat down and wept. She felt strangely weak and giddy, and the gnawing pains in her stomach would not be allayed by chewing leaves and the inner bark of certain trees and fern-roots.

On the morning of the third day, after a night of worse horror than before, Rambuta found herself scarcely able to take her place at the bow of the *tambangan*. Molo, in desperation, announced his intention to plunge into the thorny jungle in search of some creature whose flesh would give them life, but Rambuta hysterically refused to let him go. She pointed out that they would be more likely to find game along the margin of the stream than anywhere else. It was a logical argument. But the real reason for her refusal to let him go was a poignant dread of being left alone. The curse of the swamp was upon her. She saw malignant spirits in every bush and tree, and with a woman's helplessness, turned to Molo for protection.

About mid-morning they reached a place where the stream ran a little more freely, and the bottom mud was not so thick. Hopeful to find this an omen of a more cheerful country, they poled along more swiftly, scanning the banks eagerly for a sign of game.

The nose of the *tambangan* shot under a low-hanging bough. Rambuta failed to see it, and Molo's cry of warning came

too late. She lost her balance and swung dizzily over the side of the canoe.

There was a swirl of water less than a dozen feet away. To his horror Molo saw the gaping jaws of a huge crocodile opened to receive the helpless girl. There was apparently no escape for her.

His course was decided in an instant. With a wild cry that expressed all his terror at her peril he plunged into the water directly in front of the wide-open jaws of the giant gavial. His arms closed about Rambuta, lifted her high, and dropped her into the *tambangan*. Then the jaws closed about his middle.

"Rambuta!" the girl heard. It was a cry of exultation, a paean of victorious love. The waters boiled and foamed for a moment. The yellow stream was tinted a deep carmine. Then all was still.

Rambuta Mas collapsed in the bottom of the *tambangan*. For the first time in her life she fainted.

Hours passed before consciousness was restored. She stared vacantly at first into a heaven of arched green, close above her, then struggled bewilderedly to a sitting posture. Recollection returned and she stared with frozen horror at Molo's vacant place and the placid waters of the stream, yellow and oily as before, all traces of the tragedy obliterated. Burying her face in her hands she wept as she had not wept since Sababa's death.

A peculiar cry aroused her. The *tambangan* had drifted against the bank and a little krah monkey was regarding her benevolently. Seizing Molo's knife she leaped to her feet and thrust at the creature's vitals. It dropped dead in the boat. For the first time in three days she had food.

She gazed with superstitious dread at the little krah lying at her feet and at the somber forest shades about her. She remembered what the old Kayan hunters had told her, that the *hantu token* of Lake Kini Balu demanded human life as a gift ere they were appeased. The tale was true, the spirits had taken their toll.

"Why could it not have been me?" she moaned. "I have not a friend in the world, and Molo has a mother."

There was a little ridge of sand near by,

She skinned the monkey, built a fire, and roasted the flesh. Most of it was set aside for the next day. Bitter experience had taught her the pangs of starvation.

That night she was alone. The gavials fought and thrashed about the water as before, tigers and other carnivora uttered their hunting cries, but she heard nothing. The next morning she accepted the evidence of a restful night without amazement. The *hantu token* were appeased, she said.

Of her hardships during the next eleven days in the grim struggle with jungle wilderness, swamp, and morass, an endless tale might be written. In some way she rounded the lake. She had entered the swamp equipped with a canoe, weapons, food, and a warrior companion; she emerged with nothing but Molo's knife. All the rest had either been lost or discarded. Her skin was cut with thorns and poisoned by venomous creepers, there was scarcely an inch of it that was unmarked by bruise or scratch. Her cheeks were pinched and sunken, and her eyes glowed with the unnatural light of those who have witnessed great suffering and endured.

Mount Kini Balu, cloud-massed, serene, loomed before her. There was jungle on its upper slopes, but it was the jungle of the uplands. The thorny screw-pine of the flats was behind. The incredible journey had been accomplished.

Two days sufficed to cross the jungle belt. She had been steadily climbing toward the great water-shed. Ahead of her lay a rock formation, full of chasms and yawning crevices, a country to task the mountaineer, but for her it held no terrors. She had conquered the jungle, she did not fear the open. Across these barren wastes of *padang batu*, she knew, lay the hermitage of Laki Sadahana Worung.

For two days she climbed the mountain. Her limbs were faint, she no longer possessed the strength she once had. On the afternoon of the third day she discovered a well-worn path. She followed it to a huge cave, whose entrance was like the entrance to a mammoth temple. A bent and withered figure, dressed in the blue chawat and colored headgear of the Dyaks, stood in the doorway. He awaited her approach.

"Is this the Father of all Knowledge, the Beloved of the Gods, our Manang, Laki Sadahana Worung?" she ventured timidly.

"Come in with me, Sababa's Karen-child," he returned kindly. "I have long waited for thee."

## CHAPTER XI.

### "INSULINDE."

BRUCE WESTFIELD stood on the deck of an East Indian liner and watched the panorama of the Indies unfold. Java Head rose to the right, black and towering, majestic as Gibraltar. The blue waters of the Sunda Straits rolled and rippled under a gentle southeast monsoon. Ahead the Anjer sampans swarmed out to meet them, riding high on the crest of the swells.

The liner plunged on. On the other side the frowning chin of Cape Java dimpled and smiled in sunlit strips of silvery beach lined with clustered huts and level stretches of shore-palm. Behind them, terrace upon terrace, lay rice and coffee plantations, broken by tall groves of waringin, whose broad-spreading branches concealed the village that lay within, as a mother-hen hides her chicks. In the far distance Mount Karang rose, blue and imposing, garlanded with a silver-and-rose-tinted cloud. The morning breeze was fragrant with spice and tea blossom.

On came the sampans, swarming with gay plumaged birds, golden-ripe bananas and purple mangosteen, custard apples and dates, squawking poultry and talking parrots of an unbelievable plumage. A passenger tossed a coin and a score of glistening brown bodies, naked save for their loin-cloths, plunged deep, to come up grinning with the cry for more, while the lucky diver held the coin between his gleaming teeth. The boatmen screeched their wares in every tongue of the eastern and western world.

"Enjoying it?" a voice said at Westfield's side. He grinned with boyish enthusiasm at Erskine.

"I feel just like a kid on circus day," he acknowledged. "George, it's great, isn't it?"



"Next to home, it is the most wonderful country in the world," was the quiet response.

Late that afternoon the long, well-kept wharves of Tanjong Priok, port of Batavia, crept into view. The liner slid alongside and discharged its swarm of human freight. Seated in a compartment with Erskine and Kantoor, Bruce rode swiftly toward the capital of Holland's great colonial empire in a railway coach comparable to the best in Europe.

"It all seems like a dream to me," he declared as they whirled through Weltevreden, a suburb of Batavia, and watched the gaily painted poles flit by, every one of them flying the standard of the Netherlands.

"Rijswijk, the European portion of Batavia, is the most European of all the cities of the east," Kantoor asserted with conviction. The little Dutchman's eyes sparkled with joy. Java was his home, every foot of ground they traversed was familiar, and the deep joy that home always brings to the returned exile was his.

Two days at Batavia was all their schedule called for. Bruce left with regret, wistfully eager to continue his explorations in the quaint Chinese kampong, with its curious shops, multicolored flags flying everywhere, and placid citizenry; the picturesque Pasar Baroe, where a stream of life, fed by every portion of Asia, flowed continuously by; the Doktor Djawa-school, with its thousands of little black-eyed, brown-skinned Javanese, reading, writing, and performing turner exercises in precisely the same manner as American children of their age; the beautiful Wilhelmina park; and the wondrous botanical gardens of Buitenzorg, quite the finest in the world, Kantoor assured him. But the necessary equipment had been purchased and transportation engaged, therefore, perforce, they must go.

The trip to Borneo was made in one of the royal packets (Koninklijke Paketvaartboot) that operate between the various ports of the Dutch possessions. It was a roundabout voyage, made in the leisurely manner customary to the Indies, where haste is a sure precursor to nervous breakdown or apoplexy. Stops were made *en*

*route* at Soerabaya, the island of Bali, Lombok, and Macassar.

Bruce had plenty of opportunity to study his fellow voyagers. There were less than a half-score first-class passengers aboard; two traders in copra, a rattan buyer, a German drummer selling machinery, three men, who from their talk were apparently merchants at Macassar, and a stoutish Dutch woman from the same city who was returning home with her son, a petulant youngster of about nine years of age with a mania for sweets.

All talked Dutch, and, with Dutch conservatism, minded their own affairs and left their American fellow passengers severely alone. There was only one exception—one of the Macassar merchants who, on learning the object of their trip, confessed that he too had once been an orchid-hunter, and gave them a great deal of valuable information about the northern portions of Kotei, the principality they expected to visit.

Kantoor, of course, was in his element. Westfield watched him with considerable amusement as he circulated from group to group, complacently blissful, jabbering his native Dutch in a perfect ecstasy of happiness. He took no pains to avoid displaying his greater cosmopolitanism and his perfect equality with the young American nabob whom he accompanied, he hinted, somewhat in the rôle of a mentor. All this percolated to Bruce by degrees, and he chuckled inwardly at the deferential "*mynheers*" accorded Kantoor as he strutted about the deck.

The third-class passengers, herded on the lower deck, were far more interesting, however. They swarmed as thickly as bees in a hive, Malays, Arabs, Parsees, Kling, Javanese, and Chinese. Each group kept apart from the other as much as their crowded quarters permitted. Religious differences were defined even more clearly than racial, and it was strikingly apparent that the Parsees and Mohammedans held each other in equal superlative contempt.

The Javanese were largely coolies, *en route* to the rubber and kina plantations of the various islands to work out indentures for debt. The customary contract

was for three years. Poor creatures, life for them was but one slavery after another, with short but hectic periods of prosperity between, for they were hopelessly unable to retain any wealth that might pass into their hands. Yet they were apparently happy and wholly reconciled to their condition. They were accompanied by their families and all their meager household supplies, a few mats, cushions, earthen pots, and the inevitable sirih-box.

The Malays were largely merchants, proud, haughty creatures of Mohammedan persuasion. Several of them wore the *hadji-tulband* that proclaimed a pilgrimage to Mecca. These were accorded the major measure of esteem by other members of the faith of all nationalities.

The Chinese were the most exclusive. They looked with bland indifference on the turmoil of native life about them, and meditated on the profits to be made at the next port. All, without exception, were of the pedler class, vendors of the much-prized *toko-artikelen*, the cheap finery that so delights the savage heart.

Of Soerabaya Bruce gained but a fleeting impression of a picturesque water-front, busy marts, and an astonishing industry that differentiates the port from all other equatorial cities.

The next stop was Blelling, on the island of Bali. It was a city of temples and shrines—"more temples than houses," as Bruce laughingly remarked to Erskine. The tall, pagoda roofs rose, one upon the other, to an extraordinary height, on walls of solid masonry. "Like a stack of wheat cakes," Bruce observed, and Erskine laughingly complimented him on the accuracy of his simile. One of the interesting finds was a temple evidently patronized by people of wealth, for its outer walls were of glistening porcelain in many colors.

Any vacant plot of ground unoccupied by a temple was the site of a *koelkoel*, a shrine in which hung a great wooden block which sounded the call to prayers. Bruce was wishful of staying until the next morning, that he might hear the tremendous majesty of sound when all the *koelkoel* blocks were struck in unison, but the steamer's sailing that evening prevented.

"I've never realized the wonder and beauty of the Indies before," he remarked earnestly to Erskine and Kantoor that night. "They are more fascinating than India, and the least known region of the world."

Macassar was a disappointment after Soerabaya. Westfield had anticipated great things from the famed capital of Celebes, one of the richest pearls of the Indies, but he found little that excelled. The European business district was not to be compared with that of Soerabaya, and the thriving hum of industry that filled the Oedjong quarter of the Javanese port was sadly lacking in the Celebes capital. The harbor, however, was filled with a majestic row of ships, flying the flags of the Netherlands, China, Siam, Belgium, Great Britain, Germany, Portugal, and the United States. The commerce of Macassar, at least, was not inconsiderable, he perceived.

They visited the European quarter, with its wide streets lined with white houses almost buried under tall tamarinds and kenari-trees. At Kantoor's insistence they inspected the fort, a relic of the seventeenth century, and built of solid masonry to resist the artillery of that period. The old name "Rotterdam" still clings to it.

The sun was sinking in the west when the brown roofs and yellow sands of Macassar disappeared from view. Bruce turned toward Erskine, and drew a deep breath.

"To-morrow, Borneo!" he exclaimed.

"Borneo to-morrow," Erskine acknowledged, with a slight smile at the young man's enthusiasm. "We ought to sight Cape Kumungun before sundown twenty-four hours hence. Another thirty-six hours will bring us to Sandakan. Then we can say that the great adventure has actually begun."

## CHAPTER XII.

### MAROONED IN THE JUNGLE.

AT Sandakan, Bruce Westfield first began to appreciate the value of Kobes Kantoor to the expedition. It was necessary to engage the services of native

guides and boatmen, and in this art the little Dutchman proved himself a past master. Kantoor knew the *lingua franca* of the coasts almost as well as he knew his native Dutch, and spoke half of the hundred odd dialects and languages of the Indies with a tolerable degree of fluency.

He was intimately acquainted with the devious workings of the native mind and the oriental love of trading. He cajoled, begged, and threatened, pandered to the vanity of one and hinted darkly at reporting another to the Resident, and vociferated perfect torrents of language when a mooted point arose.

The net result was that after three days they got three fairly comfortable and seaworthy tambangans, one to carry their impedimenta and two for themselves, and the services of six guides and boatmen.

"I could never have done it," Erskine laughingly confessed to Bruce. "Whenever I hired a boatman, I always got the laziest lout in the port, and I paid him double the usual wages. He loafed as he pleased and robbed me blind. I've always felt myself to be at the mercy of those chaps."

"It was not an easy task," Kantoor volubly told them, after the selection had been completed. "There are few guides here who are willing to go into the interior. They are Ida'an, and there is an ancient feud between them and the Kayahs, who live in the jungle. While there is no head-hunting along the coast since the British and Dutch took control of the island, and nominally none in the interior, the Ida'an tell me that the jungle holds many secrets."

"I don't like the looks of that head boatman," Westfield observed, watching the shifting glances of a tall, ill-favored native, whose physiognomy indicated a mixed Dyak and Malay lineage.

"Muda Pangeram?" Kantoor exclaimed. He shrugged his shoulders. "I don't like his looks myself, Mynheer Westfield," he acknowledged. "I should hate to be compelled to trust him. But we are three, and well-armed. Moreover, the government has taught the natives that mishaps to white travelers to whom they hire themselves will not be countenanced. They will be care-

ful to see that we come to no injury. But it will be no easy task to manage them."

"Wouldn't it be better to look a little further before going into the jungle?" Erskine suggested.

Kantoor shook his head. "*Neen, mynheer*," he negatived. "There are no better in Sandakan. Nor are we likely to find any along the coast. Guides are scarce. You must remember that we are about to enter a wholly unknown country, of which even the Dyaks themselves know very little. Fifty miles inland you will find natives who have never seen the sea. The rivers of Borneo are her only highways, the jungle is wholly impassable. Hostile tribes occupy various territories along the same river, and travel is necessarily precarious. I think we are very fortunate in finding a boatman who has been as far inland as the chief Kayan villages."

Since Kantoor had spent many years orchid-hunting in Borneo, they acquiesced in his judgment. Erskine suggested to Bruce, however, that it would be well to keep a watchful eye on Muda Pangeram and his crew.

"Not that they would commit violence," the lawyer added. "But I'm positive they'd rob us if they thought they had the slightest chance."

The next morning the start was made. Kantoor, Muda Pangeram, and one of the boatmen occupied the leading tambangan; Erskine and Westfield, with two boatmen, were in the second, and the other boatmen with the luggage occupied the two rear-most. The lower stretches of the stream, within reach of the tides, were thickly covered with the beautiful nipah palm, whose tall, delicate fronds rose like giant ostrich feathers. Flocks of padi birds circled low about them as they breasted the sluggish current. The country was low and swampy, and the river rambled through it in sweeping curves, so that their progress was necessarily slow.

An hour after luncheon Muda Pangeram turned the nose of his tambangan toward a sandy ridge along the bank, and Kantoor shouted at them. Bruce was unable to distinguish the words because of the distance that separated the two canoes, but

Erskine replied with a stentorian, "All right," and promptly directed their boatmen to follow their chief.

"What's the idea?" Bruce inquired curiously.

"It's about time for the tide to turn," Erskine replied. "If I'm not mistaken, we will witness a rare phenomenon, peculiar to these latitudes, and known as a bore. There's nothing like it in the world except a wall of water rushing down-stream when a dam bursts. I've never seen it, but I've heard of it."

The other traffic on the river was also scurrying to the banks. Presently Westfield heard a droning sound, like the distant roar of surf on a shingly beach. It grew rapidly louder. Looking down-stream, he was amazed to see the flat plane of the river suddenly rise to a perpendicular that boiled and foamed like the base of Niagara and rushed toward them at an astounding speed.

Back of it was a solid sheet of water, the roaring tide coming in, sweeping on with an irresistible majesty. The avalanche swept by them with the deafening thunder of a mighty surge, a yellowish-brown flood that carried the flotsam and jetsam of the marsh country on its crest.

Fortunately for them, there was a narrow bayou near by, in which Muda had moored their tambangans. This escaped the violence of the flood, rising more gradually. When the bore was out of sight, and the river had quieted, Muda methodically led the way back to the boats and they resumed their journey.

"Another new experience," Bruce commented. "I see it's risky to travel about a country like this without having some one with you who knows something about it."

"We'll have a lot more," Erskine responded grimly. "I only hope Kantoor will be able to handle his Dyaks. Some of them are grumbling already."

By nightfall they were out of reach of salt water and the nipah country. Screw-pine supplanted the low-shore palm, a none too agreeable change to Westfield, who conceived a violent prejudice against the somber, low-growing trees after coming in con-

tact with their thorns while trying to recover a krah that he had shot. In places the river widened to a small lake. The sluggish waters were generally overgrown with pandanus and water hyacinth.

They stayed that night in a Dyak long-house. It was an unique experience to Westfield, who had never seen communal life practised to quite such an extent as having one roof shelter an entire tribe. He remarked on the nudity of the women, clad only in chawats.

"I presume, living this way, that they haven't the moral scruples of civilized society," he observed to Erskine.

"On the contrary," the lawyer replied, "chastity is practically universal. An adulterous couple is punished by death, both the man and the woman. There is no double standard here. Americans could profit immensely by adopting the example of these simple savages."

"I'm surprised that contact with Europeans doesn't change them," Bruce continued.

"It doesn't, because they will have nothing to do with white men," Erskine replied. "They are hospitable, and their house is always open to you unless it has become tabu on account of disease, or because the omens are being taken. But you cannot abide with them."

"They have steadily resisted the invasion of missionaries, not with force or violence, but with a persistent refusal to listen to them that has quite discouraged the best of them. Sarawak is the most important city of Borneo, and the Dyaks of that province are the best treated and most contented on the island, but as proof of their refusal to mingle with the white man there is not a Dyak living in Sarawak city."

"Strange!" Bruce observed thoughtfully. "At the same time I can't blame them. For an aborigine to mingle with a white man means eventual extermination for the former."

"That is the verdict of history," Erskine agreed.

After supper Bruce enjoyed himself inspecting the house of his hosts. The structure was over two hundred feet long, and

built on a series of bamboo posts. The floors were also of bamboo except the main gallery, which was of rough boards, hewn out by hand with a biliong, the Dyak adze.

On one side ran a series of small cubicles, where each family slept apart from the others. There was a raised platform on the other side, which, Kantoor informed him, was to be their sleeping apartment.

On the numerous posts that ran through the house to the roof the Dyaks hung their various equipment—back baskets, paddles, spears, blow-pipes, and other paraphernalia. The old men sat apart, pounding their betel in bamboo cups and sagely nodding to each other across the spiral flames of a brisk fire that burned in an earthen base at the center of the dwelling.

Before leaving the next morning they gained the everlasting friendship of the village by a generous distribution of tobacco. Shouts of "*Tabet tuan*," (good day, master), followed them long after they were out of sight around the next bend of the river.

By noon they had left the region of screw-pine behind. The river flowed silently between tall stretches of jungle. The sunlight filtered to them through a thick, leafy screen. Monkeys played in the tree-tops, and colonies of gibbons scurried away at their approach.

Occasionally they passed a slashing where fire had killed the life of the great trees, and they stood in their sorrowful nakedness, save for the epiphytes blossoming in their upper branches.

A sense of awe came upon Westfield. The solemn gloom of the tenebrous shades, the infinite silence, the majesty of the great jungle giants, the pressure of enormous vegetation walling them in, strangely moved him. He felt himself in another world, where man and his works faded to nothingness in the presence of the mighty creations of an omnipotent God.

Matthew Arnold's immortal sonnet recurred to him:

Two lessons, Nature, let me learn of thee—  
Two lessons that in every wind are blown;  
Two blending duties, harmoniz'd in one,  
Though the loud world proclaim their enmity;  
Of toil unsever'd from tranquillity:

Of labor, that in one short hour outgrows  
Man's noisy schemes, accomplish'd in repose  
Too great for haste, too high for rivalry.

Yes, while on earth a thousand discords ring,  
Man's weak complainings mingling with his  
toil,

Still do thy sleepless ministers move on,  
Their glorious course in silence perfecting;  
Still working, chiding still our vain turmoil,  
Laborers that shall not fail, when man is gone.

That night they slept for the first time under canvas. The myriad insect life of the jungle droned and hummed and buzzed around them. Westfield's dreams were a curious commingling of weird sounds and weirder visions in which his old life and the present were inextricably mixed, a pot-pouri of the multitude of new impressions that had lodged in his plastic brain since Java Head first raised its somber crags above the horizon.

Once he awoke with a start to hear a gaval boom a challenge on the farther bank and a whole flock of night birds screech their indignant protest at this interruption of the jungle harmony. Out of the discordancy rose the clear, sweet voice of an unknown feathered songster carolling its full heart out to the silent stars. Westfield returned to sleep thanking God that he had not lived without knowing Borneo.

For ten days and nights they traveled in this way, penetrating constantly deeper into the jungle. On Kantoor's advice they struck north of the principal Kayan villages.

"Where there are *bruinevelten* (brown-skins), there you find orchid-hunters," the little Dutchman observed. "To find what is new you must go into new country, where even the Dyaks do not go. That will be the Kini Balu country, where we are now heading."

It chanced that Muda Pangeram, who knew a little English, overheard them. He said nothing. But that night, when they reached their camping place, he and his associates had a whispered consultation. The next morning they refused to go on.

"What's the reason?" Erskine inquired.

"*Sehub hantu* (because of the spirits)," the mongrel chief replied. "Around Lake Kini Balu there is a great swamp. That swamp is sacred to the *hantu token*. Who-



ever ventures therein pays the penalty with his life."

Kantoor stormed and threatened. Muda remained firm. He would guide them back to Sandakan or any other port. But farther into the interior he and his followers would not go.

Westfield fumed and fretted. He saw the entire expedition fall flat at the start because of the nonsensical stupidity and superstitions of a few natives. He heard Jimmie Allemann's laughter as the latter pocketed his check, the raillery of his friends. In desperation he walked up to the disputants and said to Kantoor:

"Tell him we'll double his pay if he'll go on. Promise him anything."

Muda Pangeram's face lit with an avacious gleam. He had heard and understood.

A glance at the half-blood's face told Kantoor the story. His own features were inexpressive. He repeated Bruce's offer. After some dickerings the Malay accepted.

They made slow progress that day. There was constantly something wrong with the *tambangans*, particularly the two rearmost craft which persisted in dropping behind. Finally Kantoor suggested to Erskine and Westfield that they take the lead while he made up the rear and saw to it that none of the craft dropped out. When sundown came, they had made less than half the usual day's journey.

The next morning they were faced with another strike. Summoned to answer why the boatmen did not shake down the tents and pack them in the *tambangans*, Muda Pangeram made the same sullen excuse that he had made the day previous:

*"Sebab hantu."*

This time Kantoor was firm. Bruce, chastened by a severe lecture from the choleric little Dutchman who made it plain that he would tolerate no interference with his leadership of the expedition so long as they were in the jungle, kept aloof. When Muda blandly suggested that the young *tuan's* opinion be secured he was given a thorough tongue-lashing by Kantoor.

But all the argument was of no avail. Muda and the boatmen remained firm,

they would not go on, even when told that if they did not pack up instantly the promised double wages would be forfeited.

The uncompromising attitude of the three white men forced a day's stay in camp. Kantoor expressed the confident opinion that the Dyaks would show signs of weakening the next morning. Erskine, who had been quietly studying Muda Pangeram's face and had noted the dangerous look in his eyes when his plans were blocked, thought otherwise but reserved his opinion.

On the lawyer's suggestion, they decided to keep watch that night, dividing the night into three shifts, of which Kantoor was to have the first, Erskine the second, and Bruce the third. Somewhere in the dead of night, when the cold fog had settled over the landscape and the jungle about them was dripping a heavy tropic dew, Bruce was awakened by a firm hand on his shoulder, gently shaking him. It was Erskine calling him to take his watch. He stumbled out in a semistupor. For a time he listened to the myriad voices of night. Gradually these died. He fell asleep, with his rifle across his knees.

When he awoke it was broad daylight. He crawled guiltily out of the tent, ashamed of his negligence. Kantoor was on the river-bank, staring up and down stream. Erskine stood before the remains of their fire, chewing a leaf.

A glance at the lawyer's face brought a startled look of anxiety to Bruce's features. Something was amiss. The Dyaks? He looked around for them. There were none in sight.

"What's happened?" he cried. "Have the Dyaks left us?"

"It seems that way," Erskine replied quietly.

It suddenly occurred to Bruce that their *tambangans* were no longer moored to the tree to which they had tied them.

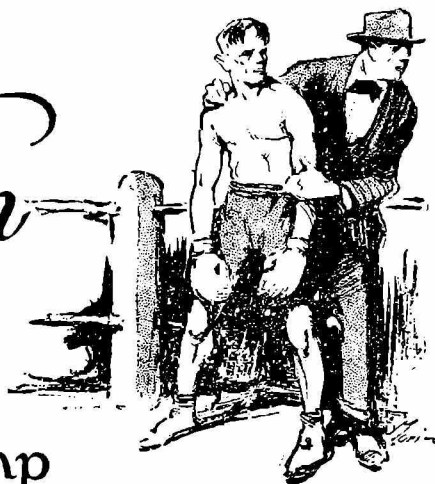
"Where are the boats?" he asked, the words sticking in his throat as a terrible fear began to grip him.

"Gone, all gone," Erskine responded dully. "The scoundrels cleaned us out of everything."

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

# Go 'way Woman by

Samuel G. Camp



**B**RINGING W. Shakespeare up to date, all the world's a movie, and, during his youthful life, a guy is liable to find himself called upon to play 'most everything from the comic cop in a two-reel comedy-scream to the leading gent in a seven-reel superfeature. For example, take a look at me. No charge. Maybe you wouldn't believe that there was once a period, a couple of commas and several semicolons in my existence when I used to go round with a pocket bulging with highly embossed business-cards which proclaimed to the world that I was "Mr. Budlong Peters, manager of Mr. Pinkus McCabe, the 'Cyanide Kid,' coming middleweight champion of the world."

I mind the time me and the Cyanide Kid arrived back in the big town after a highly successful and destructive tour through the pugilistic sticks. On that trip Pinkus McCabe had proved beyond the passing shadow of a doubt that when I nicknamed him the "Cyanide Kid" I did a first-rate job of christening; he certainly was poison to his opponents. So me and the kid mushes back to the metropolis with the idea of cooking up some trouble with a bird by the name of "Battling" Burns, who was next door to, or, to use the technical term, runner-up to the middleweight title-holder. Having disposed of Mr. Battling Burns we would then give our kind attention to the champ.

The day after our return I put this matter up to Battling Burns's manager, a guy by the name of Jake Kepplemann.

"Go get a reputation," he tells me.

He had his hand on his watch-pocket, so I decided to take his advice.

Me and the Kid immediately institutes a campaign of frightfulness among the local battlers with the purpose of forcing Burns and Kepplemann to give us a tumble—which tumble the Kid agrees to hand right back to the Battler as good as new. We fight at least once and sometimes twice a week, and the results are uniformly satisfactory to all concerned—except maybe to the One Round So-and-Sos, or Knockout This-and-Thats, which the Cyanide Kid lays away with monotonous regularity.

Then, with the Kid going like a three-alarm fire and accumulating a large and ear-splitting following among the fight fans, along comes old Aloysius X. Trouble and sits into the game. In a word or two, me and the Kid attends a performance of "Oh, Look, Ernestine!" which is playing an indefinite and highly profitable engagement at Bannermann's Refined Burlesque Theater, and the Kid proceeds to crash blindly into what is sometimes called love; the cause of Mr. McCabe's heart-trouble being a young lady who has nicknamed herself Rubye de Lisle, and who shakes a shapely foot in the Beauty Chorus of Forty—fourth from

the right as the fat guy who comes in late steps on your ankle.

Beauty Chorus of Forty was right. I doubted if some of 'em would ever gaze on fifty again. But, as for Miss Rubye de Lisle, and without going into particulars further than to say that Rubye classed in the featherweight division and featured a lot of yellow hair, which might have been original, but probably wasn't, and two large violet eyes, I'd say the Kid had a fairly good excuse, as such things go. Notwithstanding which, this twist in the scenario was as welcome to me as was prohibition to Broadway. Me and the Kid had a definite purpose in view and, if I knew anything of such matters, the beautiful Rubye would prove of no great assistance in accomplishing that purpose.

However, it's a wise guy that knows when he's licked, and I didn't give Pinkus any argument beyond this:

"Kid," I says, "love's young scream is no doubt all very well, but business is business—and don't you forget it!"

"I ain't liable to," he says, "not with you around. You get me this guy Burns," he says, "and I'll show you."

"Fair enough," I says.

This was a few days after Pinkus, in one of the various ways them things are usually managed, had succeeded in making himself well-known to the fair Rubye. At first the Kid's affair with Miss Rubye de Lisle failed to progress with what somebody has called leaps and bounds. There was others—several. Two guys appeared to be leading, with the rest outclassed but still in the race. Of the two leading candidates one was a semianimated collar-ad who claimed to draw a salary from the movies and advertises himself as Willard Washburne. The other was a large but mushy member of the "Oh, Look, Ernestine!" company, and whose monniker appeared on the programs as F. Bernard Pyle.

Yes, Mr. Willard Washburne and Mr. F. Bernard Pyle give the Kid quite a battle, it seems; at one time Mr. McCabe and Mr. Pyle, so I hear, even coming almost to blows—which was no doubt close enough for Mr. Pyle, considering who he was up against. But for a red-headed guy with one badly

shell-shocked ear, and whose assets consisted mostly of one four-base wallop in each mitt, you've got to give it to the Cyanide Kid. Anyhow, a couple of weeks after the affair gets under way, it is reliably reported to me that Messrs. Washburne and Pyle are losing with every stride and the Kid is an odds-on favorite to win.

Far be it from me to pick on a lady, but no doubt Mr. McCabe's financial prospects as the coming middleweight champ had considerable influence on the beautiful Miss de Lisle; anyhow, doubtless Pinkus made the most of 'em.

Meantime the Kid had laid away a couple more ambitious pork-and-beaners in his usual prompt and distinctive style, thus proving that this heart-trouble of his wasn't affecting him to any great extent in the practice of his profession, and I left off worrying. Then along came the first of them epistles from Diana Marie Smith.

One morning, shortly after asking for his mail at the desk—me and the Kid was stopping at a small but select hotel. "Pipe this, bud! Class to me!" smirks Pinkus, handing me a large, square, pink missive which smells like an accident in a perfumery-shop.

Close examination reveals the fact that the letter is from a member of the well and favorably known Smith family who signs herself Diana Marie. Furthermore, it ain't necessary to read between the lines to deduce that Diana Marie Smith, having run onto a sport page story carrying a photo of Mr. McCabe in a belligerent attitude and also recounting Mr. McCabe's sensational deeds in the roped arena, is very favorably impressed with regard to Mr. McCabe. In fact, in one place she even goes so far as to say that she positively refuses to insult him by comparing him to a Greek god—to say nothing of Wallie Reed. Without going into further details, the letter wound up with the injunction to "Destroy this"—and she was cordially the Kid's, Diana Marie Smith.

"And they let 'em vote," I says. "Too bad your affections are otherwise engaged."

"Yeh," says Pinkus, proceeding to fulfill Diana Marie Smith's dying request by destroying this.

At that, this being something new—for

one reason or another—in the Cyanide Kid's brief career I could see he was considerably interested, not to say flattered.

However, that was the last either of us would have thought about the matter, no doubt, if next morning another pink and highly scented epistle had not arrived from the mysterious Diana Marie—which proved to be the case. And the next morning another. And so on without fail. Furthermore, it ain't necessary to use a clinical thermometer to discover that Diana's manner of addressing Mr. McCabe is increasing in warmth—and not so gradually, at that. Anyhow, Diana Marie comes across promptly every morning for a week or more, and, in spite of the charming Rubye, it's plain to be seen that the Kid is giving the matter considerable thought—also handing himself no little credit.

Maybe I've omitted to say that Diana Marie had given no address, and consequently there was no way of following the thing up, even if Pinkus had been so minded—which, of course, he wasn't. Still, there's no gainsaying the fact that the Kid was curious; and I'll confess to a slightly inquisitive sensation myself.

Such is the fairly interesting situation when the latest of Diana's daily heart-throbs announces, in addition to the usual peach-Melba stuff, that she is positively going to be present in a ringside seat when, that night, the Cyanide Kid mingles with a fairly well-known middleweight by the name of Willie Wyckoff at the Royal Sporting Club; and so it is fair to presume that whatever conjectures me and the Kid has indulged in with regard to Diana Marie Smith will very shortly rest in peace.

Yes, our curiosity was now about to be satisfied—and it was. Absolutely.

"Sufferin' caterpillars!" or words to that effect, ejaculates the Cyanide Kid when, that night, he lamps the one and only female sitting anywheres near the ring, and who, therefore, it is fair to presume is Diana Marie Smith, the faithful correspondent. And in my opinion the Kid's words was well justified. For, whilst Diana surely pushes a poison pen, it is plain to even an amateur beholder that, as a member of the speaker sex, and judged by the usual stand-

ards of beauty, Diana Marie Smith is wide open to several gross tons of criticism. All of that.

In a word, Diana Marie turns out to be a large, formless, synthetic or drug-store blond, encased to the cracking point in a gown of a passionate purple hue, and with a face that only a fond and doting parent could love. Furthermore, it's my bet that Diana was a bud about the time that the Passing Show of 1870 was current. And whilst it is possible to conceive that, as a historical object, Diana might be of interest to the curator of a museum, or the like, her effect on me and the Cyanide Kid—specially the Kid—is more along the line of stupefaction followed by apathy.

I don't know just what we'd been expecting, but, anyhow, Diana Marie Smith wasn't it.

"Sufferin' caterpillars is correct," I agreed. And I'd have gone on to congratulate Pinkus on his conquest if, for one reason and another, I hadn't thought better of it.

A few moments afterward the official referee chirps, "Let 'er go!" and the Cyanide Kid-Willie Wyckoff fray is on. Two rounds later everybody sitting within ear-shot of Diana Marie Smith is painfully aware of the fact that the Cyanide Kid has certainly got a friend in Diana, she being at no pains whatsoever to conceal her favoritism—in fact, rooting for the Kid in a wholly unrestrained and shrilly audible manner.

With what result it is easy to guess—a large amount of rude, would-be humorous and out-loud comment among the spectators, which comment is followed by laughter, not all of which laughter is directed at Diana Marie Smith. Naturally, the Cyanide Kid gets his share.

In fact, Diana Marie Smith is in imminent danger of stopping the show, when, in the fourth stanza, Willie Wyckoff blocks the Cyanide Kid's right with his solar plexus and retires to the resin for a short nap.

And that's that.

A lapse of six weeks or so, as they say in the movies, finds the Cyanide Kid fit to be tied; and I'll admit that I've felt better myself. The reason was none other than Diana Marie Smith, who has begun to

affect me and the Kid something like a nightmare, or worse. Scarcely a day goes by without the Kid receiving one of them delicately tinted and sweetly smelling billy doux from friend Diana, which, though Diana continues to adjure the Kid to "Destroy this," the Kid receives with a snarl and chucks any and everywhere without reading. Howsoever, I occasionally takes the trouble to peruse one of Diana's effusions myself, and I'll say she was still going strong.

But them letters would have been the least of our troubles if Diana Marie had laid away from the Kid's fights. Which she did not. On the contrary she is prominently present at each and every one of them and, the fight fans having learned to look for her, her appearance is greeted with cheers and laughter. And when the Cyanide Kid, subsequently makes his appearance in the ring—let your conscience be your guide. The razzberry!

You've got to give it to Pinkus: in spite of laboring under a severe handicap—yes, it was all of that—he continues to make good. Which ain't saying that Diana Marie Smith couldn't show a clear title to the Kid's angora, because she could.

"Bud," he says to me once, "if you don't do something to get rid of that woman I'll just plain murder her—you hear me!"

And he acted like he meant it.

As it happens, the Kid is fighting that night and, in the attempt to obtain a few kind words with Diana, I lays for her near the box-office of the fight club. But Diana must have secured her ticket beforehand. Anyhow, in due time she crashes in, making, howsoever, directly for the entrance to the arena. Taking my foot in my hand I brush up to her, and:

"Excuse me, madam," I begin politely—and stop.

For Diana Marie Smith, after handing me one of them "Unhook me, villain!" glares, has passed me by with all three chins pointing upward at an angle of forty-five degrees, or maybe fifty.

On two other occasions I engage a private sleuth, who ought to have been working for the movies as a comical cop, to trail Diana Marie Smith to her lair—object an interview

if I can find out where she lives. But on both occasions Sherlock reports that Diana has taken a taxi and he has proceeded to lose her in the traffic.

"Which," I comments aptly, "appears to be the only way we can lose her."

It struck me as sort of curious that Diana was seemingly content to worry along without meeting Mr. McCabe personally. But far be it from me, thinks I, to attempt to solve the problem—or any other problem which has to do with the justly famous shopping sex.

Beyond that, one day along toward the last of this same period of time—something in the neighborhood of six weeks, as I've said—the Kid maneuvers me into a corner and blushingly admits that he's engaged to marry the entrancing Rubye, and *vice versa*. I wishes Pinkus the compliments of the season.

On the evening of the same day the Cyanide Kid scores a decisive victory over Hurricane Kelly, who is rated well up in the middleweight ranks. And next morning a fresh sport-writer slyly adds the following footnote to his description of the affair:

"As usual," he says, "a fair admirer of the Cyanide Kid was observed occupying two prominent ringside seats."

Now seeing that, for reasons best known to himself, the Kid had not seen fit to mention Diana Marie Smith to Miss Rubye de Lisle, this puts Pinkus in a somewhat embarrassing position. If Miss de Lisle happens to lay a large violet eye or two on that same interesting observation it is well within the bounds of probability that Pinkus McCabe will have a regular job of explaining on his hands. And, outside of the brutal murder of a well-known sporting scribe, there's no knowing what might have happened if something hadn't come up to sort of distract the Kid's attention.

Whilst the Kid is still raving—that morning me and Pinkus, as customary, had sat down in the lobby of the hotel to look over the papers, and it was then that the Kid had run across that fair-admirer stuff—I'm called away to answer a phone call. When I get back:

"Lay off, Kid," I says, "and listen. The campaign has borne fruit. The phone



was from Jake Kepplemann and you get Battling Burns in ten days' time! And then—listen, Kid! The champ! He'll have to listen to us—in time. And now get this. Let all this stuff ride. Chances are Miss de Lisle won't see that little item, and if she does, you can explain. And as soon as we've finished with Battling Burns—you know how it is, it'll take some time to get the champ into the ring—we'll hit the road for a spell, and that, Kid, will be about all from Diana! Are you with me?"

After some further argument he was.

In due time the day arrives on the evening of which the Cyanide Kid is due to cinch our chance at the champ, to say nothing of a bunch of money, by eliminating Battling Burns as a contender. That afternoon, arriving back at our rooms in the hotel after an absence of some time, me and the Kid at once perceives that, whilst we've been away, said rooms has been broken and entered. For a while, howsoever, it seems that nothing is missing—till the Kid discovers that several of Diana Marie Smith's little notes, which he'd left kicking round the apartments, are now absent.

The Kid had hardly made this discovery when the phone rings and Miss Rubye de Lisle requests an immediate interview with Pinkus in person. She gets it—and, in a word, Pinkus gets the gate. Why? Merely because somebody has called her attention to that little item in the paper; and, furthermore, the same somebody has put her in possession of the letters we've recently missed and of which Diana Marie Smith was the author. Which, being of a highly jealous disposition, is enough for Rubye!

That night when the Kid climbs into the ring at the Star Athletic Club, where the Cyanide Kid-Battling Burns thing is to come off, he has recovered some from the shock and is certainly in one of them fighting moods. And there, as usual, in a seat near the battle-front, was, of course, none other than Diana Marie Smith, the cause of it all.

Whilst the master of ceremonies is introducing him to the spectators, the Kid stands there registering murder in the first degree at Diana Marie Smith. Then, all of a sudden, the Kid is over the ropes and into the

audience, and aiming a wild swing at Diana Marie, who has rose up to meet him! Diana ducks the swing and starts a wicked counter which the Kid foils by crossing with his right to Diana's chin. The blow is followed by loud cries of "Shame!" from the audience—which immediately rises up and falls on the Kid.

For some minutes the riot—it was nothing less—continues unabated. Then the uproar subsides revealing the Cyanide Kid in no fit condition to fight for six months to come; and which, of course, was about what he had coming for assaulting and battering a lady. As for Diana Marie Smith, having lost her luxurious blond wig and several other items of make-up, she is difficult to recognize. In fact, I don't seem to make her at all, seeming to recognize instead the fat features of F. Bernard Pyle, already mentioned as a member of the "Oh, Look, Ernestine!" company, and who the Cyanide Kid had outpointed in the battle for the hand of Miss Rubye de Lisle!

"The whole thing," I summed up to the Kid a little later, "was a frame-up to get your goat, just out of revenge; and his being on only during the first part of the show gives him the chance to pull it. No doubt showing her them letters, which he must have hired an expert to steal for him, and also calling her attention to that little item in the paper—no doubt all that was a sort of afterthought. He couldn't have seen that far ahead. Just a frame-up, Kid, to get the old angora—and it worked!"

Just before that the Kid had explained to me how, as he stood there gazing at her whilst being introduced to the patrons of the Cyanide Kid-Battling Burns attraction—which failed to attract—Diana Marie Smith's real identity had suddenly dawned on him in spite of the make-up, and—you know what happened. Plenty!

"Yeh," the Kid utters through a pair of split lips. "It worked. But, anyhow, this squares me with Rubye."

"This squares you with Rubye!" I yelps. "Here you are down and out for six months to come. Six months without taking in a cent—and our chance at the champ looking like Belgium! And—this squares you with Rubye! What a world!"

# The Levanter

## By Captain Dingle

Author of "Measure for Measure," "Hate Laughs at Locksmiths," etc.

TIM HOLLY stumbled out of the Central Bar in Valetta, Malta, urged by a hand trembling with suppressed annoyance, fell over the bell-leader of a flock of milk-goats in the street, and landed in a puddle of muddy water just as a severe, elderly naval officer walked past. Tim Holly, A.B., R.N., paused where he lay, swearing cold, blood-curdling oaths which embraced in their objects both milk-goats, uncivil barkeepers, and inquisitive naval officers impartially: for the officer had stopped, with an oath almost as lurid as Tim's, regarding first his bespattered clothes, then the recumbent seaman.

"So it's you, is it, Holly?" the officer snapped at last. He glared down at the disgrace of the fleet while he futilely attempted to remove the mud from his ruined clothes.

"It's me," retorted Tim savagely. "Wot of it?"

"Your name is on the defaulters' list this morning, Holly. Go on board at once. I shall attend to your case tomorrow. Stand up!"

Tim struggled to his feet, rubbed some mud out of his eyes, and glared redly at the officer. The memory of recent faults was vivid; his tally of minor crime in the service was about full. This latest escapade spelled disaster to his career as a seaman under the white ensign, and furthermore it spelled a term in the brig.

"You go to hell!" he said crisply, and turned on his heel. A stupefied officer stared after him for perhaps thirty seconds: then, catching sight of a picket passing along the street, the officer's whistle shrilled out, and the patrolling seamen appeared.

"Take that man on board—" began the officer furiously; but Tim read the writing on the wall aright; he fled down the tiny crack of a lane beside the bar, and vanished among Valetta's mazy windings.

Instinct guided him wide of naval or military establishments; and as darkness fell he halted in the rear of a mean little wine-shop at Samra, realizing two things very thoroughly: that he had a consuming thirst and very little money to satisfy it, and that he was a deserter—a pariah, a thing shorn of honor, to be hunted down and caught like any beast.

Keen eyes were watching him while he stood undecided what to do. Then the door creaked open, a withered Maltese invited him to enter, and at the old man's shoulder a pretty, dark face with the lines of fresh youth and the eyes of old experience gave emphasis to the invitation.

"Come, I geev you wine, sailorman," the girl smiled, and Tim accepted with the desperation born of thirst after an orgy of English beer and Maltese wine.

He flung down his last coin to pay, and growled out: "That's all I got, sister."

"You keep," grumbled the old man, who shuffled around like one in great excitement which he strove to hide. "You are tired from de walk, my frien'. You mus' stay here to-night. Tha's all right, sailor."

Old Jose knew sailors as he knew his own goats. Tim's appearance at that hour, and in that condition of travel-stain and cash shortage, hinted at something not quite as it should be. Sailors often visited him, for his wine was fairly good and Concetta's eyes were eloquent: but they usually came in such fashion as to leave him an appreci-

able profit when they departed. But to get a profit out of Tim there was only one way, quite obviously. Jose silently motioned the girl to bring more wine, and again refused payment.

"Wot's the game, old 'un?" demanded Tim, when his thirst was eased and the wine began to stir up suspicion in his heated brain. "Why the free lushin's?"

"You no like to drink wit' me, sailorman?" cooed Concetta, rumpling his hair. Old Jose saw the man's state of mind, and decided that this was a case for himself, and not for his daughter.

"Go make ready a couch for my frien', Concetta," he ordered. Then, laying a wrinkled hand like a claw on Tim's arm, he spoke in low tones and went direct to the point.

"I savvee very well, sailorman," he said. "One tam I was in navy, too. You run away, yes? Very well. I no like navy officer myself. I help you, see?"

"Wot for? Love?" Tim put in harshly. He knew Maltese character perfectly well.

"Well, perhaps a leetle bit," replied Jose, his beady eyes giving away no secrets. "Leetle money, too. I know you got no money. You want some, hey? All right, my frien'. You go bed. I take your clothes; oh, very good cloth English sailor wears; and I sell 'em. Then you pay me for bed and wine, maybe; I sell you some of my clothes, and you go 'way with vegetable cart early in the morning, and we both satisfy, hey?"

The scheme sounded good. It did more. It reminded Tim, if such were needed, that Malta was a tiny place, full of service men, and he would have to travel very early, and very continuously, by vegetable cart or otherwise, in order to remain at liberty as long as he stayed inland. He would be spotted in a minute, in any of a hundred places, unless he adopted some disguise even more identity-concealing than Jose's old clothes.

"Wot time's the Gozo boat leave?" he asked, before giving an answer to the other's suggestion.

"Oh, you no go in that!" exclaimed Jose, hands upraised. "He go from de harbor, my frien'. Dey catch you sure!

You go bed, like I say. I bring you money in one, two, t'ree hour; then you go to coast on vegetable cart, and find plenty boat, *felucca*, go for Messina, Palermo, and plenty places—"

"All right," Tim decided, suddenly smitten with a shiver of fear. "You get busy, old 'un. Here, you give me clothes now, and I'll make a start. Never mind bed. You can keep all you get on my togs."

"I very sorry," Jose whined, "but I no got more clothes. You stay just little while. I not be long. Concetta give you more wine. Come, take off your clothes, sailorman. You wrap you in this blanket, see?"

In ten minutes more Jose was gone. Tim sat swathed in a filthy blanket, with a flask of red wine before him, glaring at the inner room door through which Concetta had vanished in mock terror at his fierce refusal of her company. And as an hour crawled by his fears grew ten-fold. Now, face to face with facts, he recalled cases similar to his own, and in no one of them could he recall a deserter who had got clear away.

Jose's transparent trick was flashed before his mental vision like a screened picture.

"The old swine!" Tim cried, leaping to his feet with a crash of overturned chair. "Keep me here while he fetches the picket and earns his blood-money! Like hell!"

Out of the door Tim sped. The night was black, the path undiscernible. He groped blindly for an outlet, and in his eyes a lantern flashed; the voice of Concetta sounded close behind the light.

"You no stay, sailorman?" she laughed. "I t'ink much better you go back inside. Very dark out here."

Tim cursed her, and plunged on to slip past. She spoke again, and now there was a tigerish snarl beneath the purring of her voice. The lantern was set down in the path.

"You go back, sailorman! You no come dis way." And over the top of the lantern a gun-barrel menaced his head. He saw the gleam of the girl's eyes, the glint of the steel—and both were hard, cold, merciless.

Clutching his blanket desperately about him, he grabbed for the rifle with his free hand. There was a frightened cry from the girl, the rifle came away in his grip, and he dashed forward, swinging the gun like a club.

Vaguely he knew that the girl had fallen; he had heard the choking sob of her cry; but it was not until he changed hands on the weapon that he felt the warm stickiness which told him that he had struck her down with her own gun.

"That's about done it!" he muttered, stopping short at the edge of a narrow road. "It's the limit for me now, whenever they cop me. Might as well go the limit, too, Tim."

At daylight he stood on the shore of a little bay, where a *felucca* lay close in while her small crew loaded her with figs and oranges bound for Valetta. The toiling seamen stared at him, as at some apparition, as he suddenly appeared out of the morning haze clad in a shapeless blanket, bearing a gun.

Tim cared little for their stares. He peered over the water and saw a solitary figure on board the *felucca*, busily putting the boat in sailing trim while the last few baskets of fruit came down. Tim strode straight down to the shore, waded into the water, and, holding his gun aloft, swam to the vessel with his blanket robe trailing behind him.

Before the lone seaman on board could well grasp what was happening, the deserter stood before him, rifle ready, and was giving him orders in a voice not to be argued with.

"Get yer anchor up, me boy! Sharp's the word. I'm goin' to borry yer ship, Mr. Malt!"

There was the menace of the gun, and his solitary situation, to persuade the boatman to obey. Just once he turned to shore, as if he would shout for help: his men were staring stupidly at him, that gun was pointing at his head; the *felucca* master went forward and hauled in the rope cable, while Tim let go the brails and let fall the big lateen mainsail from the yard.

In five minutes the craft was under way, slipping fast through the smooth water be-

fore a fresh morning breeze, while on the shore six sailors and as many fig and orange growers capered and gesticulated excitedly.

"Now you can go. Mr. Malt," Tim told the *felucca's* owner when everything was shipshape. The man looked at him in fearful amazement. "Go on, 'op it!" growled Tim, pointing the gun. "Overboard you go, dead or alive, me boy! I don't want no crew, I don't. Now then. Are y' goin'? One—two—"

With a howl the Maltese took the dive, and his black head bobbed frantically shoreward while the *felucca* stood straight out to sea.

In his better days, while enthusiasm for the service still ruled him, Tim Holly had risen to the proud position of captain's coxswain. That was before the fall; but he retained sufficient knowledge of simple chart-and-compass navigation to enable him to lay and sail a course. Now his first care was to gain such an offing as would place him beyond detection from any lookout station ashore, after which he would work a crooked traverse to baffle pursuit until he could gain the shelter of the crowded islands of the archipelago.

That would be quite a long traverse to work alone; but when once he saw the coast of Malta mellow into vagueness astern the full force of what he had already done came upon him, and he knew there could be no looking back. A deserter he was without quibble; that he had killed old Jose's girl he had no doubt; by stealing the *felucca* he had branded himself pirate. No, there was going back.

He was shrewd enough to know that he might be seen from an elevated shore station even after he had lost sight of the land from the low elevation of the *felucca's* deck: so he swarmed up the mainmast to survey the horizon. And not until he reassured himself, after a dozen such climbs, did he permit himself to seek satisfaction for the gnawing hunger that had come over him.

Then he fed on sweet, juicy oranges and green figs, food and drink at once, without losing precious time in seeking out the vessel's real stores. From time to time he altered his course to avoid a distant speck or

wreath of smoke; and when another night came down he curled up by the tiller and slept like a dog, with one eye open and every other sense alert.

During many days of sailing Tim reviewed all aspects of the situation. First of all he discovered that the gun he had snatched from Concetta was unloaded. Then he examined the arm more closely, and found that, loaded or unloaded, it was only fit to be used as a club. The discovery brought a crooked grin to his hard-lined face, and he decided that since it had, even in that condition, secured him a boat and solitude, it held further potentialities for usefulness. It was carefully slung just inside the tiny cabin hatch, and there it was, ready to hand, when Tim uncoiled himself in the dim light of a certain smoky dawn and found his *felucca* in the middle of a small fleet of Levant traders and Cyclades sponge-fishermen.

## II.

DRINKING-WATER had been growing scarce for some time, and Tim looked about him for the likeliest craft from which to replenish his stores. The spongers were not fishing, but were sailing slowly along toward the grounds, and the traders, Smyrna and Saloniki *feluccas* and brigs mostly, brought up the rear of the straggling line as became staid old merchantmen. Tim decided to board a *felucca* of seventy tons or so, which seemed to be swifter than the other traders and was creeping past on the edge of the fleet, nearest to him.

As he bore down upon her he saw the crew watching him curiously; and his own curiosity was whetted at sight of the dark, eloquent faces lining the rail awaiting his hail. Two commissions in the Mediterranean had given him a complete education in racial types, and he knew there were two kinds of Armenian traders, two kinds of Greeks: thieving, and piratical. Both were there aboard the *felucca*, and cunning eyes were fixed upon his crewless decks as he ran alongside.

"Hi, Johnny, give it water," he hailed, holding up his spare stone jar. "I give oranges and figs for water. Come on."

A hand reached down and took the jar;

but an outburst of voluble Greek, which Tim could not interpret, accompanied by keen inspection of his cabin entrance from the larger vessel, speedily gave him a hint that he had aroused more interest than the mere demand for water should have induced.

"Come on, Johnny," he urged; "hurry with that water."

"Where you goin' without a crew?" asked the *felucca* captain softly.

"Never you mind," retorted Tim, with rising impatience. "You give it the water-jug, quick."

"Where you get the boat?" persisted the Greek, and other men approached the spot just above Tim's head. "I think you steal him," laughed the inquisitor; and as if on a signal four swarthy sailors leaped over the rail and crouched toward Tim, long knives gleaming in their hands.

Whatever his previous plans had been, the sudden emergency called for swift action, and action of impulse. Darting for the cabin slide, Tim seized his empty gun, then, presenting it at the heads of the intruders, he jammed the tiller over with his foot, and roared:

"Shove off for'ard there! You, crojack-eyed camel-face, haul that fore-sheet to starb'd! Board me wi'out invite, will you? Then I'll make ye welcome an' give ye a helluva long ride, me lads!"

His uninvited visitors stood like dummies in face of that rifle menace, but only for an instant. Tim left them in no doubt that it was they at whom his orders were directed; with many an appealing glance flashed at their own vessel, they helped Tim swing his *felucca* clear, then stood helplessly bewildered as to what was going to happen to them. Their own vessel swam on as before, her scanty crew reduced by half, her captain staring agape at the lone mariner who, asking for water, had left his jar behind and taken four able-bodied seamen in exchange.

Tim was under no misapprehension regarding the men he had kidnaped. He knew that such fellows were traders only for lack of openings in piracy. That they had been ready to attempt the confiscation of his vessel merely on chance was enough for



him. He bullied them into activity, and sailed his craft until he had left the sluggish fleet far astern; then he addressed them.

"So ye like my boat, do ye? Right-o! You got her, ain't yer? That's all kiff, me lads. But, y' see, I ain't got no grub nor no water to spare. I didn't invite ye on board, did I? 'Opped in on me just friendly, didn't ye? Oh, yes. I don't think! Now, wot ye goin' to do about it, hey?"

The four men, three villainous Armenians and a cross-eyed Greek, had never ceased muttering together, though they had kept very much apart from Tim and his gun. Now they argued vociferously over his announcement that there was no food to give them after carrying them away from their ship, and they might have tried to coerce him with steel only for that grimly ready gun which he carried in the crook of his arm while he steered.

"You no got water, sar, and no got it food; s'pose you take us back then," suggested the Greek.

"Try another guess, old swivel-eye," grinned Tim. "This yere's my boat, see? Not your dirty-shirted captain's, savvee?"

"Plenty food, plenty water in other *feluccas*, sar," ventured one of the Armenians with an ingratiating smile which did not render any pleasanter his hang-dog face. "Plenty food on islands, too. You put us ashore. We get water for you."

"I got something better than that, son," Tim said after thinking it over. "Carry on a bit. I been wanting to get a crew for a long time. You can eat figs and oranges a bit longer, me lads."

### III.

LATE in the afternoon a small island was raised ahead, and coasting round it Tim spied a three-masted *xebec*, floating high out of the water, apparently bound toward Malta or Sicily.

"Wot is she?" Tim asked his crew. "D' ye know that kind?"

"She goat-ship. go to Gozo for goats, sar. No got goat now. She light."

"Right-o!" Tim hauled up a point nearer the wind, and had the sheets

trimmed. "She'll give us water, me sons. Get up all the jars."

While the men worked, passing out empties, they chattered incessantly, casting hungry glances at the nearing *xebec*, and more doubtful ones aft at their ragged, blanket-clad commander. Very soon the Greek approached Tim, a knowing smirk on his unhandsome visage.

"You want crew, cap'n, and you steal four men," he said insolently. "How much will you pay us if we stop with you?"

"I'll pay you with the end of the mainsheet, me lad, if you don't keep yer place," replied Tim coolly. "I got no money for wages. I'll trade figs and oranges for grub and water with that goat-wagon. Go forward now, and don't trespass again. This end of the ship's mind, savvee?"

"Savvee all right, cap'n," persisted the man, standing his ground and grinning full in Tim's face. "No matter to trade with that ship, sar. We ask for food. If he say no, we take. He only got two, three men. You got it gun, cap'n." Into the Greek's cross eyes crept a wolfish glint. "He got money, too, sar. Money to buy goat. I sail in same trade many times."

As if to allow the hint to sink in, the fellow rejoined his companions; and from the shadow of the foresail they watched Tim stealthily. Tim stared after the Greek until he joined the rest, and a wide, unpleasant grin stole over his features.

"Now, that ain't such a bad tip," he muttered, caressing his gun-stock. "That's what I call a direct inspiration from old Provvy." He pondered over the suggestion until he had worked his boat well to windward of the *xebec*, and was standing down to hail her, then he called his crew aft.

"Listen, you hunks o' evil. I got a notion to foller Swivel-Eye's tip. I tell you wot it is, see. I run away from th' navy, so I ain't likely to stop at trifles, 'specially when I bashed a girl's head in as well. I'm goin' to get water from that chap, and cop his cash-box too. So I promote Swivel-Eye to be fust mate, and we go on shares to be fixed arterward. But don't try no funny tricks, me lads. or you'll stop bullets, see?"

"We no try tricks, cap'n," the Greek hastened to assure him. "Plenty money you get like that. Many, many small ships in this sea, small crews—"

"That's the stuff," Tim put in with a grin. "We only got a small crew ourselves. Don't want to buck ag'in' no war-ship's crew."

"We easy get more men, cap'n, if you like. Sailor very poor man. Get money more easy—"

"Blow me if I don't think you show signs of intelligence!" Tim said, staring at the fellow with growing respect. All at once, as in a clear-cut picture, he saw a career opened to him which could rival the most colorful exploits of Morgan, Blackbeard, and the rest. He even saw himself clad in gorgeous raiment far outvying the trappings of a Turkish admiral, commanding a fleet of free-traders which would be strong enough to defy the service he had fled from. And it was certain that nothing he could do in the future could either add to or take from his punishment if caught. He might as well make it a short life and a merry one, and the merrier the better. He answered the Greek:

"Stand by, then. We'll run him aboard and capture his ship, but no killin' mind, unless he makes a fight. One o' you sing out soon's we climb aboard, and tell the crew we won't hurt 'em if they'll join us, and I'll tackle the skipper. Hide them knives till you 'op over the rail. Ready!"

Any lingering doubt regarding the sincerity of his crew was dissipated as he watched their wolfish faces and noted the air of tense preparedness with which they waited for the vessels to touch. He hailed the *xebec* in orthodox fashion as the boats ran side by side.

"*Xebec* ahoy! Hullo, cap'n. Give us some water, will you? Needn't heave-to. I'll run alongside and hook on."

With the words, he touched the tiller, bumped alongside, and saw his crew pass a line through the *xebec's* shrouds and swarm over the rail like monkeys. When he followed, gun in hand, he found a dumfounded crew and a pop-eyed skipper staring in fright at four ugly, knife-armed ruffians slithering toward them. His own ap-

pearance only increased the panic, and the *xebec*, sailing on outwardly tranquil, was completely in his hands.

It was his first essay at carrying a ship by boarding, and the ease of its accomplishment flurried him. It needed the sharp jolt he got when the *xebec* captain darted toward an ax on the cabin roof to bring him to his normal senses.

"Drop it!" Tim barked, presenting his gun.

The man halted, scowling blackly. The Greek and his mates had lined up the *xebec's* crew and were chattering volubly to them. Tim addressed his own particular captive.

"I'll help meself to water and grub, old feller. You get busy and produce that cash you got to buy goats with, sharp now!"

Under the threat of the gun the *xebec* master sidled toward the cabin, volubly denying the existence of money, but in obvious fear of the ragged intruder. Out of the corner of his eye Tim glanced at the other figures on deck; and the combined effect of the Greek's fierce chatter and the sidelong looks cast his way by the *xebec's* frightened crew was almost to convince him that his pressed crew meditated treachery. Keeping his own prisoner well covered by the gun, he yelled a warning to his men, and as the skipper stepped below, with Tim at his heels, the Greek shouted in response:

"All right, cap'n! You no 'fraid. We got crew for us now. Get de money, an' we get de water an' stores!"

Thus Tim found himself embarked upon the career of his most recent and rosy dreams. The handling of that *xebec's* goat money supplied the touch needed to topple him over the brink. It was more money, and gold at that, than he had ever seen in one heap in his life, and his own share, after dividing up very fairly according to his ideas, was equal to a year's pay in the service he had deserted.

And now he had a crew of ten men under his command, a stout, speedy *jelucca* underfoot, and a hold amply filled with sea stores of pleasing quality. The *xebec* carried five of a crew besides the captain; they

appeared well content with the change; and even the captain had yelled to be taken into the brotherhood when he was left on the *xebec's* deck alone and heard the sea pouring into his vessel through holes bored by the marauders before quitting him. In joining he brought with him knowledge of the islands which proved highly acceptable to Tim, whose navigation was none of the smartest; and once he had taken the step he proved so capable a rascal that even the cross-eyed Greek was willing that he should be promoted to be Tim's chief lieutenant.

For three months the self-made corsair plagued the Cyclades and the Archipelago, enjoying immunity from pursuit by a cunningly thought-out scheme of Tim's. After watching the *xebec* sink, one more capture was made of a small fruit *felucca*, and the pirates made their first killing when the master stoutly refused to join them and threatened reprisals.

The knife of the Greek decided his destination, and his boat was sunk; but the addition of murder to robbery placed them in a light even less pleasant than before, and Tim announced his plan after deep consideration.

"One o' these times a man 'll get away from us, me lads, then it 'll only be a matter o' time before our description's spread from Gib to Joppa. I ain't anxious to be copped and scragged by no old ship-mates o' mine, me lads, so here's the 'ookum: After this we picks our ships a bit more careful, and we changes into a boat of different size and rig as often as we takes one as is as fast as the one we're in. And we started leavin' nobody behind to holler, so we carries on with that too, savvy? Change boats and leave no 'owlers. see?"

Following Tim's notion, the pirates in another month or so possessed a big, fast *xebec*, and their numbers had mounted to fifty men. Arms, too, they had acquired, until Tim considered he was strong enough to attempt an ambitious exploit of which he had long nursed plans.

Every month a rich freight of silks and rugs left Smyrna, and the capture of any one vessel so laden would mean a share for him big enough to enable him to play the

deserter again and retire to a place of peace and safety.

Tim retained vivid recollections of the service he had disgraced. In cruising among the islands he had many times discerned the smoke of passing war-ships, and had even been spoken by one on a night of storm just after he had destroyed a French brig.

Darkness, and change of rig from that last reported by lucky victims who had escaped death, enabled him to satisfy the cruiser of his peaceable character; but the encounter had stirred up old memories to such a degree that Tim Holly lost a lot of his courage and began to nurse a rankling fear. Each time he saw a dangling rope he shivered.

So he went in search of the Smyrna fleet, depending upon the trading skippers among his crew to select a rich prize, and relying on those same cunning skippers to find means for the profitable disposal of the booty afterward. One of those skippers, a Maltese, had attained a popularity with the crew which threatened Tim's preeminence; and the popularity was fairly earned, for the man was a merry rascal, fat and not unhandsome; he knew every square yard of Malta, Gozo, and Comino, and was as intimately acquainted with the Levant ports as with his own.

He sang like an Italian tenor, and could fight more than a little when under the influence of wine; while his own stories seemed to indicate a knowledge of devious byways of trade, and crooked traders, which promised good results when Tim had captured his Smyrna ship.

They sighted their quarry to the north-east of Crete—a big, deep-laden, slow old bark of seven hundred tons. She wallowed along, far astern of her swifter and smaller sisters, with an air of disdain for haste, and absolute certainty of destiny. In the evening twilight her old sails glimmered like pearl, the foam at her forefoot glistened like snow against the black of her bluff bows, and over her rails two or three heads in red caps remained motionless while the owners thereof sent a casual glance at the *xebec* before going down to their supper of bread and onions and sour red wine.

"Let 'em eat, poor swine," ordered Tim in response to the murmur of his crew against delay. "Besides, by the time they get through supper it'll be a'most dark, and there won't be another sail in sight. I ain't goin' to slip up on this capture, me lads. Means too much to all of us. Break out a case o' that cognac from the Frog brig, and let's all hands slip in a couple o' hookers just fer luck."

The brandy was good. It sent the fighting fluid coursing through the pirates' veins, and imbued Tim with a sense of tremendous importance. He allowed that Morgan or Lolonais might have been somewhere near his own quality, but as for the rest of the marauding sea-rovers—pish!

When the stars began to twinkle, and the sea lay bare of speck or blur, save broad on the lee beam where the bark sailed stolidly on, he gave his hat a rakish tilt, buckled on his pistol belt, and sent forth the shrill whistle which brought every man from his brandy swigging to action.

"Run down till I hail him," he said.

The Greek took the helm, and with foreyards squared the *xebec* slanted over to the bark. Tim scanned her black bulk, untouched by light except at the wheel, and decided that he might chance a shot. First he hailed:

"Bark ahoy! Back yer mainyard, old socks! I'm comin' to visit yer!"

A head appeared in front of the light at the wheel, and a voice sang out. Swiftly another head appeared beside the first, and the voices grew excited. Soon the demand came in Turkish to know the reason for Tim's peremptory summons. Being translated to him, Tim replied in a fashion in keeping with his estimate of his standing as a rover. With a pistol in each hand he fired as fast as he could pull trigger, and both the heads by the bark's wheel vanished amid frenzied howls.

"Come on, me lads, jam her alongside and 'look on," commanded Tim, reloading his weapons in readiness. The *xebec* jarred the side of the bark, nimble hands made the vessels fast together, and with a rumbling, terrifying roar the pirates swarmed up the black sides and lighted, fighting mad, on deck.

There was not a soul to be seen. Even the helm seemed to be unwatched, and for a moment Tim suspected a trap. Then a feminine scream sounded aft, muffled as if coming from behind a closed door, and from the darkness about the cabin two shots crashed out.

A pirate pitched forward with a sobbing curse, and Tim's jaunty hat flew over the side like an evil bat. It was a declaration of war in earnest.

Tim spat on his hands, hitched up his belt, and, taking a stout pull at his pocket brandy-flask, he plunged toward the shots.

"Come on, me lads, for'ard and fight 'em!" he roared. "There's something besides loot here. There's a pretty gal for one of us, or else my lugs don't hear prop'ly."

As in attacking other less pugnacious crews, some of Tim's men took care of the fore part of the ship to guard against rear assaults. Backed up by his latest lieutenant, Dion the Maltese, and the cross-eyed Greek, Tim charged for the cabin entrance, and another bullet whanged past his ear while the flame all but blinded him. On he plunged, until he could thrust his head and shoulders through the port-hole out of which the shot had come; then his own pistols filled the interior with stabs of fire and murderous lead, smoke, and noise, while a score of his men hurled themselves at the bolted companionway doors on the poop and forced entrance.

"Come up, cap'n, we settle 'em quick!" shouted the Greek as the doors fell in splinters, and Tim flew up the ladders, having first assured himself that some of his crew were on deck in case the defenders tried to escape by way of the port-holes.

In the dark stairway to the saloon he found a fierce fight in progress, and above the shouts of desperate men, the smash and thud of blows, the occasional crack of firearms, the screams of women rose, shrill and piercing.

"Shut off the firing, me lads, and stick to steel!" yelled Tim, forcing his way through the crush and seeking the leader of the defense. "Now me fine young feller," he snarled when he faced a tall, agile young Turk who fought like a fury, "stop the fightin' and give in, 'less ye're tired o' life,

"Give yer my word ye'll get bumped orf if ye don't quit."

"I yield to no renegade!" retorted the Turk, attacking Tim furiously. "Give up yourself," he panted as he fought, using perfect English. "You are already known. Your navy seeks you at this minute for a deserter and a murdering—"

"Keep still!" screamed Tim.

The Turk's words touched him on the raw, and he thrust savagely at his foe. In the darkness the Turk stumbled on a fallen man in stepping back slightly; the next instant Tim's long knife slipped through the fellow's throat, and the backbone of the defense was broken. The captain and mates howled for quarters in tones which said very plainly that their recent resistance had only been forced at the hands of the Turk.

But there was little time for inquiries as to identity. A hush lasted perhaps a full minute after the fight ceased; then, as if that hush had been interpreted rightly, the after end of the saloon rang with the wailing cries of frantic women.

"Come on, old feller," Tim ordered the bark's captain; "produce yer cash and valuables. Tell them females to open their doors and shut their 'owlin' yappers, too. You, Mr. Sailorman, you the mate?" he asked of the captain's nearest comrade. The man nodded surlily. "Very well, then," Tim suggested with a fierce scowl, "you better get busy and show my men where the best o' yer cargo is stowed, see? Just one hour I give ye to transfer the best o' the lot to my ship. Get a hustle on, now, while I go look-see the ladies. Come on, skipper, lead me to the doll-house. Come on, Dion, and see the Turk's pigeons. Old Crojack-Eye can 'tend to the cargo."

Before following the captain aft Tim took another deep swig at his brandy-flask, and when he stood in the wide-flung doorway of the great cabin across the stern, and saw three young Georgian girls cowering on the carpet in palpable terror, his vision was rosy enough to show him only the youthful prettiness of the girls, and none of their terror.

"Ho!" he uttered, making a grotesque bow. "Don't stop outside, Dion. Look-see the little dears. One fer you, one fer

me, one for the crew to gamble for, wot? Ho, but this is the real stuff like old Black-beard pulled orf, this is! No error."

"Better get business done first, cap'n," Dion suggested with a smirk of impatience. "You look after the women, while I take care of this shivering skipper's strong-box and the Greek looks out for the cargo. Better you should take the girls on board our own ship right away, then you'd leave us free to finish up any time. Here, I'll help with them first."

Speaking to the three women in their own tongue, Dion speedily convinced them of the reality of their plight, and got them to gather up the few small belongings they had and follow him and Tim over to the *xebec*, where they were lodged in the main cabin, while Tim himself puttered about setting out wine and biscuits for them in order to moderate their fears.

The combination of wine and brandy, with the added excitement of female company, brought Tim Holly to such a degree of beatitude as to make him forget for the while all such sordid matters as shipping stolen cargo. Dion's hail that the work was done found him with a frightened girl on his knee, a jug of wine in his free hand, roaring out a deep-sea love-song in a voice like the roaring of a walrus.

"Shall we scuttle the bark, captain?" Dion called out.

"Scuttle yer aunt!" hiccuped Tim, staggering out into the darkness still waving his wine-jug. "This yere's my fare-well p'formance, me boy. Set the bloom-in' old wagon alight, Dion. Make a celebration of her."

"The fire may be seen, captain."

"T'ell with it! Let it!"

"None but two of the crew will join us. Shall we let them take the boat?"

"In the pig's eye!" roared Tim spitefully. "Shut 'em in the hold and set fire to her. Hurry up, too. We got to draw straws fer these gals, me boy. Get a wiggle on and let's beat it away from here."

#### IV.

THE burning bark was out of sight before the last of her ravaged cargo was se-



cured under the *xebec's* hatches. Then Tim called all hands to decide on some points not yet clear. First was the final selection of a port for the disposal of their rich cargo.

"Adalia, I say," Tim announced flatly. He felt entirely competent now to dispense with advice he had previously sought. Besides, he had taken from the three women a fairly considerable fortune in jewels, which now reposed in his broad belt along with nine-tenths of all the proceeds of earlier piracies. This, with much wine and brandy, tended to render Tim slightly intractable.

"Adalia, no, sar!" protested the Maltese lieutenant and the cross-eyed Greek in one breath, while all the rest stole restless glances at Tim. "If we try to sell fine silks and fine rugs in Adalia, we get only very leetle money, captain. You say this is the last job you do, then you geeve up this ship to us. All right. We go to Alexandria, more better. Beeg risk, beeg money, see? How you say, men?"

"Alexandria!" the crew responded readily, as if they had been well rehearsed in the scheme.

But Tim saw nothing suspicious. He beheld things through rosy spectacles; he was impatient to return to the snug cabin to see how fared his fluttering doves from Georgia. They, too, had to be disposed of among his lieutenants.

"Oh, all kiff, then," he assented gruffly. "Faint heart never won fair lady, me lads. I'll take a chance in Aleck if you say so, Dion. I knows ye're smart at getting rid o' pinched goods. But fust of all, come below, old feller. I got a pigeon for yer, and arter you take yer choice there's one for the rest to gamble for. Come on down."

Dion followed Tim below, muttering under his breath, but it was not until the curtained door was flung open that Tim made out what Dion was telling him.

"Don't want a gal?" Tim echoed in amazement. "Got a gal waitin' for yer in Malta? Bli'me! 'Oo ever heard tell of a bleedin' pirate bein' satisfied with one gal—'specially one as is oodles o' miles away? Come on in and see the pretty little duckies. Here, Joolianner, give Dion a

kiss and a 'ooker o' wine, like a pretty little gal."

Dion took the proffered wine, but put aside the obedient salute with a short laugh.

"Send the children to bed, Captain Tim, and let us talk men's business," he said.

"Ain't no better man's business than a pretty gal, ol' matey," leered Tim drunkenly. "D'yer mean to say ye're in earnest? Don't yer want one o' them witches?"

"No, thank you, captain. I have a pretty girl in Malta. She waits for me. When this voyage is done I go to her, and together Concetta and me shall keep so fine a wine-shop. I want no other girls, captain. Shall we leave the women and talk about business?"

Tim was laughing shakily, leering up into Dion's face with some devilish humor in his eyes. Getting the mastery over a fit of hiccups, he asked:

"Concetta, did y' say? Concetta in Malta? Samra, maybe? Did she keep a wine-shop, ol' feller?"

"You know her, then?" smiled Dion. "She is fine girl, hey?"

"Y' silly ol' coot!" Tim laughed aloud. "You ain't got no gal, you ain't. Better take one o' these. Sure I know Concetta. Didn't I bash 'er 'ead in when I done a duck out o' her old man's wine-shop? Forget Concetta. Pick one o' these. I'll go get out the tally of our boodle. Y' can come into my cabin when ye're ready."

Coolly he left Dion, and saw nothing of the spasm of white fury which transfigured his mate's face as he departed. Dion had composed his features when he rejoined Tim a few minutes afterward, and outwardly he was resigned, with the callousness of a true pirate, to the reported fate of his sweetheart.

They discussed shares until the morning watch, and overhead men strained their ears to listen. But Tim and his lieutenant were shrewd, even though their discussion grew hot, and no word of their business reached those eagerly listening ones above.

"It is better that we divide what we have now, captain," Dion repeated again after one fruitless suggestion. "The men are murmuring. They say you mean to

leave them and cheat them in Alexandria. There is money to them due. Let them have their shares. When we sell our cargo there will be plenty chance to fool the ignorant cattle, and you and we officers shall profit enough."

"Nothin' doin', ol' feller," Tim repeated parrotlike. "I'll divvy up when the cargo's sold and all's in hand, see? I won't gab no more about it. Have a drink and turn in, me lad. I'm sleepy."

"Then give me my share, captain," Dion persisted, declining the wine. "I am your chief mate, and no gold have I touched yet."

"Blast yer eyes!" roared Tim, leaping to his feet and dragging out a pistol, "and yer won't touch none, neither, till I'm good and ready. Git out o' 'ere, 'fore I drill yer!"

Dion backed out hurriedly, and Tim locked the door and closed the port-hole. Then, after gloating over the weight of his broad treasure-belt, bulging with gold, gems, and negotiable paper, he turned in and went to sleep with a revolver in his hand, innocent of and indifferent to any result from his quarrel with Dion.

As for Dion, he sought out the cross-eyed Greek at once, and together they whispered in the shadow of the high bulwarks. Fiercely they muttered; and dark figures joined them at intervals, until the entire watch on deck stood around trying to catch the import of the talk.

But Dion only let them know that there was likelihood of trouble with the captain over shares; he knew that the mere notion of that would keep them smoldering. It was between the Greek and himself the real gist of the work lay, for they, as first and second officers, were entitled to larger shares than the men, and, like pirate sub-chiefs, they expected to gouge a bit from the lesser shares, too, if possible. Therefore he and the Greek disclosed nothing of their real plans.

What those plans were was revealed to Tim, however. Out of an uneasy sleep he was aroused just before dawn by the crack of splitting wood. Through his muzzy brain the fact was borne by a second crack that somebody was trying to force his door.

Grinning cunningly, he groped for and found his pistol, uttered a yell of defiance, and fired as fast as he could press trigger through the panels of the door.

"He is the devil!" he heard the Greek's voice exclaim outside; then the sound of scuffling footsteps told him his assailants were leaving the saloon, and he hurriedly sluiced his hot face in cold water and made his way on deck. He kicked a knife on the floor as he left his room, and smiled grimly to see fresh blood on the handle of it.

Fully awake to his danger, he pulled out a stair carpet-rod and on it thrust out his hat before showing himself in the companionway. Like the strokes of cobras two knives licked into the dummy, and before the knifers could recover their balance Tim had burst through the door with a yell to find the Greek sprawling across the coaming, and another man running toward the short ladder down to the main deck. Dion, to his surprise, was running forward from the wheel, horror on his face. Dion had been the first man to occur to Tim as the companion of the Greek in the attack on his cabin door; but to all appearances the lieutenant was now bent upon visiting vengeance on the two would-be assassins.

"Come back, you perishin' murderer!" Tim roared, and shot at the fleeing sailor as he yelled. The fellow pitched headlong to the deck, the back of his skull shattered; and the cross-eyed Greek cowered where he crouched, his bleeding right hand giving evidence of his participation in the cabin attack, even if Tim had not been assured of his identity by hearing his voice.

Tim intercepted a glance flashed from the Greek to Dion, and for an instant would have gladly shot Dion; but the face of his lieutenant wore an expression of such utter abhorrence that his innocence seemed proved.

"Get up!" ordered Tim, turning his pistol upon the cowering Greek. "Stand there!" He indicated the spot by firing a bullet into the deck between the Greek's feet. "Call all hands, me lad," he told Dion, and while he waited for the men to tumble up he reloaded his weapon.

"Now," he announced, when the deck was filled with lowering faces, "there's a

bit o' misunderstandin' goin' about. Up to now we ain't had no bother. And we ain't goin' to 'ave none now, not if I knows it. You, crojack-eyed Greek waster, yer 'and is bleedin'. I picked up a knife just now wi' yer blood on the handle outside my door. Must ha' been somebody's knife you borried as you stuck through my old 'at just now, wot? Stand by, you fellers, and see wot happens when a man thinks to beat ol' Tim Holly out. Then any more o' yer wot wants to try it on is welkim to."

He pointed his pistol at the Greek.

"Pick up yer pal!" he said.

The Greek obeyed, lifting the fallen sailor to his knees.

"On yer shoulder wi' 'im! That's right, me lad. Now 'op up on the rail wi' 'im, lively! Real pals you was, you two. 'E'll be glad to know as 't was you as give him a launch out."

The Greek shouldered the dead sailor, climbed laboriously to the rail, holding on by the shrouds with his free hand.

"Get 'old of him properly," yelled Tim.

"Get yer two 'ands to it, can't yer? Give 'im a good toss out, me son."

The Greek balanced himself, raised the body to his chin, and poised himself for the cast.

"That's you!" laughed Tim viciously. "Give 'im my respects when yer meet 'im in 'ell!"

He fired as he spoke, the Greek toppled headlong overboard, carrying his dead mate with him, and their two faces upturned seemed to glare frightfully; they floated astern, and Tim addressed his crew in short, crisp sentences, as to the wisdom of making further attempts of like nature. None seemed to harbor any desire to court the Greek's fate, and Tim remained, outwardly at least, supreme.

The three hundred miles from Crete east end to Alexandria was covered by the swift *xebec* in a day and a half, and during that time Tim never left the deck. He told off four men for helmsmen, and let none of them leave the poop. He kept his own watch on the gratings abaft the tiller, and they could never be sure that his eyes were closed. As for food, he had his own brought

to him by the women, and told the helmsmen they could fast in penance for their recent outbreak of dissatisfaction.

So they came into the ancient harbor of Alexandria, and anchored within sight of the palace. To Dion, who had showed extreme zeal throughout the passage, Tim gladly gave over the task of disposing of the cargo, for which he had prepared shrewd copies of manifest and other papers from true documents taken from the last *xebec* and the burned bark. He also resigned himself to permitting Dion to take the three women ashore.

"Only trouble for you if you keep them, captain," Dion assured him. "Let me take them to bazaar. They are very fine girls, young, pretty, and of no common birth. For them we shall get much money, for I know where such goods may be sold."

"I like that saucy little black-eyed one," Tim demurred.

"Oh, let us sell our goods, and share up, captain; then you may buy a dozen such as she, and in a place far, far away from here, where none may look suspiciously at you."

Tim yielded, and saw Dion carry the women away with him in a closed four-wheeler toward the Mohammedan quarter between the two harbors. Then, setting up two men over the rest as deputy officers, whom he speedily convinced that their best interests lay in loyalty until the sharing out was done, Tim donned fine linen, stained his rugged face mahogany color, and sculled himself ashore in the ship's small boat and made his way to the custom-house to enter his ship, the health officer having boarded him already before dropping anchor.

Then straight to the Inn of the Three Mariners went Tim, half drunk already with elation over the imminent fortune to come to him. Noisily he called for liquor, insisting that all present drink with him. More than one pair of keen eyes searched his brown face: his lavish gold did not pass unnoticed among the polyglot crowd who drank his liquor.

But Tim was riding high on a strong tide of boastful pride, and cared nothing for any man. He had reached a point where

he began to throw out perilous hints as to the source of his wealth, and the prospect of more to come, when he saw one of his crew, one of the original Armenians who had joined with the cross-eyed Greek, worming his way through the crowd with a queer look on his face. He sidled up to Tim, stood in the attitude of a beggar to avoid too much notice, and slipped a sheet of printed paper onto the table.

"Many of these papers be spread throughout the town, Captain Tim," the man said in an undertone, which fell to a whisper with his next words: "Dion means to take the *xebec* from here, captain, and a war-ship of the English now enters the harbor."

Tim had been reading the paper. It was printed in Turkish, Greek, and other languages as well as English; and it set forth in so many words all the crimes of one Tim Holly, deserted from H. M. Navy, murderer, pirate, and many more unpleasant things; it drew a word picture of himself as vivid as any photograph, and named a price set on his head sufficient to tempt even a comrade. It was a sour draft to swallow, and the Armenian's announcement of Dion's treachery, and the coming of that war-ship, drove the pirate to frenzy.

He stumbled to his feet, and fear shone in the Armenian's eyes.

"There is a steamer at the mole, captain, loading camels for Beirut. It may be the captain will give you passage—"

"Blast yer souls fer a gang o' crooks!" Tim shut him off, and, seizing the unfortunate man by the throat, he hurled him to the ground, where he lay with wryly twisted neck.

Tim dashed outside, and took the road to the harbor at a run. Long before he reached the front he could see the *xebec* standing out to sea; he could see also a long, low gray war-ship flying his country's flag just coming to an anchor; and at the mole, just taking in her gangway, was a rusty-sided steamer, a camel in a sling in mid air just hovering over her hatches identifying her.

Just for a minute Tim stood in speechless rage. In a single moment all his gold-

en castles had tumbled about his ears. Death, ignominious and swift, at the hands of his own fellows, suddenly loomed large before him. Cold fear settled at his heart as he cast this way and that for inspiration. Then the feel of his heavy belt comforted him. The sight of that camel steamer gave him courage.

"By cripes," he swore, "I got to make that steamer, no error! Beirut? That's Turk. I got enough money to buy a Turk governor. And I got to get out o' here, that's flat, or—" He made a grimly humorous gesture implying stricture about his neck.

"Any place 'cept Port Said or Malta 'll have to do," he panted as he hurried toward the steamer. The war-ship's booms were down, and boats sank past her sides into the water before Tim reached the steamer. He caught the last shore-line as it was dragged on board, and swarmed up it to face an angry skipper who stared at him almost suffocating with outraged dignity.

"All right, old dear," Tim sang out, puffing with triumph, "I got to get a passage with you. I can pay, or I can work me passage on deck or in the stoke-hole. Don't make no odds. See, I got money!"

He lifted his linen jacket and showed his fat money-belt. It proved sufficient to persuade the skipper at least to listen to Tim's explanation, and meanwhile the steamer was gaining sea-room.

It occurred to Tim once that if the war-ship's commander knew of his presence anywhere in those waters, it was queer that the steamer was not signaled to stop for search, seeing that he was posted as wanted even in Alexandria, so far away from the scene of his nefarious exploits. He still held in his fist the crumpled sheet given him by the Armenian. And as the steamer passed on to sea he caught sight of the *xebec* flying down the coast, and the depth of Dion's treachery came upon him with redoubled force.

He opened the paper again, and looked blankly at fingers stained black with damp printer's ink. It took but an instant for the truth to sink into his brain.

"The ruddy cheat!" he exclaimed. "That's Dion's smart trick, too--gettin' this printed and plantin' it on me to scare me off! Fat lot o' good it done his messenger!" he spat viciously, remembering the Armenian's wryly twisted neck.

He glanced up at the bridge, to see the captain looking down at him with strange interest. At once he saw a shrewd method of getting even with his double-dealing mate and crew. It would make him secure with this steamer skipper, too, should anything happen.

"Just a minute, cap'n," he called up. "I got somethin' to tell yer as may be useful. Come on down."

To the attentive captain he pointed out the *xebec*, and told enough of her history to show him how he might benefit by having her stopped.

"You can signal to the war-ship, can't you? Tell 'em wot she is. There's a reward out for her, cap'n, and you can get it any time. 'It won't stop yer v'yage at all, 'cos they won't know where yer wireless comes from, will they?"

"But are you sure that's the pirate *xebec*? It would put me in a mess if I had her stopped and she proved to be some plain trader," said the skipper, looking narrowly at Tim.

"Am I sure?" snarled Tim, shaking a fist at the receding *xebec*. "I ought to be! Ain't I been—" He pulled himself up sharply, aware that he had said too much. "I been in Aleck long enough to hear all about them fellers," he went on. "If I hadn't got to go to Beirut on business I'd stop and get that reward meself, mister."

"I see," rejoined the skipper, pulling at his beard. "I'll try it. There's a reward for the boss pirate, isn't there, besides the one for piracy? Wasn't his name Holly, or something? A deserter from the British navy?"

"That's 'im," grinned Tim. "Rough ol' lot, from what I 'ear."

"Very well, my friend, he'll be stopped very shortly. You come down with me and I'll show you a cabin, since you say you can pay passage. Dinner's at six."

Tim was shown into a tiny room scarcely big enough to swing a cat in: the port-

hole was hardly bigger than a saucer; the iron side of the ship sweated moisture direct on to the bed.

"Oh, it 'll do," he decided with a grimace. "It ain't fer long, is it?" But the skipper had gone up again, and Tim took a deep draft of water in relief at his escape.

Then the effect of his recent potations overcame him, and he lay luxuriously in the narrow bunk and slept amid visions of a captured *xebec*, and dangling rows of pirates among which the face of Tim Holly was missing. Other visions, less gruesome, showed him a different Tim Holly, safe in Beirut, rolling in the riches contained at present in a broad money-belt, surrounded by discreet servants and pretty, agreeable, black-eyed females with no other will than his pleasure.

Then, naturally, his dreaming brain showed him the less desirable things from which he had escaped, and among them he saw views of Grand Harbor, Malta, and Port Said, prominent in each view being that same old flag which he had disgraced. Quite naturally his dream took him from Grand Harbor to a little, dirty wine-shop at Samra, and that brought vividly to his recollection Concetta, Dion, and—

"Gawd! I don't ever want to go back there!" he awoke exclaiming, in a cold sweat.

Then, reaching over his head, he took the water-bottle and drank thirstily; and as he replaced it a knock sounded on his door and the captain's voice inquired if he was awake.

"Wot is it?" growled Tim, too uneasy after his dream to get out of bed right away.

"They've gone after the *xebec*," said the captain, and his voice sounded strangely shaky, as if he were either sorrowful or rumbling with laughter. "The biggest pirate of 'em all will be collared very soon, too. When I sent the wireless to the war-ship they sent me back a description of Holly. I asked 'em for it."

Tim gasped; then he recovered his balance and replied in sleepy tones:

"I 'ope they'll cop 'im, mister. A 'ot lot, 'e is. Call me when we get in sight



o' Beirut. I don't want no supper, and don't s'pose I'll want any brekfust. You can send me in a bottle o' rum, if you got any."

"Haven't any rum. Sorry. But please yourself about food. You'll be hungry before you land."

"Oh, I dunno," retorted Tim, impatient of all the talk through a closed door when he wanted to sleep again. "How long will yer old camel wagon take to steam the three 'undred mile to Beirut, then?"

"We're not going to Beirut. I never said we were," began the captain. Tim was out of his bunk like a flash, and at the door, yelling. But as he tugged at the handle the skipper's voice finished what he had started to say: "Those camels you saw are for government transport, bound out to the Cape with a draft from Malta.

That's where you're bound for, Tim Holly—Valetta, Malta!"

Tim tugged and battered at the door in vain. It was locked; and all his great strength, aided by fear and fury, could not shake it in its frame.

He turned away at last, his fists and knees bleeding, and stared long through the tiny port-hole. Far away in the south he made out the lean shape of a war-ship, sunk by distance to her lower-deck ports, rolling slowly as a stopped ship rolls. And close beside her was another, much smaller craft, a mere speck it seemed; but to the eyes of Tim Holly, who knew that speck so well, it was a *xebec*, three-masted, and in imagination he could see a line of cornered pirates, not fighting to a glorious finish, but creeping like the meanest curs up the side of their captor.

(The end.)



## DOGGEREL

I'M merely a dog with a very snub nose,  
And dreary expression of eye;  
I've hair on my body, and more on my toes,  
And carry what tail I have high.

My mistress—the dearest a dog ever knew—  
Is human, but fine all the same;  
Albeit, poor creature, her legs are but two,  
And never a tail to her name!

I take her for walks and look after her well,  
And never allow her to fight  
With strangers, for sometimes—you never can tell—  
They not only bark, but they bite!

She gives me my supper, and when it is done,  
I curl for a nap on her knee.  
Let others repine for a place in the sun,  
That place is sufficient for me!

And when we are nearing the end of Life's day,  
I'll cherish her still all the more;  
For who can describe how— Excuse me, I pray,  
She's just left a bone on the floor!

*Lenore Palmer.*

# Jason, Son of Jason by J. U. Giesy

Author of "Mimi," "Palos of the Dog Star Pack," etc.

(Sequel to "The Mouthpiece of Zitu")

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE EMISSARY.

**A**LL Scira was *en jete*, or seemed so, though there was a strange sullenness about her crowds, despite the flags, the banners that decked the houses and lined the streets, and flew above her blue walls.

The Mouthpiece of Zitu was coming from Aphur on a mission, and the city was adorned to greet him by the orders of Mutlos, Governor of Cathur himself. The throngs which waited his coming, to welcome him, and escort him to the house of Koryphu, where the sun-rayed banner of Aphur hung beside that of Cathur in the almost breathless air, wore their brightest garments. But his mission forbade little holiday spirits in the minds of the crowd.

True vendors of sweetmeats and light wines in tabur hide sacks slung on sinewy, naked shoulders, passed among them, jugglers and acrobats performed their tricks and feats of strength on mats spread on the pavement. But that was merely the seeking of profit on the part of those who plied their various trades. It had naught to do with the kidnaping of Naia, wife of the Mouthpiece, her carrying into the neighboring nation which had twice endeavored to capture the northern pillar of the Gateway—once over fifty years before, and again at a more recent date.

Wherefore, Koryphu, the man with whom the Mouthpiece would lie as guest in Scira was no longer of unimportance in Cathur. Why Koryphu in this hour? the people asked. And possibly Koryphu asked himself as he prepared to welcome his guest: Why the honor of the Mouthpiece of Zitu's presence in this time of his bereavement, at which when a messenger from Mutlos had come and told him of it, he had gasped.

What was the purpose of the man to whom all Tamarizia looked as little less than a demigod in his knowledge, in visiting Koryphu, who had poured over tablets and scrolls in a semiseclusion ever since the disgrace Kyphallos, son of Scythys, now happily dead, had brought upon Cathur's royal house?

Be that as it may he prepared his residence for the occasion and on the day of the expected arrival of Jason Croft donned his bravest apparel and waited to welcome his guest.

Yet it was mid-afternoon before Jadgor's galley, bearing the standard of Zitra—the circle and cross—appeared and bore down on Scira's walls.

The giant sea doors swung open, admitting her to the harbor, and closed again when she had passed. Breaking forth Cathur's flag, she advanced across the inner harbor and swung to a mooring. A band of trumpeters ruffled forth from the quay, where Mutlos waited. The gangway was

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thrust forth, and the Mouthpiece of Zitu, walking alone and unattended, appeared.

"Hail, Mouthpiece of Zitu!" the assembled populace roared.

Mutlos advanced. The two men struck hands on shoulders, and joined their palms in a moment's clasp. Side by side they entered Mutlos's motur. The trumpeters fell in before them, breaking a pathway through the crowds.

So came Jason to Scira once more, somber of mien, yet steady-eyed.

"My sympathy as a man I give thee, Advisor of Tamarizia," Mutlos said as the car began to move. "My assistance and that of Cathur I pledge you an' it be needed. This thing passes all endurance. Say but the word and Cathur will gather her swords."

"Nay," Jason replied slowly. "Thy sympathy, Cathur, warms the heart of the man. But the time of rescue has not arrived. Armed interference at present were ill-advised since Zollaria fears it, and should it be attempted, thinks to offer my son to Bel a sacrifice."

"Zitu!" Mutlos gasped. "What then O Mouthpiece? Where lies a chance of rescue? Zollaria makes demands of ransom?"

"Aye—or will. Even now one approaches a rendezvous in the mountains north of Cathur to meet with an agent of ours. It is because of that I am here."

"To arrange a mission to this meeting?" Mutlos said with ready understanding.

"Aye. Zollaria sends Kalamita of ill-fame to Cathur as her agent. Tamarizia, with the knowledge of Cathur and his own consent if it is forthcoming, sends Scythys's son."

"Now, by Zitu!" Admiration waked in Mutlos's eyes. "'Tis well thought of—to face that tawny enchantress—this creature of Adita by one in whose heart must burn hot hate against her. Guardsmen I place at your disposal and his. My palace lies open to you, and you will honor it with your presence—or plan you to lodge in Koryphu's house?"

"With Koryphu this night at least," said Jason. "Yet with Mutlos things must be discussed ere the mission fares forth. Hence

at the palace on the night succeeding the sun after this. I accept the offer of guardsmen gladly. A score will be enough."

"They will be forthcoming," Mutlos promised, and spoke to his driver. "To Koryphu's house."

Up to the door of the lesser palace, stalked Jason alone, once he had descended from the motur.

But Koryphu had marked his coming, and the door slid open before him.

"Hail to thee, Tamarizia, in the person of Jason, Mouthpiece of Zitu," Koryphu exclaimed and drew back a pace before him, that he might enter under the eyes of the watching crowd.

His eyes were a trifle bright with excitement, his features a bit flushed with unwonted color at this sudden prominence thrust upon him—wherein the governor's car, with the governor in it, set down so distinguished a guest at his doors.

"My lord," he said once the portal was closed, shutting them in together after Mutlos had risen in his motur and bowed and he had returned the salutation. "My lord!"

"Greetings to you, Koryphu, son of Scythys," Croft responded. "Behold in me not so much anything as a man bereft and sorely troubled by his loss—one who comes to you thus in a time of trouble to ask you to lend him aid."

Koryphu's eyes widened swiftly. "But, by Zitu—in what can one of fallen fortunes aid you, Mouthpiece of Zitu?" he questioned in uncertain fashion.

"It is of that we must speak together, Prince of Cathur," Croft replied.

"Come then." Koryphu turned and led the way across a court done in blue and crystal, surrounded by a balcony of blue and white to a room at the farther end—the same room in which Jason at the time of his astral visit to him had seen him bending over his tablets and scrolls—his study—the room in which more than any other Koryphu spent his life.

"Be seated, lord," he invited, indicating a redwood chair and taking his place in another drawn close to a table of copper, littered with numerous scrolls. "Loss is not unknown to Scythys's son, nor the feeling of

it. Yet never praise be to Zitu and Azil has he lost either wife or child. Wherefore, only in the mind may he conceive faintly of thy sense of loss, and therein share thy grief with thee. Speak—Koryphu lends his ear to thy voice.”

Jason explained—going at some length into past events—advising the Cathurian of the meeting to be held in the mountains, declaring it of vital importance to establish negotiations with Zollaria as quickly and protract them in indefinite fashion, in his estimation, proffering Koryphu the leadership of the first embassy at last.

“I—Koryphu!” The Cathurian noble stammered, his breathing a trifle quickened, his nostrils a trifle tightened. “Zitu’s Mouthpiece chooses me for such an errand as this?”

“Aye.” Croft inclined his head, watching the man before him. “Koryphu the Tamarizian.”

“Tamarizian!” Koryphu repeated and paused and went on again in a somewhat bitter fashion. “But why, Koryphu—why the son of a discredited house? Why not another, whose loyalty none could question?”

His eyes narrowed slightly and he clenched a hand.

Croft looked him full in the face. In it he saw how deeply his brother’s action had affected this man—how the loss of confidence, the lack of support by the people of Cathur, as shown by his overwhelming defeat in the last elections, had rankled without expression in his mind. The thing looked back at him a smoldering fire from between Koryphu’s lids. It had quivered in his voice.

“Because,” said he, “who heads this mission, will meet Kalamita of Zollaria in the north.”

“Kalamita!” Koryphu stiffened. Suddenly his body stirred, he half rose in his chair and sank back well-nigh gasping. “That—foul sepulchre of dead loves and unholy passions—that stench in the nostrils of true men, and blot on the name of women. Say you she comes herself to this meeting?”

“Aye,” said Jason Croft. “Wherefore, there appears no better agent in all Tama-

rizia to meet her when she comes to trap me also as she hopes, seeing she has bidden me to this conference in person, than one who loves her not, nor is apt to fall captive to her shameless graces—than Koryphu Tamarizian first, and son of Cathur, and loyal in his heart to both, as I believe.”

“Thou believest?” Koryphu questioned with an eagerness almost pathetic.

“Aye. Else were I not sitting in his house.”

For a moment silence came down, save for Koryphu’s audible breathing. For a moment his eyes flamed with a sudden light, and then he turned them away since, in the code of Tamarizian manhood, there was little room for tears. And then he rose.

“Zitu!” he broke forth hoarsely and lifted his arms. “Father of life—hast then given ear in such fashion to my prayers. Is the time of penance ended? Am I again to step forth proudly among men as among my peers? Is it so your Mouthpiece brings this labor to me—placing upon my shoulders a task that through it I may prove my love of nation, tear to ribbons the garment of sorrow in which I have been clothed? If so, I think thee, Zitu.”

He sank down again, dropping his head upon his folded arms on the table among the scrolls.

For a time Croft watched him, elation and sympathy blended in his regard. Here was his agent ready. There was small doubt Koryphu would accept the chance to prove he had been misjudged as blood brother to Kyphallos. The mere thought of what the opportunity offered had left him too deeply moved.

“Nay, Koryphu,” he said presently as the Cathurian kept his face hidden while his shoulders heaved. “None questioned thy loyalty really. Half thy sorrow was of your own conceiving. Few spake illy of thee. Men deemed rather you had taken for comfort to your tablets and scrolls. By Jadgor and Robur of Aphur, my choice of thee is approved.”

“Hai! Jadgor—Robur! Say you so?” Koryphu lifted his head. “Perchance thou art right,” he went on more calmly. “Perchance I have brooded over much. Yet comes this now as the realization of dreams

born in nights of brooding, hopes formed in sorrow, held in sorrow, and well-nigh dead."

"You accept then?" Croft questioned.

"Accept. Aye, by Zitu—and I shall serve you loyally. Speak what you wish, Mouthpiece of Zitu. What do I when I face this beauteous slayer of men's souls—shall I slay her for you, watch for opportunity and strike her dead? If so the life of Koryphu were a small price—"

"*Hilka!*" Croft interrupted the man's almost hysterical outburst. "Hold, Koryphu of Cathur—Koryphu does naught save listen to her words. Think you the death of their agent would help us—or render my dear ones more safe—or that the dead body of Koryphu would bring to Tamarizia more swiftly the demands Zollaria will make through her toward those negotiations that shall follow. Nay, small danger lies in this mission so that rather than inflamed with rage when he stands before her, Koryphu appears but one come to return with her words."

"Aye." Koryphu caught his breath quickly. "Yet owe her I a debt of over long standing."

Croft nodded. "I deny it not. Let Koryphu's vengeance begin when she sees me not of Tamarizia's party—and finds herself outplayed."

"Thinks she the Mouthpiece of Zitu a fool to walk into her trap?" Koryphu questioned.

"She thinks me a husband and father, less well informed of her true purpose than perchance I am," Croft replied. "It were well she be not undeceived. Wherefore I send airplanes north before you—to fly above the mountains as though seeking a place of concealment, that she may not know I am aware Naia of Aphur lies in Berla, and fancy I think her hidden in the mountains as in her message to me she said."

Koryphu narrowed his eyes in appreciation of what was intended. "The thought were well conceived. I do naught then save meet this Zollarian and give ear to her terms of ransom?"

"Naught else, save say that those terms will be brought to my ears and the ears of the nation."

"Tis well," the Cathurian accepted.

"That shall I do, and naught to endanger the success of the undertaking, because of my personal affairs. When do I depart upon my mission?"

"Presently," Jason told him. "Mutlos will furnish you a score of guardsmen. You will go north after the airplanes have arrived."

"Two alighted before Mutlos's palace this morning," Koryphu announced. "They declared to the crowds they came by your orders, yet said nothing further. Are there others?"

"Six in all," said Jason, smiling, well pleased that his flyers had lost no time. "Doubtless the others will arrive."

Dusk had fallen as they talked. A Mazzerian major domo with lighted lamps appeared and set them in the metal sconces on the walls. Koryphu rose.

"A momentous day in the life of Koryphu," said he, "is drawing to a close. Zitu's Mouthpiece will pardon, if he withdraws to the presence of his wife to acquaint her with his decision and the changed fortune of his house."

"Aye," Jason assented, well enough pleased to let the man carry his news to the ears of his family, and remain with his own thoughts for the time. "Carry my greetings to her and say I wait her pleasure of a meeting."

Koryphu appeared slightly embarrassed. "We have lived much alone of late, Hupor. You will dine with us or shall I have food sent to you?"

"With you if it suits your convenience," Croft replied, forming a vivid picture of the seclusion that held this house once second in the state only to that of the king.

Later he met Pala, a not uncomely woman, though showing the effects of that self same seclusion in face and manner, and her two children, a daughter and a son, and reclined with them at their common table—speaking of general topics with the two elders until the meal was done.

Once more back in Koryphu's study he went into the details of the mission with him, finally arranging to go before Mutlos the succeeding afternoon. Long before the oil lamps had burned low in their sconces the thing was done, and his conversation



with Koryphu had convinced him that in Naia's suggestion of the former prince, the right man had been found.

Passing from the study to the apartment set aside for his slumbers, the two men intercepted Pala, speeding a parting guest, and she spoke to her husband.

"Laura, wife of Gazor—Koryphu. Thou hast not forgotten."

"Nay." Koryphu bent before the matron in greeting. "Yet it is long since I have given her salutation."

For a moment the face of the caller regarded him almost blankly and then she smiled. "Ah, but—old friends should not be forgotten." She glanced at Jason.

Koryphu made the introduction, and she sank to a knee before Zitu's Mouthpiece.

"Hupor, my obedience to thee. It came to my ear you were present in Scira, and somewhat of the reason. Zitu uphold you in a troubled hour."

"And spare them to you," said Jason, bowing.

And yet when he stretched out on his couch and drew its silken coverings about him, the thought came again as it had come while he watched Laura rise, that life on Palos or earth was very much the same thing, and those with friends were, after all, those on whom those in power smiled.

The next day he spent with Mutlos, arranging for Koryphu's departure and explaining his purpose in the airplanes, the last of which arrived. The evening passed in meeting many of the Cathurian officials, bidden by Mutlos to the occasion and a feast at which Koryphu and Pala were among the more prominent guests. No secret had been made of his mission. In fact, word of it had been given out.

For the time being Koryphu found himself again a person of importance—one in whom Tamarizia herself had given evidence of faith. Watching him under circumstances more or less trying to a man of inferior metal, Croft found himself pleased by his demeanor—satisfied that he would see the meeting with Kalamita carried off with what it held of success.

Well pleased then, he gave orders that the planes depart in the morning, and that later Koryphu and his escort should leave

for the north. Taking tablets, he wrote rapidly a message to Kalamita, setting forth the fact that the bearer was his representative in person, and gave it to Koryphu after pressing his signet into the waxen surface with instructions to place it in her hands.

It was the last move. In so far as it could serve the meeting on which Kalamita counted for far more than it was fated to bring her was arranged.

Stretching himself on the couch in the sumptuous chamber in Mutlos's palace, to which he had been led, he freed his consciousness from his body and went in search of the woman herself, to find her in the midst of a wayside camp of Zollarian soldiery, asleep on the pads of her gnuppa drawn conveyance, beside which the giant Gor of the galley mounted watch.

Koryphu went north with the dawn, and Kalamita was hastening to meet him. Satisfied, he left her in slumbrous ignorance of his presence and visited Naia, telling her of the progress he was making, and how Robur was stoking the furnaces of Himyra toward the creation of yet another marvel, in the eyes of the population, until they flared red above the red walls of the city in the night.

In the morning he sent Robur a message announcing his departure, said farewell to Mutlos and was driven to the quays and Jadgor's galley. Going aboard he gave the order for sailing. The sea doors were opened. He passed through them, and turned the prow of the craft at his disposal swiftly into the south.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE MEETING.

**K**ORYPHU of Cathur, under the banner of Tamarizia—with seven red and white stripes and a blue field with seven stars—a thing designed by Croft himself after the republic was established, fared north in a gnuppa drawn conveyance with his escort of Cathurian guards.

Kalamita of Zollaria came down from the north in a similar fashion, but with a vastly heavier escort—strong enough as Croft had suggested to Robur to avoid any chance

of surprise. Croft sailed south, but watched their progress each night, when he let his consciousness steal forth. The airplanes sailed north and found themselves a landing place as best they might, to which, after each day spent above the mountains north of Cathur's border, they returned.

Three days brought Jason to Himyra. Jadgor's galley was swift, indeed. Each day he spent in the shops sometimes with Robur, sometimes without him, when matters of state interfered, drafting designs with ruler and calipers and stylus, supervising the makings of patterns, holding consultations with his captains over the production of each part he desired, calling for speed and more speed.

It was the thing that obsessed him now that Koryphu was going north and Kalamita was coming south—speed in the production of the only thing that seemed to his straining mind fitted to meet his desperate need. And a part of each night he spent in the laboratory he had fitted up in Robur's own part of the palace, experimenting in the blending of potent reagents, the making of the liquid fire.

In Zitra, in Cathur and in Aphur, Tamarizia roared, and by degrees the other states of the nation had the word of the last Zollarian outrage and added their voices to the chorus of resentment and demand for some retaliatory move. Croft had their sympathy and support in his plans of rescue, unequivocally expressed.

Meanwhile Robur took what steps he advised to safeguard the secret of how that rescue was to be made. Guardsmen established a patrol on the banks of the Na, with a port of search at its mouth, where all ascending vessels were compelled to stop by watchful motor craft. Other guards once more went aboard each ship at Himyra's gates, both north and south. For the time being the red city came to be an armed camp, as closely guarded from entry by unvouched for outsiders, as though in a state of siege.

And his labors ended, each night Croft stretched himself out on his couch and closed his physical eyes and maintained his weird observation of events taking place in the north.

Three days after his return to Himyra, Kalamita arrived at her hunting lodge. Rather the thing was a small palace, built of native stone from the mountains and massive beams of wood—its central court fur-lined, its walls and floors covered with trophies of the chase—skins of the woolly tabur, which ran wild as well as in domesticated herds, of the ferocious tigerlike beast, such as the sculptured group in Jason's mountain home portrayed as attacking the man who sought to keep its ravening jaws from the body of a kneeling woman—and of other carnivora as well, many of them gifts to her from admirers, many of them the pelts of animals slain by herself.

And there the Zollarian magnet set herself down with her escort camped about her to await the coming of the man she hoped would be drawn to her out of the south. She sent guards farther in that direction to meet and escort him. Koryphu at the time was still distant some half-day's journey, and Jason was assured it would be noon of the next day before the Cathurian appeared.

Wherefore he spent the succeeding morning in the shops and returned at midday to the palace, retiring to his rooms after explaining to Robur that he intended being present in the spirit at the meeting between Kalamita and the Tamarizian agent, even if not in the flesh as the woman desired.

Robur nodded. "Zitu—that such things can be. Not that I doubt you, Jason, but the matter never ceases to excite my wonder. Yet shall I wait with impatience word of what occurs when she beholds Koryphu, brother of Kyphallos, in your place."

"She is apt to show displeasure," Jason told him, and he was thinking as much—that the beautiful Zollarian was very apt to show marked displeasure, covered perhaps as best it might be by a haughty bearing—as he stretched himself out and closed his eyes.

To the mountains north of Cathur. The Central Sea a-sparkle in the sunlight fled away beneath him. Scira was passed and the many weary stretches of winding road over which Koryphu had passed until he found him, advancing with the Cathurian footmen ringed about him, the Tamarizian

flag a glowing standard above him, led by the Zoliarian guards.

Swiftly then Jason willed himself into the hunting lodge where sat Kalamita, dressed or undressed as one might prefer to express it, for the occasion, in a huge chair draped with the black and tanhide of some savage creature; Gor, her giant attendant by her side.

Fire—the fire of delayed purpose burned in her tawny eyes—there was the suppressed liteness of the predatory creature already scenting the kill in her every movement, the tremor of suppressed emotion in her words.

"Thou understandest, Gor, that when this one comes before me, I shall demand that we speak together alone. And I have given word to the guardsmen that his men shall be surrounded and at a word from me, after my purpose is accomplished, all save one be put to the sword. After a time as we speak together I shall simulate anger at some word of his, to the speaking of which I shall lead him by taunting speech, and then fling thyself upon him and bind him. This is clear?"

"Aye, mistress, Gor hears and obeys," said Gor, curling back his heavy lips.

Kalamita's rounded busts rose and fell sharply in a deep-caught breath. "See to it, then. Let there be no mistake."

"Nay, mistress—when has Gor failed thee—or to do thy bidding?"

"None fail me save once," said Kalamita. "Enough."

Outside a trumpet blew a ruffling blast. There followed a pause, and then Cathur tricked out in his bravest armor, with the twin mountain peaks of Cathur on it done in blue stones, appeared in the doorway of the lodge between two Zoliarian captains, and paused.

"Cathur for Tamarizia seeks audience with Kalamita," the senior captain announced.

For a moment the face of the woman twitched with some sudden emotion and then she replied, gripping the arm of her chair till her knuckles whitened. "Let Cathur approach."

The captains fell back and disappeared. Koryphu advanced. A single pace before her he halted.

"These tablets bring I from Jason, Mouthpiece of Zitu to Tamarizia, to Kalamita," he said, and placed Croft's message in her hand.

She held them for a single instant, ere she hurled them to the floor. Her lips twitched, hardened, her tawny eyes glared. Half she rose from her fur-lined seat and sank back again. Her body panted. And then her words lashed forth in hot contempt. "Now by Bel, it would seem thy Mouthpiece is a man of caution that he sends thee in his stead to treat with me concerning Naia of Aphur and her child."

Koryphu waited, standing stolidly before her, neither moving nor making answer, while a slow flush mounted to his face. Gor stole a glance at his mistress. The silence became oppressive. Presently Kalamita once more drew a body-filling breath.

"Well—hast lost thy tongue, messenger of Jason, or have you perchance never beheld a woman?" she rasped.

"Nay." Koryphu lifted a hand and pointed to the fallen tablets. "Yonder lies the nature of my mission. I come to hearken unto Kalamita's words, and having hearkened, to return again to Jason, Mouthpiece of Zitu, with her demands."

"Say you so?" Plainly Kalamita was fighting for control. Once more, as in Berla, she was faced by an unexpected element in her plans. The thing on which she had counted to win her country's ends at least—to glut her own thirst for revenge in a measure, was here in the person of the man before her, withheld from her outstretched hand. Inwardly she raged as any vengeful person may rage when the object of their hatred escapes their vengeance—and doubly because, despite her assurance, Helmor had foretold some such ending to the meeting she had planned.

But outwardly she strove for calm. "How are you called, man of Cathur, who come to listen to my demands and carry them to this strong man, who exerts not himself to come before me?"

"Koryphu, brother of Kyphallos, woman of Zollaria," Koryphu replied in a somewhat husky voice.

Kalamita recoiled. Her body shrank back as from a blow, and then she stiffened.

"Koryphu!" she repeated, staring at him out of widened lids. "Now, in Bel's name, what trickery is this that sends before me the weakling student brother, at whom Kyphallos laughed."

"No trickery, Zollaria lies in it, but rather purpose," Koryphu returned, still more thickly, "in that Jason chose for his messenger one who had sufficient knowledge of thee to assure his remaining unmoved by your charms, no matter how shamelessly employed—one who would hearken to your demands as regarding Naia of Aphur and Jason, Son of Jason, yet give no ear to other words."

Mentally Croft applauded even while physically Kalamita, the magnet, gasped.

"Thy Mouthpiece were a shrewd man," she said after a moment, "yet might he have felt doubly assured in thy choice, had he considered thy presence. Kalamita wastes not her wiles on aught less than a man. Did he send also to guard thee, the things that fly over the mountains the past two days?"

"Nay," said Koryphu as one who considered his answer. "They but seek a place of hiding, since Kalamita said her whose terms of ransom I come to bear to him, would lie hidden in the mountains until such terms were arranged."

Kalamita smiled in crafty fashion, with a vulpine widening of the crimson slit of her mouth. One would have said she was pleased by the information.

"As he wills," she said more lightly. "I might forbid it, but it disturbs me not. He will not find the place, and endangers the terms himself, since a part of my demands were gained, already if one of his devices falls. Even now my guardsmen lie in wait for such a happening in the hills, since I had conceived his purpose, and foreseen wherein it might be turned to my advantage."

"Nay," Koryphu appeared unmoved by the information. "Let your guards beware, since if one of them falls it will be destroyed. Does Kalamita desire the secret of them for Zollaria or herself?"

His lips relaxed slightly in an almost taunting fashion as he regarded the woman before him out of steady, unwavering eyes.

And again Croft applauded his choice of the man who was unveiling the true state of affairs behind the present meeting, and yet leaving Zollaria's agent at least in part deceived. For his words appeared to flicker and she answered quickly:

"Were it not the same, Kalamita being Zollarian, man of Cathur?"

"Aye, perhaps," Koryphu assented. "If perchance the interests be the same. It would seem then that as well as Kalamita's price to Jason, I return to Tamarizia with Zollaria's demands."

"And thy shoulders can support so vast a burden, Cathur—these terms I warn you are not light."

"I await them," Koryphu replied.

"Then hear Kalamita's price for the pale-faced one and her suckling." The woman leaned a trifle forward as she named them. "Mazhur must be returned—the Gateway must be opened without let or hindrance. There must be no tax exacted over Zollarian traffic on the Central Sea. There must be surrendered with men to explain them the secrets of your moturs and your air machines, and of all other devices born of the Mouthpiece of Zitu's brain—the fire-weapons, the balls that burst when thrown amidst an enemy's forces. Name these things as the price of ransom to your Mouthpiece when you return."

"These seem heavy terms, indeed." Koryphu threw out his hands in a helpless gesture. His face was pale, even though Croft in their conversations had foreshadowed some such thing. "Were it not wiser for Zollaria to ask less with a chance of obtaining somewhat than to overshoot the mark by asking everything?"

"Nay." Kalamita leaned back well pleased as it seemed by the man's quite natural confusion on being given a message that spelled little less than his country's ruin. "Nay, by Bel, Cathur—once was there a time when thy brother's plans and mine went down in confusion when Tamarizia demanded and Zollaria yielded. Now Zollaria speaks, and should Tamarizia not accept, or make any move to resist her demands by force of arms, Naia of Aphur goes to the mines with the blue men who labor in them and her puny offspring into Bel's

mighty arms a paltry sacrifice. So much herself the woman understands—wherefore she sends this ring to Jason to plead as her own voice that he hearken to Kalamita's words."

Stripping a signet from her finger, she extended it upon her palm.

Koryphu's features were strained as he took it. "These things then shall I carry to Jason's ears. Does Kalamita await his answer?"

"Nay—let Jason arrange the next meeting," said Kalamita. "I go to a place he knows not of, despite his man-made birds and their spying. Yet will a messenger on the highway north from Mazhur be met, and his message accepted. So I shall arrange. Perhaps if he feel need, he may employ one of these self-same flying devices."

She broke off sharply as a commotion arose outside the lodge, then turned to Gor. "Go learn the cause of this disturbance—"

Gor stalked to the door, and paused.

"Mistress, they come," he declared, and drew back as a group of Zollarian guardsmen in charge of a captain entered, a man in leathern jacket and helmet held captive in their midst.

With a start Croft recognized one of his own fliers. Disaster—already one of the planes had fallen, he thought, and heard the captain confirm his fears.

The man saluted with upflung arm. "Behold, princess, one whom we bring before you—a Tamarizian dog—who fell with the device he rode like an arrow-pierced bird from the skies."

Kalamita's smile was coldly gloating as she regarded the captive, young, slender, grimed by the smirching of his fall and the struggle attending his capture, his leathern flying-suit torn, and gashed where some Zollarian, overardent, had slit it with a spear-head. For a moment she turned her regard on Koryphu as if to say here was her prediction already verified, and back again to the man.

"Well, Tamarizian found you the hiding place you flew in search of?" she sneered.

"Nay." The youth stiffened. "'Tis not always easy, Zollarian, to discover the

hiding places of Zitemku's agents. Nor have we searched over long."

Kalamita's features hardened. She gave her attention to the captain. "What of the machine?"

"The machine, princess, was by this one destroyed ere we could prevent it. It lies burst and ruined by flames."

"So?" Rage lighted the woman's tawny eyes—once more she was baffled in a purpose. "For that he dies."

Under his grime and sweat, inside the circle of his helmet, the aviator's face went pale, but he maintained his poise of body even as Koryphu spoke quickly: "Princess of Zollaria, unsay those words."

"Peace, brother of Kyphallos," Kalamita turned like a tigress on him. "Who are you to interfere? Stand back and watch how Zollaria deals with Tamarizian spies. Gor, take thy spear."

Gor's lips curled back as he advanced slightly, lifted his heavy weapon and poised it.

Impotently Croft's spirit writhed as he gazed upon the scene—on Kalamita leaning forward in all her savage beauty, her sinuous body panting, her nostrils flared, once more gripping the arms of her chair with tightened fingers—at Koryphu deadly pale because of the contemplated outrage, at the figure of Gor, wonderful in its sheer brute strength and proportion, set for the thrust on the word of command, at the guardsmen, the captain, the figure of his flyer, drawn up now to its fullest stature, proudly erect in the face of death, and knew himself powerless to intervene.

And suddenly the aviator threw up his hand toward the other man of his nation. "Hail Cathur, Aphur salutes thee," his voice came strongly. "Long life to Tamarizia. Say to Zitu's Mouthpiece that Rogur—"

"Slay!" Kalamita screamed.

Gor's spear plunged home.

"Carry off that carrion." The woman's arm rose jeweled and rigid, pointing at the body.

The captain growled an order. The guardsmen lifted the limp form in its suit of leather and bore it out on their spears.

Kalamita swung her whole form lithely



about to where Koryphu was standing. "Say to Zitu's Mouthpiece that so we treat his spies."

"Aye," he made answer gruffly. "Small doubt but I shall narrate to Zitu's Mouthpiece many things."

For a moment the eyes of man and woman met and plunged glances lance-like one into the other, ere there rose again an outward commotion, a burst of thunderous sound, which gave way in an instant to groans and cries.

Koryphu stiffened. Kalamita started to her feet, as the outcry continued. Some of the flush of anger faded from her features, and then Koryphu, turning, ran across the floor toward the doorway and outside it.

"The standard—the standard of Tamarizia, let it be unfurled," he roared.

Out of the sky came down a drumming from where an airplane sailed. On the ground lay some half-dozen Zollarian guards—the same who had carried out the aviator's body—some of them without motion, some of them that groaned and moved. The vengeance of the flyer's fellow had been swift and deadly. But as the flag of Tamarizia broke out over Koryphu's party, the Tamarizian in the plane circling to drop another grenade, altered his course, zoomed up above the nearest ridge of hills and disappeared.

Croft quivered in spirit as he watched him. He could scarcely censor his hot-headed action in dropping the bomb on the murderers of his comrade and yet now—blood had been shed on both sides, and Gor was approaching Koryphu where he stood.

"Go!" he commanded with a gesture of dismissal. "My mistress grants you safety since you are of no value save as you carry her message. Take thy men and get thee on thy mission."

"Aye—be you my messenger to carry her my parting greeting," Koryphu returned, and stalked to his carriage, about which, under the banner of Tamarizia, his Cathurians had already formed.

Entering it he gave the word for marching. Followed by the black looks of the Zollarian soldiery he and his party moved off toward the southbound road.

Bloodshed—bloodshed on both sides. Croft opened the eyes of his physical body in Robur's palace and lay staring into the night. Kalamita had slain one of his flyers. The man's death thrilled him as he recalled it, even while it filled him with sorrow. He had died as a patriot, a man loyal to his nation, his last word a wish expressed for that nation's long life. And his fellow had retaliated swiftly, dropping a bomb from the skies. And now Kalamita was returning, no doubt—returning raging to Berla, cheated of the major object of her journey south. And a representative of her nation would wait word on the road that ran north from Mazhur's borders. He lay pondering the matter until dawn and rose.

He sought Robur and told him of all he had seen.

"Send a message into Cathur, Rob, recalling the airplanes," he directed. "Zitu forbid that I waste further the lives of such men. They have served their purpose in a measure. Bid them return."

"And what of the further course of the matter?" Robur inquired.

"Kalamita returns to Berla, in my estimation," said Croft. "She must make report. Yet thus far have we dealt with Kalamita only. Thus far the matter has lain between herself and me alone. It was to me Bathos was sent with his message. Wherefore, so quickly as Koryphu returns, we shall ask Zitra to send one through Mazhur, calling upon Zollaria to confirm or deny Kalamita's acts in a representative parley."

Robur nodded. "By Zitu, I sense your intention. In such a way you safeguard our cousin and gain time for our own endeavors."

"Aye," said Jason, "time in which our work must be pressed with speed."

## CHAPTER XV.

PTAR, PRIEST OF BEL.

**B**Y day the forges of Himyra roared, and at night they blazed. Men toiled and sweated. Croft planned, designed, and urged for haste, instructing, ad-

vising, passing upon each part of the engines of swift deliverance he had ordered made by day, by night watching in his own peculiar fashion the progress of Koryphu back to Cathur, and that of Kalamita north.

Two days after the meeting in the mountains he sent Jadgor's galley to Scira, to await Koryphu's coming and returning to Himyra with the Cathurian aboard, deeming it best to take the man with him to Zittra to appear before Jadgor in person, that his own statements might be confirmed by Koryphu's words. Himself he determined to be present astrally in Berla, when Kalamita appeared before Helmor to make her report. It occurred to him that at such a time something of importance might transpire, and he wished to see how the Zollarian magnet would seek to cover her defeat.

That her return empty handed was a bitter thing in her heart he was well aware, since his nightly visits to her wayside camps showed her cloudy eyed, haughtily exacting, acrid tongued to all, even her giant body-guard. Gnawed by her disappointment, she made her way toward Berla in something like a baffled rage, reached it and drove straight to her own and Bandhor's palace; refreshed herself from her journey and loaded herself with jewels, as though thereby seeking by outward show to mitigate the manner of her return in Helmor's eyes.

Jason, Mouthpiece of Zitu, and Bandhor watched, the former unseen yet seeing, his body stretched seemingly lifeless in Himyra, his astral presence alert to her every move and action, Bandhor sprawled scowling on a copper and silver couch.

"Helmor had right. This Mouthpiece was too shrewd for you, my sister," he sneered.

"Or else lacking in the courage to meet me," Kalamita rejoined, fastening the clasp of an armlet.

"Nay," Bandhor declared, with the respect of the soldier for one of his own profession who had beaten him twice. "He lacks not courage by Bel, or the ability to look even on thy beauty unmoved, as you should be aware."

"Say you so?" Kalamita whirled, stung by his reference to Croft's refusal of her favor on a past occasion, and brought her hand into stinging contact with his ear.

Bandhor sprang up, wagging his head, to tower above her.

"You devil—you yellow-eyed devil!" he roared with guttural laughter. "No doubt you are angered and with justice. To have sent Koryphu—the brother of one who fell on his sword for love of thee—his messenger to you. That were a master move."

Kalamita regarded his amusement out of narrowed amber eyes.

"Laugh fool, an' it pleases you," she said at last, coldly. "A master move indeed. What lies behind it?"

Bandhor frowned. His attention seemed arrested by the question.

"By Bel I know not," he stammered. "Save to learn your price of ransom without walking into the trap you laid, and thereafter to lay a counter proposal before you."

"Counter proposal?" And now Kalamita sneered. "Such things require time, Bandhor. This one seems in small haste to regain a wife and child."

"Or become prisoner to Kalamita," Bandhor suggested.

Kalamita eyed him. Her own expression was brooding.

"Enough," she said. "Your mind reaches not beyond the sweep of your sword. Go—say to Helmor I appear before him, and—say no more, save that I will make all things plain when I arrive."

Bandhor nodded.

"Nay, and thou canst, thou canst do more than Bandhor," he declared, once more frowning, and stalked hugely from the room.

Kalamita remained seated for some time after his departure, her features cast into lines of consideration, tight lipped, a trifle drawn.

"Now Bel aid me!" she cried, at last rising and lifting her jewel-circled arms in a body-stretching gesture, turned and went swiftly down to where Gor waited with her carriage, and its prancing green-plumed gnuppas. Entering the conveyance, she drew the curtains, and reclined on the pad-

ded cushions, her tawny head supported on an arm.

Watching her, Croft sensed that once more her brain was busy with its schemes.

Bandhor met her at the palace and escorted her into a small and sumptuously furnished room. Helmor of Zollaria sat there, his face contorted into an expression of displeasure. As Bandhor and his sister entered he half rose, and Kalamita sank swiftly to her knees.

"Hail Helmor, emperor and lord," she faltered.

"Rise," said the Zollarian monarch. "Thy coming was expected. Bandhor informed me as you bade him, yet seemed unminded to further use his tongue. So, then, you appear before me alone?"

"Aye, Helmor." Kalamita lifted herself on shapely limbs and stood with downcast eyes. Suddenly she had adopted a meekness wholly out of keeping with her usual demeanor. "Helmor foresaw the outcome of my effort in his wisdom. All things fell out as he advised."

"The Mouthpiece came not to the meeting?"

"Nay. Perchance he lacked the courage on which I counted." Kalamita threw up her head. Her tawny eyes flashed for a single instant.

Helmor resumed his seat. His brows knit in a frown.

"I await thy story, sister of Bandhor," he said after a time.

Kalamita explained. Helmor's frown deepened as she proceeded with her story. Once and once only his expression denoted satisfaction, and that when the woman spoke of the airplanes flying above the mountains.

"It would seem then that he knows not the woman lies in Berla," he said, nodding. "It was so I planned. In so much is he deceived. Go on—finish the story."

"Nay," Kalamita resumed. "There is no more save that I stated the requirements of her ransom as it was agreed upon between us, and gave Koryphu her signet which I had taken from her finger, bidding him say to the Mouthpiece that she bade him yield, and that one of the flying devices falling, and the Tamarizian within it,

being captured, though not before he had destroyed it, was slain by my orders before Koryphu's eyes."

"Slain?" repeated Helmor sharply. "Now by Bel were 'wise to slay him, or didst let thy judgment be consumed by rage?"

"Perchance," Kalamita admitted, still adhering to her rôle of meekness. "Yet if so the act was avenged and quickly, in that one of his fellows flew above my lodge and dropped a fire-ball, which, bursting, slew two in the number of my guard—and would have repeated the attack upon us, save that Koryphu himself bade the flag of Tamarizia unfurled above his party, whereat the flyer altered his course and disappeared. Helmor of Zollaria—blood has been shed by Tamarizia in this matter. Did not Helmor vow that such an act by the southern nation should give Bel, the child of the Mouthpiece, a living sacrifice?" And now as she broke off she looked full into Helmor's widening eyes.

Croft's listening spirit quivered, sensing the dark turn in the woman's mind, the deadly purpose of her plans. Tensely he waited while man and woman confronted one another, his soul torn with the strain of the delay that preceded Helmor's words.

And then the Zollarian monarch gathered himself together, controlling what had plainly been no less than a swift shock of surprise. "Aye, so Helmor promised," he returned slowly. "Yet meant he not the act of a man enraged by the death of his fellow—a minor instance—a matter of no consequence along the border. Sister of Bandhor, you appear over quick to destroy what were a safeguard as well as a price of advantage in Helmor's eyes."

Once more Kalamita lowered her visage.

"There were no advantage to Helmor or the nation," she said slowly, "save by favor of the gods. If Kalamita err be it upon her own head, yet thus far the matter has not gone over to our liking—and were Bel's favor purchased—"

"Enough!" All at once Helmor roared. "Question not Bel's favor. Has he not placed these two wholly in our power? Is the way not paved for parley and negotiation? Think you the man who waits on

the road out of Mazhur will fail to receive an answer to our demands?"

"Nay," said Kalamita, "there will be an answer. Yet now is it in my heart to warn Helmor against permitting that these parleys—these discussions of our demands—be entered into over long."

"What mean you?" Helmor's demeanor was uneasy. "Were time not needful when a matter of so great importance is to be arranged?"

"Aye—none may deny it." Kalamita granted the point without hesitation. "And I know not wherein lies the peril save that these be a crafty people, depending more upon their wits than on their strength, and that this Aphurian woman boasted to me aboard my galley that the one who devised those things, the secret of which we are demanding, might well devise a greater. Wherefore let Helmor be warned against protracting his parley to great length."

And now once more Croft's spirit quivered. Let Zollaria depend on the power of might as much as she pleased, this tawny woman, standing before Zollaria's ruler with hypocritically downcast eyes, was possessed of craft at least. Again he waited while Helmor weighed her words, until with surprise and a vast relief he beheld the emperor's expression alter, grow from one of startled speculation to a thing amused.

"A greater device?" he questioned. "Now by Bel what were it? Has he not brought his fire weapons, his fire chariots across the earth, his fire ships to swarm upon the water, his flying devices into the skies? Where else shall he turn for a new field to conquer? Earth, water, air—their mastery is his—and will remain his only unless Zollaria wrests it from him. These airplanes, as he calls them, are our greatest menace—and now they fly above the mountains, seeking her who lies safe inside Berla's walls. Nay, sister of Bandhor, thy work is finished—leave what else remains to be accomplished in Helmor's hands, nor heed the words of a woman. Perchance she meant to raise up a fear thought to affright thee."

Kalamita stiffened.

"Kalamita is not easily affrighted," she made answer. "And being woman, may

sense the meaning of a woman's words. Yet has Helmor spoken. May Kalamita retire now that her mission is ended, less happily than she wished, yet ended none the less?"

"Aye." Helmor inclined his head. "Ere the sun sinks I shall send to your palace a chariot filled with silver. Bandhor remain. I would speak with you briefly."

"Bel strengthen Helmor's mind." To Croft it seemed almost as though a double intendre lurked in the woman's words as she sank again to her knees, rose and passed from the room.

He followed. Let Bandhor and Helmor talk, plan, plot, devise. There lurked not the danger he feared, but rather in the brain of the woman now making her way toward her carriage across the palace court. Seemingly she had taken her dismissal, had yielded to Helmor's decision. Meekness had characterized her most surprisingly throughout the major part of the conversation. Yet Croft did not believe she had given over her more personal designs.

Little by little he was coming more and more to understand the woman, and to realize that in all her sordid standard of existence there lurked one sincere if superstitious strain. She believed in the power of her gods. She had been thwarted in her purpose to honor the greatest of them, by Helmor's resolve to hold Naia and Jason in safety, but with the quick perception of the spirit, Croft felt assured she would try again.

Hence it was with no surprise as she entered her carriage that he heard her direct Gor to the Temple of Bel, before she reclined upon the cushions and drew a gasping breath.

And he followed close beside her as she mounted the steps of the truncated pyramidal base of the temple itself.

It was built of some dark-hued stone, in color nearly black, set down in the exact center of a mighty open space. Pillared it was on four sides, about a mighty central court, like a great rectangular funnel, the sides of which were corrugated with steps, leading down once more to the outer level of the mighty base. These steps could furnish a multitude with seats as he saw at a

glance. And in the center of the remaining level — huge — massive — smoke and fire darkened—horrible in its grinning visage, its pot-bellied furnace back of extended arms, the idol of Bel found place.

At the head of the inner steps on the side from which she had entered, Kalamita paused. So vast was the structure that standing so alone in her supple beauty, her figure became a pigmy thing, was suddenly dwarfed. Her arms rose above her head. She bent once, twice, thrice from the hips in salutation to the monstrous thing before her, its every detail thrown into revolting relief by the light of the open sides above its uncovered court, turned and made her way among the pillars of the surrounding colonnade toward the end opposite that the idol faced.

It was built in, unlike the other three sides, and here Jason fancied as he followed, would be the quarters of the temple attendants and the priests.

Upon a door of silver, set in the ebon surface of the wall, Kalamita hammered with peremptory fist, and waited, until the portal was swung ajar by a heavy-muscled individual clad in no more than a leathern apron tied about his waist.

"Go," she directed, stepping past him. "Say to Ptah that the Princess of Adita desires speech with him at once."

"Aye, beautiful one."

The man saluted and hastened off along a passage, to return and beckon her after him mutely until he paused before a second silver door.

He struck upon it. A voice rumbled from beyond it. The man set it open and Kalamita passed it into the presence of Bel's priest.

Huge he was, powerful, heavy muscled, thick of neck and nose and lip, with a knotted, shaven poll, gross, in seeming an unwieldy human beast, as dissimilar to the lithe beauty as day to night. Yet she flexed her rounded thighs before him, spread her rosy, gem-banded arms and sank down with lowered eyes.

"Hail to Ptah, priest of the Mighty One," she spoke in salutation.

"Rise, Priestess of Adita," said Ptah, his small eyes nearly lost behind heavy lids

lighting at sight of her kneeling figure. "What seeks the Lamp of Pleasure in the house of Ptah?"

"Counsel, O Wise One," Kalamita answered, rising, and went swiftly on to explain concerning her vow to Bel in regard to Naia of Aphur's child.

"So?" Ptah pursed his heavy lips at the end. "Helmor is headstrong nor listens as closely as his fathers to the voices of the gods. In this case hardly could even I defy him, Priestess of Joy."

"Not Bel's priest?" his caller questioned in a tone of unbelief, and broke off sharply and went on again quickly. "Am I in this then to stand forsworn? And think you what may depend upon it. Does Bel take a promise lightly—and were his favor purchased—" Once more she paused.

Ptah frowned.

"True," he said at last. "Few are brought to the temple, since there are fewer wars—and those in the greater part of the children of slaves. It may be—woman of Adita—"

"An augury—an augury, Ptah." Kalamita leaned a trifle toward him. "An augury to foretell how this matter tends. I dare thee to put it to the test—to gaze on the living expression of Bel's pleasure—to hearken to the Strong One's choice."

"Hah!" Ptah stiffened. Once more he pursed his lips, and then rising, he took up a metal hammer and struck with it upon a gong, Croft now perceived let into the substance of the door.

Casting the hammer aside he waited until the man with the leathern apron appeared.

"Go," he commanded then; "fetch me a suckling tabur and the knife of augury from the hall of sacrifice where it is stored."

Returning to his seat he waited, his eyes never shifting from the shape of the woman before him until the man reappeared bearing the little creature he had named, and a massive knife of copper with a weighted blade.

Rising, he received both and held them until the attendant had disappeared.

"Oh, Bel—though Strong One—show us thy pleasure in the matter before the nation and in the case of Naia of Aphur's



suckling. Speak to us through the life of this creature I Ptah am about to sacrifice to thee," his heavy voice rumbled.

Seizing the tabur by the hind legs, he poised the copper blade, and with one muscular sweep of his mighty arm, struck off its head, and laid the carcass down.

"Let me, O Ptah!" cried Kalamita, seizing the reeking knife from the hands of the priest and kneeling to slit open the quivering belly of the tabur, so that the entrails were exposed. Plunging her pink-nailed hands into the quivering mass, she wrenched them forth and spread them writhing on the blood-stained floor.

Ptah bent above them, marking the fall of them closely. The woman still knelt before him, watching his every change of expression out of questioning eyes, holding forth toward him, palm upward, her crimson-dripping hands.

For a time while Croft sickened both at the sight of the uncouth male and the physically lovely woman—the spectacle of beauty and the beast sunk in the unclean orgy of a filthy rite, and at the decision resting upon it, Ptah said nothing, and then he straightened and lifted his hands toward the ceiling. "Bel, I Ptah, thy servant, hear thee," he intoned hoarsely.

"An augury—an augury!" Kalamita panted. "What says the Strong One? Speak, Ptah, that I as well may know his pleasure."

Ptah lowered his back-tilted head. "Naught but the child may prevail to save Zollaria in this matter," he made somewhat cryptic answer after the manner of his calling.

But Kalamita sprang up, her red lips parted, her nostrils flaring—a light of unholy satisfaction in her eyes. "Then," she began, her tone tensely vibrant—

"Nay." Ptah raised a hand. "It lies with Helmor. Him must you persuade to give ear to Bel's decision."

"Or"—she bent toward him, laying her blood-dabbled hand against his mighty torso—"were the child brought into the temple—"

"Hah!" Ptah's eyes fired. "Bel himself has spoken to thee also, Priestess of Adita. Were the child within his temple

none, not even Helmor, would have power to regain him, and were Helmor to know a third defeat, one more bidable to the gods might mount the throne."

For a moment there was silence, and then Kalamita said slowly: "An' he listens not to Bel's message, perchance the Strong One will show me a way to gain our ends."

Ptah nodded. "Perchance, Priestess of Adita."

A glance of understanding passed between them, and Kalamita moved toward the door.

"Be prepared to act quickly should such time arrive," she prompted, and was gone.

False—utterly false—to her womanhood, to her nation, Zollaria's magnet would plot even treason if thereby she fancied she could serve her ends. The realization burst on Croft with a force little short of appalling. Filled with an intolerable loathing, he followed her back to Bandhor's palace, and then returning to Himyra, he opened the eyes of his physical form, and groaned. Sunlight fell into his chamber. A semi-tropic warmth was all about him, and yet, all at once he shivered as with cold.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE DREAM OF HELMOR.

**K**ALAMITA and Ptah. He knew not wholly what they plotted, what plans might lie in their brains. Yet whatever they might intend certain it was that the death of Jason, son of Jason, was included in the plan. And whatever that plan might be, Croft was assured that the priest had taken time to weigh many matters while he bent above the entrails of the tabur suckling, before he had given voice to his none too explicit interpretation of their meaning.

Kalamita—beautiful toy of the Zollarian court and Ptah, priest of the nation's god. And when had there been a time or age wherein the lure of woman, the craft of priest, had failed to largely determine the setting of the stage, when both had not been involved in plot and counterplot? He shivered again and sprang up.

Helmor alone it would seem stood now between Jason and destruction. And in that stand Helmor must be encouraged. He must be doubly warned that harm to the child meant nothing less than destruction to himself, the overthrow of his house. Such word might be sent him by the messenger who would carry an answer north to the borders of Mazhur. Yet before he could be sent some time must needs transpire, and, in the mean time, suddenly a thought seemed given birth in full form in Jason Croft's brain.

Like another experienced long before when as a spirit he battled to find a way to reach to a physical union with Naia the one woman for whom his spirit hungered, it fired him with its potent meaning, set a light of deep-formed purpose in his eyes. Helmor of Zollaria could be warned—and warned in such fashion that one of his nature could scarcely fail to give heed—or so Croft believed. Meanwhile his own work waited, work which in view of his latest knowledge more than ever demanded speed.

He left the palace, entered his motor, parked now always in the red court in readiness for his demands, and drove swiftly to the shops, attended to such matters as demanded his immediate attention, and went on to the place where, when once the Blimps were ready the hydrogen to inflate them would be formed.

From there he passed swiftly to a monster warehouse, formerly filled with the merchandise of many galleys dragged up by harnessed canors from the quays along the yellow Na through tunnels, but now converted to his purpose—a hive of industry where dozens of men and maidens were busily engaged in varnishing a most amazing extent of cloth.

And that night as he labored in the laboratory he called Robur and Gaya to him, and explained to their ready ears those things he had heard and seen.

At the end Gaya's soft eyes were wide with sympathetic sorrow, and Robur's square lower jaw was clamped hard against its upper mate. As Croft paused he broke into exclamation:

"Now, by Zitu, and by Zitu, Ptah had right. Naught but the child of Jason can

save his unclean nation indeed—and should harm come on him Zitemku will have a foul pit full of Zollarian souls."

Croft eyed him, his heart warmed by Robur's ever ready upflaring of spirit. But in the end he shook his head. "Aye, if he be harmed. But it were an empty revenge after all, my friend, and one which might not bring him again to my house."

Robur nodded. "What then does Jason propose? Many suns must pass ere we are ready to attempt the rescue, and meanwhile Kalamita plans."

"To warn Helmor of her planning," Croft told him and watched him widen his eyes.

"Warn him? In what fashion may Helmor be warned in time—even were he minded to give ear to any word out of Tamarizia. Jason, you speak in riddles."

Croft nodded. "Nay—Helmor would pay little heed to Tamarizian words, but were he to dream—"

"Dream—" All at once Gaya caught her breath. Her glance met Croft's in a subtle understanding. "Jason, thou meanest—thou canst induce a dream in his brain?"

"Aye." For the second time Croft nodded, well pleased at her intuitive understanding. "Why not? Gaya knows how in the spirit I called Naia of Aphur's spirit to me, before our marriage, and that night—now we speak so together concerning our love and this present thing; also that I speak so to Zud of Zitra when the need arises, having taught him to answer the call of my spirit: wherefore may I not visit Helmor in the spiritual presence and by the same force inspire a vision of his and Zollaria's danger in his mind?"

For that was the thought that had come to him on waking after his return from Berla—the conception of the manner in which Helmor might be warned and fresh caution inspired in his guarding of Naia of Aphur and Jason, son of Jason, and even Helmor's self against the perils involved in Kalamita's schemes.

"By Zitu!" Robur mumbled again.

But Gaya sat brooding the thought for a moment longer, presently lifting her head to murmur: "Three times. Let the dream

be repeated once and yet again, Jason, until it takes possession of him wholly, nor is absent from his thought at any time."

Croft started slightly. He had only considered the one inspired dream of warning, but now he realized swiftly the value of Gaya's words—the weight attached always to the repetition of a dream. Her suggestion demanded acceptance. "Aye, Gaya," he assented. "Ga speaks through you to the benefit of child and mother. The dream shall be repeated three times, on as many nights—until Helmor is convinced of an agency behind it, even though the nature of that agency he fails to suspect."

Robur rose. His manner was restless. Suddenly he whirled around.

"You can do this thing?" he questioned. "Is naught forbidden to you, my friend? You can enter the mind of another and order the shape of the pictures in his brain?"

Jason eyed him for a moment before he answered. "Naught is forbidden to the seeker after knowledge, Rob, so he seek not from evil purpose or for merely selfish gain. All life is a rhythm—even as the sound of the harp given off from a vibrating string. And if I alter the rhythm of Helmor's mind to the preserving of the life of my child, the honor of his mother, the estate of himself, and the lives of his people, were the action vain?"

"Nay, it were a work of justice and mercy," exclaimed Gaya before Robur found words in which to respond.

Croft lifted a tiny vial and held it toward both man and woman. "Behold!" he cried sharply. "Fix your eyes upon it."

Arrested by his sudden words and manner, they complied, and in an instant for them the room faded, gave place to another scene. A straw-covered dungeon appeared—a dungeon with every detail of which Croft was familiar in his spirit—a woman, a blue girl of Mazzer—a child. Briefly Robur of Aphur and Gaya his wife beheld that picture and knew it for the room beneath Helmor's palace—and then the whole thing faded and once more they were gazing at a tiny vial in the Mouthpiece of Zitu's hands.

It was no more than an example of mass

hypnotism as practised for ages by the Hindu fakirs, a trick learned by Croft while still as a man of earth he had lived and studied in India for several years, but to the two Tamarizians it was altogether strange.

"Zitu! Zitu!" Robur gasped, while his wife sat staring no longer at the vial but into Jason's eyes.

"Think you that you have been to Berla?" he questioned, smiling slightly. "Nay, my good friends, the thing was but a changing of the rhythm of your minds into sympathy with mine; but a picture never absent from my thought, which I excited in your brains. Think you now that I may make Helmor behold a vision?"

"Aye." Robur's tone was thickened. "Aye, Jason, thou man unlike any other."

"Aye, Helmor shall dream," Gaya echoed his assurance. She smiled, and her smile was strange.

Yet no more strange than the hour passed by Jason, Mouthpiece of Zitu, before he stretched his body on its couch of copper, in the formulation of a dream—the careful marshaling of the various thought forms he meant of deliberate purpose to instil into Helmor's brain.

Only when their sequence was wholly to his satisfaction did he relax his body, his physical mind, will his astral form swiftly to Helmor's palace and into Helmor's room.

A vast apartment it was, draped in saffron hangings, lighted by small lamps to a dusky twilight, in which blue maids, slaves of the palace, kept up a ceaseless waving of noiseless fans above the silver couch on which the emperor slept.

Unseen, unnoted any more than the trailing smoke of one of the low-burning lamps he drifted to Helmor's luxurious bed and began hurling his thought force upon him, seeking thereby to awaken a sympathetic vibration inside his heavy head.

Over and over he drew the mental pictures he had formed, concentrating all his power on them—Helmor defeated in every purpose—Kalamita and Ptah as coplotters—Helmor about to be dethroned—the child sacrificed to Bel—and Tamarizia resorting for vengeance to the sword—the Zollarian armies once more beaten into a bleeding

rabble—fleeing—leaving their own defenseless monarch to face the future alone—Kalamita haughty and sneering—her mask of meekness cast aside—showing at last as the one by whom these things had been brought to pass.

And suddenly the lips of Zollaria's monarch moved. He muttered in his slumber: "Lost — all is lost — defeat — dishonor." For a moment while the slave girls eyed one another without stilling the sweep of their fans there was silence, and then Helmor groaned.

He stirred, he knotted the fingers of a heavy hand. "Thou—thou treacherous one," he muttered. "Through thee Helmor stands undone."

Croft thrilled. The thing was succeeding. In his mind Kalamita answered. "Aye, Helmor, through me, these things have transpired to my ends. Defeat have I brought upon you. Tamarizia would have held back the sword, had you possessed the child to place safely in her hands."

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

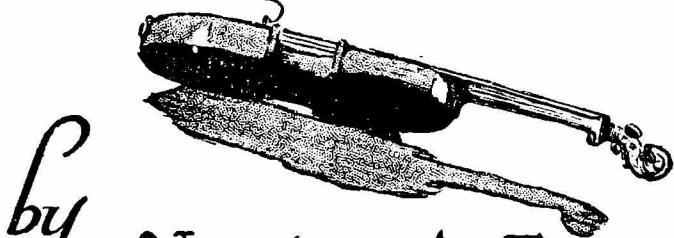
And then suddenly, as though to point the moral, appeared Naia, clasping the form of the infant the tawny siren had announced as slain, lifting it toward Helmor in suppliant fashion even as in the flesh she had held it to him once. And she spoke sinking upon her knees. "Take him and give him back to his father, O Helmor, and all will be well with thee again." And Helmor, seizing the infant, lifted it toward the skies and — Kalamita screamed, covering her face, and turned to stagger out of his presence, while a multitude of voices sounded, crying: "Hail to Helmor, savior of his nation! Hail to Helmor the Wise!"

Whereat Helmor surged suddenly up in his bed, and sat blinking in the half dusk of his chamber, from one to another of his attendant slaves.

So for a moment he sat, and then throwing off his coverings he rose.

"Go," he directed in a voice that quivered with the emotion of his vision. "Rouse Gazar and say to him that I have dreamed, and require his presence."

# The G-String



by

Newton A. Fuessle

**E**VEN the men who professed to admire Chaselon's judgment the most were astonished when he made Pogue vice-president and production manager of the Chaselon Tire Company.

Not that Pogue didn't have ability. He was admittedly a tire genius. He was credited with the knack of building "shoes" that could roll huge distances over any kind of roads before they "blew." But Lee

Pogue could also combine the raw materials of bad temper, cruel words, and ugly moods into explosives that had blown three different organizations into small and inconspicuous pieces. It always seemed that an organization began going to pieces directly this man Pogue took charge of production.

He was a taciturn fellow with many admirers, but no friends. In appearance, he was a little under forty and greatly underfed. Unfriendly eyes stood deep in his lean face. A look of menace shone from beneath his tawny hair and eyebrows. He was possessed with a savage love of the hardest kind of work. It was like the love of a lion for its cub.

He had shoved two tire manufacturers out of the running by an uncompromising insistence upon a degree of quality that forced them to price their product so high that it could no longer compete with the price-cutting trend of the trade. This Pogue had an uncanny sense of quality. He had seen the descent from oxide of zinc to lamp-black, had seen side walls getting thinner and beads getting frailer, had seen great salesmanship usurp the place of great mileage, until his engineering heart was at times near breaking.

His father had made a clean-up in the Klondike and later in Nevada. The paternal love of the quest for gold had been transferred from father to son in a somewhat modified but none the less intrinsic manner. The metal itself and the riches it represented had no apparent lure for this hard-working, concentrating, hard-driving production manager. The gold for which he strove was the gold of quality. Everything else was dross in his eyes and futile in his judgment. He had learned his profession in England and in Germany, and was essentially a craftsman. When it came to mechanical relations, no one in the tire business could teach him anything. But when it came to human relations, any first-class office boy could have taught him much and valuable information.

"Chaselon," said one outspoken director of the company to the manufacturer, "I think you're crazy to hook up with Pogue."

"You can safely leave him to me," replied the other with quiet assurance.

"He can't safely be left to anybody. He'll wreck us. I understand that no one has ever been able to work with him. Look at what he did to the Crams. Look at what he did to the Goodgores."

"They didn't understand him," said Chaselon unperturbed. "Lee Pogue can build tires as nobody else can build tires. He's got what we want."

"Yes, and he's got a devil of a lot that you don't want and that no manufacturer wants. You can't handle him."

"I can handle anybody," said Chaselon with an easy smile. "I've made a reputation for myself as a salesmanager for just one reason. Because I'm a good man-handler."

"You have got a fine bag of tricks. But they won't work with Pogue."

"It isn't a trick with me. It's an art. I pick my men as a virtuoso picks his strings: for their fiber, and strength, and range, and contrast. I play on a production organization and a sales organization as if they constituted a great big musical instrument. I make it my business to know their fiber and range and peculiarities. Pogue will fit into my organization as a G-string fits the bridge of a fiddle."

"I wish you luck," said the director unconvinced.

"You don't have to wish me luck. A lot of wise old birds in the automobile business thought it was luck when I put that electric starter on the market. And again they thought it was luck when I did the same thing with the headlight lens. And they told me I'd blow up when I tackled that lubricating oil, because I wasn't an oil man. But did I blow up? Not perceptibly. I took hold of that oil when it was a poor tenth in an overcrowded field and shot it into a safe second place. Not because I knew oil, but because I knew human beings."

"Pogue isn't a human being. He's a wild beast."

"All right. You are cordially invited to watch me tame him."

The tire world leaned expectantly forward in its seats to watch the spectacle between Chaselon and Pogue, wondering if Chaselon would tame the other, or if Pogue



would eat up his superior and wreck the new organization.

Chaselon was amiable, likable, diplomatic. He unquestionably knew men and how to attune them to a common objective, how to wring from them exquisite manufacturing and merchandizing harmonies. He knew how to make people like him, how to make them like each other, how to advertise a product into public liking.

Pogue was as surly as Chaselon was pleasant. His hard engineering eye was at home among blue-prints and cost-sheets, and awkwardly out of place among men and women. He was abrupt and relentless. He discharged engineering associates as unceremoniously as he would have fired a day laborer.

When it became known that Chaselon had hit upon a new road-contact idea and was going to start his own company with Pogue second in command, Akron real-estate brokers promptly pounced upon him with the remaining available factory sites. And they felt personally and civically grieved when Chaselon smilingly told them to chase themselves. But when it was learned that the city of Litcherton, instead of the city Akron, was the place-elect for the location of the Chaselon plant, tire circles might have been said to have lost their concentric poise and rolled along unevenly like lame ellipses and ungainly ovals.

For tires had usually issued as naturally from Ohio as Presidential candidates or the buckeye itself. By no stretch of even a rubber-man's imagination had Litcherton ever been considered as a site for a tire establishment. Despite the fact that good enough tires for any car to travel on were being made in Cleveland, Denver, Trenton, and Jeannette, Pennsylvania, and other places that might readily be mentioned, the orthodox rubber mind still considered Akron the arcanum of tires.

Early in September, businesslike crowds of workmen might have been seen entering the doors of the Chaselon plant in Litcherton. Smoke poured in businesslike clouds from the tall brick stacks. The rumble of mixing machines and impregnating machines issued from the open windows of wire-glass. Production had begun.

Past the russet casement curtains of Chaselon's spacious throne-room poured the hazy afternoon sun. On the street in front of the imposing entrance to the office building stood a long, gray touring-car, ready to bear Chaselon to his home in Morristown. Chaselon stood at the broad window, surveying the car, surveying the long structure of his factory with satisfaction. His ruddy, almost boyish face, beamed with the glow that is ignited by the conquest of obstacles.

The door opened, swinging silently on its great hinges. A man entered. He was as thin and hard-looking as an augur. His brownish suit had far from the easy fit of Chaselon's consummately tailored garments.

"Comé in. Pogue," said Chaselon.

"Well, we're making 'em," said Pogue shortly.

"You bet. We're not only making tires, but we're making the best confounded tires that it is possible to produce."

"It's a good tire," returned Pogue dryly.

"Some of those fellows think we're crazy to try to make tires down here," continued Chaselon.

"I don't know but we are," answered Pogue.

"You're not losing your nerve, I hope."

"I never lose my nerve."

"Have you never felt any curiosity as to why I picked Litcherton?"

"I don't give a damn where we make them," said Pogue without interest.

"I'll tell you why," said Chaselon. "But it's for your information only."

"I never talk."

"You know, I was born down here," began Chaselon. "My people were poor. God, they were poor! I used to sell newspapers on that corner across the street. Do you see where that garage is? I used to spend three cents for a bottle of pop on hot days before trudging home. I can remember the face of the dago now who ran a fruit-store where that garage now stands. Mornings before school I used to watch bankers and manufacturers and lawyers roll past their corners in their top-buggies, going to their places of business. I used to stand there and imagine what I was going to be. Wanted to be a manufacturer of

some kind. Remember how I used to imagine a factory of my own on this street."

Chaselon paused, blowing a fragrant cloud of smoke out of the window.

"I dare say you think I'm a sentimental ass," he added, watching the unsmiling face of his companion.

"How did you guess it?"

"After all," continued Chaselon pleasantly, "sentiment is the big, moving force of business achievement."

Pogue made no reply; his mind was on his treads, his compounds.

"I don't suppose you ever have any emotions, Lee." Chaselon talked on good-naturedly. "You're a piece of machinery. One needs only to set you up, let you alone, and watch the product emerge. Your end of the job has dealt entirely with the mathematics, the strains, the stresses, the wearing qualities of the thing. That's all you can see: the fight between the tire and the road; a tire's stamina and the forces of destruction."

"That's about it," observed Pogue, somewhat bored.

"To me," continued Chaselon, "a tire is something that I think of in terms of men and women. I try to get down to something basic, something human and emotional. I'm always thinking of tires in relation to what motoring means to the man with a wife and family; to the fellow with a girl; to the doctor driving to the bedside of his sick and his dying; to the business man who steps out of his office half-insane with worry and weariness and into his car for the rejuvenating roll home. Why, you and I are in the most romantic damn business in the world. We are lifting people off the ground and making it possible for them to ride on air. We are manufacturing the means of trysts and honeymoons. We are tranquilizing the snarl of modern life and smoothing it out into something wonderfully soothing. I think of a blow-out as perhaps the crack that explodes a happy family life. I tell you a fine, honestly built, dependable tire can unroll an inestimable amount of happiness for troubled human beings. That's the way I'd like to have all of us here think of this product of ours."

Chaselon paused and leveled his blue, kindly eyes at his colleague. Then he asked:

"Do you get me at all, Lee?"

"I was thinking of that shipment of Para that came in this noon," answered Pogue. "Nice looking biscuits."

"The point is this," said Chaselon with a laugh. "If we expect to emerge from the runners-up in this business, and to grab a place for ourselves among the leaders, we've not only got to strain every nerve mechanically, but we've got to get ourselves imbued with every proper manufacturing motive. We can't win if we remain simply machines. We've got to be human beings all the time. We've got to quit merely manufacturing parts of motor-cars, and have got to start manufacturing the thing which is in the greatest demand in the world to-day—and that thing is human happiness. In other words, we can't let ourselves suffer from an overdose of blue-prints, production costs, short cuts, and formulas. It isn't the best thing for our business. In a sense, we must be sentimentalists."

"Oh, rot!" was all that Pogue replied.

Pogue's reply, "Oh, rot!" kept revolving through Chaselon's mind as his car bore him over the shady, evening roads that wound through the hilly Jersey country to his summer home in Morristown.

The manufacturer felt no resentment against Pogue. He had not talked to him in these terms with any idea of "selling" him his point of view in a few minutes' time. He was merely probing, trying to get better acquainted, endeavoring to discover what kind of a man dwelt back of that hard crust and forbidding demeanor.

As yet he had found nothing companionable about Pogue. The latter had refused repeated invitations to dine at the Chaselon home. He did not indulge in midday luncheons, and never joined his associates at meals unless the luncheon was a conference. He never attended a conference unless it could not be avoided, and unless it had to do directly with production problems.

Chaselon pitied the solitary, friendless figure. Wholly aside from the desire to in-

ject into Pogue his own broad aims, Chaselon felt drawn to him and eager to seek closer acquaintance and to win the confidence of the dour engineer. He was aware that here were strange caves of personality, a rugged structure of character, curious depths and drifts of mind that he was anxious to explore. Here were locked doors, thick walls and bars and barriers that set Pogue interestingly apart from the more pliable and transparent men with whom Chaselon had usually dealt.

One day Flipping, the office manager, brought Chaselon a tale of trouble.

"Mr. Pogue has fired another secretary. He has called on me to replace him," said Flipping nervously.

"How many does that make?" asked Chaselon.

"Five."

"We should rejoice and be glad that he has only declared war so far upon his secretaries."

"My own time is rapidly coming," said the office manager.

"How's that?"

"He will hold me personally responsible for the efficiency of this next."

"Give him a dictaphone."

"That's out. I've tried it."

"With what results?"

"A cyclone. He talked into the receiver for two hours without having the recording switch turned on."

"Have Mr. Pogue's secretaries all been men?" asked Chaselon.

An incredulous look flew into Flipping's mild eyes.

"I suggest you try a woman on him," observed Chaselon.

"A woman?"

"Why not?"

"He issued special orders not to."

Chaselon pondered. For some time he had been wondering if a woman's influence might not have a wholesome effect upon this man whom no one could handle. It might be steadyng. It might be soothing.

The next morning Chaselon started for Pogue's office for a chat. A weary-eyed young man intercepted him at the door.

"Mr. Pogue left orders for no one to be admitted," said Pogue's new secretary.

"I'm Mr. Chaselon. What's he doing?"

"Designing something, sir. He's been in his office now since noon yesterday."

"Since noon yesterday?"

"Yes, sir. There was a broken differential on one of those new machines. He said it wasn't worth a hang, sir. He's designing a new one."

"And you mean to tell me that you've been standing guard here since noon yesterday?"

"I gave Mr. Pogue my word that no one should interrupt him."

"What's your name?" demanded Chaselon.

"Pierce."

"Keep on like this, and some day you'll ride in one," said Chaselon.

A few days later Chaselon mentioned the episode to Pogue.

"There's real loyalty for you," he said.

"I suggest you give this chap a good raise in salary."

"What for?"

"There are mighty few employees who would stand guard in front of a man's office door all night long."

"I work. Why shouldn't he?"

"I'm sorry you've had such bad luck with some of these secretaries," pursued Chaselon.

"Idiots!"

"A position like that requires training. You alone can give the proper training."

"There was nothing to work with. No mentality."

"You're too impatient."

"I know my business," snarled Pogue.

"You know the mechanical end, but you don't know the human end."

"What do you want—my resignation?" flared Pogue, directing a look of sleet at his superior.

"There isn't money enough in this country to buy your resignation."

"Then don't tell me how to run my office."

Chaselon knew enough to let the subject drop. He continued: "I'm glad this man Pierce has joined the organization. I like his looks. He has stuff in him. If ever you want to be rid of him, turn him over to me. I'll make a salesman out of him."

"The hell you will. I'm going to make an engineer out of him," said Pogue.

The passing months were punctuated with the usual disturbances in the production department. Pogue's rampages continued unabated. He flew into a rage over an inferior lot of Sea Island cotton, the echoes of which traveled as far as Akron. He got into a jam with the head of his curing department, threw him out bodily, and got into overalls, and for three days did the job himself. Other storms brewed and broke until Chaselon was near despair in his efforts to hold the organization together.

One day little Pederson, who from the first had been in charge of mixing the compound, burst into Chaselon's office. He was quivering from head to feet.

"What's the matter? Have you seen a ghost?" demanded Chaselon.

"No, I've seen a devil."

Chaselon knew what was coming.

"That damn Pogue!" spluttered the Scandinavian. "If he ever talks to me again, I'll kill him! I tell you I'll kill him!"

"What did he do?" asked Chaselon, thoroughly alarmed.

"He told me to get out."

"Oh, is that all?" said Chaselon with relief.

"It was the way he said it. He ain't human. I tell you I'm afraid of him."

"Nonsense," said Chaselon. "You just take a few days' vacation. When you get back, Pogue will have forgotten all about it."

"When I get back!" exclaimed Pederson.

"That will be never. I'm done. I'm sorry for you, Mr. Chaselon. I'm sorry for the whole plant as long as that crazy man is around here."

"What caused this disturbance?" Chaselon asked.

"Absolutely nothing."

"That seems strange. Surely there must have been something said or done that caused the provocation," continued the president, perplexed.

"That's the funny part of it. Absolutely nothing happened that was out of the way. I give you my word. We were just talking quietly, when all of a sudden one of those

queer looks came into his eyes and he started in."

"What were you talking about?"

"I was telling him about my wife and about a nice new coat I was going to buy for her. But I don't think he heard a word I was saying. Suddenly that wild-cat look came into his eye. Mr. Chaselon, I'll say good-by."

Pogue rarely attended a directors' meeting. It was well that he was not present at the one that was held that afternoon. It was the sense of the meeting that Pogue be got rid of at any cost.

"Gentlemen," pleaded Chaselon, "you can't do this. If Pogue goes, the quality of Chaselon tires goes. We've got to learn how to handle men. If we can't handle good men, we can't continue in business."

"Pogue can't be handled. He's a wild horse," retorted the director who had been fighting Pogue from the start. "He's impossible. He cut me dead in the hall just a few minutes ago. He's not a tiremaker. He's a troublemaker. He keeps this place in a continuous state of uproar and disorganization. It can't go on."

"All I ask is just a little more time," begged Chaselon. "Give me three more weeks and I promise to get this man under control. I have never failed yet in the long run to control any man I wanted to control. I'll tame Pogue yet."

The directors grudgingly gave Chaselon three more weeks in which to accomplish his aim. But they were convinced that it could not be done.

Chaselon's request for another three weeks of grace for Pogue was more than a gesture. He was convinced that he was now on the right track of the solution. Something that Pederson had said, corresponded with what other targets of Pogue's wrath had reported, namely, that Pogue's manner had suddenly changed from friendliness to savage hostility in an instant and without provocation. Assuming, however, that every effect had its cause, and that like effects must be traceable to kindred causes, he now undertook a careful study of the various conversations, no matter how trivial, that had preceded a Pogueish outburst.

In the days that followed, Chaselon himself talked to a score of people who had come into more or less violent collision with Pogue. And he had his secretary talk to scores of others. With written reports of each investigation before him, Chaselon now plunged into a study of this mass of data, endeavoring to correlate, interpret, and draw helpful conclusions from it.

But this was not as simple as he had hoped. It was noted that at times a mere reference to the weather had set Pogue off at a tangent. Once some one had asked Pogue's advice about naming a child. Many of the outbursts were caused, not unnaturally, by requests for increased pay. But generally there appeared to be no slightest relation between the numerous causes of the numerous deplorable rackets.

Chaselon regretfully had to admit that he was no nearer the fathoming of his problem, Pogue, than ever before. Student of method though Chaselon was, he was unable to perceive any method or logical cause for Pogue's disturbing ways. He knew that he would have to let Pogue go.

A few evenings later, Chaselon emerged from the plant long after the workers had streamed from the doors. Just as he was about to step into his car, he caught sight of Pogue moving off into the dusk on foot.

"You can go on home," said Chaselon to his chauffeur.

Chaselon, impelled by sudden curiosity, trailed on in the direction of Pogue.

They were approaching the region of cheap stores, where the town's factory workers and mill hands bought their merchandise. Dunes of second-hand clothing were stacked upon wooden display-stands in front of dirty establishments. Italian women haggled noisily with merchants.

Presently he saw Pogue pause, and enter one of the shops. Chaselon halted in front of the place, watching and wondering. It was a shoe-store; Pogue was buying a pair of shoes. Chaselon saw the other inspect the shoes, try them on his feet, stand and walk in them. Then he put on his old shoes, had the new pair wrapped, paid the dealer, and emerged.

"Hello, Pogue," said Chaselon. "Been making a purchase?"

"Yes. Had to have a pair of shoes."

"What did they cost you?"

"Five dollars. It's too much."

"I should fancy that you had struck a bargain."

"They'll do."

Chaselon fell into step at the other's side. "Whereabouts are you living, Pogue?" he inquired.

"Just around the corner. Come on up, if you want to."

Chaselon followed Pogue through a shabby doorway, and up a long repellent flight of bare stairs. He heard Pogue's key grate in the lock, watched him enter, strike a match, and light a gas-jet. To the astounded manufacturer, there was something piteous and incredible about this abode of Pogue's. It had an air of impoverished austerity. A plain, cheap table was littered with blue-prints and designing instruments. There were no curtains at the windows. An adjoining room revealed a bedstead. There was no trace of ease, of comfort. It might have been the home of a day laborer.

"Sit down," said Pogue. "We'll smoke a pipe; then I'll take you out and buy you something to eat."

Chaselon seated himself on a cane-bottomed chair that had seen better days and prolonged service. He looked about him. He said:

"Pogue, old man, what in God's name makes you live in a dump like this?"

"It's cheap, and close to the plant."

"But you'll die here. You're too sensitive to eke out a living in a hole like this. If some of these settlement workers found even some of our wops living like this, they'd soon have the newspapers full of it. Why the devil don't you move into one of the houses I'm building for employees? Compared with this, they're palaces."

"I'm satisfied," said Pogue, unmoved.

"But I'm not. Do you suppose I can go home and sleep while I know you're in this dump?"

"Forget it."

"We pay you plenty of money," continued Chaselon. "If you need more, you can have it. What the hell are you anyway—a miser?"



Pogue gave a harsh little laugh.

"No," he said. "I'm in debt."

"Judging by the way you live," replied Chaselon, "I wouldn't think it possible for you ever to be in debt. How do you do it?"

"Let me tell you something," began Pogue after a moment's silence.

"I wish you would."

"My father made and blew in three different fortunes," stated Pogue. "He died without a cent. I was born with the same weakness. I couldn't keep a nickel. You don't know what it is not to be able to keep a nickel."

Chaselon was listening attentively. It was the first time he had ever heard Pogue open his mouth to talk about himself.

"You know," Pogue was saying, "it's a blighting thing not to be able to hang on to a little money. It's like a cancer. I've been married, you know. That was before I entered the tire business. Where my own ingenuity in spending money failed, my wife's began. We worked fast. Hot water all the time. Drenched with bills, hounded by creditors. We couldn't cross a room without stepping on bills. The postman staggered under them. Our bureau and desk drawers stuck with them. My ears roared with the yell, 'Please remit.' We were forced into bankruptcy. I got back on my feet, and the same thing started all over again. Nothing on the horizon but creditors."

Pogue stopped. There was a glitter in his eye.

"I ached in every nerve," he continued. "Do you know what it is to feel a sting in every nerve? I'm paying some of those bills yet. I'm paying off some of my father's debts yet."

"What happened to Mrs. Pogue?" asked Chaselon with interest.

"She sued me for divorce. Got it. Charged non-support."

It was the longest talk Chaselon had ever heard Pogue make.

"I want people around me who are tight-wads," continued Pogue. "Tight-wads! People who know how to live on what they've got. There's enough extravagance in that factory of yours to drive a man

crazy. I can't talk to them about it. I can't reason about it. It makes me see red. You remember that Swede, Pederson? That fellow's silk shirts came near making a maniac out of me. One poor nut kept kicking because he didn't have a car. That's why I threw him out. I don't know how many wanted more money because their wives were hollering for fur coats."

"I understand," said Chaselon. "I got you. I only wish I had known this long ago. I understand better now why you have been such a fanatic on long-mileage tires."

At that moment there came from the street the loud report of a blow-out.

Chaselon looked at Pogue and saw him writhe.

"I hope that wasn't a Chaselon," smiled the manufacturer.

"It was. I know the sound," snapped Pogue.

"Pogue," continued Chaselon, "I've had you on my mind almost constantly of late. I fully recognize that you and you alone are responsible for the quality that goes into our tires. If you go, quality goes. But at the same time my board of directors is yowling for your scalp. They say you're not a tiremaker, but a troublemaker. They think you're a wild man. They say you've got to go. I've begged them for just a little more time. At to-morrow's meeting of the board, I've either got to put up or shut up."

Pogue was gazing indifferently out of the window.

"I'll tell you what I want you to do," continued Chaselon. "I want you to go before the board with me to-morrow and tell these fellows what you've just told me. I want them to understand you. I want them to know how you got this economy idea in you. It will impress them. It will justify my faith in you. Everything will be O. K. I want them to hear you tell it."

Pogue shook his head.

"But why not, man?" demanded Chaselon. "Tell them what you've just told me. Tell them why you hate extravagance, why you hate to see anything go to waste."

"No," said Pogue relentlessly, "it would only be a waste—of time."

# White Heather Weather

by John Frederick

Author of "Luck," "Cross-Roads," etc.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### MAGIC.

SAMSON rode home under a leaden sky that night. The rain washed down in steady torrents, drumming on roofs, crashing on thatch, and whistling down the wind; but when he reached his room at the house of Master Godfrey Lawrence he found the fire kindled on the broad hearth, and all the air was sweet with the light, sharp scent of heather blossoms. For several boughs hung here and there from the walls, and a great stand of them glimmered in the corner. He closed his eyes, and now, through the steady drum of the rain he seemed to be once more in the room at Jerry-on-the-Hill, with the sun pouring over the bright hills and the song floating through the window:

"Ride you high, ride you low,  
Ride you all together.  
There is no sweeter time, I know,  
Than the white heather weather."

Aye, and now, to his astonished ears, came that song in very fact, sung melodiously, and near by. He opened his eyes in astonishment; there was not a soul in the room, and the song broke off in the middle of the last line.

"Sally!" he called suddenly. Not a sound in answer. "Danime," muttered Samson, as he stepped before the fire and

tossed off his cloak and streaming hat, "I could have sworn the wench was in the room. Sally! No answer! She has more ways than a young colt. Needs bridle and saddle and the curb."

"Odds body, man," said a voice beside him, "it would take a strong hand to rein her!"

He saw a rather small man wrapped in a cloak which he could have sworn to be his own and with a broad hat drawn at a swaggering angle across his head. Underneath this hat appeared a strikingly handsome face; but the body of the man was lost in the folds of the cloak.

"And how, sir," asked Samson, "have you come in here?"

"By the door," said the other, and, stepping to the table, he freely poured out a glass of Samson's Spanish wine and sipped it. The hand which held the glass was slender and curiously delicate. Some high-born fellow, no doubt, who had undertaken a foolish freak. And hardly well out of his teens, as the soft voice and the meager inches of the visitor witnessed.

"Well," said Samson, "I'm a lover of good company, which I take you to be. Sit down and tell me what prank is this?"

"Prank? Aye, a prank you shall pay for dearly, by Heaven!"

It was the voice of Colonel Blood, flat, dull, unemphasized, though somewhat more meager in volume than when he had last

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spoken to Samson. The latter started and stared wildly about him. Not a sign of Blood.

"Aye, look your fill, young fool. Look! But the reckoning will be the same."

It was the tone of the landlord to a dot, half whining, half snarling; so vivid that Samson could almost see the bent old wretch rubbing his lean hands together.

"Now, by Heaven," said Samson, striking his hand across his eyes, "are there ghosts here?"

"Dead and living, I take it," answered his companion.

"Begone, sir," said Samson. "I am not in the mood for foolery. Take yourself off with your fellows!"

"Be damned to you," retorted the youth carelessly, "if I move a step for all your ranting."

"Now," said Samson, frowning, "what silly talk is this? Be off, young sir, before I harm you!"

"Beware," cautioned the stranger, with a somewhat melodramatic air, and laying his hand upon his hilt, "I am armed and ready for offense."

"Tut, tut," chuckled Samson, "we'll have an end of this."

So saying, he stepped toward his visitor; the latter made a move—in fact, half drew his sword—but instantly the iron embrace of Samson was around his arms. To the utter bewilderment of Samson, the form he seized yielded under his grip, gave close to him, melted softly against him; it was a woman he held in his arms. But the fierce, upturned face beneath his own was saying, in the dull, savage tones of Colonel Blood:

"God's death, there shall be spilling of blood for this!"

"Sally!" cried Samson. "You little incarnate fiend!"

She staggered back from him, laughing, and as she did so her hat toppled from her head and great masses of black hair tumbled over her shoulder, far below her knees, and the great blue eyes gleamed and blazed at him as she cried through her laughter: "Have at thee, hound of a prick-eared villain!"

To the very ring of the words, it was

the voice of the coachman—the voice of Monmouth.

"Sally, Sally, Sally!" cried Samson, "How in the name of Heaven have you done this?"

"A trick of the voice," said Sally. "I have no company, take it all in all, saving myself, except for those who curse me when they will and kiss me if they could. So I have taken to talking to myself."

"Nay, I do not mean the voice," explained Samson, rising, "though that is marvelous enough; but I mean you yourself." He stepped up to her and by both shoulders turned her so that the dancing light of the fire struck full against her face. It set a glimmer of reflected yellow in her eyes, it stained her cheeks with excitement and youth. His hands fell away. "Sally, you are lovely—lovely!"

Her laughter went out as a candle the wind snuffs. He found great, grave eyes upon him.

"Am I? Truly—good to look at?"

"By all that's holy—beautiful, Sally Leigh!"

Her head canted a little to one side and her eyes half closed as one who hears music afar; a tremulous smile touched her lips, and if she had been lovely before, she was suddenly bewitching.

"Say that again," she whispered.

"You are beautiful, Sally; you are beautiful!"

She sighed.

"It is nicer to hear that than to eat cake and drink wine—a great deal!"

"But where have you hidden yourself all these days, Sally? What mask have you worn?"

"This!" she said, and, flashing a glance at him, she whirled away. Her hands plied swiftly among the masses of her hair, and then she turned to him again with the hair drawn so tight that it stretched the skin of her forehead and a high knot above. All the glamour was gone; she was the rather wan charwoman once more.

"Magic!" breathed Samson. "Black magic, Sally! Let down your hair instantly."

A single gesture released it, and the glimmering tide washed again across her shoul-

ders. Inspiration came to Samson, so that he started up, but sat down again with a sigh.

"You have heard nothing except the swaggerings of rough men, poor child," he said. "Ah, Sally, if you could only imitate woman—the quiet, the innocence of those—"

He broke off, for her slim hands swept her hair into two parts and formed it in a heavy braid that waved low across her forehead. She plucked a sprig of the heather and stood turning it in her hands, with downcast eyes.

"La, sir," she said, "it is true I be from Wentmore, and there be little I can do. But an your worship have cows to milk, them I could tend as well as any, most like. But city ways and London folk—la, sir!—they be strange to me!"

And the great eyes rolled up and she sighed. And one graceful hand lay against her breast.

"Odds my life!" cried Samson. "It is perfect! But I did not mean exactly this, Sally, but one of these girls of blood and fashion—"

Her hands suddenly fluffed her hair far out on either side: she caught a side of the cloak across her arm, and, turning a little, flashed at him a keen sidewise glance.

"Master Northam, Master Northam!" she said, cautioning him with a raised forefinger no larger than a pencil. "If your heels have the grace of your tongue, you will be the most marvelous dancer between London and Paris!"

"Sally, you little witch, you shall pay for this!" He would have caught her in his arms: but she drew herself up and stood suddenly stiff and straight, and her eyes looked at and through and beyond him without expression.

"Sir," she said coldly, "what may be the meaning of this? Go back to your father's shop, Master Northam, and learn manners of the gentry you serve behind the counter!"

"Breath of my life!" gasped Samson, frozen mid-gesture.

"Nay, sir," and light flashed suddenly in the eyes again, "if you woo me with curses, I must e'en leave you."

He caught her as she would have slipped by him.

"There is toll to be paid here!" he insisted.

"Sir, sir!" she cried, still in her part; "you will be reckoned with for this by those who can manage you!" She changed suddenly. "Nay, Master Samson, I pray you!" Then, seeing that he persisted, she struggled fiercely. Once, twice, she had nearly slipped from his arms; when suddenly all struggling ceased. She lay quite motionless on his breast without sign of life saving for the compressed lips and the fire of her eyes. Samson Integrity raised her hand and kissed it.

"We shall dance again, my lady," he said, bowing as if to a queen, "and to a different music, I know!"

But to his utter astonishment she flung herself headlong upon the couch near her and burst into passionate tears.

"Nay, Sally," he cried gently, and touching her shoulder, "nay, dear Sally! If I have hurt you—"

She whipped a flushed, tear-stained face toward him for an instant.

"I hate you!" she panted. "Hate, hate, hate you!"

It took him aback, so that he stiffened with angry dignity and frowned. But Sally Leigh sat suddenly up on the couch with tears still streaming down her face; and she held out her arms to him in an infinite appeal.

"Oh, don't you see?" she said. "I could stand anything from the rest of them—but—from you—I—"

She buried her face in her hands and wept again: great sobs which shook her, and which moved Samson, as if he were listening to the grief of a strong man. He sat on the couch beside her and drew her hands down: with the other arm he supported her gently.

"Sally," he said, "you were meant for another life than this, and by Heaven, I will give it to you!"

She tore herself from him, and, running to a little distance with her hands still pressed to her face, he saw her body stiffen and strain a moment; the next instant she turned upon him a perfectly calm face—a

little moist, a little tear-stained—that was all.

"You can put your pity to bed," she said. "I've been a greater fool than I've been since I entered service with old Godfrey Lawrence—damn him!—but if you'll forget this, I'll never give you cause to remember it!"

"There is only one thing in my life, Sally," he said gravely, "that I wish more to remember."

"And that?"

"It had to do with moonlight—a courtyard—and cool air filled with the scent of heather, Sally. Well—I meant what I said just now."

"To take me away?" She drew a great breath. "Take me away? Nay, Master Northam, if you were an actor, you might use me on the stage. I should do as well as some!"

"But what if I should need you for myself, Sally?"

"You? Need me? You have beaten Dick Greenway at dice and outfaced Colonel Blood." She snapped her fingers and dropped one hand mannishly upon her hip. "Odds body of me, man, what d'ye want with a nameless baggage?"

"Her help to win a wager?" said Samson.

"A wager?" echoed the girl, and it seemed to Samson that a shade of disappointment flickered across her face. "Well?"

"A wager with the king, Sally."

"La, Master Northam, there be little I know, but why will ye talk of kings and such to me?"

"A wager with Charles the Second, our king, Sally, upon my honor. If you will help me—with your wit and your grace and money I have and will make at the gaming table—we'll hoodwink all London, Sally. What, can you wear fine clothes and put on patches and sigh and simper?"

"With any girl in London, Master Northam."

"Then we'll start planning this great adventure now. Shall we?"

"Yes, yes! But, ah, Master Northam—" she sighed, with one of her sudden reversion to a deep gravity—"after the

ball there were ashes again on the hearth for Cinderella to gather!"

## CHAPTER XXVII.

MME. LETTRAILE.

NO week in all of Samson's life held more action than the seven days which followed, and on the morning of the eighth a messenger came to him from no less a person than that kingly peer, George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham. The duke would have come himself to consult Master Northam on an affair of the greatest import, but he could not seize a moment of leisure from his plans for the great ball which he was giving on the following night—giving at the king's request, indeed. Therefore if Master Northam would be of such favor as to ride with his servant to him, the duke would consider it a boon of the first magnitude.

Requests from Buckingham were almost in the nature of a command, so regal was his position in the court, and Samson Integrity, though he had worked ahead for that day, mounted the servant's led-horse and galloped with him to the hotel of Buckingham.

They found the latter, though it was well past midday, only newly arisen from bed. Yet he sat in his room in his dressing-robe with slippered feet and carried on business with a whole chamberful of men. Some of them—in fact, the greater portion—held samples of cloth for draperies, and others carried costumes, and others still trinkets of various sorts, and spread out on the table before the great peer was a broad map, such as a general might have consulted before planning his battle. At sight of Northam he rose and waved.

"Maxwell!" he called, and a man came running. "Hear what M. Tenier has to say of his design. And use a sharp ear. If you misreport a syllable I'll have your ears trimmed! And tend to Venner and Carson over there, and read through the ode which Master Lawson bears so carefully tucked under his arm."

"But, sir," objected poor Maxwell, "the least one of these things would occupy—"



"Damme, man," cried Buckingham, "are you here to argue with me or to serve me? Mr. Northam"—and he turned to Samson Integrity—"I have been eaten with a fire of impatience waiting for you. If you can spare me a moment to hear my troubles—"

"As much as you wish, my lord," said Samson.

"Good, good! Northam, you're the peer of all generous gentlemen. Mind you, Maxwell, care and speed. I warn thee!"

And with his robe slipping off one shoulder, his slippers shuffling, waving and shouting orders as he walked, the duke led the way into a comfortable closet guarded by a massive door. The instant it closed all sounds from the noisy room without were dead.

"Sit down, Mr. Northam," said Buckingham, "while I pour a glass of wine."

"You are in haste, my lord," rejoined Samson. "Dismiss formalities, I pray you, and let's to the heart of your matter."

"Kind of you, damme if it isn't," nodded the duke. "But I'm never in too much haste to taste a glass of wine."

He poured the drinks.

"Red wine makes red blood, sir. That pompous ass Clifford said that the other day. Damme, even an ass can bray the truth now and again. 'My lord,' said I, 'I am surprised to know that you do not drink red wine.' Odds life! He turned red as a sunset over his fat face and glared at me. But old Rowley laughed. Now, Mr. Northam, before I ask a great favor of you, you must let me know if there is any matter within compass of my power to be of some service to you. Or better—wait till I have made my request, and from the nature of that you will better gage your own wishes."

"Nay, my lord," said Samson, "there is one thing I wish above all others. It pertains to your ball of to-morrow night."

"Now, by Heavens," cried Buckingham, "that villain Maxwell did not send you a request to honor us with your presence to-morrow? On my honor, Master Northam, I would not have left out the man who out-diced clever Dick Greenway, outfaced Mad Jack Ogle, overmastered Tom Blood, and

beat that murderous villain Harchester. Leave you out? Tut, man, I would never have dreamed of it!"

"I have your very generous and thoughtful invitation to come, my lord," said Samson, bowing, "but my aspirations reach still higher. I even wish it might be so arranged that I could have the honor of going to the ball with Mme. Louise Lettraile!"

The duke hesitated.

"I know," broke in Northam, "that it's a rare request, and probably some other fortunate gentleman has already persuaded Mme. Lettraile to permit him to go in her company."

"To tell you the truth, Northam," said Buckingham, "I have no idea who this Mme. Lettraile may be. But hold—hold! By Heaven, it is the new beauty arrived from Paris not four days since?"

"I believe she is newly come."

"Master Northam, you keep damnably well abreast of the times! Yes, one of the French embassy spoke to me of her. The embassy received a letter from this lady, written in haste, as if she were leaving France hurriedly, begging that they find proper lodgings for her in London, and enclosing a large order for money to be drawn upon a London goldsmith. It seemed a shadowy business at first to them, but the goldsmith honored the order for money at once, seemed to know the signature, and very shortly the lady herself arrived, and when she called on the ambassador she was taken to her lodgings and expressed her disgust with the best suite of rooms in Harrington Hall! Yes, by Heaven! Nay, and beauty! I remember how the fellow raved in his damned French way when he talked of her."

"There is no other manner of reaching her, my lord, than through the embassy. But if your great influence were brought to bear—I think they might find it possible to present me to Mme. Lettraile—"

"It shall be done," said Buckingham instantly. "It shall easily be done, and I shall include her among the guests. Lettraile? Some old family, I suppose, but I fail to recall it among any names I know. But France is always bringing out marvels

from her most distant corners. A nation of miracles among women and dotards among men, Northam, and every one in ten wears horns, damme! But this is a small thing to do, and when you hear the nature of my request—"

"My lord," said Samson Integrity, "when a thing gives me pleasure I do not haggle over its price."

"Ah?" said Buckingham, lifting his brows. "Now, I wish I had said that!"

"Perhaps you will, my lord," murmured Samson.

"Ha?" cried the duke. But then he laughed. "A palpable hit, Northam. I probably shall. But now to my matter. With ladies, Northam, most men are mortal, and I am most damnably so! One whom you know and apparently dislike was the last who sent a shaft at me and pricked me to the quick—Northam—to the very bone! Mistress Kate Malvern! You flush, sir?"

"The wine, my lord."

"Well, I have drunk wine of that same nature," said Buckingham shrewdly. "However she offended you, it must have been unforgivably. But you allow, Northam, that the German will have his beer even if the most exact palate of the Frenchman will have wine alone. I have seen this northern Venus, Northam, and on my honor she outshone every star that ever glimmered near Whitehall."

"I have heard that she is not always unkind."

"You say that with a sinister pale smile, Northam. Well, I think she smiled on me, but I could not be sure. She has a damned patient, quiet cast about her that baffled me. And before I could plan how to besiege her ladyship the news comes to me but now that her father and Harchester appeared this morning—her father healed from his wound—and demanded the Mistress Katherine be handed over to them. Of course her grace of York could not do other than accede to the father's demand, though God knows it will not advance his interest at court. But these country boors have no policy—none! Off he goes with Mistress Kate tucked under his arm and on her way to a marriage with that unspeak-

able Harchester, the swordsman and brawler!"

"Marriage?" murmured Samson Integrity.

"You look pale, Northam. Is the air too close here?"

"It is nothing, my lord. I was too long over my wine last night. Married, did you say?"

"I suppose so. At least they have taken the way north to the Malvern estate. Now, Northam, if they were to be overtaken by a group of men—bandits of the road, d'ye see?—and if they bore her away to demand a ransom, and if she should escape from them and flee back to London and take refuge with my lady of York again—why, d'ye see, man, all London would roar with the stratagem, and there would be ways found of keeping old Malvern from dragging the poor girl so rudely away to the wilderness again. Am I plain, sir?"

"Exceedingly, my lord!"

"Why, Northam, if your pride sticks on such an adventure, we'll say no more of it. If I had not this damned matter of the ball—at Old Rowley's command, mind you—I would do the trick myself. The best invention that has come to me in many a day! But my hands are tied, and I thought that such a wild bit of work might be after the heart of the man who gagged Blood and made a wager with Rowley."

"And why not?" mused Samson softly. "Why not? If she has chosen the life, why should she not be forced to keep to it? Why not?"

"In fact, there is no reason, Northam, and my eternal gratitude if you succeed. As for aid, I can give you a band of tight fellows, free with their swords and tight with their tongues—as many as you want. There are half a dozen armed men with Malvern and Harchester. They know there may be danger, damn 'em! Suppose you take twenty. Twenty to eight should turn the trick handily."

"Nay," said Northam, "if I ride at all, I shall go alone."

"Madness, my dear Master Northam! One to eight?"

"They left this morning, my lord?"

"Before prime."

"Then they might be overtaken by nightfall by one on a fast horse."

"The finest in my stable is at your command."

"Nay, it might be known. I shall find a nag," and he rose.

"By Heaven, Northam," said Buckingham, "I would give a year of life to ride with you to-day!"

"My lord," said Samson, "it will cost me more than that if I see her."

"And how do you mean by that? Well, I'll let you keep your riddles, so that you bring back the errant beauty. But what of your wager with Old Rowley?"

"I still hold by it."

"But to make him judge the matter himself! That was foolhardy, Northam. Well, you have no money at stake on the venture, I think."

"Why, my lord," answered Samson, "I have something more than money. I hold it would be a great shame to fail my king."

The duke laughed heartily.

"Now a moment since," he said, "I thought you were sick with anger, or something of that disturbing nature. But now I see it's only your odd nature, Northam. A thousand good wishes follow you. Odds my life! I shall not close my eyes till I know how you have succeeded!"

"Then I shall make speed! Adieu, my lord!"

"Farewell, Northam."

He waited until Northam had left the closet, and then muttered to himself: "The lad is wood-wrath with me, as the old book says, for setting him on the trail of the lady. What has the minx done to him? Well, George Villiers shall find a way to manage her!"

But Samson, before he left Buckingham's hotel, wrote a brief note:

I am away on a short journey. Sally, and shall not be back before the morrow. Keep a brave heart and never show one of them your face. I have great news. Buckingham will send you an invitation to the ball, and he will also arrange for my presentation to you through the embassy of France. At the ball you shall be presented to the king, or my service to Buckingham is nil. Farewell. The great adventure is on!

Then he called a servant.

"Can you spare an hour from your work, my friend?" he asked.

"If there were reason for it," said the fellow.

"Here is a broad one," nodded Samson, slipping a coin into his hand. "Carry this note to the address you find on it. And see that Mme. Louise Lettraile receives it into her own hand."

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

JACK THORN.

TO follow a mere coach in the days when the coach was almost the only popular mode of travel was no easy task; but to trail a coach surrounded by eight armed horsemen was hardly more difficult than to pursue the path of an army. Every inn could tell Samson at what time the party has passed and what road had been taken; and here and there he reached groups or solitary travelers who assured him he was on the correct route.

Lord Malvern had traveled fast, but no lumbering coach could keep pace with the eager speed of a single raider. At Halwich village Samson Integrity learned that the party had intended to put up for the night at the sign of the Wheel, some two miles beyond the little town; it was near to midnight when he trotted his flagging horse down the slope to the inn lying broad and tall and black in the moonlight. Round the main building he skirted without delay and went straight to the stables in the rear. All was dark within, and he had battered noisily at the door for some moments before the stableman opened it an inch or more and peered out; the yellow shaft of the lantern light fumbled like a hand over the face of Samson Integrity.

In response to his noisy commands the door was finally opened. In the aperture stood a low-browed fellow of formidable breadth and negligible height; he looked more like a blacksmith than a hostler, in his leather jacket; and now his frown was black as midnight as he surveyed Samson.

"That beast of a porter," said the latter angrily, "has refused me admission to the

tavern and says that they are full—every room—the lying dog.”

And in truth Samson dared not show himself where the eye of either Harchester or Malvern might fall upon him.

“Old Tom is drunk again,” rejoined the hostler, “most like drunk as a fool. Yet, belike he had reasons for not letting in wayfarers who ride at this hour of the night.”

And, raising his lantern, he peered more keenly at the traveler.

“Now what the devil d’ye mean by that?” growled Samson. “Where manners are lacking, manners may be whipped into tough hides, fellow!”

He pressed close, but the stableman, drawing back a pace, shifted a formidable bludgeon into one hand—a weight which an ordinary man could scarcely have wielded with both.

“Nay,” he grinned, “not while I can swing this little switch!”

“Good fellow,” said Samson, changing his tactics at once, “my nag is weary, and so am I. I must find place and fodder for him and a nook in the mow for myself. You shall be roundly paid for it.”

“So? So?” grunted the hostler, keeping his post of vantage. “There are two tunes for your whistle, eh? Well, stand there and cool a while and be damned to ye! I’m no man’s dog to be whipped about!”

He swung the door to, so that it would have slammed in the very face of Samson, but the latter thrust forth his heavily booted foot and kept it ajar.

“Now, by Heaven—” began Samson hotly, and laid a hand on his hilt.

In this action he had pressed close to the door, and the full light of the lantern shone clearly upon his face. The stableman, who at this second act of aggression had heaved up his cudgel, now lowered it suddenly and stared at Samson, his mouth agape.

“I did not see thee well at first, my master,” he said with a sort of sullen submission.

“And what d’ye make of me now?” Samson pushed back the door and advanced a half-step into the stable.

“No matter,” said the other, giving

back. “Give me the nag. I’ll find a stall for him. Ha! poor brute! Thou’st had a weary legging of it this day!”

He took away the horse without further ado, and presently returned, smelling much of the sweat of the mount.

“And now a place for me?” asked Samson.

The other frowned, though he did not raise his eyes from the floor.

“There’s a danger in putting you up, thou know’st that!”

“And what danger, poor fool,” cried Samson, “in letting an honest traveler snuggle away in the hay?”

“You know what you know,” rejoined the black-browed hostler, “and it’s not for Jack Thorn to be telling you.”

“Sit down, man,” said Samson, taking a stool for himself. “I’m not yet weary enough for sleep.”

“Then you’ve slept through the day?” asked the hostler, his eyes flashing as he sent a keen glance up at his companion’s face.

It began to dawn on Samson that Jack Thorn had fallen into an error which was somewhat excusable. He decided to turn the conversation.

“D’ye think,” he said, “that I could get a room in the tavern if I burst open that same cursed porter’s door and knocked some sense into his thick head?”

“You’d be more apt to get a span of cold steel through your own,” answered the hostler surlily. “For that matter, they may well be out of rooms, for a dozen people came with one coach before night.”

“A dozen with one coach!” exclaimed Samson.

“Eight of ’em riding around it. They were bringing a woman under guard.”

“Ha!” cried Samson. “Some damned rape, most like!”

“Nay, it’s report that the girl’s father was taking her away from London.”

“That’s easily said by villains and easily believed by fools!” cried Samson, working himself into a heat. “For my part, I say, down with the damned fine gentlemen who copy the French styles!”

“And what of your own?” grinned Jack Thorn.

"I need these styles in my trade," replied Samson, watching the face of the hostler keenly.

"No doubt," growled the other, dropping his eyes again. "For that matter, they keep a precious eye on her. They put her in the last room of yonder wing with two men outside her door, armed to the teeth, and one man at the base of the wall 'neath her window. Poor lass! If they have ill-will toward her, she has small chance of escape!"

All this while Samson Integrity had been watching the face of the hostler intently. Now he suddenly rose and laid a hand on the other's shoulder. The man shrank back and turned a livid face upward.

"How now?" he gasped.

His whole thick body was trembling.

"Mark ye," said Samson sternly, "I know ye—Jack Thorn!"

He said the name with a certain sneering emphasis.

The hostler drew back and wiped his mouth with a shaking hand.

"Did the captain send you?" he asked, and his little eyes darted suspicious glances here and there from under beetle-brows.

"Who else?"

"I tell ye," said the man, in a sudden fury. "I'm done with that life. I'll be an honest man. I've started, and I'll be one and be damned to the captain and all of you!"

"You fool!" cried Samson contemptuously, still watching the hostler's face shrewdly. "You know me?"

The other surveyed him gloomily.

"You may be the devil, for all I know," he said. "But I know your kind. You ride too late and wear clothes too fine to be an honest man!"

"Bah!" sneered Samson. "Do *you* talk of honesty? Do you remember the night you—"

"Be still, in God's name!" begged the other, sick with fear. "There may be some one about!"

"Harken to me. Jack Thorn," went on Samson, still giving the name a sneering emphasis. "It's a small thing I require of you this night. I must have two horses saddled and ready—two of the best nags in

the stable and two sound saddles. That gray nag and the blood-bay will be the ones, I think."

"Why not put a halter round my neck?" responded the hostler surlily. "Why not hang me at once, as soon as have me let two horses get away?"

"Might you not sleep, and might not two nags be led from the stable the while?"

"Might not the constable come, and might not a hempen noose fit my throttle?" growled Jack Thorn.

"But if money were left for the horses, fool?"

"Money? Would you pay for 'em?"

"I'll leave this nag of mine for one of the fresh mounts. What say you to this for the price of the other one? And this besides for yourself?"

The hostler drew back, staring from the gold in his hand to the face of Samson Integrity. His eyes were bright with suspicion.

"Look ye," said Samson, with a show of frank kindliness, "I have no wish to harm ye—nor has the captain, though—"

The hostler shuddered and changed color again at the mention of that name.

"Two horses—and silence?" urged Samson, raising two fingers.

"You've named a price," said the other, resolved. "But when the devil did the captain begin to pay for what he wants?"

"He thinks kindly of thee," replied Samson instantly. "He has not forgotten how thou—"

"Hush! In the name of the fiend be still! The walls may hear."

"And the horses?"

"They shall be saddled."

"And brought yonder to that beech and tethered to the lower branches?"

"What if they neigh?"

"There is a chance of all things, fool!"

"So be it," sighed Jack Thorn. "Hark ye"—and his face brightened with a hard and evil light. "What game is toward this night?"

"You may know before morning," said Samson. "Ha, man! Do ye never yearn toward the old life?"

"Like a woman over the child of her womb," sighed Jack Thorn. "But since



that scare at old Mastey's I've had no heart for the work."

"And that's why the captain has let you go. Mind the nags—Jack Thorn!"

"With a will, lad!"

He turned and was busy with a saddle as Samson left the stable again and walked out into the night.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### PERFECT ART.

IT was the dead hour of night. The moon, in the very center of the heavens, froze and fixed all things on earth. No breath of wind stirred the trees. There was not so much as the twitter of a single bird. The great pyramidal beeches shimmered under the moon, a dark, dull-green; but the distant hills were black as a forest pool; and nothing lived about Samson as he walked saving the rustle of his clothes and the drawing of his own breath.

He walked rapidly until he reached the steep, thick shadow of the wall of the tavern; and there he paused, and drew several long breaths. Through the air, faintly as half-heard music, he perceived the sweet, keen tang of the white heather blossoms. And he remembered a thousand things of bitter and sweet.

He began to skirt the building toward the wing which Jack Thorn had pointed out, walking more softly and slowly as he reached it. There was no sign of the guard which Thorn had mentioned, but, turning a sharp angle, he came suddenly upon a tall man wrapped to the ears in a long cloak and walking directly upon him. They were both in the deep shadow, and Samson could not distinguish a feature of the other. The guard started back and, throwing aside a fold of his cloak, laid a hand upon the butt of a pistol.

"Who's there?" he called, his voice guarded by the hush of the night and the surprise of the meeting.

"Is all well?" asked Samson calmly.

"Aye, not a sound or a sight. There is no danger, my lord."

"But what's that yonder?" asked Samson, pointing.

The man turned.

"I see nothing, my lord. Where?"

"At that instant Samson leaped and struck. His fist landed at the nape of the guard's neck, and the man slipped to the earth with only a gurgling moan. For an instant Samson leaned over the prostrate, motionless figure, listening. There was not an answering sound and he set to work securing his prisoner. With the belt he fastened the guard's hands and feet together behind him. With the man's own cloak he made an efficient gag. Then he dragged the inert body into the deepest heart of the shadow.

When he stepped back he made out the single window which broke the face of the wall above him. It was a good fifteen feet up and the only means of reaching it lay in climbing by the aid of the projecting edges of the rough masonry. And this Samson Integrity set about doing.

No easy task. Once, twice, and again, his heavy boots slipped from the crumbling edges of the old stone and mortar. At length he slipped off hat, cloak, boots, and sword-belt. His dagger alone he carried between his teeth as he made the final attempt. Thus unburdened, the task was comparatively simple. His stockinged toes caught firm holds on the projecting edges and, clinging with his nails, he drew himself steadily up until his hands secured a strong purchase on the edge of the window.

It stood wide to admit the cool air of the night; and a single movement swung him up to the sill and into the room.

It was as if he had stepped into a trap; a new atmosphere closed suddenly around him—a breathless, breathing atmosphere. He looked about him. It was apparently one of the choice chambers of the tavern. A thick, soft rug lay warm upon the floor. There were big chairs here and there, with tall, rigid backs—and in the corner, filling a third of the entire space of the room, stood a great four-posted bed, with the curtains sweeping down from a circular band on the ceiling. All this he made out dimly at first, for there was no bright spot except the single square of moonlight which dropped against the side of the bed-curtains. To the bed he stole, dagger in hand,

and drew the curtain back softly, softly. The moonlight fell upon her face.

And, ah, that white face in the pool of pallid, golden hair! A wisp of it trailed across her throat, and down past her bosom, and marked with glittering the rise and fall of her breast. It stopped the heart of Samson Integrity to watch her! And he remembered that moment when the wind had whipped the vizard from her face and he had first seen its loveliness. But now to pore upon it—to drink in the exquisite rhythm of the features—to dwell on the line of the perfect mouth. She turned her head, and he saw the glimmering, pure brow, and the lovely contour of the rounded throat. That treasure of adoration, that worship of divinity which every strong man keeps for one woman in all the world—this welled from the heart of Samson Integrity and poured about her, embraced her as with arms, and drew the beauty of her into his soul. In her sleep she was as dear to him as a sacred voice, speaking; as chorused music; as this small, sweet breath of the white heather which lived upon the air.

Then remembrance struck him—brutally, in the face. She was stained: she was a living lie; the damned, handsome face of Monmouth had hovered over hers, breathing lies and the love of a day. And she had listened, and sold herself, sold all that beauty which might have made the world rejoice! The bitterness, the folly, and the waste! Of what crime was man guilty that God should waste his efforts on such a masterpiece and set it upon the earth as a temptation and a mockery? Nay, if this could be, there was no God, no honor, no truth. And every lovely thing was false. He leaned with a breaking heart and touched her lips with his.

A cold, cold mouth; and the breath which met his was as sweet as the breath of the white heather blossoms. Tenderly the long, dark lashes stirred against her cheek. She was rousing; one moment more and he would stare into the blue deeps of her eyes. Samson Integrity set his teeth and waited.

She awakened as a child wakes, into full command of her senses. Then why was it that when she first saw him her eyes widened, and a smile of unspeakably thrilling

loveliness stirred upon her lips; and her hands fluttered up—toward him? It was another's face she thought of, looking on him? Monmouth?

There was a sudden longing in Samson Integrity to take that round, slender throat between his hands and crush—one pressure would be the end, and the beautiful, evil creature would be no more! That fierceness in his eyes was what made her sit up so suddenly, no doubt, and catch her hands to her breast, staring.

"Not a whisper, not a sound or a breath," cautioned Samson in a hissing voice, "or this is the end for you."

She shrank among the pillows.

"Not murder!" she pleaded in a whisper that trembled—aye, with how mighty a power!—at Samson's ear. "I cannot die! I am not ready for death!"

"No," said Samson, "I have not come to bring justice or judgment. Stand up—dress—you leave for London within the quarter-hour!"

She slipped from the bed and stood facing him, a brilliant form of white in the moonlight, and her face transformed.

"I will go anywhere—do anything!" she breathed. "Anything to escape him. I will thank you on my knees—"

"If I bring you back to Monmouth?" he said bitterly.

The color which had sprung up her cheek went out again. She was like one checked from swift motion. He waited. And she made no answer.

A hand struck at the door.

"Open!" called a voice.

Incredible repulsion showed in her face, and wild fear.

She turned to Samson with a gesture.

"Open," he told her in a whisper. "And remember. If you betray me the man will die."

He showed his dagger significantly and slipped back behind a curtain. The girl caught a dressing-robe about her white shoulders and went to the door, which opened upon the tall form of Harchester. He was armed to the teeth; and his narrow beard and his pointed mustache gave an aspect of subtlety to him. His eyes probed the corners of the room before he spoke.

"I heard voices," he said. "What is it, Kate?"

"Your own imagining," rejoined the girl coldly.

He stepped well inside and looked about him, his hand upon his sword. Then he walked to the window and stared down. Samson grew tense, ready to spring with the naked weapon. But Harchester drew back at length and faced Katherine Malvern once more.

"It may have been the wind," he said sullenly, "but it sounded damnably like whispers."

She said nothing, but waited with eyes downcast, holding the gown closely about her.

"Kate," said Harchester, "I have this also to ask your forgiveness for."

"My lord," she answered, "I have formed the habit of forgiving."

He frowned.

"Will you never call me Sinclair, Kate? Is this infernal coldness to last forever—and this formality?"

"I can only speak as I have been taught, my lord."

"Kate, you are foolish. I know you care little for me. But why fight against fate? We are as good as married; and in the long years ahead of us, I shall teach you to love me."

"You have a winning way, my lord!"

"Perhaps not so winning," he answered, stung to fury, "as the cool fox, Monmouth!"

"My lord," said the girl, straightening, "there are those who may bring you to account for such a speech!"

"The long-legged country boob? Bah! I shall have him cudgeled into good sense if he ever crosses me again."

"You were silent enough, my lord, when your hands were empty and his point was at your breast."

"A trick, a damned French trick of fence. If we meet again, I'll spit him like a dead goose!"

"Far better rely on the cudgels and hired hands, my lord."

"I think you plague me, Kate, because in your heart you begin to love me."

"You are shrewd, my lord."

"One more day, my dear. To-morrow night the words will be spoken and the ring shall be on your hand."

"To-morrow will never come."

"I leave you, Kate. These London fantasies have turned your head. But to-morrow night will bring you back to reason."

He bowed profoundly and departed. Behind him she dropped the bars cautiously into place.

"Victory!" she whispered as Samson Integrity stepped from behind the curtain again. "Turn your back, Master Northam, I shall be ready to follow you in a moment."

He obeyed and stood with arms folded, the dagger gripped in his hand, facing the window. Behind him came the rustling of clothes—a guilty whispering. And she murmured questions as she dressed.

"How shall we leave the room?"

"I will lower you by a strip of the bedding."

Why did she not ask where they were going or who had sent him? No, she was so rejoiced to escape from Harchester that she had no questions or care about any other thing.

"And how travel?"

"There are horses."

"To ride?"

"Yes."

"But my clothes!"

"True! I had forgotten. You must have man's attire. I will return instantly."

He was out through the window and down the face of the wall with a catlike agility. Once on the ground he found that his prisoner was twisting and struggling madly to escape. The glimmer of Samson's dagger sufficiently quieted him while the latter released some of his bonds and stripped off his outer garments. Then Samson made him fast again, saw that the gag was securely in place, and reascended to the room. He tossed the bundle to the girl and faced the window once more.

He heard her chuckle softly with delight as she donned the clothes. Why should she not chuckle? She knew they were going back toward London, and in London was Monmouth—the dark, handsome face, the

dark, bright eyes—and the blood of the king in his veins.

"Ready!" she whispered.

He turned to face a slender youth with a cloak caught rakishly over one shoulder. Under the broad hat the golden hair glimmered even through the shadow; and her eyes danced with delight. What a picture—for Monmouth! And Buckingham? What a dolt the man was to bring her back for the pleasure of another man!

He tore a blanket from the bed and twisted it hastily into one roll. At his instructions she wrapped her hands in one corner of it and slipped over the window-sill, while he held the other end. And he would remember for many and many a day those dancing eyes which looked back at him as she dropped down. There was no fear in them; a complete and utter trust!

The blanket did not cover the entire distance. He reached down as far as possible, and then she dropped the remaining distance. He was at her side instantly.

"Make toward the beeches," he said, donning his boots and belt and cloak as rapidly as possible. "There are the horses."

"I shall wait for you."

"Very well, then, and haste!"

But when they hurried across the brightly moonlit space between the tavern and the trees, no outcry rose behind them. The eyelike windows of the tavern were blank, and the whole building slept in silence.

She was feverish with excitement and climbed into her saddle without waiting for his assistance. She was already trotting down toward the road before he joined her. They set spurs to the horses in unison and were off at a gallop, first with the soft turf under the thudding hoofs of the horses and then the ringing highway.

She rode with an easy grace, her head turning toward him now and again, and her lips smiling, as if she invited him to join in her happiness. But Samson Integrity rode downheaded, staring at the road before him.

"Whither do we go?" she called after they had put some miles behind them with the swinging canter.

"Whither I am ordered to take thee," he answered.

She brought her horse to a trot and then to a walk.

"Ordered?" she repeated.

"And why do you think I have come for you?"

"God knows! To free me from brutal Harchester, I dreamed; to listen to me when I tried to explain—"

"No explanations," said Samson Integrity gruffly. "I do this for a price."

"A price!" she echoed faintly.

"Odds life, girl!" cried Samson, for her beauty stabbed him suddenly and made him twist in his saddle. "Do you think I would do this of my own free will for the woman of another man?"

She struck her hand up over her eyes, and then pressed it against her bosom.

"I know what you think, Master Northam. Will you listen to me—for one moment?"

"I will not listen."

"But you have made men take up my name over all London. They have linked me with Monmouth, and God knows—"

"That thou art pure and chaste as the mountain snows, my lady."

"You sneer at me still! Master Northam, you have served me better than I was ever served by another man. Others have done me service for pay, but—"

"Nay, madam, did you not give me a purse of gold? Truly, I was paid!"

"I know of that. And it hurt me when I heard it. Master Northam, you shall hear me—"

"My dear lady, there shines a hedge of white heather. Yonder the moon glitters on a stream. And here is the long road before us, twisting up and down hill, and winding through forests and valleys. Let us talk of these things."

"Master Northam!"

"Well?"

"For two minutes you shall listen to me!"

"Nay, not for one!"

"You close your ears to the truth!"

"Hearken to me, Lady Katherine! I shall tell you why I may not listen. It is because I might look into your blue eyes while you spoke. I might look there, and listen with my heart, and believe you. I

might let the music of your soft, sweet voice run through my ears and enchant me, and the sting of your beauty might blind mine eyes. Aye, I might listen and believe you. But afterward, when my senses returned to me, I swear to eternal God I would choke out the vicious lie with your breath and leave you dead here and ride on alone with the dream of you which I once had. Aye, do you know, Lady Katherine, that I have kept the picture of you as I first saw you always about me? And I see you with the moon on your face as I first glimpsed you at Jerry-on-the-Hill. It was a fool's dream, and all that is fool in me keeps dreaming it still. Do you know that now under this moon with the fragrance of the white heather about you, it would need only a little blindness to make me think that you are pure, indeed, and clean of heart and mind? But if you value your life, Lady Katherine, speak not a syllable to me!"

Then his stare made out a moving point of light where a tear trickled down her cheek.

"Damnation!" groaned Samson Integrity. "Are you so perfect in your art? Spur, spur!"

She obeyed, and they raced on into the heart of the night.

## CHAPTER XXX.

### SALLY WEEPS.

IT was already a little past noon of the next day when Samson Integrity bore the written request of Buckingham to the French embassy. Before the name upon that note all doors flew open; and when at last it was read, dark eyebrows lifted, indeed—but anything might be expected from the eccentric, and Mr. Northam was most welcome. M. Carriene would lead him instantly to Mme. Louise Lettraile. The demand was a little unusual, to be sure, but the princely Buckingham must be obliged.

M. Carriene was a stately little gentleman, bow-legged, who made up for his lack of inches by a tremendous manner. When he and Samson were safely in a hackney coach and on the way, he explained many

things about Mme. Lettraile. Mr. Northam it appeared, knew the lady only by report. Then he would find her somewhat eccentric. She was of that fire-eating younger generation, and yet one could see at a glance that the pure blood of France's old nobility flowed in her veins. No, her family was not familiarly known at the embassy, but then it was impossible for forty thousand nobles to be kept in mind, and France enjoyed that number of peers. Mme. Lettraile was charmingly educated. She spoke English like a native. Altogether, a superior type of which La Belle France could well be proud.

Arrived at *madame's* rooms, the door was opened to them by a gigantic negro in livery of splendid reds and blues. He showed them into a little reception hall, daintily furnished with such slender-legged chairs that Samson hardly dared intrust his weight to one of them. The negro brought out a maid from the inner room and, having received the message of M. Carriene, she curtsied and retired. But she reappeared almost instantly. *Madame* was in bed; she would be charmed to receive them.

They followed the maid into a hexagonal room, whose walls rose to an arched ceiling. The old gold, the orange and the blue of the Turkey rug were repeated in varying shades through the ivory-tinted walls, through the blue upholstery of the chairs, through the heavy blue curtains of the bed, worked with gold. These curtains were caught back now by long-tasseled cords, and from a heap of pillows Mme. Louise Lettraile looked forth upon them.

She was newly awakened, no doubt, for languor still hung heavily upon her lids, and through the slight openings Samson found himself looking into eyes of slumbrous black. The loose sleeves of the dressing-gown fell back from her arms and her hands were folded behind the masses of her hair. At their approach, she disengaged one of her hands and held it forth with a faint smile toward M. Carriene. The old diplomat bowed low as he kissed the fingers.

"I have the great honor," he began, stepping back, "of carrying to *madame* a friend of his grace of Buckingham—Mr.



Samson Northam. A thousand rumors have tormented him with brief tidings of *madame*; and he had no rest until he could see her."

"I am very happy to receive M. Northam," said the girl in faultless English, as he obediently kissed her finger-tips.

"And yet," she continued, smiling lazily upon him, "he does not seem to bear marks of sleeplessness."

"It is the happiness of seeing you. *mudame*," said Samson Integrity.

"That is worth a cup of chocolate, at least," rejoined Mme. Lettraile graciously. "I shall have you served instantly."

"Do not provide one for me," said Carriene. "I must return at once to my duties."

"Ah, M. Carriene," sighed the girl. "You are cruel!"

M. Carriene wriggled like a fish disengaging itself from the hook.

"There shall be another opportunity. Mme. Lettraile?"

"My time is at your service, I am sure."

"Until then—*adieu*. *Adieu*, M. Northam."

He bobbed his way through the door, cast a farewell grin upon them, and was gone.

He had no sooner disappeared than Mme. Lettraile slipped from the bed, whipped the dressing-gown about her, caught Samson Integrity in her arms, and kissed him on either cheek.

"In the name of heaven, Sally, get back into bed. Your maid will be here in an instant."

"Not she. She's a jewel of a maid, Master Samson. She has neither eyes nor ears. Look at me!"

She had scuffed her feet into heavy velvet slippers and now she walked slowly up and down the room, trailing the dressing-gown behind her.

"Sally," said Samson Integrity, "you're ravishing!"

She stamped and faced him.

"Shame, shame, stupid!" she cried. "Don't you see it's the gown you should admire and not the woman under it?"

"The devil take the gown!"

"Nay, he took a round fifty pounds for

it; and he'll have you plucked as thin as an old molted hen before you're through with my masquerade."

"Bah!" replied Samson, snapping his fingers. "Money rains on me, my dear. I plucked my Lord Arran for a round five hundred the other night. You shall have all of it, if you wish. Sally, you are astonishing!"

She whirled so as to catch the gown close to her and then sat down. She said calmly:

"I am sufficiently beautiful."

"Dangerous, by heaven."

"And dangerous."

"What news?"

"Since I saw you I have squeezed the money-bags of a rich man and jarred the dignity of a duke."

"Who?"

"An ugly old fellow named Simon Andreas."

"The great merchant."

"He saw me passing in my chair—I got four big black fellows the day before yesterday to carry it—and he trailed me to my home. He tried to enter, and when he could not, he sent me this!"

She ran to a desk at one side of the room and drew out from a drawer a long, slender, lacquered box. She carried it back and drew away the cover. In it lay a broad and heavy gold triangle with a single, huge emerald in the very center.

"And the old Turk sent his name with it and an amorous message. 'I have seen my star and I am wise enough to follow it.'" She laughed gaily.

"Sally," said Samson sternly, "send it back to the old dotard at once!"

"I am not a fool, Master Northam. It would be sinful waste to send it back to the coffers of that miserable, dried merchant."

"However," said Samson Integrity quietly, "you must do as I say."

She caught the box away and tucked it under her arm.

"Am I a slave?" asked Sally, tossing her head.

"Just now," said Samson, "I am master. You shall not use this sham to cozen any but the king."

"I shall do as I please, Master Northam!"

He frowned up to her angry, lighted face.  
"Sally!"

Her anger slipped from her as the wind puffs away a heavy cloud into thin, shining tresses.

"Let me wear it only this evening, Master Samson. Only this once. That yellow gold against white skin at my throat, and the great emerald—no one will dare to doubt me then!"

"This once, then, Sally, you madcap. What was that about a duke?"

"A prince of the blood," said Sally serenely.

"Monmouth, by Heaven!"

"The very same Lord of Monmouth. You grow marvelously dark when you speak of him. Why do you hate him? It's that affair of the yellow-haired girl, I wager!"

She eyed Samson Integrity for an instant of tense suspicion.

"She is no more to me than a broken sword is to a duelist," answered Samson calmly. "I have thrown the thought of her away. Into the dust with other unworthy things."

"That's a little too pretty to be sincere. However, I promise you my Lord of Monmouth is jarred. Ah, Samson, if you had seen him! He who has tossed a tuppence a dozen times to the slave-girl—poor Sally; if you had seen the fine, dandy bow and scrape before Mme. Louise Lettraile! On my honor, he is so shaken that his coronet must hang a-tilt over his ear!"

"Brave girl—ah, Sally, if you can humble him—if you can prick the shell of his fine self-content—"

"I am well started, at least," said Sally calmly. "He heard of me through the embassy—little Carriene chatters about me everywhere!—and my lord came to see me. I refused to receive him!"

"Sally!"

"I did. He went off and came back with Carriene and was properly presented. We were no sooner alone than he dropped upon one knee and began to woo me like a regiment of infantry storming a height."

"Odds breath!" cried Samson Integrity, starting in his chair and fumbling the hilt of his sword. "It is written in heaven—we shall cross swords before the end, and—"

He stopped, and stared gloomily into the future. As for Sally Leigh, a singular light came into her eyes, and she stood with a hand pressed to her breast and her lips a little parted. She seemed like one who drank of a rare wine.

"Would you do so much for my—honor, Master Samson?"

"A thousand times—for you or for any honest girl in England."

"The devil fly away with the honest girls of England! Oh, Master Samson Integrity Northam, you fly like a bat—blind, blind, blind!"

"You're a curious little spit-fire," said Samson quietly. "But what of the duke? You ordered him away?"

"Not I."

"Ha?"

"No, he talked of love. He had heard of me—it was the scent of wine; he had seen me—it was the taste of the wine itself. Ah, a very pretty speech!"

"For which I'll split his tongue. D'ye mean to say you listened to all this, Sally Leigh?"

"And more—a thousand times more."

"The overweening hound!"

"Nay, he is used to storming hearts after that manner. So I let him talk on, coming closer and closer to me. Finally as he was about to take me in his arms, I burst out with laughter."

"Sally, you're a jewel among women!"

He was dumfounded. He staggered as if he'd been struck. And when he began to talk once more, I laughed again. It was not hard to find laughter: I was bursting with it; and the sight of his crimson face was fuel piled constantly on the fire. Twice more he attempted to speak, but I laughed and laughed, and laughed. On my honor, Master Samson, I thought he would go mad. Even a dog of sense grows furious when he's laughed at. And I know his grace hesitated between stabbing me and cursing me. At length he turned on his heel and stamped away."

Samson Integrity sat with eyes half closed, like some Oriental devotee inhaling the sacred perfume of incense.

"All London shall know of it," he said. "It will cut the reputation of Monmouth

at the root. By heaven—to be laughed out of sight and hearing. Ha, ha, ha! His majesty shall know of it if Buckingham is able to gain an audience! Then he left in a rage?"

"But thought better of it and sent me this?"

She rummaged through the desk again, and finally brought back a broad envelope.

"With his name attached," she cried gaily. "Poor fool, how much would his duchess pay to have this?"

The embers of the early morning fire still glowed on the hearth, and toward this fireplace Samson Integrity carried the letter. He turned the paper here and there, as though he were fain to guess what was in it. Then he dropped it upon the live coals.

"Save it! Save it!" cried Sally Leigh. "Oh, Master Samson!"

He held her back.

"One of these days you might be tempt-

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

ed to use it, Sally, and, after all, a man's honor is a sacred thing—even if he himself doesn't keep it clean."

She beat her hands together in a fury of impotent rage.

"I wouldn't have sold it for a thousand times its weight in gold. A letter from Monmouth! I hate you—with all my heart—forever. I'll never open my door to you again, and your prick-eared, round-headed scruples!"

"I shall leave you to recover by yourself," said Samson unperturbed.

He rose and took up his hat.

"I shall call for you in the evening to carry you to my Lord of Buckingham's hotel. Take care that you are ready."

She threw herself on the bed, weeping with rage, but Samson Integrity sauntered carelessly from the apartment; and she ceased her weeping and lifted her head to hear his whistle as he descended the stairs.



by Hamilton  
Craigie

AT the corner of Fifth Avenue and Fifty-Fourth Street Arthur Gillespie paused a moment, swinging his cane, isolated for one brief instant amid the double tides of jostling humans, in the grip of a curious indecision.

Why is it that there are times when one hesitates over an apparently trivial

matter, if it is not that Fate herself is at one's elbow, turning one into the path of destiny, whether or no?

Be this as it may, there was no particular reason why young Mr. Gillespie should not have continued along the avenue, so far as he could tell; it was six of one and half a dozen of the other; and yet, if he

had done so, this story would never have been written—the Gods of Things as They Are would have laughed up their collective sleeves—and Elsie De Ruyter would have been nameless—to Arthur Gillespie.

Idly he stood—wavered—made one tentative step southward—then, just as if destiny had nothing to do with it—turned sharply to the left and swung off carelessly along the comparative quiet of East Fifty-Fourth.

Arthur's day began at nine and ended at five. He had a rather good connection with a wholesale house which netted him a stipend really big enough for two. Arthur was a bachelor, however, which in itself was nothing unusual; in time he would marry, doubtless—an average girl, even if he didn't think she was, and—

Arthur was athletic—for an office man—his daily postprandial excursion was a rite which took him sometimes as far south as Twenty-Third. And this evening, in the soft spring twilight, promised well—how well, or ill, Arthur was to discover.

Fate grinned at his elbow as Arthur's gaze rested for a moment on a trim pair of shoulders, topped by a modish toque, a lithe, free-striding figure, plainly but smartly groomed—there was nothing to distinguish her from a thousand other young women he might have seen. The street was empty, save for themselves; it was usually so at this hour of the evening.

Arthur saw her, just ahead—perhaps it was her crimson toque: a single, vivid splash of bright color against a temporary drab background of grays and browns that drew his gaze on and after her graceful progress through the empty thoroughfare.

Then abruptly, even as he looked, she wavered, appeared to sink into the shadows—then, almost at his feet, he saw her where she had dropped on the pavement, one white hand gleaming against the stone. For the merest fraction of a second Arthur Gillespie stood irresolute. The girl might die for lack of prompt attention. And—she was obviously alone.

The street was practically deserted. Yet, after all, what business was it of his? he told himself—or tried to. True—he might stand there—call for help, bay the moon

with clamorous appeal—but by the time that it could arrive the girl might be beyond the need of it. No—his duty was plain; it had been thrust upon him; there was no alternative.

Arthur dropped on his knees beside the girl. Then—he looked wildly from right to left—up and down—searching the shadows. Now that he had her, what was he to do with her? And, as if in answer to his inward prayer, at the curb, with a grinding of brakes, there halted a taxi—a free-lance drawn to the scene on the off-chance of a fare.

The driver leaned from his seat, finger crooked at Arthur.

"Cab, sir—cab?" he solicited, his hand reaching backward to the door.

He who hesitates is—lost. But Arthur did not hesitate. Yes—the girl might die for want of attention—there was no doubt of that—

Stooping, he gathered the limp figure in his arms—the door opened, slammed shut upon him and his burden—the motor roared with a sudden, sharp, staccato clamor—and they were off.

"Where to, sir?" asked the driver.

Arthur gave the address of his rooms. Pressed to decide, he could think of no other place to take his responsibility. Then he turned his attention to the girl.

She lay against him, limp, her face a glimmering, white oval—and that was all. Arthur's heart leaped—then dropped, plummet-like, to his boots.

Suppose—suppose, after all—that she were—dead? Such things had happened.

In the dusk her face seemed a marble mask—she sagged, inert, a dead weight, against his shoulder. He bent his head to listen for her breathing, but in the roar of the motor and the night noises round about he could not be certain.

Then he bethought him of her pulse. Raising one white, unresisting hand, his own pulse thrilled to the contact of the regular throbbing. She was alive. The beating of her heart had answered him.

His fingers on her wrist slipped downward to meet other fingers: slim, tapering, aristocratic indeed they were, for an average girl.

And as if his touch had endowed them with life, they curled about his in a soft, clinging clasp—as the fingers of a sleeping child cling to its mother's. And then—a voice, faint, yet of an indescribable, throaty richness, came to his ears.

"Where—am I?" it murmured sleepily. "Where—"

"Here," stammered Arthur foolishly to the conventional question. Then, in frantic haste, he chafed her hands, her temples, helpless as the average man in the face of feminine distress.

But after that first murmured question the girl was silent. Her faint, it appeared, had passed into a sleep. They were traversing the Plaza now—and for a space the taxi, illuminated by the effulgence of a great battery of arcs along the curb, was bright as day.

Arthur turned to the girl—for the first time saw her face—a distracting, pure oval, the eyes closed beneath lashes long and delicately fine, the brow smooth as alabaster, the lips, scarlet as pomegranates, parted in an alluring curve.

And before the taxi plunged into the darkness and quiet of the street in which he lived Arthur saw something else which, indeed, he was to remember: the tiniest of moles, placed where it would work the most havoc, just beneath the lips.

Arthur did not regard it as a blemish, as indeed it was not, but now, as the taxi drew up before the apartment house, he had more practical things to think about.

The driver flung wide the door. He was a stolid fellow—romance to him, indeed, meant nothing but a fare. Now he leered inward at Arthur.

"Want any help, mister?" he inquired through the corner of his mouth.

Arthur thrust some money at him.

"Thanks—no," he replied shortly. "And keep the change."

He turned to the girl. Her eyes were open, but there was no recognition in them. And she uttered no sound as he lifted her from the cab, until—

"Can you walk?" asked Arthur gently.

"I—I think so," she murmured drowsily as Arthur, half-leading, half-carrying her, moved to the elevator.

Arthur never remembered how he managed the journey across the foyer. It was as yet early, but there were not many people about. These, however, stared curiously at him and his companion—murmured comment followed them—but nothing more as the lift door closed, and they were shot upward to Arthur's floor.

The operator, a taciturn West Indian, looked—once—then, with Arthur's eye upon him, brought the cage to a stop. But Gillespie's ears were burning as, the girl supported upon one arm, he fumbled for a moment for his key, unlocked the door, and together they entered the apartment.

For a pusillanimous instant, as the door clanged shut behind them, Arthur found himself wishing that he was back at the corner of Fifth Avenue and Fifty-Fourth—that he had never seen the girl—that—oh—well—

He had let himself in for it now, with a vengeance.

He sighed—a deep suspiration. The girl's eyes had closed, but as he gently deposited her in a huge wing chair by the fireplace she opened them, gazing at him with eyes misty bright.

"It—it's my—heart," she explained without preamble. "It—it's got a leaky hinge or something, I think."

That was all—no stilted acknowledgment of the unconventional situation—just a tacitly calm acceptance of it.

Arthur, looking at her, his momentary qualm forgot, thought her the loveliest thing he had ever gazed upon. She, in turn, found him personable—aye, and more than that. Love at first sight, the realists to the contrary notwithstanding, *does* happen. And if it is slow to come, it is swift to arrive, which is not so much of a paradox as it seems.

This, briefly, may have been Arthur's thought—and the girl's. He flushed—made a clucking sound with his tongue.

"Why—what a beast I am!" he exclaimed contritely. "You—you're weak, of course—pardon—just a minute."

He was gone but an instant, returning with something, like bells chiming, in a tall glass. She drank it, crinkling her nose at him like a kitten. Then she gasped:



"I—I'm not used to it. But—I feel so much better—now," she said.

Quite recovered, apparently, she talked for a decent interval of this and that. But with it all there was about her an elusive something—a manner—a fugitive air as of a thing veiled, concealed.

Yes, she was quite recovered, she said. But as for Arthur, as he put her into her cab (to his diplomatic suggestion that he accompany her she had returned a very positive "no"), he knew that *he* would never recover.

He carried away with him an impression of gold-bronze hair, starry eyes, a mouth made for moonlight and midsummer madness—beneath it that tiny mole, accolade of beauty, a badge rather than a blemish. He had given her his card—they had exchanged telephone numbers—but, as he re-entered his flat, it came to him abruptly that he did not even know her name!

## II.

IN the cold gray dawn of the morning after, Arthur Gillespie sat alone in his bachelor apartment, the ruins of his romance scattered in ashes at his feet. For he had found her out. His goddess of a brief interval—the girl to whom, within the compass of an hour, he had given his heart—she was not for him—never would be.

Now, from the newspaper spread open on his knees, a face looked out at him—and it was the face of his innamorata, even to that tiny, witching mole. The likeness was an unusually good one—for a newspaper half-tone—no, there could be no mistake, Arthur assured himself. It was not possible.

For the name under the photograph was that of Elsie De Ruyter—and Elsie De Ruyter, in her own right, was, as he well knew, worth upward of twenty million dollars!

And then, abruptly, he recalled the telephone number she had given him—Circle 9867—a rather odd number for an heiress, indeed! For the neighborhood it denoted was a locality, if not down-at-heel, at least scarcely the district in which one would expect to find an—Elsie De Ruyter. But his

innate delicacy forbade investigation. Perhaps it was her studio number. Hadn't he heard, somewhere, that she painted? No—there could be no mistake.

For the name under the photograph was that of Elsie De Ruyter—and Elsie De Ruyter was to him as remote as the moon, as inaccessible as the stars.

Arthur seldom if ever read the society news. He had found the picture sandwiched in between an article on current topics and a general news item he had been reading. He had never seen Elsie in the flesh, until—that evening. Never seen her! How he wished he never had—or—did he?

Arthur groaned, staring straight ahead of him with unseeing eyes. Compared to that twenty million, his five thousand a year would just about keep her in pin-money. And he had flattered himself that two could live on it. And last night he had dreamed—oh—many things—and this morning he recognized it for what it was: a dream, and nothing more.

One could scarcely say that Elsie De Ruyter, with her twenty millions, was an average girl—she was distinctly above the average—and by the same token, above and beyond Arthur Gillespie, who, average man, with an average income, and doubtless an average brain, could scarcely hope to attain to the dizzy eminence of a million—to say nothing of 1 plus 20.

Well, perhaps, when he was an old man—forty, say—and baldheaded and dyspeptic, with a—er—corporation—breakfasting on fruto-nuts or sawdust cereal or something equally dessicated—he might possibly—he *might* have made his million. Beyond that imagination could no further go. The vision was too poignant.

He sprang suddenly to his feet.

"Hang girls, anyway!" he cried to the four walls, jamming on his hat with a violent gesture. The door clanged behind him with an empty sound—the sun-washed street was empty—the very sun a pale mockery of spring, which is the season for lovers.

But for a man with his first great sorrow Arthur managed a tolerable breakfast at the restaurant on the corner. Man must

eat to live—and no average man is an exception—though hearts break under the strain.

But once at the office, it was a different matter. Never before had he been so conscious of the grind—never before had his work seemed less attractive. By night he was wildly considering the desperate alternative of a—well—desperate “dissipation”—something of a rarity with Arthur, in fact an experience unknown to him even in the days prior to the edict of total extinction.

But he got through the day somehow, and the day following—twice, however, by a heroic effort, resisting an almost ungovernable impulse to take the receiver from the hook—speak a certain magic number into the transmitter—hear again the indescribable throaty richness of that voice.

But each time, sternly resistant, he fought down the impulse, throttled it into submission. But—had he known that another waited and hoped, even as he hoped and waited—shared with him the same pangs—torture that was a delight and delight that was a torture—

But how could he have known?

### III.

It was close on quitting time. Arthur had had a particularly trying interview with an irascible customer. His head buzzed, his fingers were all thumbs, he was leaning his elbows wearily on his desk when—perhaps a mile distant—a girl with gold-bronze hair and a tiny mole on her chin, lifted the receiver of her telephone, a thoughtful frown on her face. Surely, it seemed to her, he would have telephoned her before this.

What a dear he was, to be sure! And equally, of course, he could have no idea that she— Although alone, with none to see, a slow flush burned in her cheek. Certainly—she would never *think* of calling him first—well—men *were* funny—and so—

A moment later the telephone rang sharply at Arthur's elbow. Listlessly he took the receiver from the hook; then his pulses leaped, at the well-remembered voice.

“Mr. Gillespie?”

“Talking.”

“This is—*is* this Mr. Gillespie?”

“Yes—*yes!*”

“Don't—you—remember—”

“Yes—I remember—”

In spite of himself, the voice that he willed to be studiously controlled shook—the hand on the receiver trembled. Words came from him in a torrent—low, impassioned, reckless of listening ears—words which, once out, could never be recalled.

But—did he wish to recall them? Gone were his resolutions—his newly hatched cynicism—the bitterness of his mood fell from him like a garment. He knew only that he wanted to see her.

“I—I've been wondering why you didn't phone,” he heard himself say. “I—I was going to call you myself—yes—this evening, then—you what? Yes—at eight—yes, of course—West Sixty-Sixth Street—ask for—Miss *Smith*—yes—I won't keep you waiting—good-by.”

Miss—Smith. Could it be—was it possible that, after all, he was mistaken? His heart leaped with a great surge.

But as he rose from his desk, straightening his coat, he was aware of a bulge in the smoothness of its fit, just over his heart. Yes—there in his waistcoat pocket—something that rustled.

His groping fingers came away with the object of his search: the newspaper clipping. From it there smiled up at him—and there was a quality of inscrutability in the smile—the pictured likeness, even to the mole, of Elsie De Ruyter.

### IV.

WEST Sixty-Sixth Street was a somber place—a street of shadows, it seemed to him—so that he had difficulty in finding her number. Twice he drew blank, but at the third attempt he made out, in the dim radiance of the street-lamp, a high-stooped, somber house—and on the top step, poised as if for flight, his girl!

Well—she did live here, then, after all.

She hailed Arthur in a clear voice.

“This way, sir,” she called with mock ceremony. Then, as he came up, “So good

of you to come," she murmured conventionally, with a little laugh.

"Er—not at all," he responded idiotically.

She faced him with some constraint, her head for a moment turned sidewise as if she listened for something or some one in the house.

"Would you—care to walk?" she asked him. "There's—a—park, I believe."

"Delighted," he made answer, but as they moved away he wondered. Possibly she did not wish him to see the inside of that house; perhaps— But these speculations died as, in a stippling of moonlight and shadow, they found the park, she at his side, ethereal daughter of the whispering wind, swaying like a lily upon its stem, as they went forward into the night.

For a moment there was silence; then:

"There's a—pagoda—farther along," he said. "I'm sure of it."

"That will be—nice," she assented.

And as they strolled on she was humming delicately, under her breath, a relic of a day long buried in the dusty past:

Rhoda, Rhoda—  
Ran a pagoda—pagoda—

At their left, as they strolled forward, there was a huge pavilion—noisy—garish with light and music—and beyond this, running into the park, a walk had been fashioned, festooned with gay lights here and there.

The night was a powder of stars, and as they passed along in search of their objective, faintly behind them were borne the strains of the orchestra—the murmur of the dance.

At length, at the remote end of the path, where a flight of steps ran down into an Old World garden, they seated themselves in the scented dusk.

A dozen apt phrases were at the end of Arthur's tongue, striving for utterance. He had almost blundered into a stumbling avowal of his love, but instead he stiffened, drew the clipping from his pocket.

"There!" he exclaimed dramatically. "That is why I—that is why I—" He choked, unable to proceed.

The girl took the cutting from his limp

fingers, an odd look in her face, as if she struggled with an emotion too deep for words. In the sudden silence Arthur's voice came, hoarse and strained:

"You—are—Elsie De Ruyter," he said dully. "That is reason enough."

The girl turned her face so that he could see it, sparkling, alive, as if lighted from within, in her voice a hint of tears and laughter.

"But—I am not—Elsie De Ruyter," she said.

"Not Elsie De Ruyter," echoed Arthur in bewilderment. Mistaken identity, after all! His heart gave a great leap—steadied—then lurched sickeningly as he heard her voice.

"No—you foolish boy," she continued in a low tone; "but it's my picture, just the same—beauty spot—and everything," she ended with a little laugh.

"I—I don't understand," repeated Arthur, in a mental fog through which, however, a light was beginning to break.

The girl laid a hand on his arm—eyes, in the luminous dusk, starry with a message he could not fail to understand.

"It *was* Elsie's picture because—I gave it to her—Elsie's my cousin—I had it taken last summer at the beach. She—she's bothered a good deal by reporters—and one of them, a new man, I think—was particularly persistent. He wanted her photograph—phoned about it two or three times; so when he called—he'd never seen her—she sent him down my picture. They published it, by mistake, of course. That's why—" Her voice trailed into silence.

Then she went on: "But I—I'm not the least bit like her—really—and I'm poor, too; just a poor relation, who—*works*—that boarding-house—I hate it. That's why I suggested the park."

She ceased suddenly, in shy confusion.

"I—I—work—just across the street—for old Professor Langworthy. 'Smith' isn't my real— Why—why, Arthur—you don't even know my name!" she gasped in consternation, real or assumed, as, from the disproportionate fervor of his embrace, his voice came, joyous, unconfined:

"Two lips by any other name would taste as sweet!"

# Miss Angel

## By Katharine Eggleston

Author of "Bully Bess," "Flaming Hearts," "The Girl in Khaki," etc.

### CHAPTER XXII.

#### HER PURCHASED FREEDOM.

THE almost unbelievable presence of the man who had vowed retaliation was a nightmarish kind of happening which Dewilde could not bring herself to accept as real.

"I said good evening, Miss Capet," he repeated.

"Go-od evening," Dewilde responded, unable to control her voice.

"Sounds a little better than when you spoke to me last—better to me," he commented acidly. "Why don't you inquire about your uncle?"

"Because I don't think you know anything about him. I wouldn't believe anything you said, anyway."

He came nearer. The dusk made it impossible for her to see his face, but she felt the effect of his antagonism like a searing blast. Instantly her hand went to her pocket.

He laughed. Her gun was gone. She felt her pocket carefully: it seemed incredible that it had been taken from her without her being waked. The pocket had evidently been slit with a sharp knife.

"I guess you know who is boss now!" Clayton sneered. "Don't get the notion that I'm crazy about you like Morg Martin. He'll do anything to get you; all I want is that formula. If you'll give it to me without a fuss, it'll be all right for you."

"If you won't—well, Morg Martin has arranged a neat little trip for you into Mexico, with some worn-out English dub.

You'll be received like a princess at a stately hacienda, and Morg Martin will try to woo you—well, something like a gentleman might. If you don't woo easily, you'll discover that you're a prisoner. If you make any effort to enlist the mistress of the hacienda in your behalf, Morg will pull the strings on the Englishman who loves the lady.

"As the lady happens to be married to a fierce *señor*, she's running a risk in receiving her old lover during the husband's absence. So she will not object when Morg Martin decides to take you away. I don't know any more of the plan."

"Do you mean that—that Morg Martin arranged all this?"

Dewilde asked the question with her heart in her mouth but her mind alert to the fact that the plan savored of too much intricacy to suggest Morg.

"If 'twasn't him, it was that damned Clayton!" the real Clayton replied.

"It—it couldn't be he," Dewilde instantly asserted.

"Oh, I guess abducting a girl he happens to think loves him wouldn't be out of his line!"

Dewilde bit her lips to keep back a futile declaration that she did not love Arch Clayton.

"You needn't tell me that Morg Martin and Arch Clayton are working together," she affirmed. "I happen to know that they wouldn't. You have cooked up this story to—to terrify me into giving you the formula."

"Anyway you like!" he flung back. "Just so you give it to me."

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for April 2.

"Why didn't you get it from my uncle?" she demanded.

"Because I don't know where he is," Clayton acknowledged, so sure of her that he saw no need of pretense.

"All this tale about his being at Riller's is pure fiction, then?" she demanded.

"Sure!" he laughed.

"It's all too clever for Morg Martin to have planned. Allow me to congratulate you."

The fine edge of her scorn bit into him. He shuffled restlessly as if he would have been glad to get away where he not held by the mighty magnet of that formula.

"Morg ain't such a fool," he observed.

"Neither am I. You think you'll scare me by making me think that Morg Martin is willing to get the girl he loves—any way. I don't believe it. I won't give you the formula; and I'll risk being thrown into his hands.

"You've made one great mistake in your devilish scheming—you've overlooked the fact that, at bottom, even the worst-appearing love has some element of goodness. I'm not afraid of you—and I'm not afraid of Morg!"

Clayton laughed. It was a laugh so ugly that the echoes it stirred were like the voices of small demons rollicking in anticipatory glee over some devilry they planned.

"Of course, I know you've got liberal ideas!" he remarked in a way that made her very flesh prickle with resentment. "I know you spent the night with Arch Clayton when you might have gone to the shack as you did when I was there. But I guess you don't know that Morg Martin's ideas have found pretty good nourishment among the wild women of Weenykin; and his notion of loving is getting a girl first and marrying her afterward—if he wants to!"

"You—"

Dewilde's breathless protest could not shape words. Her blood ran like fire in her veins. Her brain seemed filled with hideous, shapeless terrors that were all the worse for being without form.

She fell back against the rocks. "If—you'd just kill me!" she sobbed.

"Not as long as you have that formula," Clayton retorted.

Energy seemed to seep back in her depleted body. She had been so overwhelmed with the thought that she was to be Morg Martin's prize that she had forgotten the avenue by which she might secure freedom.

"I will tell—"

Clayton started toward her eagerly.

Something in his manner prompted her to be cautious.

"How will I know that I'll be saved from falling into Martin's hands?" she asked.

"I'll see to that," he answered briefly.

"How?" she questioned.

"I'll take you back to the trail you left. You'll find your man there, waiting, I guess."

"You promise?" she insisted.

"I promise," he answered solemnly.

"Have you pencil and paper?"

He fluttered a white sheet before her, and she gave him the formula.

As he slipped the precious document into his pocket, Dewilde caught a sob between her very teeth. It seemed so outrageous that this man, whom she hated with a woman's intuitive knowledge of his character, should be enriched by what had cost her uncle so much and what would have meant so much to her. It was buying her safety at a price that seemed exorbitant. Yet her common sense told her that it was the only thing to do.

She looked at the great rocks that seemed to be closing in about her as the night fell.

"Now," she exclaimed eagerly, "let's hurry!"

"Yes—let's," he half mocked.

And she knew she had paid a price for something she was not to get.

"You—you don't mean to stick to your bargain?" she cried out.

"I didn't say so, did I?"

"Do you mean to take me back to safety?" she demanded.

"Of course! What's got you?" he answered. "Come on."

She moved along the difficult trail after him. There was nothing else to do. But with every step her anxiety increased. She could not trust him.

"How—how much farther do we go?"

she asked after they had scrambled and slid along devious ways for what seemed an interminable time.

"Search me!" he replied. "I just know that if I keep on we'll meet some one."

"Who?"

"I don't know his name. You should."

"You mean Beps—the man who came to the foot of the trail with me?" she asked, hoping almost against hope.

"Yes, Beps. We're getting to the trail you left. We had to go a roundabout way."

She tried to accept his words, but the more she tried the more persistently Minnie Mosher's face stood out before her mental vision as she spoke the words: "He'll git even with you for this!"

"Where are you taking me?" she finally burst out.

"To find that man who brought you. Where the devil is he?"

"Are you familiar with these mountains?"

"I've prospected around here a good bit," he replied.

She trudged on because she did not know what else to do. The rocky gorge through which they moved was dark. Its straight walls rose on either side so high she could not even guess where they stopped. Escape was hopeless, even if she had not been so sure that Clayton's ears were alert to the sounds of her following in his wake.

The roar and snarl of waters, fighting with the rocks they had worn into the deep gorge, was in her ears. The din was deafening. She kept her left hand against the rock wall to assure herself that she was not too near the ravening stream. Its hungry depths and storming rapids sounded like the very voice of the danger she faced.

"Look out—keep close to the wall!" Clayton admonished suddenly.

They came to a place where the stream widened as it dashed over the ledge they had traversed.

"We've got to cross. You'll get your feet wet; but it's not dangerous." Clayton caught her wrist in the hard pressure of his hand.

He moved cautiously into the rushing stream, careful to keep well back from the

point where the water dived to the channel below. It was not deep, but the drag of the current was terrific.

Dewilde thought of how quickly she could end the horror of uncertainty in which she moved. But perhaps Clayton was really taking her back to Beps. Why not? He had what he wanted—the percious formula.

"It's deeper than Martin—it's deeper than I thought!" he called back above the tumult, tugging at her as she fought to keep a foothold and follow him.

"All right! Go on!" she sang out courageously.

Even Clayton thrilled to the sure, sweet note; he actually thought of the waste it would be if this girl fell to Morg Martin.

Then, among the shadows, Dewilde caught sight of a figure that moved down toward the stream on the bank they were approaching.

"Beps! Beps!" she called. "Here I am!"

"Howdy, Miss Dewilde?"

It was the voice of Morgan Martin answering.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### WHARTON'S INSPIRATION.

ENERGIZED by the determination not to fall into the hands of Martin, Dewilde jerked away from Clayton and sprang back into the very midst of the rushing stream.

"Here! You!" Clayton cried.

"What's the matter?" Martin demanded, stepping into the current.

"She's jerked loose!" Clayton answered.

Knowing her power to manage Morg, Dewilde half paused in her rush toward the other side of the stream. Should she risk being able to bring him to his senses, or—

In that instant's hesitation, Clayton, whose momentary recognition that she was too good for Morg had been completely obliterated by his desire to pull off what he had started to do, seized her.

As his arms closed round her, she struggled frantically.



With tigerish strength she caught at Clayton's throat. He began to breathe hard.

Behind them, above the noise of the water, to which she had now become accustomed, she heard other sounds. She knew Morg Martin, not daring to risk using his gun in the dark, was dashing toward them as fast as he could come.

Tighter she pressed her clutch, digging her nails deep into Clayton's throat. In the pain of her grasp he had no other thought than to get loose.

"Give me my gun, and I'll let go!" she demanded, her voice low but tense as she drew herself close up to his ear.

It seemed strange that he had not thought of his gun. He had wrestled with her and flung her into the water in the hope of shaking her loose, but he had not thought of the obvious way to secure freedom and a long breath.

His right hand went to his holster.

"If you draw, you'll go over this precipice with me!" she cried out.

Morg Martin gave a yell of wrath.

"Put up your gun, or I'll shoot your damn brains out!" he shouted.

And, gouging the back of his head, Clayton felt the hard barrel of Morg's weapon.

"What the devil you doing?" Martin demanded.

Clayton could not answer. The agony at his throat never let up an instant. Dewilde was like a crazed animal.

But at last she felt her strength going. The tug of the waters about her limbs became a nightmare. Hanging onto Clayton a moment longer seemed an impossibility. He was held from making a move toward his gun by the pressure of Morg's against his head.

Then, as if some source of information within herself set a up rapid communication through brain to finger-tips, she took her left hand from Clayton's throat and thrust it with sure speed to the holster on his hip.

"Damn you! I don't care!" he muttered as he felt his gun come from its place into her possession.

He knew that he was arming her against Morg. But his own interests were too much

at stake for him to be concerned. All he wanted was that tigerish grip loosened from his laboring throat.

"Give me my gun!" Dewilde demanded, her face close to his.

He drew it from his pocket and passed it over.

"Let's get out of this water!" he suggested.

"Dewilde, you all right?" Morg inquired tensely.

"Yes; only dreadfully damp!"

Her heart was singing. She had two guns and her belt held a store of ammunition.

For an instant she debated about recrossing the torrent and making an escape along the other side. By following the stream she must, sooner or later, come out somewhere at the base of the hills.

In the instant's pause Dewilde felt Martin's hand close on her arm.

"Come on out of this. You're wet through," he said, and the next moment he swept her off her feet and carried her toward the dry rock.

Clayton grinned in the dark at thought of what Morg was up against. Dewilde Capet with two guns was not the easiest kind of a girl to manage by a lover who found little favor in her sight.

He turned deliberately and made as rapid a way as possible back across the torrent he had just crossed.

He had the formula in his pocket; it meant a fortune to him. Why should he worry about what happened to Dewilde Capet? Or to Morg either?

He moved along the side of the stream, dropping away into the oblivion of the night and the labyrinth of the mountains.

Meanwhile, about four miles to the south, Edward Wharton had lived an eternity under the threat of the gun held by the unseen foe.

Still the story he had heard with a child's bated breath and luminous eyes was ever present in his mind as a suggestion for a possible escape.

Night settled over the pass. The white streak of rock looked gray, but was perfectly discernible to the eyes of the watcher.

Ed's blankets lay dark against the betraying background.

A small boy in some northern fairy tale was Edward's inspiration. He recalled how the boy, worn out but afraid to drop asleep in the midst of his perils, had put bright bits of phosphorescent wood on his eyes to deceive the giant who watched him.

Ed had carried some of his outfit to his resting-place under pretense of making a more comfortable pillow. Praying that the moon would not rise till he had had his chance, he wriggled out of his clothes, and slowly wormed them, together with some of his paraphernalia, under the blankets. Then a strange, whitish figure emerged from the latter just where the white streak of rock flowed away through the pass.

The figure was scarcely discernible against the light background. And the bumpy blankets from which it had come looked about as bumpy as before. The slight alteration in the humps might easily have been due to the change of position which would be natural for a restless sleeper.

It was after midnight before Ed dared put the ruse into effect. He had hunched himself five feet from the island of his blankets, when he stopped short.

An angry voice was flung out into the pass from the sounding-board. Ed, in his next-to-nature costume, paused, expecting a gun's sharp protest against his enterprise. But the voice asked a question that seemed to indicate another interest than the one in him.

"Tony, where are you?"

A few seconds later he heard the clatter of small stones. If Tony were the man who had watched him, then it was more than likely that some one had arrived and was being moved away from the place where his voice gave forth so clearly.

A few moments later Ed was sure his surmise was correct, for he heard nothing more and had crept forward unhindered a very considerable distance.

He grinned as he realized that the bumpy blankets were doing their work for him. Then he grinned again, even while he shivered. For his underwear suit, with his ammunition-belt as decoration, and his gun on

the middle of his back, made a costume to inspire mirth in any one but the wearer.

Five minutes later, walking gingerly in his stocking-feet, he knew he had reached the neighborhood of the sounding-canopy of rock.

He had two men now to outwit. But he needed exercise; his skin was covered with goose-pimples. He longed to get busy.

But not a sound came to guide him in his search. His rage rose. He meant to get the man who had limited his liberties so irritatingly.

Noiselessly he went forward. Now he had his gun in his hand, and he never recalled a moment in his eventful life when his blood sang so soothingly through his big body or his mind was so certain of success.

He stopped; then he sniffed the mountain air. The smell of frying bacon came to him. He drew in the odor hungrily as he reflected that the visitor to Tony was probably being fed.

With reinforced determination he went forward, now following the scent, to which the edge of his hunger made him peculiarly sensitive. The sound of suppressed voices reached him.

"I'll get the bread."

"Be quick about it. I've got to move along," was the muffled response.

"When they come with the cattle?" Tony evidently stopped to ask.

"Get the bread and I'll tell you," the short answer came.

There was something in the repressed accents that struck Ed as being familiar; but the impression was snowed under by the eagerness with which he contemplated getting the drop on the man who had so long had it on him.

Tony set out for the larder, a crevice in the rocks where he kept his supplies and somewhat removed from the cave where he had led his companion in order to converse and cook without betraying sounds or smells.

To the complete surprise of Ed Wharton and to the utter discomfiture of himself, Tony rounded a corner and saw—

Just how alarming a tall, palish figure outlined against a black rock can look, one

needs to encounter a man in underwear in an unexpected place to fully appreciate.

Tony, saturated with the superstitions of his people, probably vaguely suspecting that the men he had killed might haunt the scene of their undoing, saw Ed looming in ghastly bulk against the background. Not five minutes before he had looked out on the floor of the pass and had seen the figure under the blankets.

It never occurred to him to associate this tall terror with the man who had submitted to the tyranny of his gun.

For one horror-stiff instant he stared; then, with a scream that rang like the agony of a soul in torment, he bolted away through the cañon.

The visitor in Tony's domain started up like a guilty creature caught in the instant of effort to escape. He stood there, unable to move.

There was the leap and rattle of loose stones that flew from under the feet of Tony as he rushed southward.

Wharton glanced down at himself. The uncanny effect of his tall body in its meager costume came to him; he saw it from Tony's point of view.

Then the humor of the situation struck him with glorious impact. He was scaring the very gizzard out of the man who had had him scared.

"By George, I'll finish the two of them!" he exclaimed to himself.

He counted on the second man being another temperamental Mexican. He gave the best imitation he could think up of a ghostly cry and dashed around the rock. The next instant he froze. In the flicker of a small fire he beheld the face of the man he had killed.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### AT THE MERCY OF FORCE.

"WHERE is my uncle?"

"I'm taking you to him, Dewilde." Morg watched the gray eyes of the girl he had carried from the mountain stream flash from object to object in the cave.

It was a surprising place. The rock walls were covered with rare Navajo blankets. Their bizarre effect was like the blazing of many flames. At one side of the cavern a deep fireplace had been hollowed out, and flames fed with pine logs sent out warm fingers to feel among the water-soaked folds of Dewilde's clothing.

"Where?" she asked sternly.

"He's at a place in Mexico, the hacienda of Señorita—"

"I've heard that story before!" Dewilde interrupted. "I'm not going to Mexico. I know perfectly well that along the border you think you can do what you please. You seem to forget that this is a civilized country. If you have the faintest idea you're going to lead me any farther by deceiving me about my uncle, you're wrong."

"Well, if you're not a goin' to listen to reason, you'll have to listen to love-makin'," Morg retorted. "I'd be glad to do it right, but if you ain't willin' to give me half a show, you can bet your life I'll jes' do—as I please!"

"Do you know where my uncle is?" Dewilde demanded, her gray gaze boring into his gleaming eyes.

"No, I don't," he acknowledged.

"Then all this story about his being sick at Riller's is just a scheme you fixed up to get me where you could—make love to me as you please?"

"I didn't do the schemin'. That there Wharton—"

"I suppose it never occurred to you that he might still be working in partnership with Clayton? What they both want is to get me out of the way, so they can get the formula, or to get me in a place where I'll have to tell it. I suppose you can see that?"

"Well, what does it matter? I've—got you!"

"And this man you call Wharton has the formula; he made me tell him. He said he'd let me get away from you if I'd tell. And I did. You know what that formula means to me. You know I'd do almost anything conceivable to keep it. I reckon you can judge from that about how far you're likely to get in making love to me."

"A woman's like any other animal—git

the rope on her an' she jes' nachully settles down an' makes the best of it!"

If Morg had argued or wooed, Dewilde's power to fight would have been stimulated. But the cool conviction with which he spoke forced her to recognize that whatever she said or did had next to no weight with him. He wanted just herself; and the scorn that his conception of her inspired might as well be unspoken for all its meaning to him.

"If I say I'll marry you, will you take me back to Ransom's?" she asked.

"I'll take you back to Ransom's jes' as soon as I think I've got you so you won't break away," he replied.

"Doesn't it even occur to you that a woman would rather be dead than belong to the man she doesn't love?"

"I've seen folks that thought they'd ruther die than do what they wuz up against; but I ain't never seen one of 'em do the dyin'. It's different between thinkin' you want to be dead and doin' what will make you dead. I ain't no more scared of you killin' yerself than I'm scared of my killin' you. You love yerself jes' as much in yer way as I love you in my way. An' my way's the way that goes here!"

With the light-footed ease for which he was celebrated in his encounters with cattle or men, he crossed the room and caught her in his strong arms. And hard against his pressing arm the butt of Clayton's gun was pushed.

"I'll take that," he said, sweeping the coat of her riding costume aside and grasping the butt of the weapon. At the same instant her hand closed on the butt of her own gun.

Eye to eye, and guns pointed, they stood close together in the flickering light of the fire. For a long moment neither of them spoke, but the look of each was as cool and as calmly certain of dominance as if the threat of instant death were not imminent.

"If you imagine you can outwit me, Morg Martin, you must think again. If I hadn't the great reason for defying you that loving another man gives me, I'd still go to any length just to avoid you."

Her words were as quiet as if she spoke them in the midst of the shimmer of can-

dles reflected on the hardwood floors of her mother's drawing-room in New Orleans.

Morg laughed shortly.

"Dewilde, every time you git yer spunk up it makes me surer 'n' surer that you're my woman!"

"I'm not!" she declared, her gun still aimed.

"You are! But you don't know it. I'm goin' to learn you. I ain't a goin' to begin here. I'm goin' to give you the chanct to love me whur they's flowers and fountains an' the things that women likes to have round when they're gittin' courted. But ef you don't see it my way then—"

"Anyway, a thousand things may happen to save me from you before—then," she struck in.

"If you think I'm givin' anything a chanct to happen, you don't know me. Soon as you're dry, we move!"

Without a thought apparently of her gun, he whirled about and crossed the cave to where some supplies had been laid on the rock floor and still stood in their containers. It would have been so easy to shoot and end the menace of his passion. But she could not do such a thing. The sheer, cool courage of the man seemed to paralyze her finger.

She slipped off the coat of her habit. Morg seemed not to notice her as he moved about in his preparation of food. An appetizing odor floated from the kettle he had set firmly on the big logs. Dewilde stood before the fire. At last Morg caught up one of the boxes and dumped its contents of canned goods on the floor. He pulled a big block from the pile of wood meant to feed the fire. With a flourish of his gun, he caught the bail of the pot on the butt and deposited it on the flat end of the block.

"Now, you eat some of this hot stuff, an' you'll wonder why you're fool enough to make things hard fer yourself—an' me," he said. "Here's a seat fer you."

What happened then occurred with such incredible speed that Dewilde could only strike out wildly and scream in the agony of her rage and helplessness.

As he stepped behind her to place the box, his right arm shot around her neck

and closed like a vise on her throat. She heard the box clatter to the floor; and the next instant, with a twist of her arm that proved how completely ruthless he was, he took her gun away from her.

With teeth and nails, fighting in the maddest extremity of the great fear that grips a woman when a man seeks possession by force, she assailed him. And the trained strength of his whole body closed around her like a prison.

"Morg! Morg! I beg you—"

His lips pressed hot and hard on hers. The crush of his hold increased.

"I guess you'll find out who's master, Dewilde."

Somehow, even in the awful grip of his arms, she managed to sink at his feet. He sat down on the box and held her so that the hard hideousness of his eyes blazed into hers.

"I'll—do—anything!" she gasped, utterly unnerved in his grip.

"Will you come to Weenykin an' marry me?"

"Yes, yes," she barely breathed.

"Now?"

She nodded.

He rose and dragged her with him across the rock floor of the cave. Her terror robbed her of voice, of power to attempt resistance.

It seemed to her that she emerged from long submersion in depths so dark and so oppressive that she would never breathe again. Then she realized that she was bound firmly with ropes; her arms were pinioned to her sides, her feet tied together. She heard him laugh.

"Jing! I bet you're the fust bride that ever went to the parson in them kind of decorations!"

She turned her head away from him, but in cavemannish enjoyment of what he regarded as her complete recognition of his power he caught her chin in his hand and held her face to that the shine in his eyes poured pitilessly into hers till she closed them.

"Tain't no use to fight me, is it, Dewilde?"

Dewilde said nothing, but even in the midst of this darkest hour she found herself

hoping. He was taking her to where there were men, men who might come to her rescue from a brute.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### CONVERGING TRAILS.

MEANWHILE, Edward Wharton, in his B. V. Ds., was pounding the head of Arch Clayton against the rocks with one hand, while he used the other to jab his ribs with a gun.

"Say, you confounded nut, I thought you were dead!" Wharton sang out as he continued his thumping.

To Clayton, aching with the manhandling, the other man's voice sounded jubilant; still he could not harmonize the joy in it with the cruel treatment that the speaker was giving him.

"For the love of Heaven, if you're glad I'm not, don't kill me now!" he begged between bumps.

"What are you doing here? Are you in this cattle-stealing business? Let me tell you somebody is going to give you the killing you deserve. And he won't have to swing for it, either. It 'll be done regularly. You can't kill three men attending to their job and go scot-free. Not while I'm alive and my gun's loaded!"

"I didn't kill them!" Clayton declared. "I just got mixed up with these cutthroats lately."

"What 'd you know about them?" Ed demanded, still keeping up his punishment.

"Say! Quit, and I'll tell you!" Clayton rejoined.

"Oh, all right!"

Wharton desisted in his pounding, but kept the attentive gun prodding.

"You know that girl that you spent the night with at the Neck-and-Neck?"

A gouge that nearly broke through Clayton's ribs rendered him breathless for a moment.

"Talk like a gentleman, if you know how. If you don't, shut up, or—be shot up!"

"Well, you know who I mean?" Clayton muttered.

"Yes; go on," Wharton ordered grimly, too eager to hear what Clayton had to say that concerned Dewilde Capet to treat him as his anger prompted.

"I got wind of Morg Martin's intention to get her down here by pretending that her uncle's at a place in Mexico. He's doing it under cover of this gang of cattle-thieves that he's in cahoots with. I—well, I wanted something she had, so I just sided in with the plan, but did a little work of my own. I—lost out. I didn't get what I wanted."

"And Miss Capet? Where is she?"

"She's at some ranch where she teaches school," Clayton lied.

"Ransom's?" Ed asked quickly.

"I guess so."

"Martin didn't get her to come to find her uncle, then?"

"No; some one gave him away."

It was no desire to serve Morg Martin that moved Clayton to lie. It was simply that he recognized if this young giant, with muscles rippling under his skin as if they craved action, knew that Dewilde Capet was in Martin's hands, he would as likely as not drive him forward at the end of his gun to the place where he could find and save the girl.

Wharton was silent for a perceptible interval. Then he gave Clayton a no gentle poke.

"You just turn out everything you've got in your pockets— Hold on! Hands up till I give you the high-sign!"

Ed's hands went to Clayton's belt. There was no weapon there?"

"Where's your gun?" he asked.

"Lost it."

"All right. Show what you've got!"

Clayton's watch, a cheap one, a cigar-cutter, a roll of bills, and some change were all he had to display.

Then Wharton pointed his gun at a pocket in his shirt which he had not yet touched.

"Nothing in it," Clayton tried to speak casually.

"Turn it inside out," Wharton insisted.

Clayton obeyed. The voice was of the kind that suggested the advisability of quick action.

A crumpled sheet of yellow paper fell to the ground.

"Pick it up and give it to me," was the next order.

Clayton did so. With his gun at attention, Ed smoothed out the crumpled sheet against his chest. Then, backing toward the fire that still burned in a protected cranny, he read the message.

It was a despatch signed Cogswell & Sterritt. But Ed recognized the once well-known kindness of old Cogswell himself in the wording:

Great to find you. Congratulate you on your fortune. Am awaiting further word from you, according to your telegram. Wire if you need money. Come home to your old friends.

"You wired Cogswell & Sterritt?" Ed asked, warmed through with the friendliness of the message.

"Yes. Thought you'd want them to know you were alive to inherit." Clayton deftly evaded the real reason for his interference in Wharton's affairs.

Wharton had disliked the man with whom he had associated himself. But it seemed to him now that he had misjudged him. And he had certainly treated him pretty rough. Now the other's seeming service fell like a coal of fire on Ed's head.

"Say, Clayton, I want to—to apologize for—"

"That's all right. I lost my head, too. Glad things are no worse."

There was a simulated magnanimity about his words and the manner in which he spoke them that deceived Wharton, whose mind and heart were reveling in the comforting news that Clayton had brought. The girl he loved was safe at Ransom's, where he had seen her last. The crime, that had loomed between him and her as the barrier he could not dare to surmount except in the wild sweet moments of dreaming, was completely broken down. Arch Clayton, alive and well, stood within reach of his hand.

"What are you doing here?" Ed suddenly asked, wondering how Clayton happened to turn up in that particular location.



"Came here to get a horse. Haven't much time to spare. I'm bound for Weenykin, where I can get a train in the morning."

"How'd you know you could get a horse here?" Ed went on.

"The cattle-rustlers that Martin's in with make this pass a kind of headquarters. That's why they keep a man on the job to shoot up—"

"Yes, I know. I guess I'll go to Weenykin with you! I don't know where the cattle-thieves keep their horses, but I have two of my own. You'll ride one. Move on back along this trail. I may need you."

Clayton felt the subtle change in Wharton. Without realizing it, he had stimulated in the other that craving for justice and fair dealing which had given to his adventurous life somewhat the aspect of a knight errant's. The grave, newly made, with the headboard bearing the sinister warning, flashed across the screen of Ed's mind. And instantly he recognized that he had in Clayton a witness to the works and misdeeds of a bunch of scoundrels. He meant to use the witness to the good purpose of eliminating the outlawry.

With Clayton riding ahead, a bit uneasy, the two men made their way toward the mining camp toward which, by a more direct route, Morg was carrying Dewilde Capet.

It was five ten in the morning when Morg led his horse up in front of a building with a suspiciously dead-looking front. The paint on the frame building was gone. Topsy shades were drawn down and holes in them revealed the fact that the windows were boarded up behind the shades.

He lifted Dewilde, stiff in body from the ride in her uncomfortable position, down to the plank platform. He held her firmly on her feet for an instant till she gained balance.

Leaving her, miserably unable to take advantage of his absence, he strode to the shabby door and lifted his hand high to pull a cord that dangled from above.

A moment later a voice asked: "That you, Morg?"

"Let me in quick, Mat!"

Morg recrossed the walk, lifted Dewilde bodily, and bore her to the door. As the latter opened cautiously he planted his elbow against it and pushed his way into the room.

Matilda Fuller, in mussy negligée, stared at him as he carried the girl to a long seat beside a gambling-table and laid her down.

"Mat, git the jedge! I'm goin' to git married!"

Dewilde turned her head and caught her breath. One glance at the frowsy woman had showed her too clearly how well Morg had chosen his assistant.

The woman looked at Morg Martin and laughed.

"You're jokin'!"

"Like hell I am! You got the whip-hand of old Meacham. Git him here ef you want to enjoy my friendship in the future."

There was no possible misunderstanding.

"Got your—"

Mat meant to ask if he had the license. But Martin's hard eyes warned her to silence.

"Vamose!" he snapped as Dewilde fought herself up to a sitting position.

Mat went shuffling through the long room, littered with the stubs left by smokers and the decks of cards that had served as proofs of marksmanship.

"I'd rather die than marry him!" Dewilde cried after her.

"Say, girl, you're-damn lucky that he wants to marry you. He ain't always so pertickler!" Mat sent back as she opened a door and went out into the dawn.

Morg sat down on the table in front of Dewilde. He seemed anxious about something.

"Morg Martin, don't you know you can't do things in this high-handed fashion?" Dewilde exclaimed hotly.

"No, I don't! I kin do it all right; but I hate to have to. I—I guess I'm scared you'll never care fur me like you would ef I wasn't so high-handed, as you call it," he said, evidently struggling with a thought of so unfamiliar a type that it made him uncomfortable.

"Care for you? I hate you!" Dewilde spoke with a venom that bit into him like poison.

"That settles it!" and he swung down from the table edge.

"You mean—you won't marry a girl who hates you?" Dewilde believed that the prayer she had sent up was being answered.

A mean smile came over Morg Martin's face. He then looked at her from head to foot.

"No, that ain't what I mean. I'll marry you—if Mat brings the parson. If she don't, it's—all the same to me."

Morg pulled his watch from his pocket.

"Morg Martin, you know there's only one State in the Union where you can get married without a license. And we're not in South Carolina now!"

"Well, I said I wasn't pertickler about bein' married. I jes' wuz arrangin' that on yer 'count."

"Your judge won't—"

"Don't you worry 'bout whut he'll do! He'll jump through any hoop I hold up."

"But it won't be marriage—even if he says the words!" she insisted.

She had caught the sounds of some one moving about above them. Her heart began to beat with more evenness. It was scarcely possible that Morg Martin could continue his lawlessness in the face of any kind of observation.

No one would stand by and see him make mock of being married.

"Morg, if you'll wait and do—it—right, I promise—"

She paused as the words fell from her lips. In her eagerness to secure some advantage she heard herself promising what she knew she never would perform if there was a ghost of choice.

"I won't wait fur nothin'—'cept this jedge; and he's got to be mighty damn quick!"

Dewilde edged along the leather-covered couch away from him. The ugly smile came again.

"Lots of good it does you to duck and dodge! I got you, my beauty! I got you, goin' an' comin'!"

As he spoke, the sounds of a man's boots

as they struck the stairs came to her, mingled with the clatter of the back door flying open suddenly.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### A DREAM COME TRUE.

TO Dewilde's surprise, Martin retired suddenly into a closet under the stairs. She fixed her eyes on the latter. She had no hope of help from those who were coming in through the rear door. A tall figure in rough riding clothes came down, feeling his way in the dusk of the closed and darkened room. The light of the lamp that Mat had set on the billiard-table before she admitted Morg made scarcely more than a glimmer of illumination in the big room.

"Say, Mat—" the man began, and then stopped.

He stared at Dewilde, her feet bound, her arms pinioned. Her gray eyes burned into his with a glance that spoke through its very intensity of silence.

"What's the—what's the game?" he asked confusedly.

"Get me out of here!" she implored.

"Good gophers, I didn't know Mat brung 'em here, gagged an' bound!" the man ejaculated indignantly.

At the moment he took a step toward Dewilde to release her from the ropes, Martin came up silently behind him.

"Don't mess in whur you ain't wanted, Silcott. I got enuff on you to—"

"Jing! Morg, this your game? Excuse me!"

The tall man wriggled his way through the least possible crack of the front door. Hopelessly Dewilde turned her eyes toward the rear.

Mat stood there alone.

"Say, that old fool won't come," she announced. "He says he'd be 'rested if he performed a marriage without a license."

"Whut!"

"Ye needn't roar so!" Mat retorted, though Dewilde detected a trace of fear behind her words. "He's struck a mine er something. He's a goin' to cut out of here. He ain't goin' to be bullied by you

no more because he's took hush-money from this here establishment."

A worm had evidently turned. Neither Mat nor Morg had an idea of what had put the courage into the old justice of the peace. But the defiance stirred Morg as defiance always did. He had to do something to work off the rage it generated.

Striding across the space between himself and Dewilde, he caught her up in his arms. Mat went swiftly to a draped opening at the left of the room.

She pulled back the curtain and unlocked a door beyond. Morg went toward it, shoving aside the chairs or kicking them out of his way as he strode forward.

Dewilde screamed.

Out in the night an old man, rubbing his hands in nervous excitement, heard the cry which came through the open door of the saloon. Mat had forgotten to close it as she went in.

On the side of the long, ugly building opposite where the old man stood in shivering uncertainty, the words "Your First Chance" were painted. Two men, on horseback and in single file, saw the letters glimmer faintly through the dawn.

It was Arch Clayton, with Edward Wharton close at his heels.

With a speed scarcely to be expected in one of his age, the old man dashed across the road and grabbed at the bridle of Wharton's horse.

"Say, say—" he began, and gulped. Then: "Go in there quick! Something wrong!"

Clayton saw Wharton slide from his mount.

"You'll miss the train!" he called without stopping.

Again came a cry, in a woman's voice. Without an instant's question Wharton drew his gun and dashed toward the door. Dewilde fought like a tigress as Morg bore her through the door that Mat had opened. But he edged through with her and started up-stairs.

The horror of what awaited her flashed before her dazingly. Then, like a great sword of light, she knew that something would cut away her difficulties.

At the same instant Morg stopped short. She felt as if her very body were being torn in two. The rope around her ankles, as her feet dragged across the door, had caught over the door-handle.

Morg tugged and hauled. She screamed with the pain of his great strength pulling the rope till it cut into her like steel knives. It was dark on the stairway. Morg roared like a caged and maddened lion.

"Mat, bring a light!"

He had scarcely spoken when a shot rang out. Wharton had tried to force the door. Mat stood stricken to inaction by the unexpected interruption. Then, with his gun carefully aimed, Ed began to shoot off the lock.

After the fifth shot he burst the door open. And Mat mentally made note of the fact that he had one more bullet left. She knelt and crawled under the billiard-table.

The impossibility of moving the girl, whom he knew to be bound hand and foot, baffled Martin. He gave a mighty tug. The agony of it tore forth from Dewilde's lips in scream after scream.

Then suddenly a knot loosened, or a rope burst, and the two of them were hurled against the stairway with mighty force.

Morg's head struck the edge of a wooden molding that decorated the wall. He lay quite still.

Up-stairs the girls whispered, stranded in scared groups along the hall, while men crept silently toward a rear door that communicated with an outside stairway which they hastily descended.

In the big room on the ground floor Edward Wharton was knocking over furniture and seeking wildly for the place from which he had heard the agonized screams come.

"Say, you crazy nut, what d'you want to bust the furniture for?"

Mat had stood the destruction as long as she could, and called out her question from her hiding-place.

"Where's a lamp?" was all the answer she received.

"How'd I know, after the way you've jumbled things up? Is this a raid? Are you a new sheriff gittin' funny? Whut's the damn game anyway?"

"What was that woman—"

Out from the stairway a voice rang that nearly knocked Wharton backward.

"It's Dewilde Capet! Come quick!"

"Capet? Capet?" Ed heard in high, excited tones behind him, and knew that the old man had come into the maelstrom of furniture with him.

"A light! I've got to have a light!" he cried out.

Stealing out as if it answered him timidly, a pale radiance shone from the side of the room across the top of a billiard-table—Mat's hiding-place. The light came from a lamp held at the top of the stairs on which Dewilde and Morg Martin lay. It shook in the hand of a girl who was pale under her rouge.

"Douse the glim, you ijit!" Mat ordered.

"Don't you dare!" Ed countermanded.

The girl who held the light continued to stare down at the white face of Morg Martin. Wharton dashed toward the spot.

He gave a quick glance at the ropes, and understood. Lifting his gun, he leveled it at Morg Martin.

"Don't! Don't! It's—too late!" Dewilde cried.

The girl at the top of the stairs dropped the lamp as if it had been stricken from her hand. The glass bowl broke and rolled from one step to another. The oil caught fire.

Ed leaped forward and caught Dewilde up in his arms. The flare of the flame showed him Mat peering forth from her lair. But he rushed on, one thought alone clear in his mind. He must get the girl he held away from the sights and sounds of the horror into which she had been dragged.

Out into the fresh glory of the spring morning he bore her, her cheek pressed against his as her head lay on his shoulder. His blood rose to the touch with such ecstatic haste that his knees trembled.

Up the funnel of the stairway the draft rushed in and seized the flame of the lamp. When Mat got an idea of what was happening, the stairway and hall were afire, and the girls were running away like rats deserting a doomed ship.

Except one. She came down the flaming way and gathered Morg Martin's head in her arms. Mat ran screaming out of the back door after one look at the flame-encircled group on the stairs.

The Last Chance went up in smoke, but its reputation was less ugly than it deserved because of the halo that a woman's love hung in the midst of the flames that destroyed it.

Old Judge Meacham watched Ed's efforts to revive Dewilde with trembling interest.

"She's the niece," he repeated every now and then. Then added: "Maybe her uncle could be of more help than we can."

"Her uncle?" Ed exclaimed. "Is he here?"

"Right at my house—just across that vacant lot."

Ed asked no more questions. He picked Dewilde up and started toward the cottage indicated. Fosdick Capet, peppery, excitable, immediately burst into interrogation. How had his niece reached Weenykin? How did Wharton happen to be carrying her across lots?

But in the very midst of his unanswerable questions Dewilde opened her eyes.

She looked from her uncle to Edward Wharton.

"Uncle!" she cried out. "You know him?"

"Know who? Judge Meacham—my old-time friend, Ferdy Meacham? He's fixed the papers for me, and I've sent them to Washington. No losing our precious formula now!" Capet crowed, while he regarded Meacham with an elderly chumminess delightful to see.

"Oh! then I haven't cheated you out of your fortune!" Dewilde exclaimed.

Then the gray glance of her eyes thrust like a hot lance into Wharton's eyes as she turned to him with: "You can't cheat him now!"

"I beg your pardon, I don't understand," he managed to say.

"Of course not! You wouldn't! Uncle, you tell him what we think of him!"

"Sir, I beg your pardon. I—I think something must have upset her so completely that she isn't quite right in her head," Capet said, divided between embarrass-

ment at her rudeness and concern for her health.

"Uncle! How can you—"

"My dear child, just a moment. Sir, may I ask you to excuse yourself a moment. My niece is—"

Wharton backed out of the room quietly. His burning eyes asked forgiveness for the fault of which he was unconscious. If he had resented, if he had shown a trace of hurt dignity, Dewilde would have had courage to drive herself along the hard way she must take. But that look nearly finished her. She burst into tears.

"If you're going to overlook it, I don't see why I can't!" she told her uncle between sobs.

"Overlook what, child?" Capet asked anxiously.

"His going off and leaving you to die in agony!"

"Dewilde! This isn't the one. I never saw this man before!" Capet exclaimed with conviction.

Dewilde rose slowly from the lounge. She held her uncle's eyes as if she searched his soul through them.

"Isn't Arch Clayton?" she asked, as if she scarcely dared put the question.

"Great Scott, no! This man's a gentleman."

Capet and Meacham stood aside as Dewilde. Capet crossed the little room and opened the door, and passed out, closing it after her.

The two old men sat down, looked across at each other, and smiled.

Outside, on the small porch, Wharton was leaning disconsolately against a pillar. The train he should have taken—and the man he should have kept in hand—had gone off down the cañon. The smell of the Last Chance was thick in the air. He felt heartsick and weary.

"I—I want to—to apologize," a voice announced softly.

He turned quickly. Dewilde stood between him and the door. He had seen birds poised, with the same readiness to fly, on a swinging twig.

"Oh, that's all right!" he tried to say offhandedly, thinking that her uncle had

reprimanded her and she was doing a duty-penance.

"But it isn't—when you say it that way," she replied.

"Apologizing won't fix it!" he heard himself say while he marveled and called it fool's courage in his heart.

"What—will?" she asked slowly, the blood dyeing her cheeks and her small hands twisting in half-childish embarrassment.

Ed stared in puzzled but delighted wonder.

"You don't mean—do you mean that you—if I thought you meant—"

"You seem so mixed up, I reckon—I'd better—tell you what I mean?" she suggested, her low voice dipping and sliding into intricate modulations that said a dozen things her words left out.

"If you—don't mind?" he managed to articulate, while his hands seemed determined to reach and claim her quite without consulting his will.

"I mean—you're my dream come true!" she breathed slowly, and then, with an utter loss of the coquetry that had helped her say it; she turned and darted toward the door.

"No, you don't, Miss Angel!" he cried, and caught her in the circle of his arms. "Have I got you? Have I really?" he added as he bent his face toward hers.

"I really couldn't be more entirely 'got' than I am now!" he heard her say before their lips met.

Moment after moment slipped by. The two on the small porch never even noted such trifles. And the old men inside sat as still as time itself and smiled.

Then, Dewilde held her rosy face away from the tender assault of her lover's lips.

"If I knew your name, it would be a little more convenient to introduce you to my uncle, wouldn't it?" she asked.

"Edward Chardon Wharton," he answered, laughing into eyes that widened with surprise as she listened.

"Oh! I like it!" she exclaimed, without a guess at its effectiveness in a check-book. And they went into the cottage to the two smiling old men.

(The end.)



# The Gravity Professor

by Ray Cummings

**T**UBBY shoved his plate away from him with dignity and threw his napkin on the table.

"That ain't so," he declared, glaring at his friend aggressively. "And furthermore, and in addition, I say—"

"I ain't interested in what you say; I'm telling you what *he* said. 'If you're heavier than water you sink — if you're lighter you float.' That's what he said."

"You're right, Jake," agreed the second man. "That's what he said."

"Well, it ain't so. And furthermore, I can prove it."

They sat in the corner of a small, side-street restaurant off Longacre Square. Tubby raised his voice above the whine of the little jazz orchestra and the shuffling feet of the dancers.

"Tain't so," he repeated. "And I can prove it—if you're interested." His tone was scornful and infinitely sarcastic.

"He says he can prove it, Jake," elucidated the second man.

The first man sighed wearily. "Go ahead and prove it," he said.

"What you said," Tubby began, "was that if you're heavier than water you sink, and if you're lighter, you float. Ain't I right?"

"I *didn't* say it. I said *he* said it. That's different."

"You're right, Jake. *You* didn't say it," concurred the second man.

Tubby gulped. "Well, anyway — you said *he* said it. And 'tain't so." He paused impressively. "Can you swim?" he added suddenly. He shoved his chubby little forefinger directly under the first man's nose.

"Huh?" said the first man, surprised.

"I said 'can you swim?' Can you, or can't you? That's all I want to know."

"No," the first man admitted. "I can't swim."

"Then if you got thrown in the river you'd sink, wouldn't you?"

The first man considered. "I ain't never been thrown in no river," he declared finally.

"But if you did? Ain't I got a right to ask you a hypothetical question? If you did—" He paused again.

"I guess maybe I'd sink," the first man admitted.

Tubby smiled with gratification. "Yes, maybe you'd sink. And how much do you weigh?"

The first man's huge Adam's apple bobbed up and down his stringy neck under this cross-examination.

"I — I — hundred and five," he stammered. "Maybe more. I ain't been weighed lately."

"I weigh hund'ed and ninety," said Tubby triumphantly. "Naked — hund'ed and ninety. So I weigh more'n you, don't I?"



"He's right, Jake. He weighs more'n you," said the second man.

The first man, recovering his poise, conceded this with magnanimity. "But that ain't got nothing to do with this here argument. I said—"

"If I weigh more'n you," Tubby pursued relentlessly, "and *you* sink—why is it I float? *That's* what I'm askin'. That's a fair question, ain't it? There's somethin' wrong somewhere. Ain't I right?"

"He's right, Jake," said the second man.

The first man rose to his feet. "I'm only tellin' yer what *he* said—I ain't sayin' what *I* think." He looked at his watch. "Come on. We'll be late for this here lecture if we don't hurry."

"I ain't goin' to no lecture," declared Tubby. "I'm sleepy. I'm goin' home."

"We got free tickets," urged the first man. "Come on."

"Come on," said the second man. "We got free tickets."

And Tubby reluctantly went.

## II.

THE little hall was crowded when they took their seats. A huge rectangle of white sheet hung before them.

"It's a steopican lecture," explained the first man. "They're goin' to shine pictures on that sheet. It's a scientific lecture."

"I ain't interested in no lecture," Tubby declared again. "I wish I was home."

The lights dimmed suddenly. A hush came over the chattering little audience. A man appeared on the platform and began haranguing them in a dull, hopeless monotone.

Tubby wished again, fervently in his heart, that he were home in bed. The hard little wooden seat into which he had wedged himself was too small. He slid lower on his spine, but his knees bumped the back of the chair in front. An aisle ran beside him; he extended one of his legs into it.

A man, coming down the aisle from behind him, touched his elbow. Tubby looked up, startled.

"I want to see you," said the man softly. "Come outside for a minute."

Tubby saw he was a little wisp of a man—all skin and bones—with an emaciated face wrinkled by great age.

"Come outside a minute," he repeated. "I got something to see you about."

Tubby hesitated. A little air would do him good. Jake would never miss him; he'd be back before the lecture was over. He slid into the aisle and followed the stranger to the door.

In the lobby outside Tubby stopped.

"Where we goin'?" he asked. "What you got to see me about? I ain't interested in nothin'."

The little man smiled, exposing three decrepit yellow teeth behind his shriveled, bloodless lips.

"You'll be interested in this," he said. His voice was a thin, cracked treble—like a little child who was sick, Tubby thought.

The man's long frock coat and plug hat were exceedingly shabby. Tubby felt very big and prosperous by contrast.

"Right," he said briskly.

"Not here," said the little man. "My laboratory's at the corner. We'll go there."

"Sure," said Tubby. "We'll go there. You got somethin' to show me. Ain't I right?"

The laboratory into which Tubby was ushered a few moments later was a gigantic room completely full of a variety of mechanical contrivances. Nothing was familiar to Tubby but a big pool of very black, very ominous-looking water that occupied the center, and around which the various pieces of apparatus—complicated affairs of pulleys, weights, pendulums and little incline tracks with leaden balls to roll down them—were clustered.

Tubby's host took off his hat and coat and laid them on a stool. A huge lead ball as tall as Tubby's knees stood near by. The little man looked at his watch anxiously. Then he got behind the ball and, exerting all his strength, tried to roll it forward on the floor. After a moment of ineffectual effort he stopped and stood panting before Tubby.

"You might help me," he said.

"Sure," said Tubby. He rolled the ball forward. It was an extraordinarily heavy ball; it took all his strength to move it.

"Wait! Oh, my goodness—wait!" The little man gripped his arm in terror.

Tubby stopped rolling the ball; and the little man dropped to his hands and knees on the floor. Tubby saw that the boards were marked with chalk lines like a ruler.

"You've moved it too far," wailed his host. "Quick! Move it back. Two inches—no, wait." He whipped out a magnifying glass and examined the chalk marks where the ball lay.

"One inch and a half. A little less. Roll it back!"

His agonized tone alarmed Tubby. He shoved the ball back carefully.

"There! Now—all right!" The little man stood up trembling, and mopped the sweat from his forehead with a torn black-silk handkerchief.

"We nearly did it wrong," he said, smiling weakly. He looked at his watch again, and sighed with relief. "But it's all right now. I guess the danger's past. It's all right now."

"I'm glad," said Tubby. "We're all right now, ain't we?" He paused, suddenly embarrassed. "Say, how about me and you gettin' acquainted?"

"I beg your pardon," said the little man contritely. "My name's Graves—Dr. Graves, P. G."

"Pleased to meet you," said Tubby, shaking hands. "Mine's Tubby. What's the P. G. for?"

"Why P. G.—Professor of Gravity," said the little man.

"Oh," said Tubby.

"Professor of Gravity," repeated his host. "I see you don't know what that means?"

"No—yes," said Tubby. "You're sad. Ain't I right?"

The professor smiled. "You will have your little joke, I see. You are a clever man."

"Yes," assented Tubby. "What did you want to see me about? Why did you roll that ball? What's a Professor of Gravity?"

The professor looked at him with undisguised admiration. "You are a precise man, too, I see. You don't forget anything."

"No," said Tubby. "What—"

"I can answer all your questions at once," said the professor. "I am a Professor of Gravity—I know all about the laws of gravitation."

"That's fine," said Tubby. "What's gravitation?"

"Gravitation? Why—why—gravitation is what makes the weight of things."

"Oh," said Tubby. "Is that what you wanted to see me about?"

"Partly," said the professor. "I've made a wonderful discovery—I've been working at it eighty-two years, ever since I was a little boy—and now it's all ready."

"Fine," said Tubby.

"And I want you to help me test it out," the professor added. "I picked you because of your extreme weight."

"Hund'ed and ninety pounds," announced Tubby proudly. "Naked."

The professor beamed. "Wonderful! Marvelous, for so short a man."

"Yes, ain't it?" said Tubby. "Why did we roll that ball?"

The professor's face clouded again with anxiety. "To save the world," he said. His voice trembled with emotion. "In seven million nine hundred thousand and two years, one month, six days, four hours, thirteen minutes, eight and one-quarter seconds, the world would have been destroyed if we had not moved that ball just where we did."

"Countin' from when?" Tubby asked anxiously.

"From eight thirty-four this evening—the moment at which you moved it," the professor answered.

"But it won't be destroyed because we *did* move it," said Tubby. "That's fine. Ain't I right?"

The professor nodded abstractedly. After a moment a thought occurred to Tubby. He wrinkled his forehead. "Say, professor, you ain't tellin' me nothin'. Why did we have to roll that ball to save the world?"

"Thou canst not touch a flower without troubling of a star," the professor quoted. "You have heard that, haven't you?"

"No," said Tubby. "What's that got to do with—"

"It's a poetical quotation," explained

the professor. "It's based on the laws of gravity. Shall I explain?"

"Yes," said Tubby.

The professor sat down on a little stool with his feet dangling perilously over the black pool. Tubby sat beside him, a little further away from the water.

"The law of gravitation was formulated by Sir Isaac Newton," the professor began. "He saw an apple fall, and worked it out from that."

"He must 'a' been a clever guy," said Tubby.

"Yes," answered the professor. "Here it is: 'Everybody in the universe attracts every other body with a force that varies directly as the mass and inversely as the square of the distance.'"

"Ah," said Tubby.

"That means," the professor went on enthusiastically, "that if an object—a person—or a world, is twice as big, it exerts twice as much force—that's 'directly as the mass.' Do you see?"

"Yes—no," said Tubby.

"And if it's twice as far away it exerts one-quarter the force—that's 'inversely as the square of the distance.' That's plain, isn't it?"

"No—yes," said Tubby. "Why did we roll—"

"I'm coming to that. Now you see, every particle of matter in the universe attracts every other particle. That ball, therefore, attracts the sun, the moon, and all the stars, just as they do it. It attracts the earth also—as the earth attracts it."

"But the earth is so much bigger it holds it down tight," said Tubby. "Ain't I right?"

"You are indeed," beamed the professor. "The reason we had to place the ball in a certain position at eight thirty-four to-night is this: I have calculated—I am a very wonderful man, you know—I can calculate anything—my figures show that in nine hundred and eleven years and a few odd days, minutes and seconds, the orbit of Neptune will bring that planet into collision with a new comet which has just been discovered."

"A collision?" repeated Tubby. "That's bad."

"Yes," said the professor. "Very bad, because you see if that took place, then, a few centuries later—I have the exact figures written down—Neptune would so disturb Uranus and Saturn that they would cause Halley's comet to collide with Mars."

"Another collision," cried Tubby with concern. "That's *very* bad. Ain't I right?"

"Yes," said the professor. "Because, you see, if Mars is thus deflected from its normal orbit, it will affect both the earth and Venus very materially. Worse than that, within a few million years Venus will collide with—"

"Gosh," ejaculated Tubby. "Things will be on the fritz then, won't they?"

"Yes. Listen. When Venus does this, then, a million or so years later, the earth—"

"The earth has a collision, too," Tubby interrupted. "Ain't I right?"

The professor nodded. "But you see, we moved that ball. Its attractive force altered the position of Neptune to-night. Very little, of course, but enough to avoid that collision nine hundred and eleven years from now. I figured it all out—and that danger's past."

"Are there any others?" asked Tubby in alarm.

"Millions," answered the professor. "I have them all listed and I'm watching them. With that ball—and a thousand others I have in the next room—I can take care of them all."

"Fine," said Tubby. "We're all right then. That's fine."

A short pause.

"You ought to get a man to help roll the balls," Tubby added. "Is *that* what you wanted to see me about?"

The professor had fallen again into abstraction. Tubby's question brought him back with a start.

"No," he said. "Not exactly. It was about specific gravity I wanted to see you."

"What kind of gravity?"

"Specific gravity deals with solid objects immersed in a liquid," the professor explained grandly. "A man in water—for instance."

"I can't swim very well," said Tubby.  
 "But I can float."

"Of course you can. That's what I wanted to see you about—to test out my great invention."

"What is it?" Tubby asked.

The professor's little chest expanded proudly. He sat up so straight on the stool Tubby feared he was about to tumble forward into the tank.

"My invention makes water so that nobody can sink in it," the professor stated slowly and impressively.

"Great!" exclaimed Tubby. "Then nobody can't never get drowned. Ain't I right?"

"Yes," answered the professor. "You are a man of perspicacity, I see. I like men of perspicacity. Also ships will float better. Also—"

Another thought suddenly came to Tubby. "I got a question I want to ask, professor. Why can I float when Jake sinks, and he's so much lighter'n me?"

"I'll explain it all," said the professor. "The law of floating bodies is this: 'The weight of a body immersed in a fluid is equal to its own weight minus the weight of the fluid it displaces.'"

"Oh," said Tubby.

"That works like this," the professor went on. "Take water, for instance."

"Take me and Jake, and water," suggested Tubby.

"Who is Jake?"

"A skinny guy."

"All right. We'll take you and him, and water. Now water weighs about sixty-two and a half pounds per cubic foot. It differs according to what kind of water it is—salt water weighs much more. Now about the water you displace—do you understand that?"

"Yes—no," said Tubby.

"Take a bathtub exactly filled with water and get in—head and all. The water that flows over the edge of the tub is the water you displace."

Tubby nodded.

"Now if you weigh that water you get the weight of the water you displace. Do you see?"

"Yes," said Tubby.

"Now to find out what you will weigh in water, we take your weight—"

"Hund'ed and ninety pounds—naked," Tubby prompted.

"And the weight of the water you displace—is, say, a hundred and ninety-five pounds. Thus you would float by a margin of five pounds."

"Yes," said Tubby. "How about Jake? He weighs hund'ed and five."

"He might displace only a hundred pounds of water. Then he would sink by a margin of five pounds. Thin men generally sink. That's because they are *heavier* in proportion to their bulk than fat men—because the skeleton—the bone—weighs more for its size than fat does. Do you see?"

"Yes," said Tubby. "What's your invention?"

The professor rose to his feet. "I'll show you."

He got down on his hands and knees at the edge of the tank. Tubby sat beside him laboriously.

Two wires, connected with little cylindrical cases, led down into the tank. Tubby could see that the water around the wires was boiling sluggishly. Two other wires stuck up into the air; like a little wireless outfit, Tubby thought.

"A molecule of water is composed of two atoms of hydrogen and one of oxygen," explained the professor. "H-O is its chemical symbol—you see I am a professor of chemistry as well as physics."

"Yes," said Tubby. "Go on."

"Now it is well known that an electrical current will change water into oxygen and hydrogen—that's called *electrolisis* of water. See?"

Tubby nodded.

"My invention is something like that—only different. My current takes oxygen from the air and adds it to the water. Now as oxygen is heavier than hydrogen it makes the water heavier. And yet it does not change the water in any other way—that's the peculiar part."

"That is peculiar," said Tubby.

"What I'm going to do," the professor continued, "is build a lot of big plants like this little one here and make the water of

all the oceans heavier so that nothing can sink in them."

Tubby nodded again. "What do you want me to—"

"I want you to test my tank," said the professor. "I calculate you should float with head and shoulders out. Try it and see. Jump in."

Tubby drew back in sudden fear. "Suppose I sink? You might 'a' made a mistake, professor." He climbed to his feet hastily.

"Nonsense," said the professor. "Jump in." He stood up also.

Tubby shook his head. "I ain't interested in jumpin' in," he said decidedly. "You jump in—I'm goin' home. I—"

He got no further, for the professor suddenly gave him a violent shove. Tubby staggered and plopped down into the tank, sinking like a lead plummet. A roaring filled his ears. He scrambled about on the bottom of the tank, feeling as though he were glued down.

What was it Jake had said? "If you're heavier than water you sink." Jake was right, then—and the professor was wrong.

A dim, distant voice came down to him through the water—the professor's voice.

It was muffled and blurred, yet distinct enough for Tubby to hear the words.

"Oh, my goodness," it wailed. "I've made a mistake!"

Tubby was quite sure he'd made a mistake. He wanted to shout back his agreement, but the water choked him.

"I've made a mistake!" the professor's voice wailed again. "I've been taking *hydrogen* out of the air instead of oxygen! The water is lighter than ever. You can't float—you'll never come up!"

The water was black as ink and icy cold, especially at the back of Tubby's neck. Funny! Why should that be when he was wet all over? He would have to ask the professor that. But how could he, if he were never coming up? That was most annoying. There were a lot of things he wanted to ask the professor.

The first man bent over Tubby contritely, an empty glass in his hand.

"I didn't mean to spill it on you," he said. "I was drinkin' it, but somebody bumped me."

"You're right, Jake. You didn't mean to spill it—somebody bumped you," said the second man.



# Yokel Stuff

by James W. Egan

MORGAN KEENE was a firm believer in the effect of combined beauty and innocence, and it was for this reason he adopted Dimple Hawthorne as a partner in his sundry sinful undertakings. If ever a girl seemed as guile-

less as she was pretty it was the charming Miss Hawthorne.

But pink and gold loveliness and soft blue eyes may mask a hardened and worldly soul, as numerous persons have learned to their sorrow. The apparently ingen-

uous smile of Dimple had baited many a trap which only a golden lever could spring. The girl played the demure and simple maid very well; and Morgan Keene was an adept in providing the rude and unexpected climax.

A fatuous young idiot in Oakland, California, had been the latest victim of the clever pair. He had allowed Dimple to lure him on until he had been painfully introduced to the ancient and dishonorable badger game—at a cost of something like five thousand dollars. And now Keene and his pretty partner were sailing away to summer in southern California at his expense.

From the upper deck of the steamer President the precious duo watched the harbor of Golden Gate fade away behind them, their faces serene and untroubled.

"Soft and safe," commented Keene, over his cigarette. "And to think there is a yokel like young Ralph Wall born every minute. It was like copping candy from a kid in a crib."

"It might not have been so safe if his father, old Joe Wall, the oil operator, had blown in on us," Dimple asserted. "They say he is as hard-boiled as the street named after him in New York, and he'll be foaming at the mouth to find his son was a mark. Probably the old man's money, too, and it'll hurt his pride to be made a sucker. He might make it tough for us yet. I learned a lot about his disposition from that fool Ralph—and I'm just a little bit worried, Morg."

"Forget it!" advised the other. "The old boy may rave, but he'll grin and bear it. He ain't going to tell the world what a sap his son was. And we'll be hundreds of miles away, with brand-new names and occupations, my dear. Don't bother the old bean about Joe Wall. Let me tell you the real kick in this affair, Dimp."

Morgan Keene now laughed in great glee.

"What kind of a kick do you mean, Morg?" The girl gave her partner a curious look.

"Well, my dear, it seems this young boob Wall looked like pie with whipped cream to others besides ourselves. You

know Nick Nasby and Chatty Collier? Sure, I've told you about them. I don't know 'em personally myself, except they have the rep of being two of the slickest con men in the country, and are awful proud of the fact. Yesterday I heard in San Francisco that they had framed up something grand and were all set to sting Wall for his roll when you cut in and we worked the old racket. We nailed the lettuce and plucked the prize. Oh, boy! I'll bet Nasby and Collier are sore guys! It gives me a real wallop to outstep wise birds like that. Guess they haven't all the class in the world, huh, kid?"

"That is funny!" Dimple Hawthorne was amused. "Let them cry over it, or look for other marks. The country is loaded with them."

"Sure thing!" agreed Keene. "No telling what we'll gather around Los Angeles, Dimp. What beach we going to?"

"Long Beach is best," the girl responded. "Quieter there, Morg, and yet there is plenty of money. We might combine business with pleasure, even if we are resting."

Several days later Dimple Hawthorne was comfortably established at a very high priced Long Beach hotel. Morgan Keene was in town, but not at the same hostelry. Seldom did the pair descend upon pastures new together. They found it better to keep separated until the time for action arrived. It greatly aided in bringing about those startling climaxes to Dimple's little intrigues.

For reasons best known to her attractive self Dimple was registered as Bonita Bland, and casually let it leak out she was none other than the beautiful star who appeared in a certain moving-picture company's two-reel comedies. Of course she was at Long Beach merely to rest, but her personal charms and her alleged profession drew plenty of attention. The girl won many friends by her apparently artless and demure ways.

Two sunny weeks passed before Morgan Keene arranged a little business session with his fair partner. In a quiet café they dined, and over the cigarettes their conversation became otherwise than idle.



"What's the good word, Dimp?" Keene grinned. "Something in sight?"

"Might be, Morg." The girl smiled and blew a smoke ring.

"Who is the target? I've been noticing one old duffer hanging around you a good deal for pretty nearly a week. Looks like a real yap. Stringing him along, kid?"

"Trying to, Morg. He is a real yokel, all right. One of those rich farmers from the middle West, out in California to spend all his dough. His name is Lucas Toland, and he's from Nebraska."

"A farmer, is he?" Keene grew thoughtful. "The farmers ain't boobs any more, Dimp. Can't sell 'em gold bricks or pull old stuff on them nowadays. Most of 'em are mighty shrewd birds."

"I know that, Morg. But no matter how shrewd they are, just wait until they land in Los Angeles and get excited about the movies." The girl laughed. "That's when they begin to fall."

"Oh, Toland is excited about the pictures, is he?"

"He's a bit thrilled over the famous star, Miss Bonita Bland." Dimple laughed again. "He didn't dream movie queens were modest persons like me, and I won his heart by confessing to him I liked him because he made me think of home. You see, Morg, I'm from a small farm in Iowa myself—just a simple country girl who has suddenly flashed to fame on the screen. All that old bunk. Oh, I have him eating out of my hand! He has shown me pictures of his family. They are back in Hamperville, Nebraska. A wife and three kids at home, while the old man has his fling."

"Fine!" enthused Morgan Keene. "I'll look up Mr. Toland's finances myself, and then see if we can't invent a nice little game for him to play in. I think it can be done, my dear. By the way, Dimp, the Gluck boys—Archie and Benny—are in Los Angeles."

"Oh, how are they?" asked the girl.

"Not so forte. Not so forte. Pretty near flat, and want to get in on a racket with us. Were in on a little movie grafting, but that stuff has been sat on in this neck of the woods, and they are pretty cold."

"We want to steer clear of partnerships, Morg," warned the charming Miss Hawthorne.

"I know, Dimp. But the Gluck boys were good pals when we needed help once. I wouldn't mind letting them in on something, if possible. We owe them a favor or two, all right."

"Yes, but this splitting four ways is the bunk. And it adds to the danger. But suit yourself, Morg. You're the doctor. When do we meet again?"

"Let's lunch together day after to-morrow. I'll try to have a plan mapped out for the benefit of Mr. Toland by that time."

So they parted, and Dimple Hawthorne serenely went her modest way until the hour of the appointed luncheon arrived. The girl found Morgan Keene in rare good spirits, and eager to get down to brass tacks.

"Say, Dimp, would your friend Lucas Toland be tickled if he thought he was going to play a short scene with Bonita Bland, the celebrated movie star? Would he just hate to appear for a few moments in a comedy that will be shown over the civilized world, including Hamperville, Nebraska? Huh?"

"Would he be tickled?" echoed Dimple. "I think he'd give his right eye, Morg. What's the stunt, anyway?"

"It's new, and a pip. The Gluck boys and I framed it. I wanted to have them in on this scheme, and I'm glad I did. We may make a little less jack, but we can stand it for once. This is only side money, anyhow, you know."

"Well, shoot!" the girl commanded. "I knew the Glucks would horn in, but if it's Jake with you I ain't kicking."

"Here's the big idea: Miss Bonita Bland tells her friend Mr. Toland she is summoned back to the studio to make a few extra scenes for her new comedy—a few exteriors. Carelessly she asks Mr. Toland if he would like to be in a picture with her. You know—get it off good to him, Dimp. He'll be wild over the idea. Any yokel would."

"Then you tell him that you are supposed to part from your father in the park

as one of the incidents in the picture, kissing him an affectionate good-by and all that. This is the only place your father appears in the comedy. As it is such a short scene, and as Mr. Toland, with his short gray beard and general appearance, would make a far more dignified parent than a made-up actor, you thought it might be a novel experience for him to take part in the picture. Tell him there will be no other actors in the scene to embarrass him. Only a director and the camera man will be present beside yourselves. Invent a story for the comedy and have a good excuse for father saying farewell in the park. That must be an affectionate scene."

"I get you, Morg. But what's it all about?"

"An old idea in new trimmings, my dear. The Gluck boys will play the rôles of camera man and director. They are up in that stuff, you know. Archie has a pair of puttees, which naturally makes him a director, and Benny still has the camera he used to use. But there won't be any film in it."

"Oh! And where will you be?"

"The scene will be shot in Westlake Park or some such spot, and we'll pick the location with care, so I can conceal myself in a handy spot with a camera in working order and get some real photographs of you two in action."

"A light begins to dawn," smiled the girl. "What follows?"

"You leave that to me, Dimp. I think Mr. Lucas Toland will part with many, many berries before long. Incidentally, who is that small, chin whiskered rube I have seen with Toland the last couple of days? One of the family?"

"Oh, yes. That's his Uncle Sam, who hopped in from Lincoln, Neebrasky, this week," mocked Dimple. "He is really terrible. Smokes a corn-cob pipe and asks the silliest questions you ever heard about movie stars."

"He looks like one of the four Head boys, all right," Keene observed.

"Who?" the girl queried.

"The Head boys. Haven't you ever heard of them, Dimp? The four are Pin, Sap, Bone, and Fat."

"He's all of them. When does this screen thriller come off, Morg?"

"Any time you can make arrangements with Toland and the Gluck boys. They'll prepare me. I'll give you their number. Don't waste too much time, that's all."

"I won't. I'm getting weary of being sweet and lovely to that pair of yokels. Uncle Sam is a pest."

Two afternoons later, for probably the millionth time in its history, Westlake Park was invaded by a group evidently having affiliation with the motion-picture world. There was a distinguished gentleman in riding breeches and leather puttees, a bored person carrying a camera, an enchantingly pretty girl in summery costume with her face expertly tinted, and a graybearded individual who seemed acutely nervous. Also there was a fifth member of the party, a little man who puffed on an offensive corn-cob.

"I hope you won't mind if Uncle Sam comes along and watches us," Lucas Toland had apologized to the fair Dimple. "He's so interested in pictures, and he'd be awfully hurt if he didn't get a chance to see one really made."

So the girl had been forced to smile and allow the owner of the pipe to join the party.

Few persons in the park paid the group any attention. Picture making was an old story to them. Archie and Benny Gluck steered to a quiet glade surrounded by many clumps of trees. No Morgan Keene was in view, but there were enough hiding places to hold a dozen men. The location had been well chosen.

Several rehearsals took place. Archie Gluck raved and ranted like a real director, much to the awe and admiration of Uncle Sam, who shook his head and forgot to smoke.

"Embrace the girl, Toland. No, no, no! She is your daughter! You love her! You are parting for a long time. Put some feeling into it! Kiss her! Kiss her hard! He is your father, Dimp—Bonita! Show affection! That's it! That's more like it. Now do it like that when we shoot. All right, Benny! Action!"

While Benny Gluck nonchalantly turned

the crank, Lucas Toland and the alleged Bonita Bland fervently embraced and kissed in a manner loving in the extreme. The girl knew how to make kisses register at a time like this. Seldom is seen, on screen or off, a father and daughter so affectionate as they proved before the camera. Finally the scene came to an end, and Archie, the director, waved his hand.

"All right, Benny. Cut!" he ordered.

"Anything else, Mr. G-Griffith?" inquired the girl.

"That will be all we'll shoot to-day, Bonita. You did well, Mr. Toland. Very well for a neophyte. It'll be a great scene—one of the best takes so far."

"Can't we have Mr. Toland's name put in the cast as playing the part of my father?" Dimple remarked as they made their way to a large, hired limousine.

"Might do that, Bonita." The director was extremely affable.

"Whut you goin' to call th' picksher?" asked Uncle Sam, who had recovered sufficiently from the spell of the cinema to re-light his virile pipe.

"Well, there really isn't any title for our little comedy yet," answered the girl, with a touch of malice. "We were thinking of naming it 'Yokel Stuff' or something like that, weren't we, Griffith?"

"Not a bad name at all, Bonita," Archie Gluck remarked, hiding a grin.

"Wonderful business, the pickshers," puffed Uncle Sam.

Star, director, and camera man dined that evening with Morgan Keene. The latter was pleased with the world.

"Beautiful negatives, Dimp," he declared. "I got some nifty photos of you in his arms and several hugging shots that are bears. Oh, baby! Wouldn't they make a hit with his Nebraska family! The way you kissed that old boy wasn't slow, Dimp."

"Maybe you think that bird can't kiss a few when he gets going," confessed the lovely Miss Hawthorne. "I'll say he's got some jazz yet!"

"Well, my fellow rogues," Morgan Keene genially stated, "I'm going out with my collection of prints to Long Beach tomorrow, and be very harsh and direct with

Lucas. He'll come across, believe me, when he hears the sad story."

"Are you going to be the wild-eyed husband or the vengeful brother?" put in Benny Gluck. "Or will you—"

"No, I figure on coming clean. He might get sore, but I'll risk that. It is easier to account for you boys that way. I'll just let him know that he has put his foot in and must dig up heavily. I know his sort. He'll dig."

"What about me?" Dimple questioned.

"You'll be on hand in the parlor downstairs, in case he doubts my tale, and is reluctant about coming across. On second thought I think I will be your husband. It will enable me to be a little more effective. After it's all over we'll meet at—you know the café I mean on Spring Street—and have a grand little party."

"I'll be glad when it is over, Morg." The girl's lips curled. "Those awful yokels were getting on my nerves. I never saw a bigger pair. They really are hicks."

Lucas Toland's room looked bright and cheerful when Morgan Keene walked in the next day, but Keene's face was not. A package under one arm held his photographs. Downstairs, in the parlor, awaited Dimple Hawthorne, prepared for emergencies.

Lucas Toland seemed surprised at Keene's visit.

"Want to see me, do you?" he said doubtfully.

"I do." The tone was curt. The black-mailer saw that the Nebraskan occupied a suite of two rooms. "Are we alone, Toland?"

"Uncle Sam is in there, taking a nap," explained the farmer, evidently puzzled. "He won't bother us, I reckon."

"I see." Morgan Keene unwrapped his package. "Some pictures I want you to look at, Toland."

The other gazed at them a long time.

"Well, well! To think they'd have them out so soon! But I thought they were moving pictures, mister! And I didn't see you, either." He turned suspiciously toward Keene.

"No, I know you didn't see me, but I saw you, and snapped you. There were no

moving pictures, Toland. There was no film in the camera you faced."

"But Bonita said—"

"Bonita is my wife, Toland. She never was closer to a studio than you. She is not an actress in the pictures. Neither were those other men connected with any movie concern."

"Then what—what are these pictures for?" There was a sound of alarm in Toland's tone.

"They are for sale, but the price is rather high. In case you don't buy, however, others might be glad to have the chance."

"Why—why, gol darn you!" Toland's anger leaped up. "You and her and the rest of them are blackmailers! And I thought she was so sweet and nice!"

"Getting peevish won't mend matters, Toland. We have the goods heré."

"I don't believe she—"

"She is down-stairs. Shall I call her, Toland?"

"No," decided the other. "I reckon I see through it. Just a put-up job to get me in a comp-compromising situation, and I fell for it. Just like an old chump!"

"Well, it was a new stunt, Toland," Keene asserted with some pride. "Others have fallen for mossier tricks by far."

"But I ain't going to give up a cent to you, darn you!" stormed the farmer. "I'll have the law on you!"

"Perhaps your family will be pleased with a copy or two of the photographs?" Keene nodded toward a picture of a woman and three children which reposed on the dresser.

"My family? I ain't got any family," Toland denied.

"Who are they?" Keene pointed to the picture.

"Oh, that's my brother's family," explained the farmer. "I'm a widower."

"Well, your relatives will see these pictures and you'll be a laughing stock forever—unless you come across!" threatened Keene, getting angry. Toland wasn't taking the thing properly.

"I don't care nothing about my relatives!"

"Do you want the name of Lucas To-

land dragged through the mire, then? I can do it!" growled the blackmailer.

"Drag the name of Toland anywhere you want to drag it!" The other's tone grew very grim. "It is nothing to me, mister. My name is something else, and I'm going to tell it to you now, so you'll know."

"Your name isn't Toland?" Keene's jaw dropped.

"No. You've heard my name before, though. It's Joe Wall! I'm an oil operator, and I have a son in Oakland!"

"Suffering cats!" escaped from the blackmailer.

"You and your lady friend thought you could trim that fool boy and get away with it. Well, you did it as far as he was concerned, but the old man was still on the job. I followed you south, having an idea where you was heading, and having a pretty good description of you both. I figured the best way to trap you was to play the boob myself. I became Lucas Toland of Nebraska, and pretended to fall for all your bunk and movie stuff and the rest of it. And now I have you dead to rights, you crooks! Oh, Sam!"

From the next room hopped out the little man who had been known as "Uncle Sam." He was minus both his corncob pipe and his chin whiskers.

"Meet our blackmailing friend, Mr. Morgan Keene," bowed the late Lucas Toland. "Sam is a detective friend of mine, Keene."

"The jig is up. I heard every word from the next room," uttered he who had been Uncle Sam. "We've got them, Joe!"

"I—I—we—you can't hold us, Wall," began Keene, in desperation.

"You bet we can, Keene!" heartily disagreed "Uncle Sam."

"If you want it to leak out what a chump your son—"

"No scandal, Sam!" snapped Wall. "I want that money back they took from my son, though!"

"He probably has it on him. Those crooks never bank their dough!" The man Sam drew out a small automatic and advanced upon Keene. Sullenly the latter parted with a fat wallet containing most of the money secured in Oakland.

"I'd like to send him up for life! I'll whale him within—" Wall growled as he advanced menacingly upon Keene.

"No, no, Joe!" Sam put forth a restraining hand. "We must keep it quiet. You have the money now. We'll destroy those pictures and give Keene and his crew just twenty-four hours to leave town before we notify the Los Angeles police."

"You — you—" stuttered the black-mailer.

"Beat it, and take your lady friend with you!" said the detective.

Beaten, Keene slunk from the suite.

"A grand little party this is going to be," he muttered through his teeth. "So Joe Wall did go after us, like Dimple was afraid. Oh, she'll be wild, but they had me hooked. And she said she never had seen a bigger pair of yokels. Yokels!"

When the door had closed behind the retreating form of Morgan Keene, the gray-bearded party who once had borne the name of Lucas Toland drew a deep breath. He flipped some bills over to the one who had been known as Uncle Sam.

"Worked like a charm, old-timer," he remarked. "He was all dazed. Thank the Lord he had the money on him."

"Think the dame will make trouble when she hears?"

"They'll clear out. You pulled the detective stuff so well that they'll hike out of

town in less than twenty-four hours. I'll bet my share of the jack!"

"Served them right for cutting in on our game, Nick," averred the alleged detective. "We had young Wall pegged before they blew into Oakland at all. That jane needed some of the conceit taken out of her."

"And whoever heard a smart pair talking on deck so the world would know their business? They get right outside our state-room and spill the whole works, Chatty. Guess I was some Joe Wall, wasn't I?"

"Young Ralph Wall's wad was ours in the first place, so we stayed right along with them until we got it. Oh, wouldn't they be sore if they knew who had overheard them talking on the President, and what happened as a result?"

Nick Nasby and Chatty Collier, the pair Morgan Keene himself had termed "two of the slickest con men" in the country, laughed merrily over the joke they had played on the unsuspecting blackmailers.

"A comedy indeed!" finally emitted Collier, wiping his eyes. "What was the jane going to have it called? Oh, yes! 'Yokel Stuff.' She was right, Nick. It was yokel stuff."

"With a few more yokels in the cast than originally planned," grinned the man who was neither oil operator nor Nebraska farmer. "But," he added, "I don't think the name she'll call it now would ever get by a board of censors, Chatty."



## THE SPRING

I COME! I come! Ye have called me long!  
 I come o'er the mountains with light and song;  
 You may trace my steps o'er the wakening earth,  
 By the winds which tell of the violet's birth,  
 By the primrose stars in the shadowy grass,  
 By the green leaves opening as I pass.

I have look'd on the hills of the stormy north,  
 And the larch has hung all his tassels forth,  
 And the fisher is out on the sunny sea,  
 And the reindeer bounds o'er the pasture free:  
 And the pine has a fringe of softer green,  
 And the moss looks bright where my foot hath been.

*Mrs. Hemans.*