ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY

A Daughter of the White Star

by Horace Howard Herr

A Dramatic Romance of Chicago's Chinatown

Why the Carringtons Bought a Colt

"Telephone nothing," he said. "The wire's cut."

"TOM!" she cried. "There they go. Telephone the police."

"Telephone nothing!" her husband exclaimed. "I can't. They've cut the wire," and he held up the telephone with the severed wire.

"Oh, dear, why can't you make them stop," his wife wailed.

"Because I haven't a Colt," retorted Tom, "and when I told you a few days ago I was going to buy a Colt Automatic Pistol—the best that money can buy for home protection—you said 'What's the use?' Now you know."

A true incident. The Carringtons now own a Colt Automatic and know their home is safe from loss by housebreakers so long as it is there.

The Carringtons live on one of the best residential streets of a New England city.

Tom Carrington is perhaps the last man you would think that robbers would molest. He played half-back for his college and is a fearless, young, up-standing American citizen.

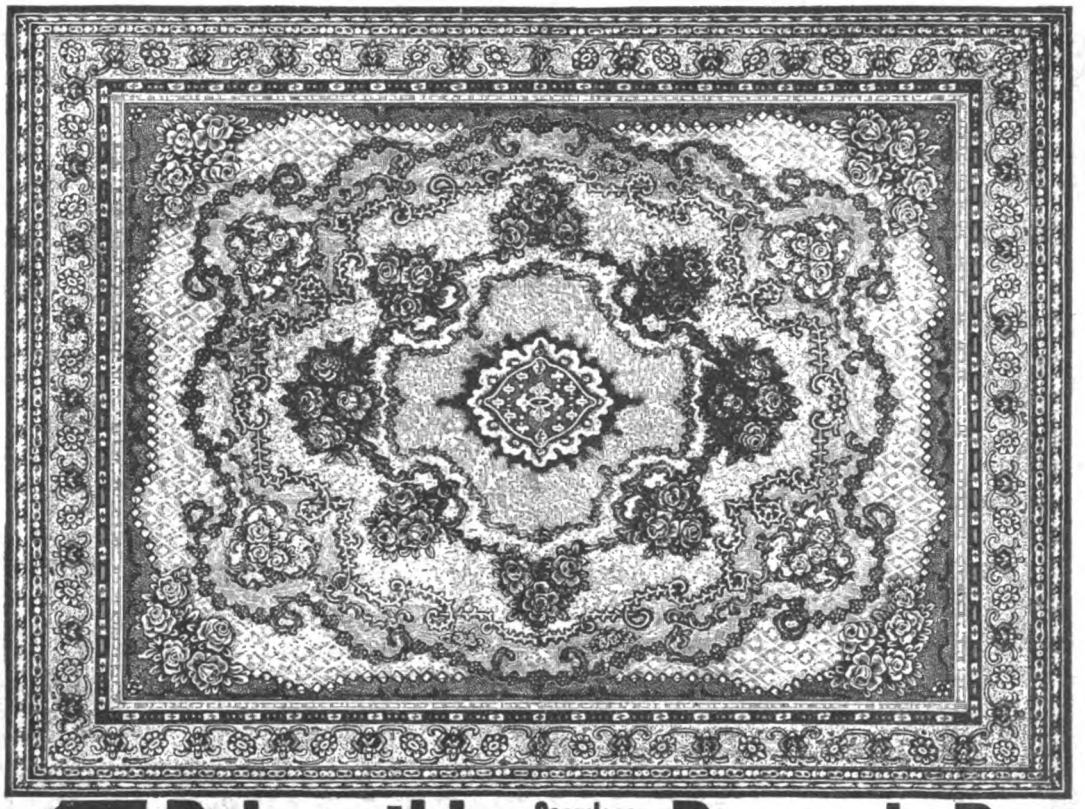
The Carringtons had been awakened just in time to hear someone on the side piazza. Tom Carrington was up in a flash. No one was going to break into his house without an argument. His wife followed him in a rush to the stairs. An open window at the first landing told the story. But the intruders had gone. Mrs. Carrington saw them climbing into a waiting car.

And that was the last of the Carrington silver.

Your dealer will be glad to show you the various models of Colt Automatic Pistols or Colt Revolvers and advise you which is the best for your home protection.

Colt's Patent Fire Arms Mfg. Co.
HARTFORD, CONN.

Manufacturers of Colt's Revolvers Colt's Automatic Pistols
Colt's (Browning) Automatic Machine Guns
Colt's (Browning) Automatic Machine Rifles



$1 Brings this Seamless Worsted Face Brussels Rug

Full Room Size, 9 Feet x 12 Feet

Only $1 to send now—and we ship this magnificent seamless worsted face tapestry Brussels rug. Use it 30 days, then if not satisfied, return it and we refund the $1 and pay transportation both ways. If you buy, take nearly a year to pay—a little every month. And note—**the price is cut**—you save over a third. Even before the war this rug would have been an amazing bargain at this phenomenally low price.

Superb Coloring—Artistic Floral Medallion Pattern

Woven from Fine WORSTED Yarns One of the most artistic designs ever woven and the coloring is soft, rich and harmonious. Brown, tan, red, green and light colorings are beautifully blended. An attractive floral pattern with large medallion center surrounded with harmonizing floral sprays; finished with a pretty border. Made seamless, and the fine worsted yarns are selected for their long-wearing qualities. Full room size, 9 feet x 12 feet.

Order by No. 34CMA13. Price $29.85. Send only $1.00 now. Balance $2.75 monthly.

Cut Price–And Nearly a Year to Pay When our stock of these rugs is gone we may not have this particular pattern to send at any price. So act quick. You take no risk. Keep it or return it—30 days' free trial. Send only $1.00 and the coupon now.

FREE BARGAIN CATALOG

Mail postal for this great book. It will save you many dollars.

392 pages of stunning bargains in furniture, "Congoleum" rugs, linoleum, stoves, ranges, rugs, silverware, watches, dishes, washing machines, sewing machines, aluminum ware, phonographs, gas engines, cream separators, etc. 30 days' trial on anything you send for—all sold on our easy monthly payment plan. *Postal or letter brings it.*

"Let Hartman Feather Your Nest."

HARTMAN FURNITURE & CARPET CO.

3913 Wentworth Ave., Dept. 3328 Chicago

HARTMAN Furniture & Carpet Co.

3913 Wentworth Avenue

Dept. 3328 Chicago, Illinois

Enclosed is $1.00. Send the Rug No. 34CMA13. I am to have 30 days' trial. If not satisfied will ship it back and you will refund my $1 and pay transportation charges both ways. If I keep it, I will pay $2.75 each month until full price, $29.85, is paid. Title remains with you until final payment is made.

Name.....

Address.....

R. F. D..... Box No.....

Town..... State.....

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOL. CXXXIV | CONTENTS FOR MAY 28, 1921 | NUMBER 3

FOUR CONTINUED STORIES

ONE NOVELETTE

FIVE SHORT STORIES

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

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

Single copies, 10 cents. By the year, $4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; $6.00 to Canada, and $7.00 to Foreign Countries. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Currency should not be sent unless registered

PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY.

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

The Man You Ought to Know

DIFFICULT his task and little his reward. Countless the exasperations of his business. You—who think you know the merchant who supplies your table—do you really know him *at all?*

You know his *name,* but do you really know *him*—this man who deserves for his service to you more than your trade can ever bring him?

Do you know him for the long hours he works?

Do you know him for his spirit of accommodation in carrying in stock an almost endless variety to satisfy the whim of this customer and that;—many things providing almost no profit?

Thanks to him the pick of the world's market, in season and out, is laid out for your choice without any guaranty that you will come and choose. Cheerfully he takes his risks and manfully he pockets his losses.

And, as this merchant looks with concern to quality and service, so also he looks to his *weighing.* What more could be asked of a good store-keeper?

Know your merchant, then, not alone for his name and face, but *know* him for a man whose belief in a square deal on both sides of the counter is equal to your own.

Quality—Service—Honest Weight

These are the factors to be considered in buying food. The merchant alone is responsible for quality and service. His scale determines the weight you get. Toledo Scales automatically give honest weight.

Toledo Scale Company, Toledo, Ohio
Largest Automatic Scale Manufacturers in the World
CANADIAN TOLEDO SCALE COMPANY, LIMITED, Windsor, Ontario
106 Sales Rooms and Service Stations in the United States and Canada
Others in 34 Foreign Countries

TOLEDO SCALES
NO SPRINGS—HONEST WEIGHT

Classified Advertising

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

Classified Advertising Rates in the Munsey Magazines:

	Line Rate	
Munsey's Magazine	$1.50	Combination Line Rate $4.00 less 2% cash discount
Argosy-Allstory Weekly	2.50	

Minimum space four lines.

July 2nd Argosy-Allstory Forms Close June 4th.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

$12.50 FOR A MADE-TO-MEASURE TWO-PIECE SUIT, the biggest bargain offer ever made by any tailoring house. We are out to beat high tailoring prices. Save 50% on your next suit. You can easily earn $60.00 cash weekly in your spare time by taking orders for our celebrated made-to-measure clothes. Write us today for our beautiful cloth samples and wonderful offer—sent free postage prepaid. Act quick. The Progress Tailoring Co., Dept. 201, Chicago, Ill.

SALES AGENTS WANTED in every county to give all or spare time. Positions worth $750 to $1500 yearly. We train the inexperienced. Novelty Cutlery Co., 77 Bar Street, Canton, Ohio.

SELL SOFT DRINKS—Make $10 to $50 a day. Just add cold water to our soft drink preparations and you have the most delicious drinks you ever tasted. Ten kinds, Orangeade, Grape-Julep, Cherry-Julep, etc. Thirty big glasses, 25c, enough for 200 for $1. Eighty-five cents clear profit on every dollar selling these delicious drinks by the glass at ball games, fairs, dances, picnics, etc. Big money selling the small packages to families, stores, etc. Send 10c for enough for 10 large glasses and particulars postpaid. Morrisey Company, A 4417-20 Madison Street, Chicago.

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

SALESMEN: EARN $3,500 TO $10,000 A YEAR. City or Traveling. Experience unnecessary. Quickly qualify through our amazing system. Free Employment Service to Members. Send for Salesmanship book, list of lines and full particulars. Nat. Salesmen's Tr. Ass'n, Dept. 133-E, Chicago, Ill.

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

AGENTS! HERE'S THE BIG MONEY GETTER. You give Pair Dressmakers Shears free with each sale of "Winning 7" at $1.50. Everybody buys. One hundred per cent profit. $10-$20 daily profit. Particulars Free. E. M. Davis, Dept. 58, Chicago.

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

CREW MANAGERS—AGENTS. OPALINE PAINTINGS ARE A KNOCKOUT. Make old territory new. Seasoned picture men double their sale. Beginners make $1.00 an hour and more with rigs. Greatest hit ever made. Samples and expense money furnished. Write today. Consolidated Portrait Co., Desk A-22, 1029 W. Adams St., Chicago.

DISTRICT AGENTS—CREW MANAGERS—AGENTS—We have just made another big reduction on price of our Waterproof Aprons and Sanitary Specialties. If you want better articles and bigger profits, get our booklet and price list now. B & G Rubber Co., Dept. 54, 618 Penn Ave., Pittsburgh, Pa.

HELP WANTED—FEMALE

WANTED—GIRLS—WOMEN—15 up. Become Dress Costume Designers. Earn $45 week. Learn while earning. Sample lessons free. Write immediately. Franklin Institute, Dept. K-872, Rochester, N. Y.

REAL ESTATE—MICHIGAN

THERE IS BIG MONEY IN SURE AND PROFITABLE CROPS of Cloverland. Fine soil, climate, water, roads, markets, schools and neighbors. Write for Free booklet. Get full information about our low prices and easy terms. Send today. G. W. Swigart, D-1272 First Natl. Bank Building, Chicago, Ill.

MOTION PICTURE PLAYS

NUPLAY SERVICE CORP., Aeolian Hall, New York, can place your Film Story or Play to your best advantage. Send for pamphlet.

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

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

BIGGEST MONEY-MAKER IN AMERICA. I want 100 men and women quick to take orders for raincoats, raincapes and waterproof aprons. Thousands of orders waiting for you. $2.00 an hour for spare time. McDonough made $813.00 in one month. Nissen $19.00 in three hours; Purviance $207.00 in seven days, $5,000 a year profit for eight average orders a day. No delivering or collecting. Beautiful coat free. No experience or capital required. Write quick for information. Comer Mfg. Co., Dept. Y-138, Dayton, Ohio.

AGENTS—IF YOU ARE MAKING LESS THAN $10.00 A DAY CLEAR PROFIT—get in touch with us. We want active agents to sell Hootch to drug stores, candy stores, news and cigar stands, restaurants, etc. They all order and want more. You build up a big business quick, using part time or all time. Beats house to house canvassing. You deal with business people. Just a few minutes makes the sale. Write and we will tell you what Hootch is and how it brings in the money. Address Hootch, Dept. 82, 229 W. Madison Street, Chicago.

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

AGENTS, $60 TO $200 A WEEK, Free Samples. Gold Sign Letters for Store and Office Windows. Anyone can do it. Big demand. Liberal offer to general agents. Metallic Letter Co., 431H N. Clark St., Chicago.

AGENTS:—$100 WEEKLY. Automobile Owners Wild With Enthusiasm. Marvelous invention doubles power, mileage, efficiency. Saves cost first day. Sensational sales everywhere. Territory going like wildfire. $26 sample outfit and Ford Car free. Write quick. Ovee Co., Dept. 5, Louisville, Ky.

AGENTS—600% PROFIT. Free Samples. Gold Window Letters for stores, offices. Large demand; anybody can do it. Big future. Exclusive territory. Can travel, sideline. Acme Letter Co., 2800 F Congress, Chicago.

WE START YOU WITHOUT A DOLLAR. Soaps, Extracts, Perfumes, Toilet Goods. Experience unnecessary. Carnation Co., 200 Olive, St. Louis, Mo.

AGENTS—MEN AND WOMEN—Make $50 a week salary and commission selling new toilet preparation. Whirlwind seller. Big repeat business. For particulars and territory, address Graham Co., 25 W. Illinois St., Chicago, Ill.

HELP WANTED

DETECTIVES EARN BIG MONEY. Be a Detective—Travel. Great demand everywhere. Experience unnecessary. Particulars free. Write, American Detective System, 1968 Broadway, New York.

GOVERNMENT CLERKS NEEDED QUICKLY (men, women), $1600-$2300. Permanent. Few to travel. Write Mr. Ozment, Former Government Examiner, 198, St. Louis.

RAILWAY MAIL CLERKS, STENOGRAPHERS, CLERKS, TYPISTS, wanted by Government. Examinations weekly. Prepare at home. Write for free list and plan T payment after securing position. CSS, 1017 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia.

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

HELP WANTED—MALE

MEN—AGE 17 TO 45. EXPERIENCE UNNECESSARY. Travel; make secret investigations, reports. Salaries; expenses. American Foreign Detective Agency, 320, St. Louis, Mo.

MEN WANTED FOR DETECTIVE WORK. Experience unnecessary. Write J. Ganor, Former U. S. Government Detective, 107 St. Louis, Mo.

SPLENDID CLERICAL WORK OPPORTUNITY. Spare or whole time. No canvassing, good money. Chautauqua Business Builders, Jamestown, N. Y.

EARN $250 A MONTH, EXPENSES PAID, as Railway Traffic Inspector. Local or traveling. Outdoors. Start at $110 monthly, position guaranteed after 3 months spare time study. Write for Free Booklet CM-30. Stand. Business Training Inst., Buffalo, N. Y.

Classified Advertising continued on page 6.

"Blake is the Man!"

"I told Hartley he was a 'comer'—and this confirms my judgment! Listen to this letter:—

Dear Sir:

You will no doubt be glad to know that James H. Blake, one of your employees of whose excellent work as a student we have been advising you each month, has completed his course and has been granted a diploma.

International Correspondence Schools

"That settles the manager question. The man who cares enough about his future to invest some of his spare time in *training* is the kind we want in this firm's responsible positions.

"That $5,000 salary will mean a lot to Blake and his family. But he'll *earn* it—and make good use of it. I'll send for him now! It's a pleasure to promote a man who *deserves* it."

IN offices, shops, stores, mines, mills and on railroads, I. C. S. trained men are stepping up to bigger jobs, right over the heads of those whose only qualification is long service.

There is a job ahead of *you* that some man is going to be picked for. And your boss can't take chances. He is going to choose a *trained* man. Why don't you put yourself in line for that promotion?

You can do it without losing a minute from work and with plenty of time left for recreation. You can do it no matter where you live, how small your means, or how limited your previous education. Yes, you can!

One hour a day spent with the I. C. S. in your own home will bring you bigger money, more comforts, more pleasures, all that success means. Don't let another single priceless hour of spare-time go to waste! Without cost or obligation of any kind, let us prove that we can help *you*. Just mark and mail this coupon. *Do it right now!*

TEAR OUT HERE

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

BOX 2201-B **SCRANTON, PA.**

Explain, without obligating me, how I can qualify for the position, or in the subject, *before* which I mark X.

- ☐ ELECTRICAL ENGINEER
- ☐ Electric Lighting and Rwys.
- ☐ Electric Wiring
- ☐ Telegraph Engineer
- ☐ Telephone Work
- ☐ MECHANICAL ENGINEER
- ☐ Mechanical Draftsman
- ☐ Machine Shop Practice
- ☐ Toolmaker
- ☐ Gas Engine Operating
- ☐ CIVIL ENGINEER
- ☐ Surveying and Mapping
- ☐ MINE FOREMAN OR ENG.
- ☐ STATIONARY ENGINEER
- ☐ Marine Engineer
- ☐ Ship Draftsman
- ☐ ARCHITECT
- ☐ Contractor and Builder
- ☐ Architectural Draftsman
- ☐ Concrete Builder
- ☐ Structural Engineer
- ☐ PLUMBING AND HEATING
- ☐ Sheet Metal Worker
- ☐ Textile Overseer or Supt.
- ☐ CHEMIST
- ☐ Pharmacy
- ☐ SALESMANSHIP
- ☐ ADVERTISING
- ☐ Window Trimmer
- ☐ Show Card and Sign Ptg.
- ☐ Railroad Positions
- ☐ ILLUSTRATING
- ☐ Cartooning
- ☐ BUSINESS MANAGEMENT
- ☐ Private Secretary
- ☐ Business Correspondent
- ☐ BOOKKEEPER
- ☐ Stenographer and Typist
- ☐ Cert. Public Accountant
- ☐ TRAFFIC MANAGER
- ☐ Railway Accountant
- ☐ Commercial Law
- ☐ GOOD ENGLISH
- ☐ Common School Subjects
- ☐ CIVIL SERVICE
- ☐ Railway Mail Clerk
- ☐ AUTOMOBILES
- ☐ Mathematics
- ☐ Navigation
- ☐ AGRICULTURE
- ☐ Poultry Raising
- ☐ Spanish
- ☐ Teacher
- ☐ Banking

Write name and address here

Name_____

Present Occupation_____ Business Address_____ 8-1-21

Street and No._____

City_____ State_____

Canadians may send this coupon to International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada

Classified Advertising continued from page 4.

AUTHORS—MANUSCRIPTS

PHOTOPLAYS WANTED. Big prices paid. You can write them. We show you how. Experience unnecessary. Easy, fascinating way to earn money in spare time. Get free details. Rex Publisher, Box 175, M-17, Chicago.

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

FREE TO WRITERS—a wonderful little book of money making hints, suggestions, ideas; the A B C of successful Story and Movie-Play writing. Absolutely free. Send for your copy now! Just address Authors' Press, Dept. 19, Auburn, N. Y.

AUTOMOBILE SCHOOLS

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

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

MEN WANTED TO EARN $3,000 TO $10,000 A YEAR. Prepare quickly and easily through our amazing system for profitable and permanent business reclaiming waste paper for largest manufacturers in the country. Boys do the work—you simply direct. Practically no investment necessary—a few dollars will start you. Simply send name for big free opportunity book—a post card will do. The Traub System, 349 Traub Bldg., Kansas City, Mo.

DESIGNING SCHOOL

BE A CLOTHING CUTTER AND DESIGNER. Earn $50 to $150 a week. Big demand. We qualify you for this profession in short time by resident or correspondence courses. Master School, Dept. A, 100 N. State Street, Chicago.

PATENT ATTORNEYS

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

PATENTS. WRITE FOR FREE ILLUSTRATED GUIDE BOOK and evidence of conception blank. Send model or sketch and description for our opinion of its patentable nature. Free. Highest References. Prompt attention. Reasonable Terms. Victor J. Evans & Co., 762 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS PROCURED—TRADE MARKS REGISTERED—A comprehensive, experienced, prompt service for the protection and development of your ideas. Preliminary advice gladly furnished without charge. Booklet of information and form for disclosing idea free on request. Richard B. Owen, 68 Owen Bldg., Washington, D. C., or 2278-J Woolworth Bldg., New York.

RAGTIME PIANO PLAYING

LEARN RAGTIME JAZZ PIANO PLAYING. Anybody can learn. Write for free booklet. Pianists write for Teachers proposition. Christensen School of Popular Music, 441, 20 E. Jackson Street, Chicago.

SONG POEMS WANTED

WRITE A SONG POEM. You can do it. Write about Love, Mother, Home, Childhood, Comic, or any subject, and send words today. I compose music and guarantee publication. Edward Trent, 652 Reaper Block, Chicago.

WRITE THE WORDS FOR A SONG! WE WILL WRITE the music and **guarantee publication** on a royalty basis. Submit poems on any subject. Seton Music Company, 920 S. Michigan Avenue, Room 190, Chicago.

WRITE THE WORDS FOR A SONG. WE REVISE POEMS, compose music for them and guarantee to secure publication on royalty basis by New York music publisher. Our Chief Composer is a song-writer of national reputation and has written many big song-hits. Submit poems on any subject. Broadway Studios, 238 Fitzgerald Building, New York.

TYPEWRITERS

RE-MANUFACTURED TYPEWRITERS AT REDUCED PRICES. Shipped for 5 days' trial. Write for our Catalog No. 20 and save money. Beran Typewriter Co., 58 W. Washington Street, Chicago, Ill.

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY
WEEKLY

VOL. CXXXIV SATURDAY, MAY 28, 1921 NUMBER 3

A Daughter of the White Star

by Horace Howard Herr

Author of "With a Crew of Skeletons," "The Stop This Side Eternity," etc.

CHAPTER I.

A TOO QUIET ROOM.

A MORE sophisticated observer, perhaps, would have been warned by the dragons and pudgy gods in the shop window. For me, these were but the interesting bric-à-brac—assurance that I had followed the directions furnished by my cordial, if transient, friend of the Pullman smoker. The oriental character of the bazaar was apparent. It occupied the southwest corner at the intersection of Bellmont Street and the Avenue. Doubtless, the hotel entrance was near.

Not only the shop, but the building also, assured me. It was reminiscent of an architectural period less pretentious than the present days of skyscrapers. The stone front had the dignity of age, and if many of the adjacent structures had their heads high in the air, this stone front, with its four stories, had its feet on the ground.

The suggestion of Gothic was marred somewhat by the skeletonlike fire-escapes and the balcony of rusty iron just above the shop entrance. The shock to my sense of symmetry and beauty occasioned by these inharmonious details was softened materially by the feeling that prudent utility is more of a virtue than rash consistency.

In the day and generation of its youth this building, no doubt, was held to be very grand; the rendezvous of those affluently circumstanced. But its youth had been served, and a veritable forest of structural giants towered above it; if there was a certain conspicuousness attaching to the old building it was of the sort that distinguishes a great stump in a pine forest. Its outward aspects, however, suggested the possibilities of calm and quiet within, and after all, for me, these were the chief considerations.

To believe there was anything other than an honest desire to be of service to me behind the directions which were responsible for my arriving at the old hotel is quite beyond my normal credulity.

"If you prefer quiet to service," my chance acquaintance of the Pullman smoker said when I confessed my inexperience with

Chicago hotels, "you will not be disappointed in the Hartford. Large rooms, moderate charges, more useful than ornamental you might say, and the place enjoys quite a reputation for the quality of its meals."

"When I am well fed and sleep soundly I am not disposed to be exacting in service," I explained. "I've served myself most of my life. Most of these hotels have too much service. I confess, too, I'm ill at ease when I'm ten or fifteen floors above the ground. When I climb that high I want a mountain under my feet."

"You'll like the Hartford," my fellow traveler concluded on this information. "It's easy to find, too. Just up the Avenue from the depot. It stands on the southwest corner of Bellmont Street and the Avenue, and you can't miss it, because there is an oriental shop in the corner of the building. The hotel entrance from the Avenue is just a few steps south of the shop, and immediately at the rear of the shop is the Bellmont Street entrance to the lobby."

The directions were simple, and following a day and a night in the Pullman car, a stroll up the Avenue appealed to me. All this was very natural and commonplace, and until I stopped in front of the shop window nothing had transpired which even an active imagination could resolve into an ominous circumstance.

Perhaps a more experienced observer would have discovered in the bazaar window justification for caution. Flowing robes on which dragons in gold embroidery disported; pudgy, ugly bronze gods, more stomach than god; little dishes on which were serpentine ornamentations such as would stay the most ravenous appetite; brass jardinières, around which winged impossibilities from cave and sea pursued one another; frivolities of thinnest silk, bedecked with brilliant flowers; garments—if they may be so designated—of a pattern and diaphanous substance suggestive of harem favorites. In fine, a conglomeration grotesque!

If I had been more cosmopolitan, better versed in the subtilities of metropolitan intrigues, this un-American window display, instead of challenging my curiosity, might have aroused my suspicion of the character of the locality.

While curiosity may have killed the cat, it must be admitted that it is responsible for most knowledge acquired by men since the beginning of time. The bazaar window was interesting enough to suggest that a peek in at the door would be worth while. Knowing that I am prone to follow up an investigative impulse even though it takes me far afield, I am convinced I would have entered the shop if I had not been diverted on the threshold.

A boy came through the door in some haste. His squat stature, black straight hair, and his almond-shaped eyes marked him as an oriental. He hurried to the curb and blew three shrill blasts on a small whistle.

It was a new procedure for me, and I watched to find out what it meant. Soon after the boy had sounded a second series of three blasts a closed automobile swerved from the line of passing cars and pulled up at the curb. Another squat figure, ridiculous in the pomp of evening dress and a long, black mustache, each side of which seemed to be made up of no more than a half-dozen coarse and drooping hairs, came from the shop and hurriedly entered the car. The boy of the whistle closed the door, and the automobile rolled away, while I, rather amused over so trivial a street scene, turned to the south, bent on locating the hotel entrance on the Avenue.

Quite unexpectedly, since I had no idea it was so near, a half-dozen steps brought me even with a modest door on which, in rather weather-worn letters, were the words, "Hartford Hotel."

Involuntarily I stopped, and a departing guest, in some haste to reach the taxicab waiting at the curb, came in collision with me. He did not stop for the apology I was anxious to make for my awkwardness. The one glimpse I had of the man left me with the impression that he was a character not much concerned either with apologies or apologizing. He was, perhaps, that type we have developed which concentrates on the business immediately at hand without consideration for the formalities once as-

sociated with good breeding and culture. I should not be surprised to discover him stepping in front of a woman at the stamp-window of the post-office, making his purchase out of his turn, and later pointing to his ability to get waited on as one of the elements in his business success.

I found the Hartford no worse than my fellow traveler had pictured it. The lobby was not crowded. Ostentation and elegance were lacking, but there was an air of quiet and ease about the place which very much appealed to me. The desk clerk seemed sincerely solicitous of my comfort, and, when I had explained my inability to sleep near the din of the street, quite frankly informed me that the only available inside room was inferior in its accommodations. Since the room had windows opening on an inner court, I preferred it to others facing the street, even though the bath facility was a shower rather than a tub.

The bell-boy piloted me to room No. 427. It was on the fourth floor, far enough from the elevator to eliminate annoyance from that source, and, if the furnishings were in nowise elaborate, the room was spacious and cool, and in it were a substantial-looking bed, a dresser, two chairs, a writing-table, and a clothes-press of rather ancient pattern and design.

I was not remiss in the civilities which convention has established as proper toward bell-boys, though the profusion of his thanks made me suspect that I had passed the prudent standard of generosity. He went out to provide me with a pitcher of ice water. I took off my coat and, finding the doors of the clothes-press did not respond to my effort to open them, laid it on one of the chairs and turned to inspect the bed, which, in my then frame of mind, was the most important piece of furniture in the room.

I threw myself back on the bed, and found it altogether comfortable. The bell-boy presently returned with the pitcher of ice water, inquired if there was anything else he might do for my comfort, and, being assured there was nothing, turned toward the door.

The clothes-press stood in the corner of the room to the right of the door as one entered the room. In the opposite corner, more useful than ornamental, a box stall had been constructed to serve as a shower-bath room. The bell-boy, in the very act of closing the door, halted. He stepped toward the clothes-press and picked up something.

Since I was flattened out, face up, on the bed, I could not see what had attracted his attention. There were times during the next few days when I was sure I would have been better off if the lad had pocketed his find, as he could have done without my being any the wiser. Instead, he tossed the trinket on the bed, saying:

"Guess you dropped your card-case, sir."

I was about to confess to him that I had no cards, much less a case, but when I picked up the trinket the workmanship interested me so that I was slow in denying ownership, and the boy closed the door and was gone.

The silver case, too large for stamps and too small for business cards, was ornamented by a very intricate scroll of a double-headed, three-legged dragon. The reverse side of the case was plain, except for a monogram or trade-mark very much resembling the grotesque characters which, in other days, decorated the wash-tickets issued by Kim Long, my laundryman in Moqui, Arizona.

I turned the trinket over and over, studying the excellent workmanship. By pressing my thumb-nail along the seam where the two halves joined, I finally forced it open. The contents were interesting enough to bring me off the bed with some alacrity and to the window where the light was better.

On the left side of the interior were four perpendicular rows of characters which I was sure were either Japanese or Chinese. Under these, engraved in English script, evidently the reproduction of a signature, was the name "Leota M. Jackson." Directly beneath this signature were three more characters similar in design—and lack of intelligibility—to those in the perpendicular rows.

As curious as was the left interior of the

case, it remained for the right side of it to delightfully astonish me. Inlaid there, the workmanship itself strangely entrancing, was the face of a young woman.

I have, I believe, seen all the face types in America—red, white, yellow, black, and all the blood mixtures. This face did not lend itself to classification. There was about the eyes a suggestion of Eskimo. There was too much Anglo-Saxon in it to permit the conclusion that it was oriental, and too much of the latter to justify the belief that the face was of an English or American woman.

When one is thirty-six years old and single it may be assumed that he either has been the victim in romance or is slow to surrender to pretty faces. In my own case I can vouch for the absence of anything suggesting romance. I believe I am justified in saying that I do not go wild over an attractive countenance. I confess, however, that this engraved miniature, no more than an inch wide and an inch and a half long, completely turned my head for the moment.

The artist who executed this portraiture in inlaid work and engraving, in artistry was a match for the superlative beauty he attempted to imprison in gold and precious stones. As the light fell from one angle the face was pallid and listless; the light from another angle, and it seemed as if red blood mounted to the cheeks and lips; from still another angle the light quickened the eyes and they became big and blue, soft and lustrous.

With each shift of the case a new feature or a new expression was revealed, as interesting, unexpected, and far more beautiful than the designs which flash with each turn of a kaleidoscope.

For half an hour I was so engrossed in this beautiful curio I gave no thought to its value, significance, or probable owner. When the query as to who might have lost the silver case forced its way into my consciousness I walked to the door, turned toward the clothes-press, in imitation of the bell-boy, and looked about the floor. I am inclined to the belief that I expected to find a clue which would give the identity of the owner. Of course, there was no clue.

As I turned toward the window again it occurred to me inquiry at the desk would, doubtless, be a speedy way of finding out who was my predecessor in the room. I resolved to make this inquiry when I went down to dinner, and immediately set about making myself a bit more presentable. As a rule, in the evening, I dine later than most folk, and it was curiosity rather than appetite which made me eager to return to the main floor on which was the hotel office and the dining-room.

When I opened my suit-case to lay out clean linen I was reminded that my other suit, somewhat better than the one in which I was traveling, would soon require the attention of a presser if I failed to hang it up. I am not sure but that there was in my mind, also, the expectation of finding something indicative of the person who had lost the silver case. At any rate, I walked over to the clothes-press determined to see what I could do toward forcing the doors.

The lock on it was very light and the keyhole small. None of my keys would fit it, and a buttonhook failed to aid me. Fortunately I carry a very heavy pocket-knife. I inserted the strongest blade in the crack between the two doors, pressed the point against the bolt of the lock, and attempted to drive it back with a prying movement.

The experiment was fruitful enough to keep me trying for ten or fifteen minutes. At first the bolt went back perceptibly with each pry. Soon it struck, and, using the blade with more force than judgment, I broke off the point. Exasperation and impatience prompted me to take as firm hold as possible on the small door knobs and give them a sudden jerk.

I all but brought the clothes-press over on top of me, but the results were gratifying, nevertheless. The right door came open.

I am sure the success of my experiment delighted me less than the discovery that whoever last used the clothes-press had left something in it. A garment, pale-blue silk, I believe, was on the floor. It added somewhat to the excitement which had taken possession of me while I was admiring the face in the silver case. That I might open the door at the left, I stooped down to

release the bolt or hook that was holding it at the bottom. My hand had all but touched the garment when I drew back in astonishment.

A slender ankle and a small foot, clad in a black stocking, protruded from beneath cloth, and a dainty slipper, black with a multihued butterfly worked on the toe, laid near by.

Just for a moment my courage, if ever I had any, seemed to desert me. A veritable nightmare took possession of me, and all the extraordinary crimes of which I had heard or read paraded through my mind. I did not doubt but that I was confronted by a tragedy, the nature of which would stand revealed when I opened the left door.

I trust I shall never again be called upon to go through a similar experience. I was trembling as if stricken with ague when again I stooped to release the bolt holding the door at the bottom. After some fumbling I accomplished this, and also pulled down the bolt holding the door at the top. With what impatience I had begun the task of opening those doors! With what reluctance I finished! Impetuosity so often is born of ignorance. Youth races to grow up, and, having grown up, would halt and hang back where the road dips to the valley of old age.

The left door opened, lying on the floor of the clothes-press, head and shoulders propped up against the left side of it, a woman was revealed. Her face was turned away from me so that the forehead rested on the back of the clothes-press. She wore a blue gown which, because I am very ignorant when it comes to using the terminology of feminine apparel, I shall say in its loose-fitting and long flowing qualities somewhat resembled a bath-robe.

I had no doubt but that I was looking down on a corpse. To verify this conviction I finally forced myself to touch the white, slender forearm, which rested palm-open in her lap. It was warm; more than that, the wrist pulse was normal, and her heart action regular and strong.

Two or three attempts to arouse her having failed, I raised her head from against the back of the clothes-press and turned it so that I could see the features. It was the face of the silver case! The artist had not done it justice. So much of beauty, so near, held me entranced and awed.

CHAPTER II.

TUNG MENG HUI.

THE fatigue of my cramped legs—I was squatted down on my heels as if tending a skillet on my camp-fire or laying the sourdough in my Dutch oven—brought me to my senses. My first impulse was to call in assistance. To what complications such action might lead was a speculation quite beyond me in my state of mental agitation.

Whoever the woman might be, and however indiscreet, I was not above protecting her from the notoriety inescapable if the circumstances under which I had found her became known. Besides, she was beautiful. It seemed to me, on second thought, a prudent course to attempt to revive her.

Obviously, the first thing to be done was to place her on the bed, where she could recline at length. I am sure it was no sense of fear which made me hesitate to touch her; it was, rather, the extraordinary beauty of her face and the fact that the filmy, fragile draperies about her made it seem almost as if I were touching her satin skin. It aroused in me a feeling of guilt of a gross impropriety even to admire her; as if I were taking a mean advantage of her helplessness. To touch her with my rough, calloused hands approximated sacrilege.

Brushing aside these sentimentalities, I took her in my arms, and, as gently as is possible for one who has put in most of his years handling sacks of ore and caressing wayward pack-mules, carried her to the bed. That I accomplished this without apparent injury to her gave me more confidence in myself. I spread over her the coverlid, got the pitcher of ice water, and began to bathe her face. Hope and dread battled within me—hope that she would revive soon, and dread of the embarrassment both she and I were bound to experience with her returning consciousness.

Under such circumstances minutes seem to be hours, and I have no clear idea as to how long I worked over my patient before a faint flutter of her eyelids indicated some improvement in her condition. Not long thereafter I turned from moistening my handkerchief in the ice water and found large blue eyes fixed on me in a frightened, accusing stare.

Twice I spoke to her, and she made no reply. It was evident she still lacked full control of her mental faculties. I went on laving her forehead with cold water. Another five minutes, and she spoke:

"Please, where am I?"

"In the Hartford Hotel, and quite safe," I assured her.

For several minutes she remained quiet, and I was debating whether or not the time had come to suggest calling a physician, when she said with some bitterness:

"You were sent by Lao-hu or Hu-li."

While I could not be sure whether she referred to persons or patent medicines, I hastened to explain that I was a very ordinary and awkward individual, a patron of the hotel for the first time, no more than three hours in the city, and sent by no one, unless perhaps by a well-meaning fellow traveler who had recommended the Hartford as a quiet retreat for one not enamored of the noise and hurry of a city.

The explanation appeared to perplex rather than enlighten her. She looked at me intently for several minutes. Theretofore when women looked at me, I generally stepped on my own feet or made some other spectacle of myself. It was not surprising, therefore, if I barely escaped upsetting the pitcher of ice water, trying to moisten the handkerchief while she was looking at me. My sudden, awkward grab to recover the pitcher startled her; an expression of pain came slowly over her face. She raised her hands to her forehead as if trying to brush confusion from her brain.

With more vitality than she had shown since I found her, she dropped her hands from her face and raised herself on her left arm so she could look over the room. When her eyes rested on the clothes-press she started, cast a quick, furtive glance at me, and dropped back on the pillow, a pathetic, half-stifled cry escaping her lips. I did not understand her cry then, but I have heard it often since and under varied circumstances. I know from experience, however meaningless they may sound to uncomprehending ears, the three words may be as welcome as life and as unwelcome as death.

"Tung Meng Hui!"

As a pathetic, almost despairing wail from my beautiful patient, they sounded as one word, and it devoid of meaning. I had not heard then of the Sworn Brotherhood, or Chinese Freedom, or the illustrious Sun Yat Sen, or the lone star in the blue flag. I did not know that the words, whatever they might mean for others, for me were to be translated as destiny.

As she fell back on the pillow the woman threw her right forearm over her eyes as if to shut out the sight of me and her surroundings. She remained still so long I began to fear lest she had relapsed in a swoon.

"Is there anything I can do to help you?" I asked, hoping to elicit a reply and thereby assure myself that she was conscious.

I was relieved when she lifted her arm from her face, even though the penetrating gaze fixed on me was disconcerting.

"Tell me again, please, how you came to be here," she requested.

I complied, making the story as simple as I could, and explained how I had found her imprisoned in the clothes-press.

"And you—you placed me here?"

"There was nothing else to do," I pleaded, feeling her question had in it something akin to an accusation.

"It was kind of you," she said in a gentle tone.

"Perhaps I should have called the hotel physician immediately on finding you," I volunteered, "but it occurred to me that the episode was so astonishing there might be some reason—that is to say—"

I was getting on badly, and her interruption was welcomed.

"I'm glad you refrained. I am in grave trouble, and no explanations are possible. Do you know how I came to be in that cupboard?"

"I have not the faintest idea about it," I replied. I might have added, in equal honesty, that my curiosity on the subject was about to consume me.

"I can make no explanation which would satisfy you," said the woman. "I can say truthfully that while I am sure of the agency I know nothing of the means and method by which I came to be there."

"It is, perhaps, a case for the police to handle. Shall I—"

Her hands wearily rose in protest as she exclaimed:

"Under no circumstances, the police! It is quite likely I was placed there that the police might be called in."

"I am sure a physician is needed," I said, not satisfied in my mind that the woman was taking a prudent course regarding the police. "With your permission I will inquire at the desk—"

"Your American doctor, I am afraid, will know less about my case than I do. It will be a simple matter for me to prescribe for myself if you will be good enough to help me."

"I am anxious to be of service to you," I assured her, wondering in the mean time whether her reference to my American doctor was inadvertent or intentional, and, if it were the latter, was it meant to inform me that she was of a nationality other than American. "I warn you, however, I am no better posted in *materia medica* than a Navajo medicine-man."

"What is this room number?" she asked, and when I told her the number was 427 her surprise was quite evident.

"Then the door behind the writing-table must lead to the room I have been occupying," she said. "Will you please see if it is unlocked?"

I tried the door. It was locked, and there was no key.

"The room number is 425. If the odd numbers are on the same side of the hall, the entrance must be next to the door leading in here. Would you mind trying the hall door?"

I slipped on my coat and went out in the hall, looked about to see that no one was in sight, and tried the door to room No. 425. It was locked. There was a transom above the door, but it opened from the top rather than the bottom. It would have been a difficult matter to crawl through the transom quickly enough to avoid being seen, and I was quite convinced the last thing the woman courted was attention from either hotel employees or guests. I returned to my own room and told my patient what I had found out.

"If we cannot get to my traveling-bag soon, I am sure I shall be asleep on your hands again," the woman said, and it seemed to me even then there was a drowsy, drawl-like quality in her voice. "I have been drugged. My lower limbs are numb, and I cannot move them. I move my arms only with great effort. Your American doctors know so little about the baine drugs. If only I had the little bamboo tube from my suit-case!"

I had removed the writing-table from in front of the door between the two rooms while she was talking, and I made an effort to pick the lock with a buttonhook. The effort failed. I was provoked with myself for my lack of resourcefulness. I could think of no way to get into the next room except by way of the transom above the hall door. I asked her if I should try to make an entrance by that route. She shook her head, and I noticed that her eyelids were drooping like a tired child's when it is fighting away the sandman. The thought of her losing consciousness again disturbed me.

"What shall I do?" I asked in some agitation. "What can I do? Surely we need a doctor here!"

A smile played about her lips as she looked up at me from beneath heavy lids, her face quite the most beautiful picture I have seen.

"Please," she said quietly and earnestly, "if you love liberty, keep me hidden here until I can help myself."

"But suppose something should happen!" I protested, thinking of the complications certain to arise if the woman died.

"Nothing will happen," she said slowly. "Nothing, if the children of Lao-hu and Hu-li do not find me."

This remark impressed me as the mild raving of a mind already beyond the zone

of responsibility. I could think of nothing to say or do. I stood at the side of the bed and marveled at the resemblance of my wits to the hole in a doughnut. If the woman were correct in her conclusion, and she had been drugged, I had not the least idea as to how long she might remain in her unnatural sleep.

I was quite willing to undergo the slight inconvenience resulting from her being in my room—so often I have slept well on the sand or a ledge of rock that a carpeted floor would serve me very well as a bed—but sooner or later some one would discover the woman, and then—the scandal and the publicity! Certainly I could not conceal her presence beyond the following morning when the hotel maids would be coming in to clean up the room!

It was a delicate situation for a fellow like me, with no experience with women, but I appeared to have no choice but to make the best of it. For five or ten minutes I again resorted to the cold-water treatment, hoping that bathing her forehead and temples might revive her. No results being apparent, I finally walked to the window, looked down the court, and cudgeled my brain for an inspiration.

"If you love liberty, keep me hidden." Her words kept running through my mind. Rather an unusual way of putting it. Most men love liberty, but when it comes to commanding action and favors a beautiful woman is, I am sure, more likely to have her way if she appeals on the basis of love of herself rather than abstract liberty. Why a love of liberty should be appealed to by this particular woman was more than I could fathom. In all frankness, the love of liberty had less to do with my making an ass of myself—I felt sure time would prove that that was what I was doing—than did the unusual beauty of the woman's face and her refinement and helplessness.

For these latter I was willing to keep her hidden until she revived, if I could, but beauty, refinement, and helplessness will not stay a man's appetite when mental excitement quiets enough to permit the physical needs to be felt. It was dinner-time for me, and I was hungry. There was a very savory odor coming up in the court. I leaned out to see, perhaps, whether I could locate the source of this palate-tickling smell, and noticed for the first time there were ornamental stone panels extending laterally around the walls of the court at the base of each series of windows. These made a series of ledges each ten or twelve inches wide. The next window to the right of me was no more than eight feet away.

Why not? Unless I had lost all my cunning, acquired in years of mountain climbing, it would be an easy matter to stand, back against the wall, and slip along that stone ledge to the window which, if the woman's word was to be relied on, led to her room. Once in the room, I could find the suit-case and the little bamboo tube to which she had referred.

At one side of the window in my room hung a strong, hemp rope. It was one of those life-lines which may be found in almost any hotel built prior to the advent of the modern fireproof building. I was inspecting this rope and figuring out how I could use it, if at all, to make safe my passage to the window in the adjacent room, when it occurred to me that even if I were able to find the bamboo tube, knowing nothing as to the character of its contents, as long as the woman was asleep I would not dare to administer the antidotal medicine if such the contents proved to be. My second thought about it was that there was no excuse for taking the chance, even though slight, of a fall when the complete success of the venture served no helpful purpose.

My appetite and reason, emerged from a five-minute debate, agreed that the sensible thing for me to do was to slip out and get my dinner. I closed and locked the window, moved the writing-desk back against the door between the two rooms, and then had another séance with myself on the definition of my duty in my unsolicited guardianship. If only she had told me more about the episode! Was it, under the circumstances and judged on a standard of passable gallantry, incumbent on me to watch over her every minute?

One hesitates to do anything which could be distorted into a breach of trust when a

woman has appealed to him for protection. If the woman is beautiful it only augments this reluctance, and—a fact which I believe I have mentioned—this woman was extraordinarily beautiful.

I could not convince myself that there would be danger to the woman if I failed to keep her under surveillance for half an hour. It was but a few minutes past seven, a time when guests are frequenting the halls, and with the windows and door locked I was sure the woman was safe from annoyance from any one who might be bent on finding her.

In spite of this conclusion I spent an uneasy half-hour in the dining-room, and hurried back to my room without having made the intended inquiry at the desk as to who had been my predecessor in No. 427. I was relieved, indeed, after slipping into the room and closing the door behind me, to have the electric button throw on the light which disclosed the room just as I had left it, with the woman sleeping peacefully. The expression on her face could have been no more eloquent of confident content if she had fallen asleep in her own home with her husband standing guard.

Did she have a husband? It is really astonishing how one will mull over a trivial question sometimes!

I improved the opportunity to compare the picture in the silver case with the original, to convince myself that the startling likeness was not, after all, a product of my imagination. There was no doubt about it; the face in the silver case was the face on the pillow.

The characters engraved on the case again attracted my attention. They, perhaps, reminded me of the several words or phrases the woman had spoken, and which I had not understood. They were marked, surely, by the open vowels and singsong characteristics I often had observed in the conversations of Chinamen in Western laundries and eating-houses. Could it be that the woman was an oriental? I studied her face again for several minutes. She was very beautiful. It was all very baffling. If only she would awake and tell me something about herself!

The room seemed close. Perhaps it was a needless precaution, but to eliminate the possibility of any one in the rooms across the court discovering a woman in my room, before I raised the shade and opened the window, I turned off the lights.

I pulled the old-fashioned rocking-chair near the window, settled myself in its generous proportions, and began my unsolicited vigil. If the woman did not regain consciousness the night would prove long and monotonous.

Just how long I had been sitting there, speculating on what the woman's husband, if she had one, would say to this unusual episode, I am not sure. It may be that I was dozing, for I had not slept soundly the night before in the Pullman; at any rate, there was a chance of my being mistaken. Some one had spoken, and it was not the woman's voice, and yet the voice had uttered that vowel-marked, singsong phrase!

I was wide awake in every faculty as I sat there and listened. I heard the faint strains of music drifting up from the dining-room where, in the later hours of the evening, provisions were made for dancing. For a few minutes I heard nothing other than the distant music and then came unquestionable verification:

"Tung Meng Hui."

It was a heavy voice. It spoke in a guarded undertone, but distinctly. It was in the room beyond the door.

CHAPTER III.

THE GUARD IS GUARDED.

MY first impulse was to cross the room and press the button that would turn on the electric lights. This gave place to a stronger impulse to climb along the stone ledge between the two windows and see what was going on in the next room. The stone ledge had a fascination for me. I am disposed to believe that a stone ledge, some day, will be the end of me, for always a cliff or precipice is a challenge which I decline with difficulty.

I scaled the five-hundred-foot wall on the west of the Hole in the Ground near Cañon Diablo, in Arizona, because I could not take its silent dare. No one up until then

had climbed that wall. There was no reason why any one should climb it, since two easy trails led from the rim to the bottom of the great pit. When in the hole one day, prospecting for meteoric iron, I looked up at the great, broken wall and wondered if it could be scaled. This speculation went on in my mind for several days. The only way to settle the question and reestablish mental tranquillity was to prove the wall could or could not be scaled. I know now that it could. If it could not have been done, whether or not I would have known it leads into speculation on the nature of the intellect beyond the grave, a subject for which I have no great relish.

Doubtless this strange attraction ledges and climbing has had for me aroused the impulse to slip along the stone ledge from my window to the one in the next room. I thought then I wanted to know what was going on in the next room. Now I am quite convinced I wanted more to know whether or not one could stand with his back to the wall and then edge his way along the narrow shelf between the two windows.

One reason why I did not make the demonstration was that while standing at the window I began to suspect there was at least one other person in the world with a mania for climbing. I was debating the possibilities of using the rope fire-escape as insurance against a fall when I heard some one opening the window in the next room.

No more than a minute later I heard a gritty, scraping sound, as if leather and cloth were rubbing against rough stone. While I refrained from putting my head out of the window to see what was going on, the nearing sound permitted no doubt in the matter. The mountain was coming to Allah. I would not have to get to the next room to see who had been there, for whoever it was appeared to be about to call on me.

Whether or not one could cross from one window to the other on the shelf of stone no longer was the paramount question. More to the point was the manner of reception I should extend to my visitor. To dispose of him would have been a very simple matter. Whether he was coming along the ledge back to the wall or face to it, as soon as his feet got on the stone casement of my window I had only to seize his feet, give them a vigorous yank, and my visitor could not stay his fall to the skylight at least forty feet below.

The net-covered skylight was, in fact, the roof of the hotel lobby. If the prowler crashed through it, all of us would break into print on the front page of the morning papers. I felt sure my ward would not appreciate such gallantry in her defense as led to either the police or the press.

In the end, quite likely, we would get to the police and the press, in spite of my good intentions, but it seemed to me if I permitted the visitor to get through the window and in the room there would be less likelihood of our immediate arrival before the public or in jail than if I forced him off the stone shelf and into the hotel lobby by way of a crash through the skylight.

Besides, if the visitor, by word or act, could enlighten me as to the nature of the drama into which I had stepped unintentionally, I was willing, eager in fact, to be enlightened. I wanted very much to know whether the play was tragedy, comedy, or farce, and whether my unsought rôle was that of hero, villain, or, as I suspected, court fool.

My first thought was of Betsy. The feminine character of the name is somewhat misleading. Betsy was, in the language of the range and the Southwest, a shooting-iron. I have found her, on several occasions, a tonic for my courage. There were two reasons why I dismissed the thought of Betsy; she was in the bottom of my grip, and it would take a minute to find her, and she had a habit of speaking her mind in such vigorous fashion that every one within a mile could hear every word she said. Betsy was in no sense a cultured person; she had been reared in a rugged country, and she had a rugged way about her—rugged, but quite persuasive and convincing.

I moved back from the window quietly and cautiously, to the bed. I touched the woman's face and pinched her cheek, for no other purpose than to assure myself she had not awakened from her heavy, unnat-

ural sleep. This villainy—it seemed such to me—eliciting no response, I moved cautiously around the foot of the bed and arrived at the shower-bath stall just as my visitor arrived at my window.

If one stood before the door leading to the hall, in the corner to the right was this stall. In the corner to the left was the old clothes-press. The button controlling the electric lights was in the wall a few inches from the left side of the door.

The bath-stall was a crude affair, no more than a box formed by two walls of the room and two light partitions. Instead of a door, there was a curtain of heavy, waterproof material. The room formed by the walls and these partitions was no more than five feet square.

I slipped within this cell-like place and watched my visitor climb into the room through the window. The subdued light coming up from the lobby through the skylight made a very distinct silhouette which I could watch from my place of concealment behind the curtain. Once in the room, the man stood quite still for some time, evidently listening. Presently, directly at his feet, flashed a small circle of light. It wandered to his right, slowly, until it had passed over the dresser near the window and rested on the right wall of the room. It moved slowly along the right wall toward the shower-bath stall, missing nothing from the ceiling to the floor.

As it came near I let the curtain drop where I had pulled it back so that I could peek out, and waited for the little search-light to pass on to the door. The circle of light moved around the door very slowly, hesitating on the door knob and the key, and also on the electric-light button at the left. Then it moved on to the clothes-press, the doors of which were open. The little circle of light seemed to be interested in the clothes-press.

The prowler silently moved away from the window, so that I could locate him only by following the pencil of light as it narrowed down to the small bull's-eye of his flash-light. He moved toward the right wall so that he could get the light into the clothes-press. Finally the light circle moved on along the left wall and toward the bed. It crept near to the face of my Sleeping Beauty. It rested, at last, full on the woman's face. It was an indescribably beautiful picture!

There was a gasp, as if the prowler had taken in breath for an exclamation and had checked it. The eye of light moved slowly across the room to the bed, and when it was no more than a foot from the woman's face it disappeared. I could see only the faintest shadow of the man. He seemed to be stooping over the bed. I was in the act of slipping out of the shower-stall toward the electric button when the man spoke.

His words were unintelligible to me, being in that vowel-marked, singsong language. He seemed to repeat the same words several times. There was no reply from the woman.

Again the flash-light rested on the woman's face, and I could see the man's hand passing slowly over her forehead, and a second or two later I experienced something of a shock.

The man bent over the sleeping face; the hand holding the electric flash evidently had been extending until it rested on the bed beyond the woman's body. The flash carelessly held lighted up the side of the man's head and his profile as he bent and pressed his lips to the woman's hair. Reverential as was the act, it disturbed me. Unless he was the woman's husband, what right had he to touch his lips to her head? If he was the woman's husband, what right had she to pick such a homely, bristle-headed fellow? For purposes of contrast? Another case of Beauty and the Beast?

All this was disquieting to me, but the shock came as I began to discover the resemblance between the prowler's face and the face of the hotel patron into collision with whom I had come when I stopped before the Avenue entrance of the hotel—the fellow who rushed away in a taxicab without acknowledging my apology. If he had refrained from kissing the hair of my ward, nevertheless I should not have liked him. My first impressions of him were that he was uncouth and rude, and his behavior toward the sleeping woman only confirmed these impressions.

Even I, who had rendered the woman no small service, to speak frankly, had refrained from kissing her hair, even though I could have done so without her knowledge. It was time to call a halt on this high-handed conduct. I slipped from behind the curtain and along the wall, past the door, until my hand found the button.

I pressed it, and the room was flooded with light.

When I was through blinking as a result of the sudden glare, my visitor was standing very erect beyond the bed, with a nickel-mounted pistol in his hand. It was a cute little pistol, and in size, if placed alongside of Betsy, it would have looked like a watch-charm. It seemed to have two barrels, one above the other.

Almost immediately the man began to back toward the window.

"Don't be in a hurry to go," I said, making an effort to appear careless and calm. "That cap-pistol will be no protection to you once you are on the window ledge, and it is quite a drop to the skylight."

The man made no reply, and having arrived at the window, while he held the gun on me with one hand, closed the window with the other and pulled down the curtain.

"Be good enough to lower that gun," I said, intending to convey to him by my manner and tone that I considered myself master of the situation. "I assume you, too, have no desire to awaken the house and become involved with the police. A pistol shot, I suspect, is more dangerous to you than a pistol bullet is to me."

In so far as expression went, his face was like so much granite. He spoke in an undertone and with no show of excitement.

"You have made one mistake, Mr. Munford. A pistol shot from *this* pistol is not dangerous to me." He was holding the weapon in his left hand, and he moved the forefinger of his right hand along the lower barrel. "This is a silencer. If it is necessary I shall not hesitate to shoot."

There was no doubt but that the man meant just what he said. I had heard of silencers for revolvers and rifles, but understood they were not a complete success. At any rate, I had never seen one nor had I talked to any one who had. I had not thought of them when I moved away from the window to permit my visitor's entrance to the room. It was very evident now which rôle I was playing in the drama. Indeed, not the court fool, but rather the common curbstone variety; if I might be permitted to use the vigorous if inelegant expression from the range country, the "common, damned fool" was the part which had fallen to me, and it seemed I was making a complete success of the rôle.

"Very well," I exclaimed, "since you have the high card let's lay the hands on the table. What's your game?"

"Tung Meng Hui," he said slowly, and I thought he bent toward me a bit eagerly.

"What sort of lingo is that?" I asked. "I've heard that mouthful four or five times this evening. What is it, the Egyptian curse, or the name of a cigarette?"

"Your words are enough. You are not one of us—"

"Oh, I understand!" I interrupted. "That's the grand hailing sign of the Double Humped Dromedaries, or some other order—the Amalgamated Association of Second Story Workers, perhaps." Pointing to the woman, I continued: "She belongs, I suppose, since she tried it out on me."

"She—she has spoken?" My visitor showed the first trace of excitement. He lowered the pistol a little and stepped toward the bed. I also moved in that direction, being ready to stop if warned.

"She was conscious for nearly half an hour in the early evening."

"Did she tell you?"

"Did she tell me what?" I questioned in reply.

"How she came to be in this bed?"

"She didn't have to tell me that. I put her on the bed myself."

Evidently my visitor didn't like that remark. He brought the pistol up to where I could look into the muzzle of it.

"You brought her here?" he asked sharply.

"She was here when I arrived," I hastened to explain. "There, in the clothes-

press. I picked her up and put her on the bed."

"And she was awake?"

"Not when I found her," I replied. "She came to after I had bathed her head with cold water."

"And she told you—what did she tell you?"

The way he shot the questions across the bed annoyed me. If he was a friend of the woman's, I wanted to tell him enough to establish myself in his confidence so there might be less strain in our relations; if he was an enemy, I wanted to tell him nothing that could prove of service to him whatever his intentions. It was difficult to serve these two purposes at the same time. It seemed to me I was giving up more information than I was getting in return. I decided to do some of the interrogating.

"Why should I tell you what she said?" I asked rather bruskly. "I don't know what is behind all this. You may be an enemy to this woman. Before I tell you anything more it is up to you to convince me that your intentions are in her interest. Who are you?"

"I am one of her men. We waste words talking. There is no explanation possible from me. Perhaps, if we can revive (here he used a phrase which I did not understand and had never heard before) maybe she will explain."

"Well, we can't get any place as long as you stand over there and hold that toy pistol on me so that I have to remain over here. Now, what are you going to do?"

In reply he turned his back to me, walked over to the dresser, and laid the pistol on it. As he turned back he pulled from his coat pocket a cigarette-case, opened it, placed one of the cigarettes in his lips, and held the case out to me. For once, I was quite sure, my wits were working. I pulled out my cigarette case, opened it, and extended it to him.

"We will exchange courtesies," I said, having in mind that, so far as he knew, my cigarettes might be doped, even as, so far as I knew, his might be. If he was willing to take a chance on my cigarettes, I was willing to take one on his. He did not hesitate, but threw away the cigarette he had placed between his lips, took a match from the holder on the writing-desk, and having lighted a cigarette from my case, to give me confidence perhaps, held the burning match out for my convenience.

"If you do not play fair, Mr. Munford," my uninvited guest remarked in a very matter-of-fact tone, "you must accept the consequences."

I blew the smoke from the cigarette toward the ceiling and replied:

"I will go as far in fairness as you go. Now what can we do to help this young woman?"

"Did she say anything to you?" he asked.

"She said she was drugged, mentioning the drug she believed had been used, though I can't recall it; I had not heard of it before. She said something about a bambo tube in her suit-case. I was trying to devise a way to get in her room and procure the suit-case when she lost consciousness again."

"We must get the tube. I will go for it."

"You had better tie this rope about you," I suggested, pointing to the rope hanging at the window. "That is a very narrow ledge."

"I have a key that opens the hall door to her room," he explained.

"Perhaps it will unlock the door behind the writing-table," I suggested.

"If it would unlock that door I should not have come in by the window."

With that he walked to the door leading to the hall. I was but a step or two from the dresser on which was his pistol. He unlocked the door and slipped out of the room. I observed he had taken the key with him. Since he had left the revolver for me, I did not resent his taking the key.

I stood by the bed, looking down on the beautiful face, and waited for him. Once I heard a slight noise in the adjoining room. If I had been pulling at the cigarette with unusual vigor, the stress and strain under which I had been, probably is a satisfactory explanation.

Two or three minutes passed, when the

face seemed to fade from the pillow, only to reappear and fade again. The lights in the room began to move in a circle. Objects in the room faded away, reappeared, and faded again. An extraordinary Mexican cigarette, even though extra strong, would produce no such effect on an habitual smoker. I had sense enough to realize that I, too, had been drugged. My wits working, indeed! Before they can work, one must have wits. I was convinced I had none.

I staggered back to the dresser and finally got the pistol in my hand. The prowler came in the door. I raised the pistol and tried to hold it on him.

"As far in fairness as you," I muttered over stubborn lips and pulled at the trigger. There was no recoil and no report. The prowler came across the room toward me. I believe he was smiling. I pulled at the trigger again. No recoil. The prowler took the gun from my hand. He led me to the rocking-chair and forced me down in it. I had no power of resistance.

He and all the room faded away.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

Away East is East

by George Gilbert

WHEN you go lurching out of the wide seas west of Sumatra against the send of the current from Sunda Strait and suddenly raise Prince's Island dead ahead; glimpse the palms on Java Head to the south-southwest, the sand-spit that ends China Point being on the other side of the channel so far to the north-northeast, you can't see it; then shoulder aside the lumpy waves of the strait; open up the Brothers to larboard, the North Watcher to starboard, turn, skirt the Thousands and circle them until you make into Batavia, you may think you are pretty far east—and you are. But, after all, it is tourist-east, with passenger steamers, postal-cards of views, tame palms, some one always at hand who can sell or tell you anything you want, or want to know—and more, unless you are careful.

Then, taking an interisland trading steamer, you may loaf through the shallow Java Sea, past Toulo Rakit, Cariman Java, Bawean, Solontha, Kalkosen, the Paternostres, and many another isle or atoll and come out into the Flores Sea, and then, with Flores on one hand, Bouton asleep under its palms two hundred miles northward, the Banda Sea ahead, you may think you are east of east—and you are. But away off, farther yet, beyond myriad islands, isles and coral-rings; where the send from the lazy but often treacherous rollers of the hundred-fathom depths that end east of Timor-Laut begin to curl up onto the bottom of the shallow submarine plateau that finally lifts Australia and its friendly neighbor convoys of islands on its shoulders, is Dobbo, in the Aru group, and that is where all sea paths meet—clear east of

east. *Prau* and outrigged interisland canoe make in there—seldom a small tramp with Birmingham wares. And more seldom still a schooner with white sails. *Praus,* with mats for sails—*praus* made by the Ké islanders out of hewn timbers, wooden pegs and rattans for binders and with holes near the rudder sweep-arms large enough to let a sea in, yet they never sink, are home in Dobbo, for on the sandy beach, soft and yielding, they can be drawn up and recalked, out of reach of the teredo that loves to bore wood to bits and the coral reefs that border the island of Wamma, on which Dobbo is, cut off the big waves. Let us sit on my pier-head here and I'll tell you of Dobbo.

Dobbo! When you think of it, think of pearls and shell and pearlers; of frizz-haired Papuans from New Guinea in with skins of paradise birds; of Ceramese and Goramese down among the islands to buy sea-slugs for themselves; of Bugis there to buy the same for traffic in Singapore with Chinese merchants who will sell them in Canton at a neat one thousand per cent profit; of Java boys trafficking in serai and betel, and Malays, courteous and quiet, dealing in tobacco and trading cheap sarongs for little boxes of pandanus wood, wonderfully made by Jilo-jilo artists who never repeat themselves in design. And of birds' nests for soup, copra, chaste women going naked, lewd ones clad—

Dobbo! A place on a bit of land near the slow-breathing, spice-scented sea, warmed by golden tropic sun, cooled by winds from isles of permanent beauty, peopled by men who are afraid of nothing on earth, or they would not be in Dobbo!

Dobbo! Changed now, a little on the surface, from growth of western trade, and so not bettered. But long ago! There's enough queer things there now, but away back. There was no law in Dobbo then, except—

Let me tell you:

With a Ké *prau* of five tons burthen, bought on the beach near Gorontulo, Celebes, of some sea gypsies who wanted a larger one, I turned east a bit, then south past Sulo-Mangola and Bouru until St. Matthew was on the starboard bow and then, due east, till I was clear east of east. I had brass wire, beads, three sizes of small axes, cloths and a good nerve, which I needed more than all else, to manage my mixed crew of Malays, Celebese, Bugis, and Timorians. But nerve has carried the Bartleys of Devon through much, as it carried those other Devon blades—Raleigh, Drake, and others—clear around the world and made them able to cut the Armada like a knife cutting a full cream-cheese. So I, Paul Bartley, was not worried, save for one thing—that I might find life in Dobbo dull.

Dull in Dobbo? Faugh! But don't blame me for thinking so then. It was my first trip there and I didn't know of it, except from hearsay. *Dull!*

Setting my men at work as soon as we landed and hauled the *prau* onto the white sand before the palm-fringe that they might get my goods out, I put the *jurumudis* or steermen, really ranking as lower mates, and the *juragan,* or chief mate, over the separate gangs of my own men and hired Aruians. Then I strolled up the open space, not a street, but an open-air bazaar, in Dobbo's middle.

Clack of Guineans' tongues, chaffer of Javanese, singsong of Chinese, slurring wheedle of Malay, explosive bullying of Kling speech, came to me. I was thronged, importuned to trade; shook off all who sought to interest me.

"To-morrow," I gave them, in a dozen tongues; "I rest to-day and to-night."

A high-peaked hut, *attap*-thatched, I took; the one nearest the beach. Then I smoked, loafed, listened to the small talk that visitors brought in, of how *tripang* was up in price there because the sea had "turned sick" near Kuora; of how shell was plentiful and copra of good quality. I showed my wares to a few, to stimulate interest, and prepared to rest for the night, being tired with the long trip.

Yes, sir; I thought I could rest for a night in Dobbo!

The sun, a ball of fire, fell into the Banda Sea. Far gulls clangored—the reef throbbed with the beat of the surf. The sudden dusk came, to be swallowed in soft darkness, star-gemmed. Then the moon, like another sun, almost, came up to silver palm and hut,

white sand and spouting combers. The stars paled before it, and from the sea a small *prau* danced, landward, in its path, that it made peeping over the island toward the west.

"*Dindah prau,*" a sea gipsy called, and from every side men rushed to the beach, I with them, for it was a "woman *prau,*" laden, not with *copra,* shell, *tripang,* but with women—for sale.

Being not short nor thin and moreover with a sudden temper that goes with red hair and sun-glinted eyes of blue-black, I thrust my way through the press that thronged the beach and was in the front ranks of those who waded into the rollers to help the *prau* to land safely. And so I was able to catch the first glimpse of the freight it carried—freight that shrewd How Duck, its owner, had brought from Macassar's native stews for his profit. Under the moon, their gay colored short skirts rippling as they moved nervously about on the *prau's* little deck, their white jackets, scanty but neat, serving to contrast well with their black hair, they made a fair showing. Yet, the dawn, merciless, would reveal them as mere wastrels of the warm isles, ready to pour forth their waning vitality in a few mad orgies in Dobbo and—then die. Why didn't the trader take Aru women? If you knew how straight and far an Aru man can throw a knife you would not ask that—

Thrust out onto the white sand before the whispering palms, the women were paired off quickly, with some giggling, squeals, oaths and a show of knife-blades where human game-cocks ran afoul of each other in the scuffle. How Duck, sleek, smiling, at the *prau's* end, took the money paid down—coins of all nations under the sun; rang the silver on a nail in the bow of the *prau,* bit the gold pieces, shoveled the nickel and smaller bits into a bag.

"One piecee more wolman I have got, you catchee me?" he drooned in pidgin, for my benefit, seeing my white face; "you likee her."

He jerked a thumb toward the little bamboo house on the *prau's* deck that served as a cabin.

"She hop-hop inside topside," How explained; "I catchee her in dugout. Much more sweet, like flower of lotus. You look see her. Go in. Can do?"

"Can do," I gave him—and swung myself over the side of the *prau,* pushed aside a China boy or two and the Javanese crew men. They all grinned at me.

"She muchee fight, fight," How Duck warned as I put my hand forward to raise the mat that covered the entrance to the cabin. Inside I could hear some one breathing, deep and pantingly, like one in pain or a rage. I stepped into the gloom, located the sounds—lunged forward, drawn by curiosity and unbridled desire to unveil the mystery hiding there. One did not have to be ceremonious with what he found in the cabin of a *dindah prau* in old Dobbo—the Dobbo of yesteryear, I tell you.

My questing hand closed over a plump wrist, slid up it to find the upper arm. The panting, whether of pain or rage, I could not tell, then ceased; then began again as I clutched again and then became a nervous laugh that had in it something that made my blood tingle. With what? You shall see. That laugh? It was chilling to the heart, yet alluring.

I let go my hold, drew back, fumbled for a match, struck it and held it so that its tiny flare flooded that far corner where she was with light.

She was a white woman! Just beyond girlhood, though in her face I read that she was a woman in feeling.

And such a white woman: tall, strong, as the white silk *sarong* and pink silk upper dress showed, in spite of their ample folds that could not conceal the rounding shape of limbs and arms and sweep of torso lines. Her hair was like new, unspun hemp, eyes like amber depths of those pools where the hermit crabs love to sidle along among the coral. And her face was rosy as the morn or white as *frangipani* petals, according as you looked on brow and upper cheeks or on lower cheeks, lips and chin. Her gaze was open, from eyes that did not chime in with Dobbo beach and its woman market.

Then the light went out, my finger-tip stinging with the last flicker of the dying match. The pain awoke me from my astonishment. I whirled in my tracks and stormed out to How Duck, calling:

"What do you mean by this? A white woman to be dumped onto the beach at Dobbo?"

His smug grin faded as expectations of large gains vanished.

"You no catchee her?" he sputtered. "You no can do—"

"No; yellow devil!" And I reached for my knife while How's crew fell back, ringing us around. "Tell me what it means. Quick, or I'll kill you! Is such as she to be put onto the beach for Dobbo traders to fight over?"

I clutched his yellow throat; my blade glittered under the moon when I heard the woman from the cabin call:

"Yes; I go on the beach; let the captain be, *meinherr*."

"You catchee me?" How Duck sputtered as I dropped him, bewildered at what I had heard. "You takee her? Can do?"

"Tell him yes," she called in silvery tones, "and pay what he asks in reason."

Yes, I took her. As we went over the side of the *dindah prau* I heard How Duck chuckle. The beach was deserted. As we left it a grating sound, to the accompaniment of How Duck's commands, told that the little ship was launched again. A little breeze, rustling the palm-tops, caught the *prau's* sail that was swung raspingly up its strong, triangular boom, and I saw, as I stopped at the town's edge, that the *prau* was going out to sea again. I doubted not that How Duck rejoiced over the gold coins I had given him for her.

"Is this the way, *meinherr?*" the woman's mocking voice cut into my pause for observation. "What is done is done. Why watch the *prau* go? We have the night before us."

I noted the title she gave me; knew that she had Dutch training or blood. I let my mind flash over the Dutch traders I knew at different islands who might have had such a woman—wife or daughter. But I could fix upon none. Had she been mistress to one? That did not fit, either.

"Is this the way, *meinherr?*" she taunted a second time.

"No," I answered, offering her my arm with all the gallantry I could command; "come to my hut."

"Gladly," she said, yet her tones had no gladness in them. And her right hand, on my arm, as I could feel through the arm of my shirt, was cold as ice. The banter of her lips that were red, the gray tone of her voice and the feel of her hand that were cold, both were at variance, as the warm sea and sand and the distant cool moon were at odds. Yet, went together to make perfect the enshroudment of the night that, as she said, was before us.

I think no one saw us as we went to my hut. The others who had visited the beach when the *prau* came in had gone. Inside the hut I let fall the mats over the windows; closed the door. Two teakwood seats were at the room's rear. I drew them up to a pandanus and split-palm table after I had lighted my lamp that was filled with cocoa-oil. She sank into a seat—that farthest from the door. I sat across the table from her.

And now that she was there, mine, bought and delivered at her own instance, I hesitated. To woo a woman; to pursue her; to win her! Yes! But to have her force herself on you, to have her cozen you into paying a woman-runner like How Duck for her. No!

And yet—

I glanced at her and found her eyes glowing—yet not with desire. I have seen caged animals with that look in their eyes; hatred bordering on fear; yearning bordering on eagerness to escape. But her lips—her lips that were carmine and that pouted—said:

"Is this the way, *meinherr?*"

I reached across the table, grasped her wrist that threw my hand off easily—so easily that I, strong as I was then, marveled.

"Yes, this is the way—until I know more of you," I said as quietly as I could. That touch and little struggle had aroused me; "What is your name?"

"You shall call me Vandervleede—Miss Vandervleede," she replied with a little laugh that had no joy in it.

"And I," arising to bow, "am Paul Bartley, of Birmingham long since, now of the Malay Islands, Polynesia, and the ends of the warm seas."

She arose, bowed gravely, all but smiled—then sank into her chair again, and I had

the notion that she almost wanted to lay her arms onto the table, her head on them and sob. But she did not. Instead, she forced a smile, showing teeth that were even, strong, well-set in a clean, pink mouth, whose strong color-values told of virility, abundance of pulsing blood, that warmed her ample, well-formed body.

"And now, Miss Vandervleede," I insisted after the mockery of introduction was past, "what am I to do for you? You had an object in coming ashore with me. No sudden love gleam in your heart prompted you to come. I think any other man who could have paid How Duck would have won your approval so far as well as I have. What can I do for you?"

She made a brave attempt to smile again at my roughness that was meant to startle her into talking.

"Come, is this the way?" I jeered, "for a white woman on the beach at Dobbo?"

Her eyes flashed a bit of fire, paled to amberness again. She suddenly flopped her hands that she had kept off the table onto it, palms down.

"Look at the nail-tips," she said.

I did. The half-moons there showed clouded. She was not all white. I glanced up at her, wondering that she should make plain that which part-bloods always try to hide—the fact of her cross-bloodness.

"What is it you wish me to do?" I asked again, after a long pause, during which our eyes fenced and mine were not best in that game of foils.

"To kill a man," she said calmly.

"I have killed a man or two in my time, in fair fighting," I said, "and might again. But to kill one just to please some one, in cold blood would be another thing for Paul Bartley." And I laughed.

Her eyes paled still more; her shoulders heaved as she drew in long, deep breaths. She threw up her hands with a gesture of despair and I noted how the muscles under her thin, silken upper dress moved. She clutched at the fastenings of her dress at the neck and two buttons rattled onto the table and to the floor, and I could see, as she gasped for air, how white and firm her neck was set onto her shoulders, like a column of rare marble.

"Listen, Meinherr Bartley," she said, recovering poise and leaning toward me. Silence for a space, while the surf's pendulum swung dolorously in the moonlit world outside and a cockchafer in the matting ticked the death-watch; "listen to me."

She leaned her face on her hands, her elbows on the table, as she talked.

"Yes; I want to have you kill a man for me. Do you know where Tilo-laut is?" —mentioning a group of tiny isles off to the west that I never had stopped at and where some tiny plantations of gambier, cloves and nutmegs were said to be under control of a Dutchman.

"Yes," I replied.

"That is where I come from, Meinherr Bartley."

I nodded.

"We Vandervleedes have had the Tilo-lauts now for three generations. My grandfather, Piet Vandervleede, of Amsterdam, learning to love these warm seas and being carefree at home, left the ship of which he was captain at Amboyna, took a timid Amboyna quarter-caste woman to wife and took Tilo-laut. He cleared the good land, laid out a profitable little plantation and was happy. My father, their only child, on a visit to Macassar, married a mild Dutch governess who was over the children of a rich Englishman, a merchant there. My mother died when I was a child. She, like my grandmother, was timid. I was like my grandfather, old Piet—and my father weak, with the weakness of the Amboyna breed. Old Piet kept opium and arrack off Tilo-laut. He was just, perhaps harsh. But our natives throve under him and loved him.

"My father kept opium and arrack out, because the custom was established, not from force of character, for he, as I have said, *meinherr*, was weak. The memory of old Piet's heavy hand and sure aim with cannon or rifle kept the pirate *praus* off, the natives under our hands quiet. My father was big of body, so the natives did not suspect that he was small of heart. One white face outshines a thousand black or brown ones in these narrow, warm seas, and the natives thought my people were all white.

"As for me, I grew up, wilful, strong, accustomed to having my own way, often boxing the ears of the white women my father brought out from Amboyna to teach me. I fished, sailed my own little *prau*, shot birds for food and sport—lived the life of a—what do you English say?" pursing up her brows and lips in thought.

"Tomboy?" I suggested.

"Oh, yes, *meinherr*, a tomboy. And so I grew up to girlhood, which comes on us island folk early. Oh, yes, I knew my father was weak because he would not withstand me when my good sense told me I was acting wrongly. And it gave me pleasure to bewilder him with my forwardness and boldness. And once a schooner with white men stopped at our islands, and one of the men said something to me that—well, it should not have been said. When I told my father he turned pale and would not make the man apologize and was glad when he went away unhurt. The pain and shame of that insult changed me overnight from girl to woman—"

She paused again, mused, went on:

"Now comes Breitsen—Olaf Breitsen, of mixed blood, but all white—into my life and story, *meinherr*. I well remember how he seemed when he first came from his schooner in a whaleboat to ask for trade. He was new in our seas, had always traded over in mid-Pacific before. How shall I describe him? It was not so much his bigness of body as the force of the man, that frightened me. And the force seemed all for evil. His eyes were fiery, so that mine fell before them and I felt that every one of his glances robbed me of some privacy of body or mind. His mouth was loose-lipped, with big, even teeth in it and, although he said nothing lewd, he seemed always about to, so that one blushed to see his lips move even and to hear his voice rumble in his deep chest that he let go partly bare from a seemingly careless habit of letting his buttons free of their holes, thus showing his great, hairy breast. His eyes were black, as was his hair and beard—and his beard crinkled. I am picturing him as he was when he came ashore, so I speak always in the past tense of him—now.

"Breitsen seemed to fill our house as soon as he entered. I was introduced to him and he bowed low over my hand as he pressed it, and when I took my hand away from his huge paw, my hand felt as if torn with hooked claws, yet it had no mark on it; my body shrank from his gaze. He turned from me with a laugh, began to talk to my father, and I could see that he was the dominant one. I? I fled, followed by the laughter of the visitor, yet he was not laughing at me, but at some joke of my father's.

"That was the beginning. Bidden by my father to dine with the guest, I found that my father had set out for him some spirits. We had some in the house always, in case of sickness. My father never had drank, except for medicine, until that night.

"Breitsen it was who drank at first. Then, urging the claims of hospitality, he got my father to pledge him in a glass, then in another. At the third I objected, but my father bade me be silent—

"I came upon the two suddenly in the dining-room next afternoon. I had kept away from the house all the day, back among the plantations, visiting old native friends. Several times I saw men from Breitsen's schooner spying about among the huts. As I came upon my father and Breitsen I heard the newcomer into our Eden say:

"'You have fifteen hundred natives here. If each of them drank a gallon of *arrack* and used a thimbleful of opium, the revenue would be large, and I can sell the stuff to you cheaply. And if you don't let it in, I'll run it in, anyway, Vandervleede. Your title to Tilo-laut is a joke. I'll go over your head and get a resident appointed in here. I have political power.'

"I came forward and faced him. My father, his nerves shattered from an unaccustomed debauch, was like putty before him. I stormed:

"'You, a stranger, could not get a resident appointed here. You are from out of the islands—'

"'Make the little girl go away,' he said to my father, turning away from me as if merely annoyed at a child's prank. Yet his desirous glances seared me.

"My father, *meinherr*, ordered me away.

Fearing to have a scene and trusting that after Breitsen went I should be able to undo any mischief he might do, I went. I made a mistake there. I should have stayed and firmed my father's weak will. My weakness then was a touch of that Amboyna quarter-caste blood in me. It never will conquer again—"

Her clenched hands came down onto the table-top with a crash. Her amber eyes leaped flame, her head was held erect, the muscles of her white neck swelled. I had a fleeting glimpse of old Piet Vandervleede then and *he* must have been a terrible man when aroused. But the vision faded; she became a woman again as she cupped her chin in her pink palms and took up the tale:

"I shut myself in my part of the house, *meinherr,* thinking that in a day or two Breitsen and his men would be gone and that then I could bring my father back to himself again. My maid, a native girl, told me that my father was drinking with his guest and I could hear Breitsen's laughter, that made the timbers of the house vibrate, even in my rooms. And at dusk men from Breitsen's crew went by the house toward the plantations, singing ribald songs, drunk, too. Then, an hour later, I saw them about the grounds, laughing, leaping, with some of our women and native men with them, drunk, as well.

"In the morning I was determined to meet my father and lash him into more decent behavior. If you had known Tilolaut as it was, *meinherr,* you would have fought for it, too. We had an Eden there; fine roads, nice houses for all, plenty of food, fruit and such little luxuries as the natives crave for. And services in the chapel, held by a native minister. We had no earthly paradise, but it was so nice—better than anything else I have ever seen in the way of human society. Yet you know how some of these native races are: a touch sends them down-hill, especially a touch from a bad white man of commanding influence.

"And such was Breitsen. He proved himself to be a leader—a bad leader, but a leader.

"So, *meinherr,* in the morning I forced my way to the breakfast-room, where my father was, with his guest. As I came into the room I heard Breitsen say:

"'Here comes your little girl again.'

"His lips declared me a girl, but his eyes branded me as a woman, *meinherr*—and for a moment I feared him.

"'What is it, Helena?' my father asked, impatiently.

"I glanced at him. His hand that he held to his forehead was shaking; his eyes seemed to have a yellow color-tone to their pupils. I did not know it then, but it was opium working on him—opium that Breitsen had coaxed him to eat, to ease his nerves after their drinking bout of the night before.

"'Send this man and his crew away,' I stormed; 'his men were ashore last night enticing our girls; they drink and have made our people drunk. He has made you drunk—'

"I heard the gurgle of brandy from a bottle's mouth. It was Breitsen pouring the strong spirits into a glass. Even as I turned on him he slid the glass until it touched my father's hand.

"'The little girl is not polite,' Breitsen said quietly.

"'No,' my father answered, clutching at the glass; 'she is not well-mannered, forgive her; she has had poor bringing-up here.'

"He drained the glass, smiled foolishly at me.

"And, I? I left the room, lest the man who called me child with his lips and caressed me as a woman with his eyes should see me break down and sob."

She paused to master her emotion. I got up, went to the door, lifted the mat and looked out upon the oily, silvered water. All was quiet. Away out I thought I saw something moving on the face of the waters, but I did not heed then, deeming it a trick of moonlight on some sunken reef or mass of drifting weed.

"And then?" I encouraged, sitting down opposite her again.

"And then I returned to my room. I saw a struggle to come; felt the need for strength of body to keep my natural forces at full current. I ordered my maid to have a hearty breakfast sent in, forced myself

to eat it. I went about my duties among the plantations and saw that on the surface no harm had been done. I visited old Arri Bandu, our native preacher, and found him alarmed. He agreed to do all he could to help me keep the people safe until the schooner had gone. Comforted, I was able to get through the day, especially as the schooner's crew kept on board and I saw no more of Breitsen. But that was because he was with my father all day long and they were carousing together.

"Then came the night, the moonlit night, and the crew came ashore with rum and opium and found our women again and gave drink to the men. But why go into details? Only this time their orgies were carried on boldly on the white sand before the house and I saw—I saw enough to make me hate Breitsen, master of vice, for when the deviltry out there seemed at its height he came out into their midst, with my father, reeling with him, and became lord of their revels. I saw my father, his arm about a girl that had been brought by force into the center of the ring, and knew her for the daughter of Arri Bandu, our minister, and in my father's face, as seen by the moon, passions working that I never had seen there before. The girl shrank back; Breitsen pushed her forward; she screamed; my father clutched at her sarong—and it tore partly from her body. She screamed again when the circle was broken and Arri Bandu appeared, his black and white robes of his calling in strange contrast to the scene.

"I saw the girl try to reach her father's arms; saw him try to shield her. Then Breitsen struck down the preacher; a Kanaka half-breed that was Breitsen's mate, a man named Andrew Huoia, seized the girl and she was whirled away in a swirling group of drunken men. Her screams came to me—for a few moments. Then I heard no more from her.

"My eyes, traveling back to where my father had been, missed him, until I saw him prone, beside Arri Bandu. Crazed with fear for him, I opened the lattice of woven bamboo through which I had been watching, leaped to the ground and sped to my father's side. Breitsen, laughing, drew aside as I stooped over my father. He was on his back—in his breast a knife. I threw myself upon him, felt of his face, listened for the beating of his heart. He was dead.

"A hoarse, rattling voice sounded in my ear. 'The white devil captain killed the master, missie.'

"It was Arri Bandu talking. I heard him.

"'He bent over me and slew him with his great knife. I am going now; good-by. Bless you.'

"I snatched the knife from the wound and stood erect, facing Breitsen, who laughed at me still.

"'Give me the knife,' he said, reaching out his hand for it; 'a girl like you would cut herself with it.'

"'You shall never have it until you get it in your death wound,' I raged at him. My heart was hot. I felt like old Piet then for a moment.

"He threw back his head and roared and I had hard work to keep from plunging the blade into his thick throat, but I was a woman. The Piet in me had died for the time, *meinherr*.

"'Get you into the house and keep away from my men,' he ordered; 'they are beyond control to-night. I shall take charge here; with your father dead you need a protector until a proper government can be set up for Tilo-laut. I like the place. I mean to stay, after making application to the authorities for a patent of occupation, which your people never have done. That is where your position is weak. You have no protection from any government. The small size of Tilo-laut, among so many other islands, makes it of small importance and so no one has questioned your claims here. I mean to have it—all of it—plantations, houses, men—and women and children.'

"I saw him lick his chops at the last words of his boasting. And I went. But with the knife.

"'Come back with my knife,' he ordered, springing after me. He caught me and whirled me about easily. I struggled; he released me with a playful oath.

"'Keep it,' he laughed into his great beard, and I could see his eyes shine as with bale-fire; 'you are strong—for a girl.

I have things to do now. I shall get around to you—later.'

" Again he laughed, turned and went swiftly.

" I? I went into the house. The knife I placed on a little table there by the window through which I had emerged. I sat down beside the table and stared at the bloody blade and fought the inward fight. The weather was fine, with a slight wind. I could have taken my little *prau* with her light bamboo masts and cloth sails, that I could manage myself, put in water and some food and stand out and escape. The *prau* was in a tiny inlet where it would not be found by the first chance comer. Or I could stay and fight for my people—

" By one act that I did you may decide what way that inward fight went. Before the soft dawn came I went out onto the open space before the house, dug a grave in the soft white sand. It was easy to do, with the knife to help me. Into that broad, shallow hole I placed my father and Arri Bandu, covered them, smoothed off the sand. And as I worked I thanked God that I was strong. I sobbed, but quietly. I would not let *him*, by any chance, hear me mourn.

" Yes, I had resolved not to run—then. There were the people. By staying, I thought, I might save them—

" The knife-blade, despite the digging in the sand, was stained. But, even so, I thrust it into my dress-front. It was of ivory, its handle; of native steel smithy work, its blade. And it had worked into its blade a Malay-Arabic inscription in copper—an inlaid script word or two.

" In the morning, my brain reeling for lack of sleep, I went my accustomed rounds of the house. Breitsen was not to be seen at first. The servants told me he had taken charge, however, before dawn, rousing them all and telling them that he had become their master. They feared him. He had given orders that I was to be obeyed as head of the house, but that he was to be obeyed in all things else.

" How I got through that day I know not, *meinherr*. I was cold and hot by turns, fevered with anger, cooled with hate. Glimpses that I had of the grounds showed me how completely the old life of Tilolaut had passed. It takes only a slip for these natives to go back centuries toward barbarism. Or for whites, either, for that matter, as I was to see.

" Breitsen did not appear at the house that day nor for many days. He was, I found out, busy about the plantations. He set up a sort of office about a half-mile up the beach. He began to fill his schooner with the choicest of the island's products. With his *arrack* and opium he enticed the people to sell all their priceless works of native art—mats, basketry, coco-plumes, paradise-bird ornaments for the hair, shell, tortoise-shell jewelry. Step by step he debauched the people, taking delight in making them drunk, or sodden with opium. He and his crew were the circle from which radiated all sorts of evils. A moral leprosy spread everywhere.

" The third night there was a fire—the third night after my father was killed. And the fire was in our native church. Breitsen was in to see me that next morning and he said frankly that he had had the church burned to remove the last traces of the old, decent order.

" ' It is a matter of trade with me,' he leered as I stood upright before him and clutched at the haft of the knife in my dress-folds; ' the more I make them drunk, the quicker I can skin the cream off Tilolaut and turn it into money. When I have sweat all their good things away from them, I can get my patent and use this merely for my trading-base among these islands. What do I care for these natives? They are inferior beings, only fit to be plucked.'

" Then he sat heavily down, without ' by your leave,' took out a big cigar, lighted it, and began to blow the smoke about the room. I went out, pursued by his rumbling laughter and feeling his glances clawing at my back that I would not bend in his presence.

" Yes, I might have struck at him with the knife and killed him. But he was leader and would keep some sort of authority. With him gone, I would still be under the dominance of his crew who were as bad as he and I wanted to escape that, for the people's sake.

"Things went then from bad to worse, and then to worse still, *meinherr*. I kept to the house, where I was well treated, under Breitsen's orders. He kept away from me, but when his glance, in passing the house, fell on me, I could feel as if I had been pawed by huge hands. Often, in passing, he would turn quickly and surprise me looking at him from a window, and then he would laugh and fling back at me, over his great shoulder, out of his great crinkled beard:

"'In time, dear miss, in time. You will come to me, in time.'

"And I, with flaming face, would turn away to keep him from seeing me cry, but the tears were those of hot rage, not fear.

"Once in passing so he called to me:

"'Give me the knife, missie, sweet. It was given me by a Tahiti girl, who got it from an Arab pearl-trader. It has words on the blade and is a lucky knife for a man to wield in a fight. I shall give you another, if you want a knife to protect yourself. It has never failed me in a pinch. Give it me.'

"I did not even answer him. He laughed, showing his white teeth, and went away, singing some South Sea love song.

"The island was in his power, completely. No ships would touch there, unless by chance. *Arrack* and opium were more powerful over the people than the moral suasion of a girl just turning into womanhood.

"How long did it last, *meinherr?* I do not know. Days flew by, nights of starlit grace in nature; nights of hell to men and women there. I even ventured among the people and tried to reason with them. They laughed at me, stupidly. Some would have been rude, but a whisper that 'the new master would not have it so' checked them. These whispers came from Breitsen's men, who were everywhere, aiding his schemes, smelling out native treasures for him through the influence of the women they had taken for themselves. In the house I was well treated as Breitsen's dependent. He placed about me his own creatures, those of the native housefolk who came easiest under his sway.

"And often he found means to make his voice reach me with his call:

"'You will come to me—in time.'

"Then came the day when, glancing from my window at dawn, I saw a great *prau* near Breitsen's schooner anchored. I heard voices off through the house—those of Breitsen and another's. I crept out through the deserted rooms and listened at the door of the room that my father had used as a reception-room. What did I hear, *meinherr?*

"In Malay they were bargaining, those two, over the sale of two hundred Tilo-laut women to the owner of that *prau*, Ali Tomia, the greatest woman-trader of the shallow, warm seas, who delivered yearly many cargoes of women to trading-camps and rulers' harems. His was the *dindah-prau*, in fact, worst of all, because largest. Knowing Ali's *prau*, Breitsen had signaled him when he had seen him passing toward Timor.

"Sick at heart and hoping a way would open for me to do something, I stole back to my rooms. I sat there, making plans that I discarded as soon as made, when I heard a noise outside my door. I rushed to the door, to find it barred outside. I rushed to the window, to find it guarded by a man from Breitsen's schooner. For some reason he had seen fit to keep me in.

"So I had to sit there and watch the women—some of them dear friends, now sodden with drug and drink—herded onto the beach and loaded onto the *prau* like so many cattle. And as they went, I made my resolve. If they had resisted and been carried away protesting, it would not have been so bad. They would have proved that Breitsen had mastered their bodies, but not their spirits. But with his drink and drugs, his example, his men's lures, he had dragged those sweet island girls down to his base level—made them children of the pit. As I looked at them being taken, most of them gladly, onto that *dindah-prau*, I seemed to see, in a vision, all the women of Tilo-laut, debauched, become hateful to clean women and men alike, dispersed among the islands as chattels, sold to the keepers of Macassar, Batavia, and worse houses of ill-fame; the men, broken, driven like dumb beasts at hard labor, the little isles made into pots of hell, the children of

the women left springing up, tainted from birth. Ah-h!"

She threw out her arms, all but fell forward across the table in the agony of her soul. I got up, opened the mat, looked out upon the moon-swept bay.

Off where I had seen that indistinct something when I had looked out before when she had paused, a ship was to be seen, coming in!

"And then?" I urged, without wishing to interrupt her story by telling her of the ship's coming.

"I knew of the *dindah-prau*, of How Duck and his yearly trip to Dobbo. We island girls learn much that others never would learn. The servants had told me of How Duck's yearly journey and its object. I knew when trade opened here in Dobbo and that How Duck would come here very soon. His *prau* I knew, having seen it pass Tilo-laut in the offing year after year. How Duck was due then—"

She paused. The surf pounded steadily outside. A little wind that must have been bringing that ship in, rustled the palms.

"Here is the knife of Breitsen," she panted, and she drew it from her dress-folds and cast it onto the table between us.

I picked it up. It had an ivory handle, heavy, firm; a blade of finest polish, the edge keen. Down one side of the blade, inlaid in copper, ran the Malay scroll:

"I thirst for blood of my master's foe."

"And then?" I queried, grasping the knife-haft firmly and trying the blade's temper by bending it against the wood.

She cupped her face in her pink palms again. Her face bent over the table until it all but touched mine as she resumed:

"That night I wrote a note, which I put inside my dress, took food, water—and the knife. I went to my little *prau*, which was a mere one-log dugout. I unhooded it from its sheltering lianas; found a lad, son of a woman who had been sold to Ali Tomia. I took the lad with me and, when all on Tilo-laut were sunk in the deep slumber, following an orgy, I put forth.

"The night was calm. I drove the little *prau* out into the usual track of passing steamers between the islands, so far she could not have been seen from Tilo-laut. How Duck was due to pass, I knew. Two days we tossed there, then came How Duck's *dindah-prau*. I signaled him, boarded his craft, sent the lad back with the *prau* with orders to deliver my note to Breitsen a day thence. Yes, the lad could steer the little *prau* well. He was well in toward land before we lost sight of him. In the letter I told Breitsen I was bound for Dobbo, to the beach, to find a man, and if he wanted me, to come take me from the man who won me on Dobbo beach!

"He will come after me; try to get me—Breitsen will. I know it. I can feel him coming now—I want him to come—to Dobbo—where a man must fight for his woman. Ah, *meinherr*, I had no other way under heaven but this, no other way to save Tilo-laut—my people. I had no other way of finding a real man in time, before the moral poison of Breitsen slays the soul of Tilo-laut. No; no other way; no friends, no near, dear relations to appeal to, I say—but if a real man will fight Breitsen for me, make it impossible for him to go back to complete his work—I can go back, save Tilo-laut, its people—live again. If not—"

She paused. Her bosom was heaving, her amber eyes blazing. Her face was not an inch from mine. Her lips were white, not red.

I snapped erect, strode to the doorway, tore down the mat. Through the frame the doorway made for the moonlit picture of the bay and sea outside a schooner could be seen, walking trippingly up the moon-sheen that danced under her far-overhung bows.

I turned toward the woman, who pointed to the ship and cried out in a voice that was like the notes of a bugle calling men to charge, for faith and honor and all things good men hold dear:

"It is the schooner of Breitsen!"

I saw the splash the anchor made as it plunged. Sails swept down, leaving bare poles silvered by the argent glory overhead. Feet began to scurry outside, men and women to call:

"A ship! A ship!"

The woman at the table sobbed once, a dry, soul-shaking sob.

"I shall meet Breitsen on the beach—for you!" I whispered, yet the whisper sounded

like a loud cry in my ears, so alert was I to everything. I began to tingle, to throb. I picked up the knife, laid it down again. She seized it.

" If you had not met him, I should have used—this!" And she made a motion as if in self-destruction.

I grasped the knife and went to the door. A boat was dancing over the waves toward the beach. In it, standing erect, was a great, black-bearded man.

" Remain here," I ordered and went out.

The sea was calm. The boat came quietly to shore. The big, black-bearded man stepped out, glared around at the ring of people. He swept them back with that mere glance of his—all but me. As the shuffling of the cowards ceased I remained alone in the ring's center, facing him.

" Was there a white woman in the *din-dah-prau* of How Duck?" he demanded, his voice booming, masterful.

" There was!" I made answer.

I had the knife against my wrist, the handle clutched closely.

" Where is she?" he bellowed; " she is mine; give her to me."

" She is mine," I answered, shouldering my way forward.

" Ha!" And he met me, shoulder for shoulder as our eyes fenced in the moonsheen. " Fool, I shall bring my crew ashore and sack Dobbo—"

" Beach law!" I cried.

" Beach law; fight for her then," several called in the crowd.

I had struck home. As well ask a Dobbo man of those times to cut off his hand as to break one of the rough rules that were called beach law. I had heard of its naked rigors, but never tested it before.

" Fight for her then," the traders called, scenting fun and a sure way to avoid trouble for themselves.

" If you are afraid—" I snarled at him.

" Afraid! Of you, stripling!"

He beat upon his chest, tore open his shirt and the black hair of his breast showed against his white skin.

" Give us room," he roared.

" After the ring is made and signal given, look out," some one called to me. " Listen for three hand-claps."

" I know," I flared over my shoulder.

The people fell back, men and women. The heaving sea was in front, as we had jostled aside from where Breitsen's boat had landed. His men I did not see.

We shed our light jackets and shirts. I clutched the knife by its blade. I was afraid of Breitsen, if he should clutch me. He was tall, thick, like iron, as I could see, in perfect condition, for all his drinking and drugging.

" Ready," called some one.

A hand-clap! Another, another!

We were face to face. Breitsen smiled evilly, advanced, I edged back, but knew that the crowd would hem me in against a possible flight. I had appealed to Dobbo's beach law. There was no escape; the tribunal before which I strove was merciless.

" Stand still, boy," the great man cried, wolfishly.

The crowd was quiet. I could even hear the little waves sobbing on the shore, so still were the people.

Breitsen came on, slowly, like fate in its march. I went back. As I did so I shifted the knife until its blade-tip was between thumb and finger of my right hand; the sea-rover's grip for a death-cast.

Back of Breitsen the crowd parted, and I saw the woman there.

I could go back no farther. I could feel people behind me, hear them breathe, sobbingly, as those who have ran a long race.

" Stand still!"

So called Breitsen again.

I was silent.

He had his body poised on his feet that were light as a woman's as he came to the combat. His knife, held firmly by its haft, glittered in the moon's rays. His left arm was advanced as a guard. He seemed absolutely sure of himself. I, with knife-point between thumb and forefinger, warily extended my right arm back of me, ready for a throw. As I did so I could feel the people there nudge each other back, to give me room, fair play.

Behind Breitsen's oncoming bulk that loomed ever closer was the woman with the white face, and as Breitsen sidled toward me he came to one side of where her pale face, like a moon set in clouds,

peered from the ring of dark countenances, and I saw her again, and this time her hands, made into a funnel, were at her mouth, as if she were ready to speak.

Breitsen rushed to close.

I tensed my muscles for the knife-cast, determined to risk all upon it, rather than close with him.

"He has your lucky knife, Olaf Breitsen," the woman called, like a trumpet, her voice ripping the silence like a sword-thrust. "He has your knife and all the luck. You are a dead man!"

"Ah!" he snarled, half turning his head toward her.

I threw the knife! I heard its hilt-guard thud against his chest and knew the blade was between his ribs—in his gorilla's heart!

Breitsen faced me with a gesture almost of pained surprise, wabbled on his column-like legs, glanced down foolishly at the knife-haft snugged there against the hairy breast of him, laughed a laugh that was ended in a sob of bloody agony—and fell onto the white sand of Dobbo, dead!

"The woman is yours," the people yelled at me.

I turned to where she had been. She was gone.

Breitsen's men stood at the surf's edge, amazed at the outcome.

"Be off with you," I ordered them, "and not back to Tilo-laut. At dawn I shall start for there, in my *prau*, with the men of Dobbo at my back, if needed. Tell the people on the schooner and signal with a white flag if you agree. Do as you please with the ship, but do not come near Tilo-laut."

They ran the boat into the surf and pulled for the schooner. We saw them leap up the ropes let down for them; the dancing boat swung up after them. Then, after a few moments, the white flag fluttered from her fore; she catted her anchor and, with the little before-dawn wind following, heeled over and tiptoed out of our lives.

I spoke to my men and they began to get my *prau* ready. A few quick sales and I was shed of all my goods. I went to the house, to the woman.

She was sitting at the table, her pink chin on pink hands, as she had been when I had listened to her story. The pink dawn was stealing up out of the Pacific toward us, making the Banda Sea to flare into life and color. Gulls overhead were calling, the surf swung lightly.

She glanced at me, held out one hand, while the other supported her chin still.

"I have come to claim my share of the bargain," I said.

"I am ready to pay," she replied steadily, yet I thought her chin quivered for all her strongly molded hand held it. I know the hand I held trembled in mine.

"Then come," I urged, drawing her up, and tall and strong as she was she came easily.

"But where?" she demanded, fearfully.

"To Tilo-laut—to your reclaimed home that is to be sweet and clean again if a fighting white man can make it so."

"He can, he can; one white, with a will, can undo all that can be undone there," she cried, gladly now; "come to Tilo-laut. I shall go with you."

"But first," I said as we went into the light of our newer, sweeter day; "first we shall go to Amboyna—"

Her eyes flashed at me, the light of supplication in them.

"Ah, not to Amboyna," she pleaded; "I have friends there; some of my mother's people. I am willing to pay—for what you have done, but they in Amboyna must not know—now—that I am a prize, won in a Dobbo beach fight—"

"To Amboyna," I went on, brushing aside her objection, "to Amboyna, to the mission, to be *married*—"

She gave a weak little cry of happiness, put her free arm onto my shoulder with a gesture of perfect trust that swallowed up the last remnant of the fierce passions that had wrecked her and had brought her to me and Dobbo Beach.

"To the mission," she sobbed, going limp in my enfolding arms; "to the misson—to be—married?"

"Yes, my sweet one."

"Ah, to be wedded, a bride, with Book and veil and heavenly music and ghostly words—I risked all to save my people; came blindly to Dobbo Beach for a man—a real man!

"Thank God, I have found him!"

The Blind Spot

by Austin Hall and Homer Eon Flint

A "DIFFERENT" SERIAL

CHAPTER XIX.

HOBART FENTON TAKES UP THE TALE.

RIGHT here at the outset, I had better make a clean breast of something which the reader will very soon suspect, anyhow: I am a plain, unpoetic, blunt-speaking man, trained as a civil engineer, and in most respects totally dissimilar from the man who wrote the first account of the Blind Spot mystery.

Harry has already touched upon this. He came of an artistic, esthetic family; the Wendels were all culture. I think Harry must have taken up law in hope that the old saying would prove true: "The only certain thing about the law is its uncertainty." For he dearly loved the mysterious, the unknowable; he liked uncertainty for its excitement; and it is a mighty good thing that he was honest, for he would have made a highly dangerous crook.

Observe that I use the past tense in referring to my old friend. I do this in the interests of strict, scientific accuracy, to satisfy those who would contend that, having utterly vanished from sight and sound of man, Harry Wendel is no more.

But, in my own heart is the firm conviction that he is still very much alive.

Within an hour of his astounding disappearance, my sister, Charlotte, and I made our way to a hotel; and despite the terrible nature of what had happened, we managed to get a few hours' rest. The following morning Charlotte declared herself quite strong enough to discuss the situation. We lost no time.

It will be remembered that I had spent nearly the whole of the preceding year in South America, putting through an irrigation scheme. Thus, I knew little of what had occurred in that interval. On the other hand, Harry and I had never seen fit to take Charlotte into our confidence as, I now see, we should have.

So we fairly pounced upon the manuscript which Harry had left behind. This manuscript is now in the hands of the publishers, together with a sort of a postscript, written by Charlotte, describing the final events of that tragic night in the house at 288 Chatterton Place, when Harry so mysteriously vanished.

Of course the disappearance of Dr. Holcomb—the initial victim of the Blind Spot—has always been public property. Not so the second vanishing—that of Albert Watson, known to us as Chick. His connection with the mystery has heretofore been kept from the world. And the same is true of Harry's going.

Hence the reader will readily imagine the intense interest with which Charlotte and I traced Harry's account. And by the time we had finished reading it, I, for one, had reached one solid conclusion.

"I'm convinced, sis, that the stranger—Rhamda Avec—is an out-and-out villain. Despite his agreeable ways, and all, I think he was solely and deliberately to blame for Professor Holcomb's disappearance. Consequently, this Rhamda is, in himself, a very valuable clue as to Harry's present predicament."

And I related some additional details of

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for May 14.

the struggle which took place between us two old football players and the wonderfully strong and agile Rhamda. I showed the scar of a certain memorable scratch on my neck.

"Proof that he's a pretty substantial sort of a fantom," I said. (It will be recalled that Jerome, the detective, who was the first man to see the Rhamda, considered Avec to be supernatural.) "Fantoms don't generally possess finger-nails!"

Referring to Harry's notes, I pointed out something which bore on this same point. This was the fact that, although Avec had often been seen on the streets of San Francisco, yet the police had never been able to lay hands upon him. This seemed to indicate that the man might possess the power of actually making himself visible or invisible, at will.

"Only"—I was careful to add—"understand, I don't rank him as a magician, or sorcerer; nothing like that. I'd rather think that he's merely in possession of a scientific secret, no more wonderful in itself than, say, wireless. He's merely got hold of it in advance of the others; that's all."

"Then you think that the woman, too, is—human?"

"The Nervina?" I hesitated. "Perhaps you know more of this part of the thing than I do, sis."

"I only know"—slowly—"that she came and told me that Harry was soon to call. And somehow, I never felt jealous of her, Hobart." Then she added: "At the same time, I can understand that Harry might—might have fallen in love with her. She—she was very beautiful."

Charlotte is a brave girl. There were tears in her eyes, as she spoke of her lover, but she kept her voice as steady as my own.

We next discussed the disappearance of Chick Watson. These details are already familiar to the reader of Harry's story; likewise what happened to Queen, his Australian shepherd. Like the other vanishings, it was followed by a single stroke on that prodigious, invisible bell—what Harry calls "the Bell of the Blind Spot." And he has already mentioned my opinion, that this phenomenon signifies the closing of the portal into the unknown—the end of the special conditions which produce the bluish spot on the ceiling, the incandescent streak of light, and the vanishing of whoever falls into the affected region. The mere fact that no trace of any bell ever was found has not shaken that opinion.

And thus we reached the final disappearance, that which took away Harry. Charlotte contrived to keep her voice as resolute as before, as she said:

"He and the Nervina vanished together. I turned around just as she rushed in, crying out, 'I can't let you go alone! I'll save you, even beyond'— That's all she said, before—it happened."

"You saw nothing of the Rhamda then, sis?"

"No."

And we had neither seen nor heard of him since. Until we could get in touch with him, one important clue as to Harry's fate was out of our reach. There remained to us just one thread of hope—the ring, which Charlotte was now wearing on her finger.

Harry has already described this jewel, but it will not hurt to repeat the details. The ring is remarkable solely for the gem, a large, uncut stone more or less like a sapphire, except that it is a very pale blue indeed. I hardly know how to describe that tint; there is something elusive about it, depending largely upon the conditions of light, together with some other variable quality—I realize that this seems impossible—a quality which lies in the stone itself, always changing, almost alive. Nevertheless, the stone is not scintillating; it is uncut. It emits a light which is not a gleam, much less a flame; it is a dull glow, if you can imagine a pale blue stone emitting so weird a quality.

I lit a match and held it to the face of the gem. As had happened many times before, the stone exhibited its most astounding quality: as soon as faintly heated, the surface at first clouded, then cleared in a curious fashion, revealing a startlingly distinct, miniature likeness of the four who had vanished into the Blind Spot.

I make no attempt to explain this. Some-

how or other, that stone possesses a telescopic quality which brings to a focus, right in front of the beholder's eyes, a tiny "close-up" of our departed friends. Also, the gem magnifies what it reveals, so that there is not the slightest doubt that Dr. Holcomb, Chick Watson, Queen and Harry Wendel are actually reproduced—I shall not say, contained—in that gem. Neither shall I say that they are reflected; they are simply reproduced there.

Also, it should be understood that their images are living. Only the heads and shoulders of the men are to be seen; but there is animation of the features, such as cannot be mistaken. Granted that these four vanished into the Blind Spot—whatever that is—and granted that this ring is some inexplicable window or vestibule between that locality and this commonplace world of ours, then, manifestly, it would seem that all four are still alive.

"I am sure of it!" declared Charlotte, managing to smile, wistfully, at the living reproduction of her sweetheart. "And I think Harry did perfectly right, in handing it to me to keep."

"Why?"

"Well, if for no other reason than because it behaves so differently, with me, than it did with him."

She referred, of course, to the very odd relationship of temperature to sex, which the stone reveals. When I, a man, place my skin in contact with the gem, there is an unmistakably cold feeling; but when any woman touches the stone, the feeling is just as distinctly *warm*.

"Hobart, I am inclined to think that this fact is very significant. If Chick had only known of it, he wouldn't have insisted that Harry should wear it; and then—"

"Can't be helped," I interrupted quickly. "Chick didn't know; he was only certain that some one—*some one*—must wear that ring; that it must not pass out of the possession of humans. Moreover, much as Rhamda Avec may desire it—and the Nervina, too—neither can secure it through the use of force. Nobody knows why."

Charlotte shivered. "I'm afraid—there's something spooky about it, after all, Hobart."

"Nothing of the sort," with a conviction that has never left me. "This ring is a perfectly sound fact, as indisputable as the submarine. There's nothing supernatural about it; for that matter, I personally doubt if there's *anything* supernatural. Every phenomenon which seems, at first, so wonderful, becomes commonplace enough as soon as explained. Isn't it true that you yourself are already getting used to that ring?"

"Ye-es," reluctantly. "That is, partly. If only it was some one other than Harry!"

"Of course," I hurried to say, "I only wanted to make it clear that we haven't any witchcraft to deal with. This whole mystery will become plain as day, and that darned soon!"

"You've got a theory?"—hopefully.

"Several; that's the trouble!" I had to admit. "I don't know which is best to follow out.

"It may be a spiritualistic affair after all. Or it may fall under the head of 'abnormal psychology.' Nothing but hallucinations, in other words."

"Oh, that wont' do!"—evidently distressed. "I know what I saw! I'd doubt my reason if I thought I'd only fancied it!"

"So would I. Well, laying aside the spiritualistic theory, there remains the possibility of some hitherto undiscovered scientific secret. And if the Rhamda is in possession of it, then the matter simmers down to a plain case of villainy."

"But—how does he do it?"

"That's the whole question. However, I'm sure of this"—I was fingering the ring as I spoke. The reproduction of our friends had faded, now, leaving that dully glowing, pale blue light once more. "This ring is absolutely real; it's no hallucination. It performs as well in broad daylight as in the night; no special conditions needed. It's neither a fraud nor an illusion.

"In short, sis, this ring is merely a phenomenon which science has not *yet* explained! That it can and will be explained is strictly up to us!"

I referred again to Harry's notes. In them he tells of having taken the stone to a jeweler, also to a chemist; and of having

discovered still another singular thing. This, as the reader will recall, is the gem's anomalous property of combining perfect solidity with extreme lightness. Although as hard and as rigid as any stone, it is so extraordinarily light that it is buoyant in air. A solid, lighter than air.

"Sis," I felt like prophesying, "this stone will prove the key to the whole mystery! Remember how desperately anxious the Rhamda has been, to get hold of it?

"Once we understand these peculiar properties, we can mighty soon rescue Harry!"

"And Mr. Watson," reminded Charlotte. She had never met Bertha Holcomb, to whom Chick had been engaged; but she sympathized very deeply with the heart-broken daughter of the old professor. It was she who had given Chick the ring. "It has taken away both her father and her sweetheart!"

And it was just then, as I started to make reply, that a most extraordinary thing occurred. It happened so very unexpectedly, so utterly without warning, that it makes me shaky to this day whenever I recall the thing.

From the gem on Charlotte's finger—or rather, from the air surrounding the ring—came an unmistakable sound. We saw nothing whatever; we only heard. And it was as clear, as loud and as startling as though it had occurred right in the room where we were discussing the situation.

It was the sharp, joyous bark of a dog.

CHAPTER XX.

THE HOUSE OF MIRACLES.

LOOKING back over what has just been written, I am sensible of a profound gratitude. I am grateful, both because I have been given the privilege of relating these events, and because I shall not have to leave this wilderness of facts for some one else to explain.

Really, if I did not know that I shall have the pleasure of piecing together these phenomena and of setting my finger upon the comparatively simple explanation; if I had to go away and leave this account unfinished, a mere collection of curiosity-provoking mysteries, I should not speak at all. I should leave the whole affair for another to finish, as it ought to be finished.

All of which, it will soon appear, I am setting forth largely in order to brace and strengthen myself against what I must now relate.

Before resuming, however, I should mention one detail of which Harry was too modest to write. He was—or is—unusually good-looking. I don't mean to claim that he possessed any Greek-god beauty; such wouldn't jibe with a height of five feet seven. No; his good looks was due to the simple outward expression, through his features, of a certain noble inward quality which would have made the homliest face attractive. Selfishness will spoil the handsomest features; unselfishness will glorify.

Moreover, simply because he had given his word to Chick Watson, that he would wear the ring, Harry took upon himself the most dangerous task that any man could assume, and—he lost. But had he known in advance exactly what was going to happen to him, he would have stuck to his word, anyhow. And since there was a sporting risk attached to it, since the thing was not perfectly sure to end tragically, he probably enjoyed the greater part of his experience.

But I'm not like that. Frankly, I'm an opportunist; essentially, a practical sort of a chap. I have a great admiration for idealists, but a much greater admiration for results. For instance, I very seldom give my word, even though the matter is unimportant; for I will cheerfully break my word if, later on, it should develop that the keeping of my word would do more harm than good.

I realize perfectly well that this is dangerous ground to tread upon; yet I must refer the reader to what I have accomplished in this world, as proof that my philosophy is not as bad as it looks.

I beg nobody's pardon for talking so much about myself at the outset. This account will be utterly incomprehensible if I am not understood. My method of solving the Blind Spot mystery is, when analyzed, merely the expression of my per-

sonality. My sole idea has been to get *results*.

As Harry has put it, a proposition must be reduced to concrete form before I will have anything to do with it. If the Blind Spot had been a totally occult affair, demanding that the investigation be conducted under cover of darkness, surrounded by black velvet, crystal spheres and incense; demanding the aid of a clairvoyant or other "medium," I should never have gone near it. But as soon as the mystery began to manifest itself in terms that I could understand, appreciate and measure, then I took interest.

That is why old Professor Holcomb appealed to me; he had proposed that we prove the occult by physical means. "Reduce it to the scope of our five senses," he had said, in effect. From that moment on I was his disciple.

I have told of hearing that sharp, welcoming bark, emitted either from the gem or from the air surrounding it. This event took place on the front porch of the house at 288 Chatterton, as Charlotte and I sat there talking it all over. We had taken a suite at the hotel, but had come to the house of the Blind Spot in order to decide upon a course of action. And, in a way, that mysterious barking decided it for us.

We returned to the hotel, and gave notice that we would leave the next day. Next, we began making preparations for moving at once into the Chatterton Place dwelling.

That afternoon, while in the midst of giving orders for furnishings and the like, there at the hotel, I was called to the telephone. It was from a point outside the building.

"Mr. Fenton?"—in a man's voice. And when I had assured him: "You have no reason to recognize my voice. I am—Rhamda Avec."

"The Rhamda! What do you want?" instantly on my guard.

"To speak with your sister, Mr. Fenton." Odd how very agreeable the man's tones! "Will you kindly call her to the telephone?"

I saw no objection. However, when Charlotte came to my side I whispered for her to keep the man waiting while I darted out into the corridor and slipped downstairs, where the girl at the switchboard put an instrument into the circuit for me. Money talks. However—

"My dear child," the voice of Avec was saying, "you do me an injustice. I have nothing but your welfare at heart. I assure you, that if anything should happen to you and your brother while at 288 Chatterton, it will be through no fault of mine.

"At the same time, I can positively assure you that, if you stay away from there, no harm will come to either of you; absolutely none! I can guarantee that. Don't ask me why; but, if you value your safety, stay where you are, or go elsewhere, anywhere other than to the house in Chatterton Place."

"I can hardly agree to that, Mr. Avec." Plainly Charlotte was deeply impressed with the man's sincerity and earnestness. "My brother's judgment is so much better than mine, that I"—and she paused regretfully.

"I only wish," with his remarkable gracefulness, "that your intuition were as strong as your loyalty to your brother. If it were, you would know that I speak the truth when I say that I have only your welfare at heart."

"I—I am sorry, Mr. Avec."

"Fortunately, there is one alternative," even more agreeably than before. "If you prefer not to take my advice, but cling to your brother's decision, you can still avoid the consequences of his determination to live in that house. As I say, I cannot prevent harm from befalling you, under present conditions; but these conditions can be completely altered if you will make a single concession, Miss Fenton."

"What is it?" eagerly.

"That you give me the ring!"

He paused for a very tense second. I wished I could see his peculiar, young-old face—the face with the inscrutable eyes; with their expression of youth combined with the wisdom of the ages; the face that urged, rather than inspired, both curiosity and confidence. Then he added:

"I know why you wear it; I realize that the trinket carries some very tender asso-

ciations. And I would never ask such a concession did I not know that, were your beloved here at this moment, he would endorse every word that I say; and—"

"Harry!" cried Charlotte, her voice shaking. "He would tell me to give it to you?"

"I am sure of it! It is as though he, through me, were urging you to do this!"

For some moments there was silence. Charlotte must have been tremendously impressed. It certainly was amazing, the degree of confidence that Avec's voice induced. I wouldn't have been greatly surprised had my sister—

It occurred to me that, if the man wanted the gem so badly, it was queer that he had not attempted to get it by forcible means. Remember how weak Chick Watson was that night in the café, and how easily the Rhamda could have taken the ring away from him. Moreover, he had never attempted to force Harry to part with it; in that struggle of ours his only aim had been to throw Harry and me into that fatal room, before the closing of the Spot. Only the ringing of the bell saved us. Why didn't he employ violence to get the ring? Was it possible that we were misjudging him, after all; and that, instead of being the scoundrel that we thought him to be—

"Mr. Avec," came Charlotte's voice, hesitatingly, almost sorrowfully, "I—I would like to believe you; but—but Harry himself gave me the ring, and I feel—oh, I'm sure that my brother would never agree to it!"

"I understand." Somehow the fellow managed to conceal any disappointment he may have felt. He contrived to show only a deep sympathy for Charlotte, as he finished: "If I find it possible to protect you, I shall, Miss Fenton."

After it was all over, and I returned to the rooms, Charlotte and I concluded that it might have been better had we made some sort of a compromise. If we had made a partial concession, he might have told us something of the mystery. We ought to have bargained. We decided that if he made any attempt to carry out what I felt sure was merely a thinly veiled threat to punish us for keeping the gem, we must not only be ready for whatever he might do, but try to trap and keep him as well.

That same day found us back at 288 Chatterton. Harry has already mentioned the place in detail. And I can't blame him for having felt more or less uneasiness when, at various times, he approached the house. Very likely it was because the thing needed painting; any once-handsome residence, when allowed to fall into disrepair, will readily suggest all sorts of spooky things.

Inside, there was altogether too much evidence that the place had been bachelors' quarters. It will be recalled that both Harry and Jerome, the detective, lived there for a year after Chick's previous residence.

The first step was to clean up. We hired lots of help, and made a quick, thorough job of both floors. The basement we left untouched. And the next day we put a force of painters and decorators to work; whereby hangs a tale.

"Mr. Fenton," called the boss painter, as he varnished the "trim" in the parlor, "I wish you'd come and see what to make of this."

I stepped into the front room. He was pointing to the long piece of finish which spanned the doorway leading into the dining-room. And he indicated a spot almost in the exact middle, a spot covering a space about five inches broad and as high as the width of the wood. In outline it was roughly octagonal.

"I've been trying my best," stated Johnson, "to varnish that spot for the past five minutes. But I'll be darned if I can do it!"

And he showed what he meant. Every other part of the door-frame glistened with freshly applied varnish; but the octagonal region remained dull, as though no liquid had ever touched it. Johnson dipped his brush into the can, and applied a liberal smear of the fluid to the place. Instantly the stuff disappeared.

"Blamed porous piece of wood," eying me queerly. "Or—do you think it's merely porous, Mr. Fenton?"

For answer I took a brush and repeatedly daubed the place. It was like dropping ink on a blotter. The wood sucked up the varnish as a desert might suck up water.

"There's about a quart of varnish in that wood already," observed Johnson, as I stared and pondered. "Suppose we take it down and weigh it?"

Inside of a minute we had that piece of trim down from its place. First, I carefully examined the timber frame-work behind, expecting to see traces of the varnish where, presumably, it had seeped through. There was no sign. Then I inspected the reverse side of the finish, just back of the peculiar spot. I thought I might see a region of wide open pores in the grain of the pine. But the back looked exactly the same as the front, with no difference in the grain at any place.

Placing the finish right side up, I proceeded to daub the spot some more. There was no change in the results. At last I took the can, and without stopping, poured a quart and a half of the fluid into that paradoxical little area.

"Well, I'll be darned!"—very loudly from Johnson. But when I looked up I saw that his face was white, and his lips shaking.

His nerves were all a jangle. To give his mind a rest, I sent him for a hatchet. When he came back his face had regained its color. I directed him to hold the pine upright, while I, with a single stroke, sank the tool into the end of the wood.

It split part way. A jerk, and the wood fell in two halves.

"Well?" from Johnson, blankly.

"Perfectly normal wood, apparently." I had to admit that it was impossible to distinguish the material which constituted that peculiar spot, from that which surrounded it.

I sent Johnson after more varnish. Also, I secured several other fluids, including water, milk, ink, and machine-oil. And when the painter returned we proceeded with a very thorough test indeed.

Presently it became clear that we were dealing with a new phenomenon of the Blind Spot. All told, we poured about nine pints of liquids into an area of about twenty square inches; all on the outer surface, for the split side would absorb nothing. And to all appearances we might have continued to pour indefinitely.

Ten minutes later I went down into the basement to dispose of some rubbish. (Charlotte didn't know of this defection in our housekeeping.) It was bright sunlight outside. Thanks to the basement windows, I needed no artificial luminant. And when my gaze rested upon the ground directly under the parlor, I saw something there that I most certainly had never noticed before.

The fact is, the basement at 288 Chatterton never did possess anything worthy of special notice. Except for the partition which, it will be remembered, Harry Wendel and Jerome, the detective, were the first in years to penetrate—except for that secret doorway, there was nothing down there to attract attention. To be sure, there was a quantity of turned-up earth, the results of Jerome's vigorous efforts to see whether or not there was any connection between the Blind Spot phenomena which he had witnessed and the cellar. He had secured nothing but an appetite for all his digging.

However, it was still too dark for me to identify what I saw at once. I stood for a few moments, accustoming my eyes to the light. Except that the thing gleamed oddly, like a piece of glass, and that it possessed a nearly circular outline about two feet across, I could not tell much about it.

Then I stooped and examined it closely. At once I became conscious of an odor which, somehow, I had hitherto not noticed. Small wonder; it was as indescribable a smell as one could imagine. It seemed to be a combination of several that are not generally combined.

Next instant it flashed upon me that the predominant odor was a familiar one. I had been smelling it, in fact, all morning long.

But this did not prevent me from feeling very queer, indeed, as I realized what lay before me. A curious chill passed around my shoulders, and I scarcely breathed.

At my feet lay a pool, composed of all

the various liquids that had been poured, up-stairs, into that baffling spot in the wood.

CHAPTER XXI.

OUT OF THIN AIR.

EXCEPT for the incident just related, when several pints of very real fluids were somehow "materialized" at a spot ten feet below where they had vanished, nothing worth recording occurred during the first seven days of our stay at 288 Chatterton.

Seemingly nothing was to come of the Rhamda's warning.

On the other hand we succeeded, during that week, in working a complete transformation of the old house. It became one of the brightest spots in San Francisco. It cost a good deal of money, all told, but I could well afford it, having recently received my fee for the work in the Andes. I possessed the hundred thousand with which, I had promised myself and Harry, I should solve the Blind Spot. That was what the money was for.

On the seventh day after the night of Harry's going, our household was increased to three members. For it was then that Jerome, who was the last person to see Dr. Holcomb before his disappearance, and who stayed in that house with Chick Watson and also with Harry—returned from Nevada, whence he had gone two weeks before on a case.

"Not at all surprised," commented he, when I told him of Harry's disappearance. "Sorry I wasn't here.

"That crook, Rhamda Avec, in at the end?"

He gnawed stolidly at his cigar as I told him the story. He said nothing until he had learned everything; then, after briefly approving what I had done to brighten the house, he announced:

"Tell you what. I've got a little money out of that Nevada case; I'm going to take another little vacation and see this thing through."

We shook hands on this, and he moved right into his old room. I felt, in fact, mighty glad to have Jerome with us. Although he lacked a regular academic training, he was fifteen years my senior, and because of contact with a wide variety of people in his work, both well-informed and reserved in his judgment. He could not be stampeded; he had courage; and, above everything else, he had the burning curiosity of which Harry has written.

I was up-stairs when he unpacked. And I noted among his belongings a large, heavy automatic pistol. He nodded when I asked if he was willing to use it in this case.

"Although"—unbuttoning his vest—"I don't pin as much faith to pistols as I used to.

"The Rhamda is, I'm convinced, the very cleverest proposition that ever lived. He has means to handle practically anything in the way of resistance." Jerome knew how the fellow had worsted Harry and me. "I shouldn't wonder if he can read the mind to some extent; he might be able to foresee that I was going to draw a gun, and beat me to it with some new weapon of his own."

Having unbuttoned his vest, Jerome then carefully displayed a curious contrivance mounted upon his breast. It consisted of a broad metal plate, strapped across his shirt, and affixed to this plate was a flat-springed arrangement for firing, simultaneously, the contents of a revolver cylinder. To show how it worked, Jerome removed the five cartridges and then faced me.

"Tell me to throw up my hands," directed he. I did so; his palms flew into the air; and with a steely snap the mechanism was released.

Had there been cartridges in it, I should have been riddled, for I stood right in front. And I shuddered as I noted the small straps around Jerome's wrists, running up his sleeves, so disposed that the act of surrendering meant instant death to him who might demand.

"May not be ethical, Fenton"—quietly—"but it certainly is good sense to shoot first and explain later—when you're handling a chap like Avec. Better make preparations, too."

I objected. I pointed out what I have

already mentioned; that, together with the ring, the Rhamda offered our only clues to the Blind Spot. Destroy the man, and we would destroy one of our two hopes of rescuing our friends from the unthinkable fate that had overtaken them.

"No"—decisively. "We don't want to kill; we want to *keep* him. Bullets won't do. I see no reason, however, why you shouldn't load that thing with cartridges containing chemicals which would have an effect similar to that of a gas bomb. Once you can make him helpless, so that you can put those steel bracelets on him, we'll see how dangerous he is, with his hands behind him!"

"I get you"—thoughtfully. "I know a chemist who will make up 'paralysis' gas for me, in the form of gelatine capsules. Shoot 'em at the Rhamda; burst upon striking. Safe enough for me, and yet put him out of the business long enough to fit him with the jewelry."

"That's the idea."

But I had other notions about handling the Rhamda. Being satisfied that mere strength and agility were valueless against him, I concluded that he, likewise realizing this, would be on the lookout for any possible trap.

Consequently, if I hoped to keep the man, and force him to tell us what we wanted to know, then I must make use of something other than physical means. Moreover, I gave him credit for an exceptional amount of insight. Call it a superinstinct, or what you will, the fellow's intellect was transcendental.

I could not hope for success unless I equaled his intellect, or surpassed it.

Once decided that it must be a battle of wits, I took a step which may seem, at first, a little peculiar. I called upon a certain lady to whom I shall give the name of Clarke, since that is not the correct one. I took her fully and frankly into my confidence. It is the only way, when dealing with a practitioner. And since, like most of my fellow citizens, she had heard something of the come and go, elusive habits of our men, together with the Holcomb affair, it was easy for her to understand just what I wanted.

"I see," she mused. "You wish to be surrounded by an influence that will not so much protect you, as vitalize and strengthen you whenever you come in contact with Avec. It will be a simple matter. How far do you wish to go?" And thus it was arranged, the plan calling for the cooperation of some twenty of her colleagues.

My fellow engineers may sneer, if they like. I know the usual notion: that the "power of mind over matter" is all in the brain of the patient. That the efforts of the practitioner are merely inductive, and so on.

But I think the most skeptical will agree that I did quite right in seeking whatever support I could get before crossing swords with a man as keen as Avec.

Nevertheless, before an opportunity arrived to make use of the intellectual machinery which my money had started into operation, something occurred which almost threw the whole thing out of gear.

It was the evening after I had returned from Miss Clarke's office; the same day Jerome returned, the fifth after the Spot had closed upon Harry. Both Charlotte and I had a premonition, after supper, that things were about to happen. We all went into the parlor, sat down, and waited.

Presently we started the talking-machine. Jerome sat nearest the instrument, where he could, without rising, lean over and change the records. And all three of us recall that the selection being played at the moment was "I Am Climbing Mountains," a sentimental little melody sung by a popular tenor. Certainly the piece was far from being melancholy, mysterious or otherwise likely to attract the occult.

I remember that we played it twice, and it was just as the singer reached the beginning of the final chorus that Charlotte, who sat nearest the door, made a quick move in her chair and shivered, as though with the cold.

From where I sat, near the dining-room door, I could see through into the hall. Charlotte's action made me think that the door might have become unlatched, allowing a draft to come through. Afterward she said that she had felt something rather like a breeze passing her chair.

In the middle of the room stood a long, massive table, of conventional library type. Overhead was a heavy, burnished copper fixture, from which a cluster of electric bulbs threw their brilliance upward, so that the room was evenly lighted with the diffused rays as reflected from the ceiling. Thus, there were no shadows to confuse the problem.

The chorus of the song was almost through when I heard, from the direction of the table, a faint sound, as though some one had drawn fingers lightly across the polished oak. I listened; the sound was not repeated, at least not loud enough for me to catch it above the music. Next moment, however, the record came to an end; Jerome leaned forward to put on another, and Charlotte opened her mouth as though to suggest what the new selection might be. But she never said the words.

It began with a scintillating iridescence, up on the ceiling, not eight feet from where I sat. As I looked the spot grew, and spread, and flared out; it was blue, like the elusive blue of the gem; only, it was more like flame—the flame of electrical apparatus.

Then, down from that blinding radiance there crept, rather than dropped, a single thread of incandescence, vivid, with only a tinge of the color from which it had surged. Down it crept to the floor; it was like an irregular streak of lightning, hanging motionless between ceiling and floor, just for a fraction of a second. All in total silence.

And then the radiance vanished, disappeared, snuffed out as one might snuff out a candle. And in its stead—

There appeared a fourth person in the room.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE ROUSING OF A MIND.

IT was a girl; not the Nervina, that woman who had so mysteriously entered Harry Wendel's life, and who had vanished from this earth at the same time as he. No; this girl was quite another person. Even now I find it curiously hard to describe her. For me to say that she was the picture of innocence, of purity, and of dainty yet vigorous youth, is still to leave unsaid the secret of her loveliness.

For this stranger, coming out of the thin air into our midst, held me with a glorious fascination. From the first I felt no misgivings, such as Harry confesses that he experienced when he fell under the Nervina's charm. I knew, as I watched the stranger's wondering, puzzled features, that I had never before seen any one so lovely, so attractive, and so utterly beyond suspicion.

It was only later that I noted her amazingly delicate complexion, fair as her hair was golden; her deep blue eyes, round face, and girlish, supple figure; or her robe-like garments of soft, white material. For she began almost instantly to talk.

But we understood only with the greatest of difficulty. She spoke as might one who, if living in perfect solitude for a score of years, might suddenly be called upon to use language. And I remembered that Rhamda Avec had told Jerome that he had only *begun* the use of language.

"Who are you?" was her first remark, in the sweetest voice conceivable. But there was both fear and anxiety in her manner. "How—did I—get—here?"

"You came out of the Blind Spot!" I spoke, jerking out the words nervously, and, as I saw, too rapidly. I repeated them more slowly. But she did not comprehend.

"The — Blind — Spot," she pondered. "What—is that?"

Next instant, before I could think to warn her, the room trembled with the terrific clang of the Blind Spot bell. Just one overwhelming peal; no more. At the same time there came a revival of the luminous spot in the ceiling. But, with the last tones of the bell, the spot faded to nothing.

The girl was pitifully frightened. I sprang to my feet and steadied her with one hand—something that I had not dared to do as long as the Spot remained open. The touch of my fingers, as she swayed, had the effect of bringing her to herself. She listened intelligently to what I said.

"The Blind Spot"—speaking with the

utmost care—" is the name we have given to a certain mystery. It is always marked by the sound you have just heard; that bell always rings when the phenomenon is at an end."

" And—the—phenomenon," uttering the word with difficulty, " what is that?"

" You," I returned. " Up till now three human beings have disappeared into what we call the Blind Spot. You are the first to be seen coming out of it."

" Hobart," interrupted Charlotte, coming to my side. " Let me!"

I stepped back, and Charlotte quietly passed an arm around the girl's waist. Together they stepped over to Charlotte's chair; and I noted the odd way in which the newcomer walked, unsteadily, uncertainly, like a child taking its first steps. I glanced at Jerome, wondering if this tallied with what he recalled of the Rhamda; and he gave a short nod.

" Don't be frightened," said Charlotte softly, " we are your friends. In a way we have been expecting you, and we shall see to it that no harm of any kind comes to you.

" Which would you prefer—to ask questions, or to answer them?"

" I "—the girl hesitated—" I—hardly—know. Perhaps—you had—better—ask—something, first."

" Good. Do you remember where you came from? Can you recall the events just prior to your arrival here?"

The girl looked helplessly from the one to the other of us. She seemed to be searching for some clue. Finally she shook her head in a hopeless, despairing fashion.

" I can't—remember," speaking with a shade less difficulty. " The—last thing—I recall is—seeing—you three—staring—at me."

This was a poser. To think, a person who, before our very eyes, had materialized out of the Blind Spot, was unable to tell us anything about it!

Still this lack of memory might be only a temporary condition, brought on by the special conditions under which she had emerged; an after-effect, as it were, of the semi-electrical phenomena. And it turned out that I was right.

" Then," suggested Charlotte, " suppose you ask us something."

The girl's eyes stopped roving and rested definitely, steadily, upon my own. And she spoke:

" Who — are you? What is — your name?"

" Name?" taken wholly by surprise. " Ah—it is Hobart Fenton. And "—automatically — " this is my sister Charlotte. The gentleman yonder is Mr. Jerome."

" I am—glad to know—you, Hobart," with perfect simplicity and apparent pleasure; " and you, Charlotte," passing an arm around my sister's neck; " and you—mister." Evidently she thought the title of " mister " to be Jerome's first name!

Then she went on to say, her eyes coming back to mine:

" Why—do you—look at me—that way, Hobart?"

Just like that! I felt my cheeks go hot and cold by turns. For a moment I was helpless; then I made up my mind to be just as frank and candid as she.

" Because you're so good to look at!" I blurted out. " I never appreciated my eyesight as I do right now!"

" I am glad," she returned, simply, and absolutely without a trace of confusion or resentment. " I know that—I rather like—to look at you—too."

Another stunned silence. And this time I didn't notice any change of temperature in my face; I was too busily engaged in searching the depths of those warm, blue eyes.

She did not blush, or even drop her eyes. She smiled, however, a gentle, tremulous smile that showed some deep feeling behind her unwavering gaze. And her breast heaved slightly.

I recovered myself with a start. Was I to take advantage of her ignorance? As things stood, the girl was as innocent and impressionable as an infant. I drew my chair up in front of her and took both her hands firmly in mine. Whereupon my resolution nearly deserted me. How warm, and soft, and altogether adorable they were. I drew a long breath and began:

" My dear miss—ah— By the way, what is your name?"

"I"—regretfully, after a moment's thought—"I don't know, Hobart."

"Quite so," as though the fact were commonplace. "We will have to provide you with a name. Any suggestions, sis?"

Charlotte hesitated only a second. "Let's call her Ariadne; it was Harry's mother's name."

"That's so; fine! Do you like that name—Ariadne?"

"Yes," both pleased and relieved. At the same time she looked oddly puzzled, and I could see her lips moving silently as she repeated the name to herself once or twice.

Not for an instant did I let go of those wonderful fingers. "What I want you to know, Ariadne, is that you have come into a world that is, perhaps, more or less like the one you have just left. For all I know it is one and the same world, only, in some fashion not yet understood, you may have transported yourself to this place. Perhaps not.

"Now, we call this a room, a part of a house. Outside is a street. That street is one of hundreds in a vast city, which consists of a multitude of such houses, together with other and vastly larger structures. And these structures all rest upon a solid material, which we call the ground or earth.

"The fact that you understand our language indicates that either you have fallen heir to a body and brain which are thoroughly in tune with ours, or else—and please understand that we know very, very little of this mystery—or else your own body has somehow become translated into a condition which answers the same purpose.

"At any rate, you ought to comprehend what I mean by the term 'earth.' Do you?"

"Oh, yes," brightly. "I seem to understand everything you say, Hobart."

"Then there is a corresponding picture in your mind to each thought I have given you?"

"I think so," not so positively.

"Well," hoping that I could make it clear, "this earth is formed in a huge globe, part of which is covered by another material, which we term water. And the portions which are not so covered, and are capable of supporting the structures which constitute this city, we call by still another name. Can you supply that name?"

"Continents," without hesitation.

"Fine!" This was a starter anyhow. "We'll soon have your memory working, Ariadne!

"However, what I really began to say is this: each of these continents—and they are several in number—is inhabited by people more or less like ourselves. There is a vast number, all told. Each is either male or female, like ourselves—you seem to take this for granted, however—and you will find them all exceedingly interesting.

"Now, in all fairness," letting go her hands at last, "you must understand that there are, among the people whom you have yet to see, great numbers who are far more—well, attractive, than I am.

"And you must know," even taking my gaze away, "that not all persons are as friendly as we. You will find some who are antagonistic to you, and likely to take advantage of—well, your unsophisticated view-point. In short"—desperately—"you must learn right away not to accept people without question; you must form the habit of reserving judgment, of waiting until you have more facts, before reaching an opinion of others.

"You must do this as a matter of self-protection, and in the interests of your greatest welfare." And I stopped.

She seemed to be thinking over what I had said. In the end she observed:

"This seems—reasonable. I—feel sure that—wherever I came from—such advice—would have—fit.

"However"—smiling at me in a manner to which I can give no name other than affectionate—"I have—no doubts—about you, Hobart. I know you—are all right."

And before I could recover from the bliss into which her statement threw me, she turned to Charlotte with, "You, too, Charlotte; I know—I can trust you."

But when she looked at Jerome she commented: "I can trust you—mister—too; almost as much—but not quite. If—you didn't suspect me, I—could trust you—completely."

Jerome went white. He spoke for the first time since the girl's coming.

"How—how did you know that I suspect you?"

"I—can't explain; I don't know—myself." Then, wistfully: "I wish — you would quit—suspecting me, mister. I have nothing—to conceal from you."

"I know it!" Jerome burst out, excitedly, apologetically. "I know it now! You're all right, little girl; I'm satisfied of that from now on!"

She sighed in pure pleasure. And she offered one hand to Jerome. He took it as though it were a humming-bird's egg, and turned almost purple. At the same time the honest, fervid manliness which backed the detective's professional nature shone through for the first time in my knowledge of him. From that moment his devotion to the girl was as absolute as that of the fondest father who ever lived.

Well, no need to detail all that was said during the next hour. Bit by bit we added to the girl's knowledge of the world into which she had emerged, and bit by bit there unfolded in her mind a corresponding image of the world from which she had come. With increasing readiness she supplied unexpressed thoughts; and when, for an experiment, we took her out on the front porch and showed her the stars, we were fairly amazed at the thoughts they aroused.

"Oh!" she cried, in sheer rapture. "I know what those are!" By now she was speaking fairly well. "They are stars!" Then: "They don't look the same—they're not outlined the same as what I know; but —they can't be anything else!"

Not outlined the same. I took this to be a very significant fact. What did it mean?

"Look"—showing her the constellation Leo, on the ecliptic, and therefore visible to both the northern and southern hemispheres—"do you recognize that?"

"Yes," decisively. "That is, the arrangement; but not the appearance of the —the separate stars."

And we found this to be true of the entire sky. Nothing was entirely familiar to her; yet, she assured us, the stars could be nothing else. Her previous knowledge told her this, without explaining why, and without a hint as to the reason for the dissimilarity.

"Is it possible," said I, speaking half to myself, "that she has come from another planet?"

For we know that the sky, as seen from any one of the eight planets in this solar system, would present practically the same appearance; but if viewed from a planet belonging to any other star-sun, the constellations would be more or less altered in their arrangement, because of the vast distances involved. As for the difference in the appearance of the individual stars, that might be accounted for by a dissimilarity in the chemical make-up of the atmosphere.

"Ariadne, it may be you've come from another world!"

"No," seemingly quite unconscious that she was contradicting me. For that matter there wasn't anything at all offensive about her kind of frankness. "No, Hobart. I feel too much at home to have come from any other world than this one."

Temporarily I was floored. How could she, so ignorant of other matters, feel so sure of this?

We went back into the house. As it happened, my eye struck first the phonograph. And it seemed a good idea to test her knowledge with this device.

"Is this apparatus familiar to you?"

"No. What is it for?"

"Do you understand what is meant by the term 'music'?"

"Yes," with instant pleasure. "This is music." And she proceeded, without the slightest self-consciousness, to sing in a sweet clear soprano, and treated us to the chorus of "I Am Climbing Mountains!"

"Good Heavens!" gasped Charlotte. "What can it mean?"

For a moment the explanation evaded me. Then I reasoned: "She must have a sub-conscious memory of what was being played just before she materialized."

And to prove this, I picked out an instrumental piece which we had not played at all that evening. It was the finale of the overture to "Faust"; a selection, by the way, which was a great favorite of Harry's, and is one of mine. Ariadne listened in silence to the end.

"I seem to have heard something like it before," she decided slowly. "The melody, not the—the instrumentation.

"But it reminds me of something that—I like very much." Whereupon she again sang for us. But this time her voice was stronger and more dramatic; and as for the composition—all I can say is it had a wild, fierce ring to it, like "Men of Harlech"; only the notes did not correspond to the chromatic scale. She sang in *an entirely new musical system.*

"By George!" when she had done. "Now we *have* got something! For the first time, folks, we've heard some genuine, unadulterated Blind Spot stuff!"

"You mean," from Charlotte, excitedly, "that she has finally recovered her memory?"

It was the girl herself who answered. She shot to her feet, and her face became transfigured with a wonderful joy. At the same time she blinked hurriedly, as though to shut off a sight that staggered her.

"Oh, I remember! I"—she almost sobbed in her delight—"it—it is all plain to me, now! I know—who I am!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE RHAMDA AGAIN.

I COULD have yelled for joy. We were about to learn something of the Blind Spot—something that might help us to save Harry, and Chick, and the professor!

Ariadne seemed to know that a great deal depended upon what she was about to tell us. She deliberately sat down, and rested her chin upon her hand, as though determining upon the best way of telling something very difficult to express.

As for Charlotte, Jerry, and myself, we managed somehow to restrain our curiosity enough to keep silence. But we could not help glancing more or less wonderingly at our visitor. Presently I realized this, and got up and walked about quietly, as though intent upon a problem of my own.

Which was true enough. I had come to a very startling conclusion—I, Hobart Fenton, had fallen in love!

What was more, this affection of the heart had come to me, a very strong man, just as an affection of the lungs is said to strike such men—all of a sudden and hard. One moment I had been a sturdy, independent soul, intent upon a scientific investigation, the only symptoms of sentimental potentialities being my perfectly normal love for my sister and for my old friend. Then, before my very eyes, I had been smitten thus!

And the worst part of it was, I found myself *enjoying* the sensation. It made not the slightest difference to me that I had fallen in love with a girl who was only a step removed from a wraith. Mysteriously she had come to me; as mysteriously she might depart. I even had yet to know from what sort of a country she had come!

But that made no difference. She was *here,* in the same house with me; I had held her hands; and I knew her to be very, very real indeed just then. And when I considered the possibility of her disappearing just as inexplicably as she had come—well, my face went cold, I admit; but at the same time I felt sure of this much—I should never love any other woman.

The thought left me sober. I paused in my pacing and looked at her. As though in answer to my gaze, she glanced up and smiled so affectionately that it was all I could do to keep from leaping forward and taking her right into my arms.

I turned hastily, and to cover my confusion I began to hum a strain from the part of "Faust" to which I have referred. I hummed it through, and was beginning again, when I was startled to hear this from the girl:

"Oh, then you are Hobart!"

I wheeled, to see her face filled with a wonderful light.

"Hobart!" she repeated, as one might repeat the name of a very dear one. "That—that music you were humming! Why, I heard Harry Wendel humming that yesterday!"

I suppose we looked pretty stupid, the three of us, so dumfounded that we could do nothing but gape incredulously at that extraordinary creature and her equally extraordinary utterance. She immediately did her best to atone for her sensation.

"I'm not sure that I can make it clear," she said, smiling dubiously, "but if you will use your imaginations and try to fill in the gaps in what I say you may get a fair idea of the place I have come from, and where your Harry is."

We leaned forward, intensely alert. I shall never forget the pitiful eagerness in poor Charlotte's face. It meant more to her, perhaps, than to any one else.

At that precise instant I heard a sound, off in the breakfast room. It seemed to be a subdued knocking, or rather a pounding, at the door.

Frowning at the interruption, I stepped through the dining-room into the breakfast room, where the sounds came from. And I was not a little puzzled to note that the door to the basement was receiving the blows.

Now, I had been the last to visit the basement, and had locked the door—from force of habit, I suppose—leaving the key in the lock. It was still there. And—there is but one way to enter that basement: through this one door, and no other.

"Who is it?" I called out peremptorily.

No answer; only a repetition of the pounds.

"What do you want?"—louder.

"Open this door, quick!" came a muffled reply.

The voice was unrecognizable. I stood and thought quickly; then I shouted:

"Wait a minute, until I get a key!"

I motioned to Charlotte. She tiptoed to my side. I whispered something in her ear; and she slipped off into the kitchen, there to phone Miss Clarke and warn her to notify her colleagues at once. And so, as I unlocked and opened the basement door, I was fortified by the knowledge that I would be assisted by the combined mind-force of a score of highly developed intellects.

I was a little surprised, a second later, to see that the intruder was Rhamda Avec. What reason to expect any one else?

"How did you get down there?" I demanded. "Don't you realize that you are liable to arrest for trespass?"

I said it merely to start conversation. But it served only to bring a slight smile to the face of this professed friend of ours, for whom we felt nothing but distrust and fear.

"Let us not waste time in trivialities, Fenton," he rejoined gently. He brushed a fleck of cobweb from his coat. "By this time you ought to know that you cannot deal with me in any ordinary fashion."

I made no comment as, without asking my leave or awaiting an invitation, he stepped through into the dining-room and thence into the parlor. I followed, half tempted to strike him down from behind, but restrained more by the fact that I must spare him than from any compunctions. Seemingly he knew this as well as I; he was serenely at ease.

And thus he stood before Jerome and Ariadne. The detective made a single sharp exclamation, and furtively shifted his coat sleeves. He was getting that infernal breast gun into action. As for Ariadne, she stared at the new arrival as though astonished, at first.

When Charlotte returned, a moment later, she showed only mild surprise. She quietly took her chair and as quietly moved her hand so that the gem shone in full view of our visitor.

But he gave her and the stone only a single glance, and then rested his eyes upon our new friend. To my anxiety, Ariadne was gazing fixedly at him now, her expression combining both agitation and a vague fear.

It could not have been due entirely to his unusual appearance; for there was no denying that this gray-haired yet youth-faced man with the distinguished, courteous bearing, looked even younger that night than ever before. No; the girl's concern was deeper, more acute. I felt an unaccountable alarm.

From Ariadne to me the Rhamda glanced, then back again; and a quick, satisfied smile came to his mouth. He gave an almost imperceptible nod. And, keeping his gaze fixed upon her eyes, he remarked carelessly:

"Which of these chairs shall I sit in, Fenton?"

"This one," I replied instantly, pointing to the one I had just quit.

Smiling, he selected a Roman chair a few feet away.

Whereupon I congratulated myself. The man feared me, then; yet he ranked my mentality no higher than that! In other words, remarkably clever though he might be, and as yet unthwarted, he could by no means be called omnipotent. He was limited; hence he was human, or something likewise imperfect, and likewise understandable if only my own mind might become—

"For your benefit, Mr. Jerome, let me say that I telephoned Miss Fenton and her brother a few days ago, and urged them to give up their notion of occupying this house or of attempting to solve the mystery that you are already acquainted with. And I prophesied, Mr. Jerome, that their refusal to accept my advice would be followed by events that would justify me.

"They refused, as you know; and I am here to-night to make a final plea, so that they may escape the consequences of their wilfulness."

"You're a crook! And the more I see of you, Avec, the more easily I can understand why they turned you down!"

"So you, too, are prejudiced against me," regretted the man in the Roman chair. "I cannot understand this. My motives are quite above question, I assure you."

"Really!" I observed sarcastically. I stole a glance at Ariadne; her eyes were still riveted, in a rapt yet half-fearful abstraction, upon the face of the Rhamda. It was time I took her attention away.

I called her name. She did not move her head, or reply. I said it louder: "Ariadne!"

"What is it, Hobart?"—very softly.

"Ariadne—this gentleman possesses a great deal of knowledge of the locality from which you came. We are interested in him, because we feel sure that, if he chose to, he could tell us something about our friends who—about Harry Wendel." Why not lay the cards plainly on the table? The Rhamda must be aware of it all, anyhow. "And as this gentleman has said, he has tried to prevent us from solving the mystery. It occurs to me, Ariadne, that you might recognize this man. But apparently—"

She shook her head just perceptibly. I proceeded:

"He is pleased to call his warning a prophecy; but we feel that a threat is a threat. What he really wants is that ring."

Ariadne had already, earlier in the hour, given the gem several curious glances. Now she stirred and sighed, and was about to turn her eyes from the Rhamda to the ring when he spoke again; this time in a voice as sharp as a steel blade:

"I do not enjoy being misunderstood, much less being misrepresented, Mr. Fenton. At the same time, since you have seen fit to brand me in such uncomplimentary terms, suppose I state what I have to say very bluntly, so that there may be no mistake about it. If you do not either quit this house, or give up that ring—*now*—you will surely regret it the rest of your lives!"

From the corner of my eye I saw Jerome moving slowly in his chair, so that he could face directly toward the Rhamda. His hands were ready for the swift, upward jerk which, I knew, would stifle our caller.

As for my sister, she merely turned the ring so that the gem no longer faced the Rhamda; and with the other hand she reached out and grasped Ariadne's firmly.

Avec sat with his two hands clasping the arms of that chair. His fingers drummed nervously but lightly on the wood. And then, suddenly, they stopped their motion.

"Your answer, Fenton," in his usual gentle voice. "I can give you no more time."

I did not need to consult Charlotte or Jerome. I knew what they would have said.

"You are welcome to my answer. It is—no!"

As I spoke the last word my gaze was fixed upon the Rhamda's eyes. He, on the other hand, was looking toward Ariadne. And at that very instant an expression, as of alarm and sorrow, swept into the man's face.

My glance jumped to Ariadne. Her eyes were closed, her face suffused; she seemed to be suffocating. She gave a queer little sound, half gasp and half cry.

Simultaneously Jerome's hands shot into

the air. The room shivered with the stunning report of his breast gun. And every pellet struck the Rhamda and burst.

A look of intense astonishment came into his face. He gave Jerome a fleeting glance, almost of admiration; then his nostrils contracted with pain as the deadly gas attacked his lungs.

Another second, and each of us was reeling with the fumes. Jerome started toward the window, to raise it, then sank back into his chair. And when he turned around—

He and I and Charlotte saw an extraordinary thing. Instead of succumbing to the gas, Rhamda Avec somehow recovered himself. And while the rest of us remained still too numb to move or speak, he found power to do both.

"I warned you plainly, Fenton," as though nothing in particular had happened. "And now see what you have brought upon that poor child!"

I could only roll my head stupidly, to stare at Ariadne's now senseless form.

"As usual, Fenton, you will blame me for it. I cannot help that. But it may still be possible for you to repent of your folly and escape your fate. You are playing with terrible forces. If you do repent, just follow these instructions"—laying a card on the table—"and I will see what I can do for you. I wish you good night, every one."

And with that, pausing only to make a courtly bow to Charlotte, Rhamda Avec turned and walked deliberately, dignifiedly from the room, while two men and a woman stared helplessly after him and allowed him to go in peace.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE LIVING DEATH.

As soon as the fresh air had revived us somewhat, we first of all examined Ariadne. She still lay unconscious, very pale, and alarmingly limp. I picked her up and carried her into the next room, where there was a sofa, while Jerome went for water and Charlotte brought smelling-salts.

Neither of these had any effect. Ariadne seemed to be scarcely breathing; her heart beat only faintly, and there was no response to such other methods as friction, slapping, or pinching of finger-nails.

"We had better call a doctor," decided Charlotte promptly, and went to the phone.

I picked up the card which the Rhamda had left. It contained simply his name, together with one other word—the name of a morning newspaper. Evidently he meant for us to insert an advertisement as soon as we were ready to capitulate.

"Not yet!" the three of us decided, after talking it over. And we waited as patiently as we could during the fifteen minutes that elapsed before the telephoning got results.

It brought Dr. Hansen, who, it may be remembered, was closely identified with the Chick Watson disappearance. He made a rapid but careful examination.

"It has all the appearance of a mild electrical shock. What caused it, Fenton?"

I told him. His eyes narrowed when I mentioned Avec, then widened in astonishment and incredulity as I related the man's inexplicable effect upon the girl, and his equally inexplicable immunity to the poison gas. But the doctor asked nothing further about our situation, proceeding at once to apply several restoratives. All were without result. As a final resort, he even rigged up an electrical connection, making use of some coils which I had upstairs, and endeavored to rouse the girl in that fashion. Still without result.

"Good Lord, Hansen!" I finally burst out, when he stood back, apparently baffled. "She's simply *got* to be revived! We can't allow her to succumb to that damned scoundrel's power, whatever it is!"

"Why not a blood transfusion?" eagerly, as an idea came to me. "I'm in perfect condition. Go to it, doc!"

He slowly shook his head. And beyond a single searching glance into my eyes, wherein he must have read something more than I had said, he regretfully replied:

"This is a case for a specialist, Fenton. Everything considered, I should say that she is suffering from a purely mental condition; but whether it had a physical or a psychic origin, I can't say."

In short, he did not feel safe about going ahead with any really heroic measures until a brain specialist had given his opinion.

I had a good deal of confidence in Hansen. And what he said sounded reasonable. So we agreed to his calling in a Dr. Higgins—the same man, in fact, who was too late in reaching the house to save Chick on that memorable night a year before.

His examination was swift and convincingly competent. He went over the same ground that Hansen had covered, took the blood pressure and other instrumental data, and asked us several questions regarding Ariadne's mentality as we knew it. Scarcely without stopping to think it over, Higgins decided:

"The young woman is suffering from a temporary disassociation of brain centers. Her cerebrum does not coact with her cerebellum. In other words, her conscious mind, for lack of means to express itself, is for the time being dormant as in sleep.

"But it is not like ordinary sleep. Such is induced by fatigue of the nerve channels. This young woman's condition is produced by shock; and since there was no physical violence, we must conclude that the shock was psychic.

"In that case, the condition will last until one of two things occurs: either she must be similarly shocked back into sensibility—and I can't see how this can happen, Fenton, unless you can secure the cooperation of the man to whom you attribute the matter—or she must lie that way indefinitely."

"Indefinitely!" I exclaimed, sensing something ominous. "You mean—"

"That there is no known method of reviving a patient in such a condition. It might be called psychic catalepsy. To speak plainly, Fenton, unless this man revives her, she will remain unconscious until her death."

I shuddered. What horrible thing had come into our lives to afflict us with so dreadful a prospect?

"Is—is there no hope, Dr. Higgins?"

"Very little"—gently but decisively. "All I can assure you is that she will not die immediately. From the general state of her health, she will live at least forty-eight hours. After that—brace yourself, man!—you must be prepared for the worst at any moment."

I turned away quickly, so that he could not see my face. What an awful situation! Poor little girl, stricken in this fashion through my own stubbornness—how, I didn't know—but stricken like that! Unless we could somehow lay hands on the Rhamda—

I hunted up Jerome. I said:

"Jerry, the thing is plainly up to you and me. Higgins gives us two days. Day after to-morrow morning, if we haven't got results by that time, we've got to give in and put that ad in the paper. But I don't mean to give in, Jerry! Not until I've exhausted every other possibility!"

"What 're you going to do?"—thoughtfully.

"Work on that ring. I was a fool not to get busy sooner. That gem can probably tell me a part of the truth. As for the rest, that's up to you! You've got to get yourself on the Rhamda's trail as soon as you can, and camp there! The first chance you get, ransack his room and belongings, and bring me every bit of data you find. Between him and the ring, the truth ought to come out."

"All right. But don't forget that—" pointing to the unexplained spot on the wood of the doorway. "You've got a mighty important clue there, waiting for you to analyze it."

And he went and got his hat, and left the house. His final remark was that we wouldn't see him back until he had something to report about our man.

Five o'clock the next morning found my sister and me out of our beds and desperately busy. She spent a good deal of time, of course, in caring for Ariadne. The poor girl showed no improvement at all; and we got scant encouragement from the fact that she looked no worse. But she lay there, the fairylike thing that she was, making me wonder if nature had ever intended such a treasure to become ill. Not a sound escaped her lips; her eyes remained closed; she gave no sign of life, save her barely perceptible breathing and her other automatic functions. It made me sick at

heart just to look at her; so near, and yet so fearfully far away!

But when Charlotte could spare any time she gave me considerable help in what I was trying to do. One great service she rendered has already been made clear: she wore the ring constantly, thus relieving me of the anxiety of caring for it. I was mighty cautious not to have it in my possession more than a few minutes at a time.

My first move was to set down, in orderly fashion, the list of the gem's attributes. I grouped together the fluctuating nature of its pale-blue color, its power of reproducing those who had gone into the Blind Spot, its combination of perfect solidity with extreme lightness; its quality of coldness to the touch of a male, and warmth to that of a female; and finally its ability to induct—I think this is the right term—to induct sounds out of the unknown. This last quality might be called spasmodic or accidental, whereas the others were permanent and constant.

Now, to this list I presently was able to add that the gem possessed no radioactive properties that I could detect with the usual means. It was only when I began dabbling in chemistry that I learned things.

By placing the gem inside a glass bell, and exhausting as much air as possible from around it, the way was cleared for introducing other forms of gases. Whereupon I discovered this:

The stone will absorb any given quantity of hydrogen gas.

In this respect it behaves analogously to that curious place on the door-frame. Only, it absorbs gas, no liquid; and not any gas, either—none but hydrogen.

Now, obviously this gem cannot truly absorb so much material, in the sense of retaining it as well. The simple test of weighing it afterward proves this; for its weight remains the same under any circumstances.

Moreover, unlike the liquids which I poured into the wood and saw afterward in the basement, the gas does not afterward escape back into the air. I kept it under a bell long enough to be sure of that. No; that hydrogen is, manifestly, translated into the Blind Spot.

Learning nothing further about the gem at that time, I proceeded to investigate the trim on the door. I began by trying to find out the precise thickness of that liquid-absorbing layer.

To do this, I scraped off the "skin" of the air-darkened wood. This layer was .02 inch thick. And—that was the total amount of the active material!

I put these scrapings through a long list of experiments. They told me nothing valuable. I learned only one detail worth mentioning: if a fragment of the scrapings be brought near to the Holcomb gem—say, to within two inches—the scrapings will burst into flame. It is merely a bright, pinkish flare, like that made by smokeless rifle-powder. No ashes remain. After that we took care not to bring the ring near to the remaining material on the board.

All this occurred on the first day after Ariadne was stricken. Jerome phoned to say that he had engaged the services of a dozen private detectives, and expected to get wind of the Rhamda any hour. Both Dr. Hansen and Dr. Higgins called twice, without being able to detect any change for the better or otherwise in their patient.

That evening Charlotte and I concluded that we could not hold out any longer. We must give in to the Rhamda. I phoned for a messenger, and sent an advertisement to the newspaper which Avec had indicated.

The thing was done. We had capitulated.

The next development would be another and a triumphant call from the Rhamda, and this time we would have to give up the gem to him if we were to save Ariadne. The game was up.

But instead of taking the matter philosophically, I worried about it all night. I told myself again and again that I was foolish to think about something that couldn't be helped. Why not forget it, and go to sleep?

But somehow I couldn't. I lay wide awake till long past midnight, finding myself growing more and more nervous. At last, such was the tension of it all, I got up and dressed. It was then about one-thirty, and I stepped out on the street for a walk.

Half an hour later I returned, my lungs

full of fresh air, hoping that I could now sleep. It was only a hope. Never have I felt wider awake than then.

Once more—about three—I took another stroll outside. I seemed absolutely tireless. Each time that I turned back I seemed to feel stronger than ever, more wakeful. Finally I dropped the idea altogether, went to the house, and left a note for Charlotte, then walked down to the water-front and watched some ships taking advantage of the tide. Anything to pass the time.

And thus it happened that, about eight o'clock—breakfast time at 288 Chatterton—I returned to the house, and sat down at the table with Charlotte. First, however, I opened the morning paper, to read our little ad.

It was not there. It had not been printed.

CHAPTER XXV.

AT THE ELEVENTH HOUR.

I DROPPED the paper in dismay. Charlotte looked up, startled, gave me a single look, and turned pale.

"What—what's the matter?" she stammered fearfully.

I showed her. Then I ran to the phone. In a few seconds I was talking to the very man who had taken the note from the messenger the day before.

"Yes, I handed it in along with the rest of the dope," he replied to my excited query. Then— "Wait a minute," said he; and a moment later added: "Say—by jinks, Mr. Fenton, I've made a mistake! Here's the darned ad on the counter; it must have slipped under the blotter."

I went back and told Charlotte. We stared at one another blankly. Why in the name of all that was baffling had our ad "slipped" under that blotter? And—what were we to do?

This was the second day!

Well, we did what we could. We inserted the same notice in each of the three afternoon papers. There was still time for the Rhamda to act, if he saw it.

The hours dragged by. Never did time pass more slowly; and yet, I begrudged every one. So much for being absolutely helpless.

About ten o'clock that morning—that is to say, to-day; I am writing this the same evening—the front door bell rang. Charlotte answered, and in a moment came back with a card. It read:

SIR HENRY HODGES

I nearly upset the table in my excitement. I ran into the parlor like a boy going to a fire. Who wouldn't? Sir Henry Hodges! The English scientist about whom the whole world was talking! The most gifted investigator of the day; the most widely informed; of all men on the face of the globe, the best equipped, mentally, to explore the unknown! Without the slightest formality I grabbed his hand and shook it until he smiled at my enthusiasm.

"My dear Sir Henry," I told him, "I'm immensely glad to see you! The truth is, I've been hoping you'd interest yourself in our case; but I didn't have the nerve to bother you with it!"

"And I," he admitted in his quiet way, "have been longing to take a hand in it, ever since I first heard of Professor Holcomb's disappearance. Didn't like to offer myself; understood that the matter had been hushed up, and—"

"For the very simple reason," I explained, "that there was nothing to be gained by publicity. If we had given the facts to the public, we would have been swamped with volunteers to help us. I didn't know whom to confide in, Sir Henry; couldn't make up my mind. I only knew that one such man as yourself was just what I needed."

He overlooked the compliment, and pulled a newspaper from his pocket. "Bought this from a boy in the Mission a few minutes ago. Saw your ad, and jumped to the conclusion that matters had reached an acute stage. Let me have the whole story, my boy, as briefly as you can."

He already knew the published details. Also, he seemed to be acquainted—in some

manner which was a puzzle to me—with much that had not been printed. I sketched the affair as swiftly as I could, making it clear that we were face to face with a crisis. When I wound up by saying that it was Dr. Higgins who gave Ariadne two days, ending about midnight, in which she might recover if we could secure Rhamda Avec, Sir Henry gave me just such a sharp glance as the doctor had given me; only, the Englishman reached out and squeezed one of my hands in silence. Then he said kindly:

"I'm afraid you made a mistake, my boy, in not seeking some help. The game has reached a point where you cannot have too many brains on your side. Time, in short, for reenforcements!"

He heartily approved of my course in enlisting the aid of Miss Clarke and her colleagues. "That is the sort of thing you need! People with mentalities; plenty of intellectual force!" And he went on to make suggestions.

As a result, within an hour and a half our house was sheltering five more persons, to whom I should have to devote several chapters if I did full justice to their achievements. But I have space here only for a mention.

Miss Clarke has already been introduced. She was easily one of the ten most advanced practitioners in her line. And she had the advantage of a curiosity that was interested in everything odd, even though she labeled it "non-existent." She said it helped her faith in the real truths to be conversant with the unreal.

Dr. Malloy was from the university, an out-and-out materialist, a psychologist who made life interesting for those who agreed with James. His investigations of abnormal psychology are world-acknowledged.

Mme. Le Fabre, we afterward learned, had come from Versailles especially to investigate the matter that was bothering us. Which is all that needs be said of this internationally famous inquirer into mysteries. She possessed no mediumistic properties of her own, but was a stanch proponent of spiritism, believing firmly in immortality and the omnipotence of "translated" souls.

Professor Herold is most widely known as the inventor of certain apparata such as finally perfected the wireless phone. But it goes without saying that, from Berlin to Brazil, Herold is considered the west's most advanced student of electrical and radio-active subjects. I was enormously glad to have his expert, high-tension knowledge right on tap.

The remaining member of the quintette which Sir Henry advised me to summon requires a little explanation. Also, I am obliged to give him a name not his own; for it is not often that brigadier-generals of the United States army can openly lend their names to anything so far removed, apparently, from militarism as the searching of the occult.

Yet we knew that this man possessed a power that few scientists have developed: the power of coordination, of handling and balancing great facts and forces, and of deciding promptly how best to meet any given situation. Not that we looked for anything militaristic out of the Blind Spot; far from it. We merely knew not what to expect, which was exactly why we wanted to have him with us; his type of mind is, perhaps, the most solidly comforting sort that any mystery-bound person can have at his side.

By the time these five had gathered, Jerome had neither returned nor telephoned. There was not the slightest trace of Rhamda Avec; no guessing as to whether he had seen that ad. It was then one o'clock in the afternoon. Only six hours ago! It doesn't seem possible.

So there were eight of us—three women and five men—who went up-stairs and quietly inspected the all but lifeless form of Ariadne and afterward gathered in the library below.

All were thoroughly familiar with the situation. Miss Clarke calmly commented to the effect that the entire Blind Spot affair was due wholly and simply to the cumulative effects of so many, many mistaken beliefs on such subjects; the result, in other words, of error.

Dr. Malloy was equally outspoken in his announcement that he proposed to deal with the matter from the standpoint of psychic aberration. He mentioned disas-

sociated personalities, group hypnosis, and so on. But he declared that he was open to conviction, and anxious to get any and all facts.

Sir Henry had a good deal of difficulty in getting Mme. Le Fabre to commit herself. Probably she felt that, since Sir Henry had gone on record as being doubtful of the spiritistic explanation of psychic phenomena, she might start a controversy with him. But in the end she stated that she expected to find our little mystery simply a novel variation upon what was so familiar to her.

As might be supposed, General Hume had no opinion. He merely expressed himself as being prepared to accept any sound theory, or portions of such theories as might be advanced, and arrive at a workable conclusion therefrom. Which was exactly what we wanted of him. "I know it"—calmly.

Of them all, Professor Herold showed the most enthusiasm. Perhaps this was because, despite his attainments, he is still young. At any rate, he made it clear that he was fully prepared to learn something entirely new—"as new as the Roentgen rays a generation ago"—and almost eager to adjust his previous notions and facts to the new discoveries.

When all these various view-points had been cleared up, and we felt that we understood each other, it was inevitable that we should look to Sir Henry to state his position. This one man combined a large amount of the various, specialized abilities for which the others were noted, and they all knew and respected him accordingly. Had he stood and theorized half the afternoon, they would willingly have sat and listened. But instead he glanced at his watch, and observed:

"To me, the most important development of all was hearing the sound of a dog's bark coming from that ring. As I recall the details, the sound was emitted just after the gem had been submitted to considerable handling, from Miss Fenton's fingers to her brother's, and back again. In other words, it was subjected to a mixture of opposing animal magnetisms. Suppose we experiment further with it now."

Charlotte slipped the gem from her finger and passed it around. Each of us held it for a second or two; after which Charlotte clasped the ring tightly in her palm, while we all joined hands.

It was, as I have said, broad daylight; the hour, shortly after one. Scarcely had our hands completed the circuit than something happened.

From out of Charlotte's closed hand there issued an entirely new sound. At first it was so faint and fragmentary that only one or two of us heard; then it became stronger and more continuous, and presently we were all gazing at each other in wonderment.

For the sound was that of footsteps.

CHAPTER XXVI.

DIRECT FROM PARADISE.

THE sound was not like that of the walking of a human. Nor was it such as an animal would make. It was neither a thud nor a pattering, but more like a scratching shuffle, such as reminded me of nothing that I had ever heard before.

Next moment, however, there came another sort of a sound, plainly audible above the footsteps. This was a thin, musical chuckle which ended in a deep, but faint, organlike throb. It happened only once.

Immediately it was followed by a steady clicking, such as might be made by gently striking a stick against a pavement; only sharper. This lasted a minute, during which the other sounds ceased.

Once more the footsteps. They were not very loud, but in the stillness of that room they all but resounded.

Presently Charlotte could stand it no longer. She placed the ring on the table, where it continued to emit those unplaceable sounds.

"Well! Do—do you people," stammered Dr. Malloy, "do you people all hear *that?*"

Miss Clarke's face was rather pale. But her mouth was firm. "It is nothing," said she, with theosophical positiveness. "You must not believe—it is not the truth of—"

"Pardon me," interrupted Sir Henry; "but this isn't something to argue about! It is a reality; and the sooner we all admit it, the better. There is a living creature of some kind making that sound!"

"It is the spirit of some two-footed creature," asserted the *madame*, plainly at her ease. She was on familiar ground now. "If only we had a medium!"

Abruptly the sounds left the vicinity of the ring. At first we could not locate their new position. Then Herold declared that they came from under the table; and presently we were all gathered on the floor around the place, listening to those odd little sounds; while the ring remained thirty inches above, on top of the table!

It may be that the thing, whatever it was, did not care for such a crowd. For shortly the shuffling ceased. And for a while we stared and listened, scarcely breathing, trying to locate the new position.

Finally we went back to our chairs. We had heard nothing further. Nevertheless, we continued to keep silence, with our ears alert for anything more.

"Hush!" whispered Charlotte all of a sudden. "Did you hear that?" And she looked up toward the ceiling.

In a moment I caught the sound. It was exceedingly faint, like the distant thrumming of a zither. Only it was a single note, which did not rise and fall, although there seemed a continual variation in its volume.

Unexpectedly the other sounds came again, down under the table. This time we remained in our seats and simply listened. And presently Sir Henry, referring to the ring, made this suggestion:

"Suppose we seal it up, and see whether it inducts the sound then as well as when exposed."

This appealed to Herold very strongly; the others were agreeable; so I ran upstairs to my room and secured a small, screw-top metal canister, which I knew to be air-tight. It was necessary to remove the stone from the ring, in order to get it into the opening in the can. Presently this was done; and while our invisible visitor continued its scratchy little walking as before, I screwed the top of the can down as tightly as I could.

Instantly the footsteps halted.

I unscrewed the top a trifle. As instantly the stepping was resumed.

"Ah!" cried Herold. "It's a question of radio-activity, then! Remember Le Bon's experiments, Sir Henry?"

"Right-o," returned the Englishman coolly.

But Miss Clarke was sorely mystified by this simple matter, and herself repeated the experiment. Equally puzzled was Mme. Le Fabre. According to her theory, a spirit wouldn't mind a little thing like a metal box. Of them all, Dr. Malloy was the least disturbed; so decidedly so that General Hume eyed him quizzically.

"Fine bunch of hallucinations, doctor."

"Almost commonplace," retorted Malloy.

Presently I mentioned that the Rhamda had come from the basement on the night that Ariadne materialized; and I showed that the only possible route into the cellar was through the locked door in the breakfast room, since the windows were all too small, and there was no other door. Query: How had the Rhamda got there?

Immediately they all became alert. As Herold said:

"One thing or the other is true: either there is something down-stairs which has escaped you, Fenton, or else Avec is able to materialize any place he chooses. Let's look!"

We all went down except Charlotte, who went up-stairs to stay with Ariadne. By turns, each of us held the ring. And as we unlocked the basement door we noted that the invisible, walking creature had reached there before us.

Down the steps went those unseen little feet, jumping from one step to the next just ahead of us all the way. When within three or four steps of the bottom, the creature made one leap do for them all.

I had previously run an extension cord down into the basement, and both compartments could now be lighted by powerful incandescents. We gave the place a quick examination.

"What's all this newly turned earth mean?" inquired Sir Henry, pointing to the result of Jerome's effort a few months before. And I explained how he and Harry, on the chance that the basement might contain some clue as to the localization of the Blind Spot, had dug without result in the bluish clay.

Sir Henry picked up the spade, which had never been moved from where Jerome had dropped it. And while I went on to tell about the pool of liquids, which for some unknown reason had not seeped into the soil since forming there, the Englishman proceeded to dig vigorously into the heap I had mentioned.

The rest of us watched him thoughtfully. We remembered that Jerome's digging had been done after Queen's disappearance. And the dog had vanished in the rear room, the one in which Chick and Dr. Holcomb had last been seen. Now, when Jerome had dug the clay from the basement under this, the dining-room, he had thrown it through the once concealed opening in the partition; had thrown the clay, that is, in a small heap under the library. And—after Jerome had done this, the phenomena had occurred in the library, *not* in the dining-room.

"By Jove!" ejaculated General Hume, as I pointed this out. "This may be something more than a mere coincidence!"

Sir Henry said nothing, but continued his spading. He paid attention to nothing save the heap that Jerome had formed. And with each spadeful he bent over and examined the clay very carefully.

Miss Clarke and the *madame* both remained very calm about it all. Each from her own view-point regarded the work as more or less of a waste of time. But I noticed that they did not take their eyes from the spade.

Sir Henry stopped to rest. "Let me," offered Herold; and went on as the Englishman had done, holding up each spadeful for inspection. And it was thus that we made a strange discovery.

We all saw it at the same time. Imbedded in the bluish earth was a small, egg-shaped piece of light-colored stone. And protruding from its upper surface was a tiny, blood-red pebble, no bigger than a good-sized shot.

Herold thrust the point of his spade under the stone, to lift it up. Whereupon he gave a queer exclamation. He bent, and thrust his spade under the thing. And he put forth a real effort.

"Well, that's funny!" holding the stone up in front of us. "That little thing's as heavy as—as—it's *heavier* than lead!"

Sir Henry picked the stone off the spade. Immediately the material crumbled in his hands, as though rotting, so that it left only the small, red pebble intact. Sir Henry weighed this thoughtfully in his palm, then without a word handed it around.

We all wondered at that pebble. It was most astonishingly heavy. As I say, it was no bigger than a fair-sized shot, yet it was vastly heavier.

Afterward we weighed it, up-stairs, and found that the trifle weighed over half a pound. Considering its very small bulk, this worked out to a specific gravity of 192.6, or almost exactly ten times as heavy as the same bulk of pure gold. And gold is heavy.

Inevitably we all saw that there must be some connection between this unprecedentedly heavy speck of material and that lighter-than-air gem of mystery. For the time being we were careful to keep the two apart. As for the unexplained footsteps, they were still faintly audible, as the invisible creature moved around the cellar.

At last we turned to go. I let the others lead the way. Thus I was the last to approach the steps; and it was at that moment I felt something brush against my foot.

I stooped down. My hands collided with the thing that had touched me. And I found myself clutching—

Something invisible—something which, in that brilliant light, showed absolutely nothing to my eyes. But my hands told me I was grasping a very real thing, as real as my fingers themselves.

I made some sort of incoherent exclamation. The others turned and peered at me.

"What is it?" came Herold's excited voice.

"I don't know!" I gasped. "Come here."

But Sir Henry reached me first. Next instant he, too, was fingering the tiny, unseen object. And such was his iron nerve and superior self-control, he identified it almost at once.

"By the Lord!"—softly. "Why, it's a small bird! Come here, folks, and—"

Another second, and they were all there. I was glad enough of it; for, like a flash, with an unexpectedness that startles me even now as I think of it—

The thing became visible. Right in my grasp, a little, fluttering bird came to life.

CHAPTER XXVII.

SOLVED!

IT was a tiny thing, and most amazingly beautiful. It could not have stood as high as a canary; and had its feathers been made of gleaming silver they could not have been lovelier. And its black-plumed head, and long, blossomlike tail, were such as no man on earth ever set eyes upon.

Like a flash it was gone. Not more than half a second was this enchanting apparition visible to us. Before we could discern any more than I have mentioned, it not only vanished, but it ceased to make any sounds whatever. And each of us drew a long breath, as one might after being given a glimpse of an angel.

Right now, five or six hours after the events I have just described, it is very easy for me to smile at my emotions of the time. How startled and mystified I was! And —why not confess it—just a trifle afraid. Why? Because I didn't understand! Merely that.

At this moment I sit in my laboratory up-stairs in that house, rejoiceful in having reached the end of the mystery. For the enigma of the Blind Spot is no more. I have solved it!

Not twenty feet away, in another room, lies Ariadne. Already there is a faint trace of color in her cheeks, and her heart is beating more strongly. Another hour, says Dr. Higgins, and she will be restored to us!

The time is 7 P.M. I did not sleep at all last night; I haven't slept since. For the past five hours we have been working steadily on the mystery, ever since our finding that little, red pebble in the basement. The last three hours of the time I have been treating Ariadne, using means which our discoveries indicated. And in order to keep awake I have been dictating this account to a stenographer.

This young lady, a Miss Dibble, is down-stairs, where her typewriter will not bother. Yes, put that down, too, Miss Dibble; I want folks to know everything! She has a telephone clamped to her ears, and I am talking into a mouth-piece which is fixed to a stand on my desk.

On that desk are four switches. All are of the four-way, two-pole type; and from them run several wires, some going to one end of the room, where they are attached to the Holcomb gem; others, running to the opposite end, making contact with that tiny, heavy stone we found in the basement. Other wires run from the switches to lead bands around my wrists; also, between switches are several connections, one circuit containing an amplifying apparatus. By throwing these switches in various combinations, I can secure any given alteration of forces, and direct them where I choose.

For there are two other wires. These run from my own lead bracelets to another pair, in another room; a pair clamped around the dainty wrists of the *only* girl—so far as I am concerned.

For I, Hobart Fenton, am now a living, human transforming station. I am converting the power of the Infinite into the Energy of Life. And I am transmitting that power directly out of the ether, as conduced through those two marvelous stones, back into the nervous system of the girl I love. Another hour, and she will Exist!

It is all so very simple, now that I understand it. And yet—well, an absolutely new thing is always hard to put into words. Listen closely, Miss Dibble, and don't hesitate to interrupt and show me where I'm off. We've got a duty to the public here.

To begin with, I must acknowledge the enormous help which I have had from my friends: Miss Clarke, Mme. Le Fabre, General Hume, Dr. Malloy, and Herold. These folks are still in the house with me; I think they are eating supper. I've already had mine. Really, I can't take much credit to myself for what I have found out. The others supplied most of the facts. I merely happened to fit them together; and, because of my relationship to the problem, am now doing the heroic end of the work. Queer! I once begged Dr. Hansen to perform a blood transfusion. And now I am sending new life direct into Ariadne's veins; the Life Principle itself, out of the void! I call it a sacred privilege.

As for Harry—he and Dr. Holcomb, Chick Watson and even the dog—I shall have them out of the Blind Spot inside of twelve hours. All I need is a little rest; I'll go straight to bed as soon as I finish reviving Ariadne; and when I wake up, we'll see who's who, friend Rhamda!

I'm too exuberant to hold myself down to the job of telling what I've discovered. But it's got to be done. Put in a fresh piece of paper, Miss Dibble; here goes!

I practically took my life in my hands when I first made connection. However, I observed the precaution of rigging up a primary connection direct from the ring to the pebble, running the wire along the floor some distance away from where I sat. No ill effects when I ventured into the line of force; so I began to experiment with the switches.

That precautionary circuit was Herold's idea. His, also, the amplifying apparatus. The mental attitude was Miss Clarke's, modified by Dr. Malloy. The lead bracelets were the *madame's* suggestion; they work fine. Sir Henry was the one who pointed out the advantage of the telephone I am now using. If my hands become paralyzed I can easily call help to my side.

Well, the first connection I tried resulted in nothing. Perfectly blank. Then I tried another, and another, and another, meanwhile continually adjusting the coils of the amplifier; and as a result I am now able, at will, to do either or all of the following:

(1) I can induct sounds from the Blind Spot; (2) I can induct light, or visibility; or (3) any given object or person, *in toto.*

And now to tell how. One moment, Miss Dibble; I wish you'd ask my sister to make another pot of chocolate, if Hansen approves. Yes, put that down, too. It's only fair to the public, to know just how the thing affects me. No, no hurry, Miss Dibble. When she gets through eating. No, I'm just sleepy, not weak. Yes, that, too!

Let's see; where was I? Oh, yes; those connections. They've got to be done just right, with the proper tension in the coils, and the correct mental attitude, to harmonize. Oh, shucks; I wish I wasn't so tired.

One moment! No, no; I'm all right. I was just altering that *Beta* coil a bit; it was getting too hot. I— Queer! By Jove, that's going some! Say, Miss Dibble; a funny thing just now! I must have got an inducted current from another wire, mixed with these! And—I got a glimpse into the Blind Spot!

A great— No; it's a— What a terrific crowd! Wonder what they're all— By Jove, it's— Good Lord, it *is* he! And Chick! No, I'm not wandering, Miss Dibble! I'm having the great experience of my life! Don't interrupt!

Now—*that's* the boy! Don't let 'em bluff you! Good! Good! Tell 'em where to head in! Just another minute, Miss Dibble! I'll explain when— That's the boy! Rub it in! I don't know what you're up to, but I'm with you!

Er—there's a big crowd of ugly looking chaps there, Miss Dibble; and I can't make out— Just a moment—a moment, Miss— What in hell does it mean, anyway? Just—I—

Danger, by God! *That's* what it means!

Miss Dibble! No; I'm all right. The— the thing came to an end, abruptly. That's all; everything normal again; the room just the same as it was a moment ago. Hello! I seem to have started something! The wire down on the floor has commenced to hum! Oh, I've got my eye on it, and if anything—

Miss Dibble! Tell Herold to come! On

the run! Quick! Did you? Good! Don't stop writing! I—

Oh, God! There's Chick! *Chick!* How did you get here? What? *You can't see me!* Why—

God! I—I'm—

Chick! Listen! Listen, man! I've gone into the Blind Spot! Write this down! The connection—

That's Herold! Herold, this is Chick Watson! Listen, now, you two! The—the—

I can hardly—it's from No. 4 to—to—to the ring—then—coil—

Both switches, Chick! Ah! I've—

NOTE BY MISS L. DIBBLE.—Just as Mr. Fenton made the concluding remark as above, there came a loud crash through the telephone, followed by the voice of Mr. Herold. Then, there came a very loud clang from a bell; just one stroke. After which I caught Mr. Fenton's voice:

"Herold—Chick can tell you what *it* wants us to—"

And with that, his voice trailed off into nothing, and died away. As for Mr. Fenton himself, I am informed that he has utterly disappeared; and in his stead there now exists a gentleman who is known to Dr. Hansen as Chick Watson.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

A Leap for Mary

by E. W. Davidson

SLOWLY McDougal's blue-shirted elbows slid back across the counter, rubbing on one side the big glass lid over the sandwiches and on the other a leg of the big, nickeled coffee-urn. He straightened up on his stool and drew a long, sad breath. The girl on the other side of the counter stepped back until her shoulders touched the pie rack's sliding door, and there she stood, her lashes drooping on her cheek and her eyes on the floor. The silence held a long minute.

Then the neglected coffee-urn popped off suddenly, starting them both into life. The girl hurriedly picked up the end of her little, blue-edged apron and reached for the valve. The man revolved on his stool, laboriously slid to his feet and walked out, closing the door carefully behind him.

Outside the fall afternoon air was good, but the tinge of coal smoke in it failed to arouse that comfortable sensation within him which it almost invariably did on such sunny, restful afternoons. The smell of soft-coal smoke fresh from the stacks of monstrous freighters laboring slowly up the mountain and stopping for coal and water had always given him the cheerful feeling that he "belonged," that he was a part of this railroad: one of the men who helped it bring its continuous stream of the world's

goods up from the plains at the east where men manufactured things, and to haul down from the ranges the bulky, unrefined manufactures of nature.

But now the smoke made no impression on his senses. Neither did the wholesome odor of hot sand issuing from the little sand-drying shack as he shambled by it. A cheerful greeting from hunch-shouldered old 'Ras Olson inside, operating the simple machinery which prepared the fine grit for locomotives passing this mid-division point, won no response from him. He walked on, head down and suffering.

What had changed Mary? Six months ago she wouldn't have said he "absolutely lacked ambition." Six months ago she wouldn't have declared frankly: "I couldn't think of marrying a man who won't even *try* to go forward."

Six months ago she was glorying with him in his promotion from roundhouse wiper down at the end of the division, to stoker, at one hundred dollars a month, of "The Tub," a little relic of an engine, her side and driving-rods disconnected, marooned on a stub track near the box of a depot here at Two Dot, her wheels blocked, patiently furnishing steam for a coal hoist and other local uses three hundred and sixty-five days a year.

During those six months he had passed up his first chance to be examined for a road firing job because he "didn't feel quite ready," and because it was hard to think of leaving this calm little mountain town and of seeing Mary only in glimpses as his engine pounded up the grade past her tiny restaurant or coasted down by it. Also he suffered at the thought of foregoing Mary's wonderful doughnuts and apple pudding.

He reviewed it all now as he shambled up the main line track toward The Tub. The first time he failed to take the fireman's examination he remembered Mary's queer little half-smile when he had said he couldn't bear the thought of leaving her. She had remained quiet, but he had supposed she was pleased and happy. And to-day he had gone down to her lunchroom to tell her he had passed up his second opportunity for the same reason. He rather wondered, at first, at her lack of enthusiasm over the news.

Then, when gentle Mary drew away her hands from him and delivered her surprising ultimatum—

A whistle shrieked. Men yelled somewhere. McDougal looked up and stood petrified an instant. He had been mooning up the middle of the main line, and a backing helper engine, coasting down grade, was upon him, its drivers locked and sliding. After that one rigid instant, McDougal had time only to jump up and backward and grab for the handrail.

His instep struck the edge of the footboard and his fingers reached the rail, but the impact of his body against the end of the tender broke his hold, his breath was battered out of him, he spun off to one side and woke up on the ground. The engine crew reached him just as he sat up.

"Howja feel, old man?" the fireman inquired breathlessly.

McDougal made no reply, but scrambled to his feet, and, to the astonishment of the fireman and engineer, ambled dejectedly off up the track toward The Tub without a limp.

"Well, Mojave the great!" exclaimed the engineer fervently. "Behold, the human inner tube! I thought we had him killed. And he just ups and walks away from here!"

"Hey!" yelled the fireman after McDougal, "my brother makes a fine line of wood, cork, and leather collapsible shoulders, screw-on, double-back-action heads and such. Not that *you'll* ever be needin' any, with that constitootion of yourn, but then I just thought I'd tell ya."

"If you do much of this here sleep walkin' on a railroad track," contributed the engineer, "you better send out a flag ahead and behind. Gosh!"

But McDougal was out of hearing by that time. Reaching his little old engine he dragged himself into the gangway and felt his back. It was getting a bit stiff. A little blood was oozing from his chin. His overalls were torn over both knees. Otherwise he was fit.

"My golly!" he gasped, stepping over to the soft, old leather seat by the right-

hand cab window. "My golly!" he breathed again as though awakening from a nightmare, and then settled back on the cushions where many a good engineer of other days had sat while about bigger business than his.

From The Tub's cab window he commanded a fairly unobstructed view up and down the simple railroad layout at Two Dot. The tracks were arranged not unlike the tines of a fork on the narrow flat between the base of the mountain on one side and the bank of deep-gullied tumbling Otter Creek on the other.

The little depot squatted on the high bank of the stream. Two hundred yards above it the single track main line curved sharply into view. A derail switch leading over the river's bank was located there for emergency's sake. Runaways down the mountain were few and far between, thanks to efficient train handling, but every mountain road must be equipped to ditch at the first chance anything running wild rather than risk greater damage down the line.

Just below the depot and about opposite The Tub, three tracks branched from the main line. A half-mile spur took the outside position along the edge of the river bank. A mile siding for upbound trains lay between the spur and the main line, and another long siding for down movements was on the inside of the main line next to the mountain.

The switch stand for the half-mile spur was closest to the depot. Then came that for the upbound siding. The two long sidings and the main track curved out of sight down the hill.

But the shorter spur came to a dead end within eight feet of Mary's big, nickeled coffee-urn. A stout bumper was planted at the spur's terminus to guard against an engineer's possible misjudgment of distance and to protect the restaurant from a crushing.

As McDougal gazed down those empty "yards," the sight of that neat little wooden building half a mile away, on a wagon road from town which bridged the stream at that point, put him back into the slough of despond out of which the helper engine had bumped him a few minutes before. A glimpse of that distant, cozy shack which spoke so plainly of Mary who spurned him, made him foolishly wish the helper engine had not been so merciful.

Then a wave of futile anger swept him. To vent his feelings he jumped down on the deck, grabbed his scoop, flung back the old fire door with a bang, and delivered two hundred pounds of coal hard against the forward end of the fire-box, thereby smothering half his fire before the mood passed. He raked the coal around more sensibly and climbed back on the seat to ruminate.

McDougal solemnly reviewed his slow climb from lowly wiper to the none too exalted stokership of The Tub. He considered the dilapidated condition of his exchequer, his slight importance among his fellows—some of his own age firing good runs and more than one running an engine—and finally concluded Mary was utterly right. He lacked ambition. He had let himself be a quitter.

But it did seem strange that Mary had changed toward him so suddenly. He vaguely wished she had done it by easier stages. That would have blunted the shock. Well, if she figured to prod the manhood in him and still hold secret faith that he would do something worth while, maybe she had chosen the right course. That must be it. Surely she hadn't lost *all* faith in him or she would have shown it before this. But if—

The movie man! The idea shot across his mind. Had one of those wrist-watched jackasses Mary fed occasionally at noone broken into McDougal's sweet intimacy? Was it one of them who had put this new idea of "ambition" into her head? Actors! Ham actors set up as standards for *him!* McDougal snorted aloud. Maybe some of them did get five hundred dollars a week, but they were cheap skates, and Mary ought to know it. The stoker of The Tub swore.

One of the great American film factories had kept a company of its men and girls working up and down the line in the mountains for two weeks, doing the railroaders knew not what. Here and there some train crew reported seeing them off on a moun-

tainside fighting and shooting blanks or waiting quietly on some little station platform.

They seemed to be spending a good deal of time in a deserted lumber camp with a spur connection to the railroad four miles above Two Dot. Mary had said they were making a great picture to be named "The Call of Eric," with Evelard Pulcifer, that blond, bull-necked darling, in the leading rôle. Mary seemed to know altogether too much about this Pulcifer to suit McDougal. It had been worrying him. Almost every day during that week he had seen some of the film crew drop off at the depot and make for Mary's restaurant down the line.

As he thought of the ham actors an overwhelming desire to see Mary again before any of them did, drove him back down the tracks to her. He would demand to know the reason for her change of heart.

Inside, disappointment awaited him. Instead of finding Mary alone, he found the manager of the movie outfit, a squat, bustling little man of forty, ordering a vast quantity of ham and eggs, an order which required Mary's presence in the kitchen. The manager was stowing away the ham and eggs with despatch when Evelard Pulcifer, grinning unpleasantly, came in.

"Oh, hooo!" burst out the viking hero of many thousand feet of film, "look who finally had to quit that 'wonderful grub' Manager James B. Plumb promised us in the log camp up here in this 'wonderful country.' What 'll you give me not to tell?"

Manager James B. Plumb was abashed only for a moment.

"I'll have to admit that big stiff I got to cook for us ain't what he's cracked up to be," he said; "but it won't have to last only another week or so. Then you wastrels can go back to town and fritter away all the money and all the good red health you been storing away up here in this honest-to-goodness country. That's all you work for anyway, you fellows."

The star turned away a moment.

"Miss Mary, one of those trout of yours and some of that apple pudding, and be in a hurry like the good girl you are," requested Pulcifer in a tone which sounded inoffensive enough, but which made McDougal yearn to commit assault and battery. He caught most of the daily trout for her himself, and contributed them for the honor and glory of Mary's larder, not to satiate the stomachs of these actor folk.

"Well, maybe if you'd be satisfied with lettin' me dive down a twenty-foot bank instead of a sixty-foot one," resumed the priceless star to the manager after the manner of most priceless stars to managers since the day of the first slap-stick chase, "and if you didn't insist that that log train go so darn fast when I jump on—you could do that with the machine—and if you'd tame down some of these other death-defiers so I'd be standin' a better chance of comin' out alive—"

"Wanta quit, do you?" popped the little manager.

The star looked at him with a certain defiance. It was evident bad blood existed between these two.

"Well, if I did," said Pulcifer, "I guess probably you'd be up against—"

"Wanta quit?" shot back the manager, dropping his knife and fork to face the actor. For a moment they looked at each other. The suggestion of a smile which seemed to lurk around the corners of Pulcifer's mouth appeared to goad Manager Plumb to an outburst.

"Now look here, Pulcifer," he stated with great positiveness, "you made me good and tired on the last couple of jobs, and I'm right here to tell you you ain't married to the pay-roll. Your contract with us ends in two weeks. You ain't anywhere near so good that we can't get along without you. Furthermore, all the close-ups in this particular picture are made, so you couldn't hurt it none by piking right off down the road this minute. Don't overlook those facts."

He glared at the actor. Pulcifer's face registered by turns surprise, befuddlement, and anger. Then his jaw, which was of high value because of its ability to knot powerfully in full face, tightened with no camera to record it. Pulcifer announced in a low tone:

"All right. I see I'm not wanted in this

company. I'll just call your little bluff and take a vacation from now until the end of this contract on full pay. Now I'm through, see?"

He slammed the polished counter with an open hand as he said "through." Then he picked up his fork and began to tap the same counter idly as he waited for his trout.

It was the manager's turn to register surprise and befuddlement. Once conciliation began to show in his expression, but just as he opened his mouth to speak, his hand slipped unwarily into the plate of ham and eggs and all conciliatory signs disappeared. He mopped off his hand, put down his money and stamped savagely out of the place and up the track toward the station and the telegraph.

McDougal, who had remained a silent, amused spectator of this unscheduled scene, watched the manager humping up the ballast path and permitted a broad grin to illumine his features. The smile vanished, however, when the triumphant Pulcifer familiarly engaged Mary in conversation.

McDougal was hurt, disgusted. The talk in the restaurant aggravated his feelings. The cutting spectacle of Mary displaying real pleasure at the attention the actor bestowed upon her drove him out of the place, mad to the core, and he found himself stamping up the ballast path in the wake of the manager.

The short, bustling man fifty yards ahead stopped, turned slowly, and, with the air of one who has chosen a distasteful but necessary course, doubled back on his tracks toward Mary's and the actor. His approach wakened no particular interest in McDougal until he was within two strides. Then a great idea popped into the railroader's mind.

"Say," spoke McDougal with a sharpness which brought the other up short, "if you want somebody to dive over sixty-foot cliffs and jump on log-trains, look me over."

The manager glanced him up and down without enthusiasm and started on.

"I guess you don't want the job," he said in surly tone.

"I guess I do." McDougal sprang in front of him with a show of heat born of the unvented anger within him. If it was movie acting Mary admired, he'd do it. The danger in it didn't matter. If he got killed, why, all right.

"I was in a circus once," he lied, "and I've been railroadin' long enough to hop trains these ham actors would be scared to even ride on. I'll go up and finish this picture for you for nothin' if you'll make a contract with me at one hundred dollars a week providin' I make good here. There ain't nothin' too tough for me. You'll never hear me yap like Clarice, down there. Do I go?"

The manager plainly was astounded at this speech. But the greater measure of astonishment lay with McDougal. He was astounded at himself, a heretofore calm-loving stoker of the most tranquil of all railroad institutions, The Tub, standing there before that film producer, eyes aflash, chest out, asking a chance to shock theaters full of people from Yokohama to Yaphank!

As he realized what he was doing an appalling fright began to rise within him. It may have been well that Manager James B. Plumb, after a brief hesitation, said "No" at him and went on to make ignominious overtures to Evelard Pulcifer. Then McDougal, his sudden exaltation gone, walked over to the sheer bank of the turbulent little mountain stream and sat down in dejection.

A few minutes later a heavy freight on the upbound siding came laboring up the grade to clear for the Alaskan following and due in twelve minutes. As the huge, squat freight engine hammered slowly past McDougal, the fireman in the gangway shouted a friendly greeting. McDougal waved his hand idly. Then perceiving a chance to ride half a mile to his post on The Tub, he crossed the spur track, swung up the ladder of a box car near the head of the train, and perched himself on top, enthroned in gloom.

The freight, proceeding toward the depot, dragged up along the siding between the main line and the spur and stopped, waiting. McDougal, long neglectful of whatever needs The Tub might have had, still sat on his car roof dreaming sorrowfully when the staccato exhaust of the Alaskan's big Pacific began echoing up the

valley. He stirred, sighed, and stood up preparatory to descent.

As he stepped toward the ladder he glanced forward over the freight engine in time to see the shirt-sleeved operator dash out of the depot and race up the track toward the derail at the curve. The freight's conductor popped out of the doorway after him. The conductor turned toward his train, waving his arms and shouting something McDougal couldn't hear. Then, with a glance over his shoulder at the fleeing operator sprinting for the derail, the conductor loped down the track toward the switches opening into the empty spur and into the siding occupied by his own train.

The next few instants were electric for McDougal atop the freight. The fireman, in McDougal's line of vision, suddenly came to life, stuck half his body out of the cab window, staring up the line at the two men speeding in opposite directions, and yelled: "What 'n th' hotel—"

At that precise moment four cars of logs shot around the sharp curve above the depot. McDougal's attention snapped to the operator who reached the derail barely in time to throw it for the last truck of the rear car. That truck split the switch, the wheels hopped to the ground, and the rear end of the car slewed back and forth, spilling logs on both sides until it reached the depot. There the coupling parted and the car swung off to demolish a tool shed and plunge into the mountainside.

The yanks of the derailed car had slowed the runaways slightly and loosened the inexpertly lashed loads of short wood so that the whole string was shedding logs as it came. The forward car's stacks of six-foot unhewn timber began to fall apart as the three charging flats raced down the main line.

McDougal, standing high on the freight train, thought of the Alaskan a mile or so down the valley, hidden by curves from this log catapult hurling at it. But the thought was brief. Realizing he could do nothing to stop the log cars, he turned to face the main track helplessly to watch the runaways rush by.

The happenings of that moment upset the whole situation. The front car, still a few rail lengths ahead of the freight's engine, hit a switch point with a crash, veered around the engine, hurling practically its whole load at the locomotive's boilerhead, and came skimming down the spur! The conductor had reached the spur's switchstand in time to save the Alaskan and to direct the runaways straight at Mary's defenseless little shack! The distant bumper couldn't stop them.

McDougal whirled, took one glance down the spur at the little building, and became a maniac. What he did next was not prompted by thought or reason. There wasn't time for these. If those three cars were not derailed before they reached that bumper—

With Mary's face before him in fantom, and with the roar of the runaways close behind him, he sprinted back along the car roof, slanting his course over toward the spur side. As his foot touched the edge he leaped off into space over that spur.

He lit on his back on the floor of that first, practically empty flat. The terrific momentum of the cars caused him to execute an instant, backward flip-flop, his feet rammed a short log as he slid rearward on his face and he brought up against a brake-post at the hind end of the car.

The short log fell squarely between the first and second cars, dropped on the coupling, pivoted half-way around it, and lit on a rail under the second car's wheels.

The result was nearly instantaneous. The cars buckled like joints of a carpenter's rule, heaved in air, rocketing McDougal down the bank into the stream, and then wallowed to a stop. A cloud of dirt and débris arose and the fearful action was at an end.

The faint aroma of Mary's coffee pervaded the air. McDougal was sure it was Mary's coffee. That aroma was the only thing that registered on his consciousness at first. Then he felt himself begin to reel through space at an impossible rate. It was staggering, the awful speed with which he hurled through nothingness. His ears pounded. He fought for breath. He cried out—and there he lay on a floor gazing up at a varnished ceiling.

"Mary," he said, with a child's fright in his voice.

"Yes, dear," came in gentle tones beside him. "Oh, God was good to give you back."

He tried to turn his head, but it refused to move.

"Easy, old man. Easy. That's only a temporary job until we get you to a hospital," said somebody somewhere; but McDougal paid no attention. He had heard Mary's voice call him "Dear!" He strove to hold his eyes open.

"Boy, you showed me what kinda nerve you got, stoppin' our log runaway," broke in a new voice. "I'll give my card to the little lady here. Soon's you're able, you come and talk over that contract you proposed to me a while ago."

McDougal essayed a sleepy smile, not at what the last voice had said, but because a wonderful face had come within his limited range of vision. Mary was shaking her head slowly and meaningly, tears of happiness brimming her eyes. Gathering her meaning, McDougal, struggling manfully to hold his lids apart, made a tremendous effort at speech and reckoned he'd stay with the railroad and take an examination for fireman.

"Well, that's the ticket!" rumbled a big voice. "I'm glad I got off the Alaskan and heard that. That's the kind of loyalty this road rewards. It sounds like the good old times when men—"

McDougal gave up the struggle against leaden lids and floated out into peaceful sleep.

THE BEST HOLIDAY

I HAVE to spend a day, the doctor said,
In bed.
I only need a little rest and quiet,
With diet,
To make myself the man I was before,
Once more.
In bed! Can you imagine my delight?
I might
Indulge in all the peacefulness of life;
My wife
Will tend to all my wants, and will not say
To-day
"Get up! It's time for breakfast—striking eight—
You're late!"
Ah, no! Good-by to all my business cares!
Affairs,
That seemed important yesterday,
I lay
Aside without thought—do what I please,
At ease!
No need to run and catch in way insane
The train,
No typewriter, no office-boy, no clerk,
No work,
But only twittering birds to listen to!
Say, who
On earth can tell me any better bliss
Than this?

La Touche Hancock.

Egrets

by Perley Poore Sheehan

Author of "The One Gift," "The House With a Bad Name," "Up-Stairs," "We Are French," etc.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SAD, GRAY MAN.

IT was word in effect that the bird-warden—Kenwood by name—had formed an alliance with an Indian family and was courting the daughter of the same, that came to Bernard Crossman, head of the feather-trust. Crossman was that sad, gray man whom Kenwood had seen in New York before coming to Florida and whom Kenwood had never forgotten.

But if Kenwood had never forgotten Crossman, neither had Crossman ever forgotten Kenwood. A bird-warden, forsooth—a mere passing employee of the meddlesome Audubon people—with the temerity to come to him, Crossman, with a warning! An impudence!

If the truth be told, however, there had been more to this interview than Kenwood—or even Bernard Crossman himself—had suspected. It was something that rankled in Crossman's heart long after Kenwood was gone—something that had come between Crossman and his business associates, like a ghostly presence, a ghostly presence out of the past, even while Crossman appeared to be engrossed in business; it was something that dwelt beside him while he sat in his private office alone, again when he dined, and most of all when he went to bed.

The ghost was real enough—in his conscience, in his memory. It was a ghost he had almost succeeded in getting rid of. Now Kenwood, in that brief interview of theirs, had raised it again.

Kenwood had challenged Crossman. So another had challenged him twenty years before. This other had been a woman. Now she was dead. But her ghost continued to walk—in Crossman's conscience, in Crossman's memory. It was her ghost that Kenwood had raised.

Upward of twenty years ago, while Crossman was still maneuvering to become the world's greatest feather merchant, his business had taken him to Paris, and there in the house of a friend he had met the girl who was to become his wife. She was a beautiful creature, daughter of a minor French diplomatist who had spent his life in the Caucasus and there had married. She was not only beautiful; she was exotic—like her name: Sonia Ménard. She was small and lithe, with a wonderful sense for color and movement.

Sonia fascinated Crossman. She appealed to every shred of his imagination. She appealed to something that surpassed imagination—that quality that was to put him at the head of the Feather Syndicate Unlimited. For Sonia was like one of those rare and exotic birds which were already the basis of Crossman's wealth.

The marriage was arranged—one of those family affairs. Mlle. Ménard was an orphan. She was poor. Crossman was presentable, he had no entanglements, he had the foundations of a fortune. And Crossman was very much in love.

So far as all this is concerned, the marriage might have proved as happy as any—as such marriages often do.

But something went wrong.

The first hint of tragedy crept in when Crossman sought to bestow on his bride a

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for May 21.

particularly rich bit of plumage—a toque of Paradise Whyda, or something equally rare—and she had tried to show that she was pleased, but couldn't conceal the shudder.

It wasn't until then that she knew the nature of his business. The feather business, yes! But she had always imagined that this had something to do with the stuffing of pillows and eiderdowns. After that she learned a lot about Crossman's business—secretly, concealing from him her knowledge, trying to overcome her horror of it, hoping that she would, yet growingly convinced that she had become the bride of a *Bluebeard*.

She suggested that he change his business. She might as well have suggested to her pet canary that it become an ostrich.

Crossman was the plume-dealer. He loved the sheen and color of his wares. There was a luxury in the very thought that these million beautiful creatures—in Dahomey, in Brazil, in weird islands—lived and flashed and died for him.

Often, in his wide, gray rooms on Fifth Avenue, he would linger after all the others were gone; and then he would go and open cabinet after cabinet where his wealth and his only joy were kept. Plunder from all over the world—shimmery pink plumes from the mouths of the Orinoco, opal-plumes from Tehuantepec; and these always from the period when the birds, like men and women, were at their best; when they were mating.

He was the first man to finance the first plume-pirates who followed the last of the egrets and pink curlews from Florida to Honduras, then followed them back again. He was insatiable. He did things in a large way. If one of his scouts reported a rookery that was likely to be shot up by a rival when the mating season came around he would forestall his rival by having the birds shot in advance.

"If we don't get the plumes, nobody gets them. We control the market."

It was some such crisis that had taken him to Florida that time twenty years ago when Mrs. Crossman disappeared. At that time they had been married but little more than a year. They were still on their honeymoon, so to speak—Crossman still deeply in love with his exotic, lovely young wife; Sonia, unbeknown to him, with that growing dread of her husband's business, but attached to him, faithful to him, and with their two-months'-old daughter to occupy her thought.

Would the mystery of Sonia's subsequent disappearance ever be cleared? There was little hope for it.

There was the half-insane old squatter who told of having driven with the beautiful foreign lady and her child back in the direction of the Everglades from Miami; and the story told, years afterward, by the moonshiner, just before he died in a Federal prison, of having accompanied a lady and her infant child to one of the Everglade islands and of a fight that took place there with a party of plume-hunters.

Perhaps the mystery remained so deep because Mr. Crossman himself had never been able to tell the full truth. Business prevented. But he often wondered—wondered—wondered; and that was what made him so gray and sad. He wondered if Sonia had heard him giving instructions to the chief of his Florida agents to have that particular rookery shot up. It would have been like her—she was capable of such movements of exaltation—to start forth to prevent the raid.

Had she challenged him, somewhat as this young Mr. Kenwood had challenged him? Crossman wasn't sure. He had been deeply concerned in his business at the time.

Crossman's chief Florida agent at that time was a renegade Seminole who went by the white man's name of Willy Smith. It was Willy Smith who served him still.

"Kenwood—hard man," said Willy Smith softly and slowly. For all his years of association with white men, he had never lost his Seminole voice. "Kenwood—he make flend with old Seminole man—Porru. Me think so, maybe Kenwood make Porru's gal his wife."

Willy Smith had long since, however, abandoned his Seminole shirt for the clothing of civilization. Very much so. Willy wore many rings. There were three watch-chains at least across the front of his fancy waistcoat. His jet-black hair was pomaded with the best from the barber-shop of Jo

the Greek. His store clothes were stiffly elegant and new.

"Him! Marry an Indian girl?" demanded Crossman.

"Sure! Why not?" said Willy Smith. He laughed softly. He was almost always a little drunk. "Me think so—mebbe so—I marry a white gal."

CHAPTER XII.

SECRET ORDERS.

WHILE Willy Smith went off to the gambling-house with the money that the big white chief of the plume trade had given him, Crossman let himself go for a while in thought. He had never lost his love for Florida, despite that tragedy of his now twenty years old. The tragedy was part of the fascination that Florida exerted over him. It was as if this great, shadowy, half-explored empire of wilderness and swamp that lay just over the horizon still owed him something.

He stood at one of the windows of his private suite. Everything about him—and everything about the great hotel—was the last word in civilized luxury.

Within the hotel there was a noiseless and ever-ready service. He had but to raise his hand and his slightest wish would be attended to. No king could have been more pampered. Just outside the hotel it was the same—lawns and flower-beds, flowering trees and noble palms; music everywhere, beautiful women everywhere, adventure and excitement everywhere—from the model golf-course to the maddest romance.

And yet, almost within sight, just over beyond that ridge of pine, the savage fastnesses of the Everglades, water-trails without end, leagues of level sawgrass, nameless islands; more empty lands and waters to the north, and south, and west; dim forests, overflowed prairies, an infinite level as if still in the first week of creation.

This was the Florida that had taken his Sonia, the wife, and his Sonia the child.

To all outward appearance, this guest of the Royal Magnolia was merely gray and sad. But there was a rage in his heart. The wilderness over there had something to answer for. What had it done to them? It had killed them, most certainly, else some trace of them would have been found. But how had it killed them? Where had it hidden their bodies? Had Sonia the elder loved him to the last? Had she really gone out on that fool's errand—that woman's errand—of saving a flock of egrets? How absurd! Wouldn't some one else have killed them anyway, those birds—when their plumes were more precious than diamonds?

Crossman had another interview with Willy Smith later in the day. Crossman had had time to think, to map out a line of action. But Willy Smith had had time to get a trifle drunker, to pursue a difficult courtship, and to lose the money that Crossman had given him at various games of chance. It was hard for a Seminole to become a white man. The white people made it so.

It is just possible that deep down under his three watch-chains and his fancy waistcoat Willy Smith felt a trifle hurt.

"I've been thinking," said Crossman, "of what you told me about Kenwood and this Seminole girl."

"Kenwood hard man," Willy reiterated. "Me think so—if him no die, *fuswu-hutke*—white bird—you no get 'em. Kenwood hard man! *Holowaugus* to hell! Shoot! Shoot! Shoot! Flighten Injun! Flighten white man. Him run in woods with Injun gal! Her help him, too! Watch bird all time! Kenwood alive—plume no get 'em! Kenwood die—plumes *ojus!*—plumes plenty!"

"I have to have those plumes," said Crossman.

"How much you pay?"

"That depends—on the way it's managed—and the quality of the plumes."

Willy had an inspiration and came straight to the point. "Give me two hundred dollar now."

"I've already paid you quite an advance."

Willy stood on his dignity. He said, "Me no lie! Me no steal!"

"I grant that," Crossman agreed; "bu I'd like to know a little more about the

details. You can't do anything yourself. You're too well known. You've been seen too often with me. Some of the Federal agents right here in Miami are suspicious of us now."

Willy saw the point.

"Two hundred dollar and I fix 'em," he said.

"Who—the Federal agents?"

"Injun man."

"Tell me about him."

"Him my flend. Him want this gal for wife. Him mad, *ojus!* Mebbeso him shoot Kenwood. Kenwood dead, plumes *ojus!* Savvy?"

"I savvy," said Crossman with a shade of gray humor. "But, of course, I do not suggest anything so extreme as getting Mr. Kenwood out of the way in this fashion. Tell me. Isn't there a law among the Seminoles prohibiting the marriage of a Seminole girl to a white man?"

"Me think so."

"What usually happens?"

Willy Smith had a flash of pure reason. "It don't happen. It don't never happen."

"But you said that perhaps Kenwood would marry the girl."

The Seminole smiled.

"Well," exclaimed Crossman with a slight loss of patience, "suppose he did?"

"Seminole kill her," said Willy.

"But how about Kenwood?"

"Two hundred dollar—you give 'em to me—me think so Black Ibis fix 'em both—fix Kenwood—fix gal—fix white birds—" Willy Smith took the flat pad of new bills that Crossman handed over to him. He went away.

Crossman went over to his window and stood there looking down into the hotel grounds—grounds of an artificial but flawless beauty, more like the grounds of some great botanical garden than those of a merely commercial enterprise.

But there was a hint of that wilderness beyond the horizon—there was, in Crossman's mind—as he saw the dusky red renegade who had just left him emerge from the hotel porch and start across the zone of heavily planted garden. Not mere clothes could ever make a white man of Willy Smith, however much he steeped himself in the white man's vices. Willy Smith walked like an Indian. There was an Indian smoothness and stealth under his carefully pretended indifference.

The afternoon was waning. Perhaps the nearness of all this jungle-growth reminded the renegade of his long-lost boyhood.

Then he paused near a mass of flowering hibiscus. From behind the hibiscus another Seminole had emerged. This latter was tall, heavy, and dark—Black Ibis to any one who had met him before. Black Ibis still wore the striped shirt of the swamp country, but he had civilized this costume to the best of his means by the addition of a pair of blue overalls.

Crossman, from his window, saw the two of them go off together.

In the thickening shadows Crossman remained at his window and looked out toward the west. From out there the wilderness seemed to be creeping in, like a tide, with the deepening night. What were its mysteries? What were its tragedies? Wasn't all life a tragic mystery?

Crossman gave a slight shudder.

He was honest with himself. That was one of the things that made him gray and sad. He knew that to some extent he had just given a command that was equivalent to the murder of a boy and a girl, as well as of half a thousand birds as beautiful as any God ever made.

It was business. It was the only way. Some one had to do it. If it wasn't he, then it would be somebody else. And didn't Florida owe him something anyway for what it had already done to him?

Nonetheless, Crossman suffered an internal hurt—as if a weapon had touched his heart without having touched his skin.

A twinge of conscience, perhaps, or a premonition.

CHAPTER XIII.

A BREATH OF EDEN.

ODDLY enough there was often a feeling like that in Kenwood's own heart nowadays—even to the twinge of conscience, even to the whisper of a premonition. A mystery and a foreboding sense

of tragedy filled his days and nights, although both days and nights were of a beauty such as he had never known—never known possibly except in his dreams; and it was as if he were living a dream.

Now he had two places to watch, each place a death-haunt — first, the rookery where the white birds were at the zenith of their beauty, and then Porru's camp over on that other island, where Meerita was like a human egret.

Death stalked both places; so did passion.

Kenwood heard a shout and a shot one night when the moon was full over in the direction of Porru's camp, and he started for the place on the run. He knew that ever since the scene under the moringa-tree Black Ibis had been lurking about the neighborhood threatening trouble. Close by Porru's camp, in a little open glade surrounded by palms, he saw the pale figure of some one running. It was Meerita.

He called to her. She heard him. He had her in his arms.

"He tried to kill us," she gasped.

"Who?"

"Black Ibis," she shuddered.

"Stay here," he told her, "while I go to the camp."

But she wouldn't let him go. She said that Black Ibis had done his worst. She said that Porru and Estékenee were safe. He said that they would worry about her.

She looked up at him. She shook her head. She drew his own head down until she could kiss his forehead. In a faltering sort of a way she intimated that she had been headed for his camp anyway, and that it was there Porru had intended her to go.

There was something about all this that Kenwood could not or would not understand. As he stood there struggling for clear vision as he had done on a former occasion, he saw a movement among the trees in the direction of Porru's camp. Kenwood held his rifle ready, but he soon made out who the newcomer was.

"Porru," Kenwood called softly; "we are here."

Then Porru saw them. He smiled in the moonlight. He came close. He still smiled somewhat, but the moonlight accentuated the grief and the awe of his face.

"You are together," said Porru. He said it in a way that was both question and affirmation.

"Yes. We were coming back."

"No, no," Meerita broke in. "I am frightened."

"The maiden is right," said Porru. He used the Seminole word for girl—*entygee,* but Kenwood understood. In Seminole, a young doe was an *eech-entygee*—a dear-maiden. Porru went on to explain. But he explained in the fumbling way of an old man who is not quite sure of himself, who is in the presence of something which he does not yet quite fully understand. "The Great Spirit, he say so. Me think so, the Great Spirit, I hear His voice. *Entygee*—she stay with you. Pretty soon we come back."

Over Meerita and Kenwood the old man waved his hands in a gesture full of dignity and grace. He turned his back upon them and went away.

For a longish interval after this Kenwood was silent and as if overwhelmed. The very soul of him was in a hush. Then he was conscious of Meerita—a tepid vibrancy in his arm. He looked down at her. She clung to him.

"This was a betrothal," said Kenwood. "So Porru intended it—and the Great Spirit. Now never more again shall we be separated."

He would have remained where they were. The moon had come up over the palm-trees. The glade was of a ghostly, friendly beauty. There was grass on the ground, and the ground was dry. There were no insects about. And here at least there was no danger from moccasin or rattlesnake. Kenwood intimated as much. But Meerita called him a child. A shy joyfulness had come over Meerita.

"Come," she said, "I love the woods on a moonlit night. Porru has taught me not to be afraid. Porru has taught me many things."

She took Kenwood by the hand. It was true, what she had said. She was as much at home in the woods—while the moon was shining, at any rate—as if it were broad

daylight. She was afraid of neither jungle nor slough nor of whatever might have been hidden in them.

"First to the swing," she said.

She led him down through the cathedral naves, where the shadows lay thick, and on through groves where the moon shone through palm and pine as through Gothic windows. In a place like this she found what she had set out to seek. It was a low-swinging vine pendant from two lofty trees and clustered thick with moon-flowers. Meerita was like a child; and Kenwood himself—he who had imagined himself old and finished at twenty-five—wondered what had become of his age.

"Swing me higher!" cried Meerita.

She sat the vine as lightly as a bird. At every rush, forward and back, the moon-flowers rained down about them.

They were still there when the moon reached the meridian—the noon of the night—and the big owls began to hoot a signal to the other birds and beasts.

"Catch me," said Meerita.

She ran. He chased her. She brought him out of the jungle of hammock onto the moonlit prairie.

"Look," she panted softly. "When the owls call like that the deer get up to feed."

From beyond a thicket of palmetto a small herd of deer emerged, nimble and light. They shone whitely in the moonlight like spirit-deer. A breath of warm and perfumed air stirred over the prairie. With this air about them they sat down to rest at last under a live oak tree and there they slept.

The sun came up as the moon went down. There, for a fleeting interval along the level horizons, east and west, half the moon was showing and half the sun. Kenwood, sitting up and wide awake, would have called Meerita's attention to the phenomenon; but Meerita still slept, relaxed, but as perfect as a flower. Kenwood looked at her.

His eyes came up again to the balanced sun and moon. Here, he told himself, was a cosmic pair of scales for the weighing of his destiny. It was the moment of great decision. The decision should be his own.

Life with her!

Or life without her!

"O Great Spirit," he said—as Porru himself might have said it—"Thou art my witness. This is the woman Thou gavest me, for better or for worse!"

He stretched out his two arms—one toward the sun, the other toward the moon. It was as if he depressed the moon and thus ended the night. It was as if he raised the sun and thus started the new day.

CHAPTER XIV.

A COUNCIL OF TWO.

PORRU also saluted the rising sun. Few Seminoles cared to travel in the night.

It was different with him who was called the Charmer, and with old Estékenee, his wife. Porru could charm anything. It was a power that he had always had. As a child he had charmed the birds and snakes. It was a power that had progressed through youth and manhood. Nothing would hurt him or his—not the spiders that lived in the ground, nor mad bulls, nor wounded alligators. Until, at last, he could even charm those shy, invisible creatures, the fairies and the ghosts.

Three days later Porru was alone. Estékenee, in keeping with the easy communal life of the Seminoles, he had left at a camp of her people. For when a man makes medicine he must go alone, and Porru had been making medicine. He was making it still.

He knelt, seated on his heels, in the midst of a grassy plain. No one else was in sight. Yet, for the time being, he both looked and spoke as if there were others present. He made a few appealing gestures with his hands. He was graceful. He was reverent. He was smitten with grief.

No use! This thing was inevitable, even as he had already seen it to be on his previous medicine trips. It would surely come to pass. He crossed his arms on his breast at last and bowed his head in submision.

The sun was sinking when he finally got to his feet, and he saluted it with a wave of the hand as he would have bade fare-

well to a parting friend. He looked about him to get his location. As usual when out on a trip like this he had taken no thought at all as to his whereabouts. The prairies, the jungles of hammock, the saw-grass ponds and the cypress-strands through which he had passed had been as nothing to him but the dimly seen and dimly remembered figments of a dream.

The realities had been those spirits, small and large, both of animals and of men, who had kept him company while he walked.

Now, as one who had slept long and had walked in his sleep, Porru stroked his forehead. His first glance told him that he was not far from the camp of a friend.

"*Hinthlo!*" he exclaimed. "It is well."

He carried no weapons of any kind. For three days he had not eaten. He was very old. Near as the camp of his friend was in this country of great distances it was too far off to be reached this night. Still he was not disturbed in his thought. There was an island near which would be suitable for a camp. He started toward it. He cast his eyes about him as he walked.

He had not gone very far before he saw a movement in the grass a few yards off to one side of him. He let out a soft cry. The movement stopped. Without haste Porru went over to the place and picked up one of those large terrapin common to the country. He addressed a few words to it—calling it "brother turtle." He tucked it under his arm and continued his way.

Porru carried his terrapin to the tip of the island he had marked, where there was an open space beneath an oak. On the edge of this space there grew a rough lemon and a wild guava, both trees heavy with fruit. There he made a fire. He then roasted the terrapin and ate of it sparingly, flavoring his repast with the wild fruit. From a near-by water-hole he drank—in the ancient way, flipping the water into his mouth with his fingers while he continued to look about him.

The swift, southern twilight was gone and the night had thickened by the time that he was settled by his fire again, but he showed no inclination to sleep.

"Lo," he meditated, "the thing will come to pass."

He sat there in the flickering light and let himself go deeper yet into his meditations.

A raccoon ambled across the clearing and disappeared. A panther crept out of the brush and looked at him for a long time with one of its front paws uplifted. A dozen deer—does and yearlings led by a young buck—came huddling in from the prairie and contemplated him with wondering eyes.

The Charmer gave no attention to any of these things. He gave no attention to anything but his thoughts, apparently, until a swishing flutter in the high, overhanging branches of the live-oak caused him to raise his head. He saw the shadowy silhouette of a large owl. After that, he listened intently. He let out a call:

"*Blind Heron!*"

There was a long silence, then a sort of rolling whisper in the Seminole speech:

"*I come!*"

It was as if Porru, the Charmer, had summoned another ghost when Blind Heron appeared. Perhaps he had. No man could ever tell precisely whether it was Blind Heron himself or Blind Heron's soul that thus roamed the woods at night and appeared to those who needed him. True, the newcomer was blind, and it was always night for him; yet it was perpetually weird, even to those who knew him best, the way that Blind Heron found his way about.

"Is it not," Blind Heron asked, "my brother Porru who is here?"

The chief and head medicine-man known as Blind Heron was even older than Porru. He was a tall, gaunt figure—an old Roman of a man, yet barefooted and barelegged; like Porru, dressed in nothing but a striped shirt. He kept his bony face upturned. He felt his way lightly with a long staff, or wand, of cedar. His hair was white and also clipped close except for the earlocks and the double-plaited scalp-locks.

"It is I," Porru had answered, and he lent the blind man a hand in placing himself.

Blind Heron smiled in the direction of the

owl. It was as if he saw it. Perhaps he did—with the eyes of the spirit, if not with the eyes of the flesh.

"Lo, I was seated in my lodge, over by the Pond of the Dancing Cranes," he said softly, "and the owl called me, and I followed her; and when I would have turned back, knowing that the thing was settled, she came so close to me that I could smell the warm feathers of her breast. I am here."

"What is it that is settled?" asked Porru.

"Next moon—the death of two."

Porru slowly stoked an old pipe—a white man's pipe, but with a broken stem that had been replaced with a reed. Porru lit the pipe, taking his time about it. He took a few noisy puffs, to get it started, then put the stem in Blind Heron's hand. Blind Heron also took a few leisurely but vociferous puffs. He passed the pipe back. The Charmer thereupon, with a touch of reverence, emptied the bowl into the flame of the camp-fire where the remainder of the tobacco was consumed. He followed the smoke of this upward with a gesture of his slim old hand. Thus, perhaps, the big man also would be present at the talk.

"Next moon, the death of two," said Porru slowly.

"You have let your heart go to a child of the white people," said the Blind Heron.

"It is true."

"You have reared her a Seminole."

"It is true."

"Yet now you give her to the strange white youth."

"I talked to the fairies," said Porru. "I talked to both sorts—they that live in the trees and they that live in the grass. They said that when the egrets mated so would my white bird of a daughter mate, even with one of her own kind who would be a friend of the egrets."

"And you knew that the egrets were the spirit-birds—they that had already entered the Big Sleep."

"Yea, I saw the death sign everywhere. I trailed the Great Serpent to his home in Rocky Lake. There I beheld him—and my children likewise beheld him."

"And was not all this enough to convince you?"

"The breath of the Great Spirit is—to hope."

"Well spoken!"

"Will my father give me no hope now?" Porru whispered.

Blind Heron thought long.

"I do not know," he said at last. "The girl is white. The youth is white. I can answer for it that the council will permit no harm to come to them by a decision of the council. Yet the Great Serpent does not lie. It does not wait on the decisions of the council. It has given the word. Yet—who can measure the craft of the white man? Porru, my child, have you not still a writing that came into your hand along with this child?"

"I have kept it ever by me, sewn in my belt."

"What does it say?"

"It says—"

And Porru began to repeat the writing from memory, word for word, in English, but translating as he went:

"'*Dear Bernard—I tried—to save—the egrets—for your—soul's sake—I did it—*'

"And at the end of the writing," Porru supplemented, "was a foreign name which was '*Sonia.*'"

CHAPTER XV.

THE CHALLENGE.

IT was a message which was to reach Bernard Crossman's self. Old Porru and the elder Blind Heron must have reached that decision between them. As Blind Heron himself had said, "Who can measure the craft of the white man?"

Years ago, not long after Porru had found the white infant and its mother in the swamps, and had adopted the child after the young mother's death, and had named the child Meerita, it had become known well enough among the Seminoles that Crossman—the big chief of the plume trade—was the father of the child. But no whisper reached Crossman then. Only the Seminoles knew what had been the fate of the mother and the whereabouts of the child.

And why should the Seminoles say anything? It would merely have meant trouble

for them. It would, perchance, have taken them into the dreaded law-courts of the white man where no son of Osceola had ever breathed the fragrance of justice. Besides they were not beholden to Crossman in any way. There were even deeper reasons.

Manifestly this young white squaw had fled from her man. By Seminole law the child had been hers, not his.

And then the supreme reason—that the childless Estékenee had taken the infant to her bosom. They had moved the little sticks about the blue flame of the council-fire—the old men had—and this nestling of a foreign breed had become a blood-Seminole.

While Black Ibis was still indulging himself in the sweets of a degenerate civilization—sleeping in a vacant lot back of a livery-stable and squandering a part of the money that Willy Smith had given him on candy and bad whisky—another type of Seminole came into town. For three days this Seminole had poled swiftly his painted dugout through the canoe trails of the Everglades. He was a slim and beautiful youth. He spoke no word of English. And yet he carried certain English words indelibly impressed in his unspoiled memory.

He sought out Willy Smith and repeated these words, together with a supplemental story told in pure Seminole. By that subtle news-bearing system of theirs the Seminoles of the distant swamps had known from the first that the big chief of the plume trade was in Miami and that Willy Smith was in contact with him.

Willy Smith had no reputation to speak of among the Seminoles. Still he could be useful on certain occasions. This was one of them. And Willy could be depended on.

Willy heard the story from the swamps. He also committed the words in the white man's speech to heart. Neither Seminole gave any sign of emotion. They were very serious. Their black eyes glittered. They separated. The runner from the swamps started back on the long trail to report that his errand was done.

Willy Smith, though, was not so prompt to execute his part of the mission. He reflected for a little while. Verily, it took much money to become a white man. The white squaw of the gambling-house was never satisfied. His courtship of her was progressing backward. Among his other accomplishments he had learned a few words of potent slang. Here was a chance to make the white chief of the plume trade come across!

"Him come across—*ojus!*"

Crossman, sitting on the porch of the Royal Magnolia, saw Willy Smith from afar. He got the Indian's signal for a private talk. Crossman retired to his private suite, and there the two met.

There was nothing hurried about Willy Smith. Again the Seminole in him was uppermost. He had the situation well in hand. When he spoke his voice was almost incredibly sweet and gentle. But it was also the Indian in him that permitted him to make his report a story.

"Me your fiend."

Crossman intuited the hint for money.

"What is it now?"

"Me your fiend since twenty year ago."

"Go on!"

"Me think so twenty yeard ago—squaw—you lose 'em."

"What do you mean?"

"Your squaw—she got 'em little picaninny—little white picaninny—little gal—all same white bird."

Crossman had gone a trifle pale. He knew Seminoles well enough to know that there was something serious back of Willy Smith's reminiscences. Crossman stood there teetering on his feet, strangled by a feeling that was half deathly fear and half deathly rage. The two feelings are often closely allied. He made no further effort to hurry Willy Smith along. Speech would have been none too easy for him anyway.

"Squaw—she die," the Indian went on slowly. "Plume-hunter, me think so, shoot her in the breast. Seminole find her—take her to Seminole camp."

Crossman uttered two strangled sounds which may have been intended for speech, but which sounded like nothing so much as that cry let out by the wounded egret that Kenwood had seen.

"*Ah-h! Ah-h!*"

"Big Sleep take 'em," Willy Smith went

on — without haste — without emotion. "Seminole make little death-lodge—make talk with Great Spirit—out in swamp."

Crossman now managed to articulate. His voice was hoarse.

"What is this nonsense that you are talking about? It is a lie. It is a lie. How do I know that it is not a lie?"

"Me no lie," said the Seminole.

"How—how—"

"Before she die, she make writing. She write letter. Me think so—letter for you."

"I never got a letter."

"Letter—Seminole got 'em. It say, '*Dear Bernard—*'"

"Where is it?"

Crossman made a movement as if he would have taken the Indian by the throat. He was no longer the gray man, lethargic and sad. A blackness had come under his skin. He was quivering all over. The Seminole watched him with glittering eyes, but did not move.

"'*Dear Bernard—I tried—to save—the egrets—for your—soul's sake—I did it—*'"

"What—was the name?"

"*Sonia!*"

There for a moment it looked as if Crossman were going to collapse. The veins in his neck were swollen. His eyes were straining from their sockets. He fumbled at his collar. He took a few blind and groping steps hither and yon. When he again spoke rage had gone from his voice.

"You spoke of the child."

"Yes."

"What became of her?"

"Her big gal now. Seminole keep her. Now Kenwood got her."

"Kenwood!"

"Sure! It was her—you send word—to kill!"

"Kill—my daughter!"

"You knew it all the time," said Crossman hoarsely.

"No."

"You lie!"

"Me no lie—me no—"

Before Willy Smith could complete his familiar declaration of virtue, Crossman had flung himself upon the Indian in a paroxysm of rage. Willy Smith had gone far down-hill in a physical way, but still Crossman was no match for him. Without leaving his chair, the Seminole had thrust the white man from him. It was a thrust that brought Crossman up against the side of the room. There he stood shaking and glaring, but incapable of further movement for the time being.

Willy Smith explained:

"You say—kill Kenwood! You say—kill Kenwood's gal!"

"No!"

"Yes!"

"For God's sake!"

"Mebbeso, me stop 'em."

"Quick! Don't sit there!"

"Me want—money!"

"Money! You talk of money! Quick! Where's that other Indian?"

"Me no savvy! You give me money—big money!—mebbeso, me savvy!"

For a while it looked as if Crossman were going to resort to violence again. He had his knotted hands on a frail little gilt chair, and the chair bent under the pressure that he brought to bear on it. But his mind was more active than his body. His body was flabby. His mind was not. He had the mind of an artist in a way. He was not devoid of imagination.

Who can say? Perhaps in those few moments that he stood there blind and staggering, his mind carried him back to those secret communings of his with the pink and opal skins of slaughtered birds—up there in the gray and scented offices on Fifth Avenue—and again to the far places of the world where these birds had been killed, at his behest, during the mating season—in tropic islands, at the mouths of the Orinoco, here in Florida.

Of this there can be little doubt. In his imagination he must have seen this lost daughter of his—herself like an exotic bird

CHAPTER XVI.

A MATTER OF HONOR.

THERE was a period of silence. Perhaps neither the white man nor the red man heard it, but up from the lower floor of the hotel came the strum and hum of jazz music and laughter.

in the tropic jungle, bleeding and mangled, now that her own mating season had come.

When Willy Smith left Crossman, the Seminole was stone-sober for the first time in many moons. Still he was drunk in a way. He was drunk with wealth. Never in his life had he had so much money. Crossman, as Willy had foreseen, had "come across."

There was really no hurry so far as Black Ibis was concerned. Black Ibis was good to hang around for two or three days yet. So Willy believed. It wasn't often that Black Ibis had the chance to enjoy the pleasures of a great city. And Miami was particularly gay just now — toward the wind-up of the tourist season—streets crowded, band-concerts, dances on the pier, moving-picture houses open, and always plenty of strangers from the North ready to shower their generosities on a real wild Seminole.

Willy Smith's thought fled to the gambling-house and the fair lady thereof whom he hoped some day to make Mrs. Willy Smith.

This was the time and place for another sort of killing.

It was midnight when Willy Smith left the gambling-house. He had had a hard session. The old adage about being unsuccessful in love but successful in business had failed to hold good in his case. That was merely another lie of the white man.

It hadn't looked that way at first. The lady had smiled on him when he had flashed his roll. She had continued to smile when the roll began to melt—like butter—on the hot griddle of a faro layout.

When Willy Smith left the house which he had hoped to make his castle he was not only broke, but the lady he wooed was frankly making love to a sailor of the grand old U. S. N.

Still, honor was honor. Or perhaps it was just the desire to find consolation in the company of his own kind.

He sought the vacant lot to the rear of the livery-stable which had been the city camp of Black Ibis. Black Ibis was not there.

He made discreet inquiries. Some of the hangers-on around the livery-stable—still there, engaged in a game of craps—had been Black Ibis a couple of hours ago. The Injun was drunk. They had showed the Injun how to roll the dice. And maybe Willy would like to join the game.

But Willy had had enough of gambling for one night. Moreover, he was haunted by a growing fear. He had heard enough to know that Black Ibis had lost all of the money that might have remained to him. And what would Black Ibis do, once he was broke? He would do what any other wild Seminole would do under the circumstances. He would beat it back to the swamps.

Still there was hope. Black Ibis might not leave before morning.

It was with this thought in his mind, and yet a growing certainty that luck was against him even in this, that Willy Smith hastened about the city in search of his missing tribesman.

"All right?"

It was Crossman.

The two of them had almost run into each other on the edge of the gardens of the Royal Magnolia. Crossman was fish-eyed. Willy Smith himself must have shown some sign of distress under his Seminole tan.

"All right?" barked Crossman again.

"Me think so."

"Think so! Don't you know?"

"Black Ibis—me no find 'em."

"Where is his boat?"

That was a practical query. Willy Smith had to admit it—out in the swamps white men were apt to be children, but here in the noises and confusions of the city they were capable of quick, clear thought.

"We go see," he said.

The Miami River is one of several streams that pour over the limestone rim of the State-wide saucer containing the Everglades. Since time out of mind it has been one of the water-trails by which the red dwellers of the interior have reached the ocean. Often, nowadays, the primitive dugouts rock at the side of millionaire launches from the swarming yachts.

They found such a place.

There were a number of Seminole canoes there—they were long and slender, each one

of them dug from a single cypress log—but Black Ibis's particular dugout was not among them. Willy Smith knew. Under the late moon Willy Smith had become pure Seminole.

An aged watchman there came hustling toward them from his little cabin. La, yes! He knowed all the Injuns whoever came to Miami. Black Ibis, drunk but able to take care of himself, had been gone for an hour.

"Gone!" breathed Crossman.

"Old Seminole camp—back in the woods," said Willy Smith hastily.

"Take me there," said Crossman, beginning to shake.

An hour ahead of them, Black Ibis, standing straight and sturdy in the stern of his dugout in spite of the white man's whisky he had drunk, poled on and on under the moon. This was a matter of honor with him. It was more than that. There was a touch of the transcendantal about it. It was vengeance that was at once sacred and safe.

He was going to kill a white man, and for this he had a white man's warrant. He was going to kill the girl that this white man would have stolen from the tribe. For this he had the warrant of tribal law.

Now and then Black Ibis raised his face to the moon, and there was a curse in his heart for the white man and all his works. With the breath of the Everglades in his nostrils the whisky-fumes were leaving him. He breathed a prayer for success.

CHAPTER XVII.

BENEATH SUN AND MOON.

IT was a chase that was to go on day and night—night and day—under the decline of the moon, under the blazing sun—up the swift river and over the rim of the Everglades, then out into the measureless levels of the big swamp. There was no stopping. Black Ibis would not stop. He was like a man possessed, led by a vision. So was Crossman like a man possessed—possessed by ten thousand devils.

There was a reality in this possession to which Crossman had fallen victim—a man tormented by ghosts—ghosts of birds, the ghost of his wife, the ghost of his unknown daughter.

What did this daughter look like? Did she look like her mother? They had called her Sonia. Would she live to take that name again? He had wearied Willy Smith with his questions. The Seminole had told him much. But now the Seminole was silent—poling, poling, poling!

For here was the third case of possession—the case of Willy Smith. Little by little, Willy Smith had shed his clothes and with them his aspirations to be white. The transformation had begun that first night when they left the boat-landing in Miami.

First the coat and waistcoat with the treasured watch-chains; then the shoes; after that, collar and necktie, and so on.

Willy Smith now stood in the stern of the borrowed dugout in his fluttering shirt, using the push-pole of his ancestors, as no Seminole could have done better. Twice, now, he had used the push-pole to spear fish in the passing waters. Such other stores as he and the white man subsisted on had been found in island camps mostly deserted. Wild meat, wild fruit, a wild people, and the smoke of Miami still just back of them over the horizon to the east.

But the eyes of the three men who were possessed were ever on the west—Black Ibis in the lead and unconscious that he was pursued—the pursuers now gaining on him, now losing amid the thousand twisted trails. It was a queer game of hide-and-seek, of life and death; it was a queer mixture of calm and frenzy.

There was something of all this—of the possession, the calm and the frenzy, and the mingling of life and death—in the world of Kenwood and Meerita at this time.

Where the egrets nested, it was like a grotto under the sea—filled with shafts of pale light, with green and floating shadows, with sable depths. But in this sylvan abyss the white birds fluttered about like no creatures of this earth imagined of man. The shoulder-plumes of the egrets were like angelic mantles.

After watching them for a space, Meerita had turned to Kenwood. She put her face

against his breast. His own breast heaved and he patted her head.

"Shall we ever be like that?" she asked.

"How so?"

"When we die."

"Death is a long, long way off," he replied.

But death was never very remote. They weren't aware of what impended until the first shot was fired, and then they were apprised quickly enough. A band of plume-hunters had come up from the west, possibly the ones who had shot at Kenwood before. They must have believed him to be somewhere else.

The invaders numbered four—three white men and a Seminole. The white men were ragged and unshaven. They looked unclean. The Indian himself was an outcast, a dusky brute, his shirt in rags.

It was the Indian who had fired first. An egret fell screaming. It was the signal for a bird panic. The white hunters stood patient. They knew that the other egrets would not go far—that they would soon come dropping back again, careless of their own safety.

Kenwood jerked an automatic from its holster. It was the only weapon be carried. But before he could fire, or call for surrender, Meerita had sprung from his side with a cry, was running toward the Indian who had fired. In the pandemonium of bird-cries and rushing wings, the Indian had noticed nothing but the stricken bird which was his prize.

He snatched it as it fell, had already started to pluck out its shoulder-plumes before these should be stained by blood or mire. The bird fought weakly.

Then Kenwood himself had the Indian by the throat. The Indian let out a strangled cough. Kenwood himself felt murder in his heart. The Indian dropped bird and gun and went over backward. At the same time Kenwood heard a double report—not very loud, the reports of the small calibered guns that the white plume-hunters use for egret, as less liable to ruin the precious shoulder-quills.

One of the white hunters had dropped another bird. The other shot must have been meant for Meerita. While he was occupied with his Indian she had charged the white hunters like a leopard.

Kenwood flung his Indian from him, slashing him as he stumbled. Kenwood fired.

He saw one of the ragged invaders jerk and begin to walk backward. He was winged. Then the man with whom Meerita had closed broke and ran. As he did so, Meerita clapped her hand to her shoulder. She turned to Kenwood with a swift smile.

All this had been taking place in the depth of the swamp—in water, mud, and bramble, in the pale-green lights and heavy shadows that suggested a grotto under the sea.

After that, it was just sniping, more or less blindly, through the thick of the swamp—Kenwood's one desire to drive the invaders off. Two of them at least he knew had got a lesson they wouldn't forget. And Meerita was bleeding for the cause—just a scratch on the pale gold of her shoulder, but enough to tell Kenwood more poignantly than anything else what her life had come to mean for him.

He said to himself: "She fought for me! She bled for me!"

The raiders had got their wounded away.

Once more, by slow degrees, the tumult was overwashed by the great tide of forest silence.

"*Ah-h! Ah-h!*" went the egrets.

It was the only word they had, but into it they could throw almost all the meaning of human speech. Now they were using it to console the frightened nestlings; and—who knows?—as a requiem for the fallen.

Meerita and Kenwood buried the dead egrets that afternoon, out in the little prairie where they had first spoken to each other, at the foot of the pink-blooming myrtle.

Over the double grave at sunset Meerita had Kenwood fire a shot in the Seminole way—into the west, to speed the souls of the departed on that longer flight. And she taught him to say the Seminole words, such as are spoken over the honorable dead:

"*Lo, they have gone into the Big Sleep. Hesukatemeesee receive their souls!*"

Said Meerita, "They may once have been a pair of lovers. And now they have known what love is in the fullest. They

may have been people who were childless. So they became egrets, and thus had the joy of having little ones. Is not Hesukate-meesee the Most Kind as well as the Most High?"

But it was in the thought of both of them that they themselves had looked upon the Great Serpent. Into Meerita's eyes there came a moisture. Into Kenwood's heart there came an echo of that cry that Meerita had uttered on his own account: "But I want you to live! I want you to live!"

And all this time Black Ibis—like a Seminole version of a death-angel, or a Seminole Charon—was poling his canoe through the unmapped trails of the Everglades. Each hour drawing a little nearer to this camp of theirs, each hour refining his plan to slay them both and collect the egret-plumes at his leisure.

Behind him—now many miles behind him, again so close that it was almost in sight—that other canoe; in the front of this, a white man, reeling with the heat, a man—if there ever was such a one—already dead and gone to hell; in the stern of the canoe, a half naked Seminole who had once dreamed of being white, but who wished to be white no longer.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE RED MOTHER.

AND there was old Porru, the Charmer, and Estékenee, his wife, coming back from their medicine trip. The man walked first, and the woman followed. Each carried a pack containing various articles of camp equipment. They seldom spoke. They covered mile after mile without pause —which was nothing, for they were of a race that lived on its feet, never rode, owned no horses.

Porru looked at a rattlesnake that coiled in the trail, and the rattlesnake slid from its coil and made way for them leisurely.

Said Estékenee, "You can charm anything."

Porru replied, "All but the Father of Serpents."

Now and then Porru paused and put fire to a dry palmetto-bed, and the gray smoke billowed up in a certain way, for a certain length of time. In this way he made a writing on the sky that could be read on a day like this from as far as twenty miles away. For the day was of a matchless clearness. All over the prairies the larks were singing. There were thousands of swallows about. And Porru was so expert with his smoke language that he never so much as turned his head to see that the smoke he left behind was what he intended it to be.

Said Estékenee, "You summon the council, and yet you do not know what the council will have to decide."

Porru replied, "The council will have a decision to make."

They were like an old couple coming home from church. They were as devoted as any couple who ever went to church. They spoke softly. Estékenee was free to discuss her husband's business. He valued her opinion. But as yet they had avoided the subject of Meerita. Each was conscious of the other's secret grief on her account, secret hopes, secret fears.

The trail they followed carried them past the boat-landing on the edge of the Everglades. They had gone but a little way beyond the boat-landing when Estékenee let out a low call that attracted Porru's attention. Estékenee was straining her eyes out across the endless levels of the saw-grass country.

"Do you see?" she asked.

"What?"

"A man in a canoe."

There was a longish interval before Porru could make out the moving speck on the horizon.

"He comes like one in a hurry," said Porru.

"It is Black Ibis," said Estékenee. "He comes from Miami. He has been in touch with the plume-merchant. It is from the plume-merchant the death order has come—for the girl."

"How so?"

"The plume-merchant and the white youth, Kenwood, are enemies. The plume-merchant would order the death of Ken-

wood—and you yourself, and all the signs, have said that two must die."

"But the plume-merchant is the girl's own father. I sent him but six days ago the writing left by his woman when she died.

"Not the writing, but the words thereof. The writing I have kept here in my belt—to guard it from mischance against such time as he shall come to these parts. The plume-merchant is the maid's own father!"

"But I am her mother," said Estékenee. "By love she has become flesh of my flesh and spirit of my spirit." The declaration seemed to remind the old Indian woman of all that Meerita was to her—although she needed no such reminder. She let herself go for a while in a crooning expression of grief that was almost like a dirge. But out of this she suddenly came with a gasp. She was startled. Her mouth went open. "Porru, my man!" she gasped.

"What is it?"

"A thought came to me. My heart just now was a place of dark clouds. The thought was a flash of lightning from the clouds."

"The lightning is holy."

"So was this thought—straight from the Great Spirit."

"Tell me what it was."

"We may yet save Meerita and her youth."

"They have looked on the Great Serpent."

"So have we!"

It was true enough that Porru, the Charmer, could charm anything.

He and Estékenee were at the boat-landing when Black Ibis arrived from his long trip across the Everglades. Black Ibis had murder in his heart and brain. That dream of vengeance—tribal and almost sacred—now had possession of his very soul. Black Ibis was in a hurry. There was nothing on earth that he was interested in except this business of getting even with Kenwood and Meerita—by killing them first—then indulging his blood-thirst further, besides making much money, by killing the egrets afterward.

He was as bad as any mad bull. He was as bad as any wounded alligator. And yet Porru handled him as easily as he would have handled either of these other dangerous brutes.

"Why your haste, Black Ibis?"

"You know; so why do you ask?"

And Black Ibis would have left Porru and Estékenee there where they had intercepted him. But Porru called softly to him to wait a moment, and, as if in spite of himself, Black Ibis sullenly paused.

"You have been appointed the slayer of Kenwood and Meerita," said Porru softly. "I stopped you before. What if I should stop you again?"

"I am young and strong," said Black Ibis. "You are old. Another thing! You yourself as good as killed the girl by giving her to a white man. The law is that such wantons be killed. If they are not killed by the hand of a Seminole the Great Serpent finds some other way. I am the servant of the Great Serpent."

"You speak with a wisdom beyond your years," said Porru. "But a white man—this white man, Kenwood—is not answerable to the Great Serpent. Aren't you afraid of the craft of the white man? Kill a white man, and a regiment of soldiers will come, as it was in Osceola's time."

"But not this time," Black Ibis grinned. "The plume-merchant—who is as great as any white man—he wants this Kenwood put down an alligator-hole, and he has given me money to do it."

"Even as I said," said Estékenee in a whisper.

"Listen, Black Ibis," said Porru. "You are right. You know as well as we do that my woman and I have already mourned in secret, that the spirits have shown us that Meerita is lost to us, and that the spirits have shown us the double death-sign. We are submissive. At the same time, you cannot expect us to let these two young people go into the Big Sleep without us preparing them to some extent."

"What do you want from me?"

"Grant us one more day."

"How do I know—"

"Listen! To-morrow, at break of day—when the moon is there"—and Porru pointed at a certain position in the sky—"come

to the white man's camp. Come from the south, by the side of the shed, and there you will see the two whom you seek. I answer for it on my soul."

CHAPTER XIX.

AT BREAK OF DAY.

ONLY the swallow-tailed kites could have seen all the gathering elements of this human storm as the night began to fade. It was one of those mornings of late moonlight when one could hardly have told whether it was day or night. But the kites knew—flying far up in the first faint pinkness while down on the earth all was still green and silver under the fragment of moon.

First, here and there, scattered over the plain, were various old Indians, all members of the council, and headed for the medicine-camp to which Porru had summoned them: Dusk Eagle, Coiled Tiger, Blind Heron, and others like them.

Willy Smith and the big chief of the bird-slayers—Bernard Crossman—now with the boat-landing in sight after their race from Miami. Soon enough? Or too late? The silence returned no answer. But just over there, in that black cypress-head—so Willy Smith averred—was the rookery that Black Ibis would indubitably shoot up the moment he had consummated that other business—the slaying of Kenwood and Kenwood's gal. Not yet had the birds been disturbed. So Willy Smith's Indian woodcraft told him, even while he and Crossman were afar, so there was still hope.

Black Ibis—who himself had spent the night making medicine, to insure that his aim should be right, now stalking a little closer, through the deceiving sheen of late moonlight and early dawn—each moment a little closer to Kenwood's camp. So a king-snake travels while on the hunt, and not more silently. For, fleetingly, several times it had occurred to Black Ibis to wonder why he had delayed in his work of vengeance at the request of old Porru.

But no request from old Porru could be lightly dismissed. Black Ibis was glad that he hadn't shot Porru. He was sorry that he had spoken to him roughly. Every one knew that Porru had power over spirits.

"And yet," said Black Ibis to himself, "Porru, who can see things invisible to the eyes of others, must have seen that my medicine was strong and that I would kill Kenwood and the girl, anyway, else he wouldn't have fallen in with my plan."

And, sure enough, there were Kenwood and Meerita headed for Kenwood's camp on the pine island from Porru's camp at the first crack of day.

It must have been that Porru could charm anything to have charmed Kenwood into remaining away from his camp near the rookery this night. And that was what Porru had done.

"I dreamed of the Great Serpent," whispered Meerita.

"I also dreamed of the Great Serpent," said Kenwood. "But I also dreamed that it was friendly—that it was going to protect us—that we should leave the swamp-country, become husband and wife according to the law of our own people, and live happily forever after."

Meerita smiled up at him.

"It is a great blessing to know," she said, "that not even death can separate us. I had grown afraid. But now, with you ever at my side, I know that love is stronger than death. Death is nothing but a little separation—you in one comp, I in another, but both in the land of the Great Spirit, where we can easily find each other. If I die, I shall become an egret, and you will keep me from harm."

"You are better as you are, Meerita. You are more beautiful than an egret. You are dearer to me this way than you would be even as an angel."

"Once I thought that I could never leave Porru and Estékenee. Now it is you to whom I cling."

"I wonder," said Kenwood, "why the two old people wished us to remain in their camp for the night. I wonder when they went away, and why. They seemed to have some secret."

"Perhaps it was to hide their grief."

"Grief for what? I never saw them so cheerful, so tender. It made me glad to think that they had been your parents."

"They have ever been cheerful and tender," said Meerita. "They have never been more so than since you came to take me away from them. They knew that you were coming. I don't know how they knew it. But old Seminoles can talk with spirits, and the spirits tell them many things."

"Maybe it was to hear the spirits talk again," said Kenwood, "that they went away from us in the night. Come! Let us hurry to my camp."

Of all the human population in the wilderness it was only Porru himself who was not on the move—he and Estékenee, his wife.

"The time is almost here," said Porru.

He drew his old wife to him as if they were still young lovers.

"I grieve only for you."

"Your love and wisdom showed the way."

"Was there no other way?"

"Two must die. The Great Serpent revealed that two must die."

"Two lovers!" whispered Estékenee.

"Two lovers, my beloved."

"If I could have made the sacrifice alone!"

"It is no sacrifice," said Porru softly. "When you are old, it is sweet to die—doubly sweet to die together. We shall become egrets. Later, we shall fly to the west—"

There was a double, heavy, reverberating report from a high-powered magazine rifle—Black Ibis's rifle. Black Ibis having completed his stealthy advance, had seen the semblance of a pair of young lovers seated there in Kenwood's camp. All the ecstasy of his stored-up red mysticism were in his arms as he raised his rifle. He couldn't have mised.

The prophesy of the Great Serpent was fulfilled.

The sound of the double report traveled far. It was added to by the cawing racket from the rookery as the waking birds swarmed up into the early morning light and fluttered there, confused.

Gun and bird-cry was like the crack of doom to Bernard Crossman. He was already a mere ghost of his former self. Those three days and nights in the swamp had been a long session of self-neglect and unmitigated horror. The horror had reached a climax.

The scattered Indians out across the plain heard the shots and located them correctly. They guessed it was some tragedy that old Porru had foreseen, else why had Porru summoned them to come in all haste? Old as most of these Indians were, they started to run in the direction of the bird-warden's camp.

All except Blind Heron—he of the sightless eyes and the cedar wand. Blind Heron also could see things invisible to others—a gift acquired by all who are very old and have thought much on such matters. Blind Heron stopped in his tracks when he heard the shots. He cast up his face. He said:

"Lo, I heard the echo from the next world in my brother Porru's voice the last time that we spoke together. The Big Sleep takes him. Hesukatemeesee receive his soul!"

Up there in Kenwood's camp, Black Ibis was like a man who comes out of a daze. He staggered slightly. It was the reaction of the tremendous strain he had been under. He saw that he had not missed. But there was something the matter with his eyes. It was odd, but this pair of lovers he had slain did not look like the white man and the girl he had loved. They looked like Estékenee, the wife of Porru, and Porru's self.

Black Ibis was still standing there when he saw Meerita and Kenwood come running from the woods.

Meerita and Kenwood had no attention except for those who had fallen. They did not see Black Ibis as he crept away. Perhaps if they had, Kenwood would have killed Black Ibis then. But that would have been unnecessary. Black Ibis was already doomed and knew he was doomed. After what he had done there would be no refuge for him in the world of the living. He desired no such refuge.

Meerita had flung herself to Estékenee's side, there where Estékenee had fallen on the floor of Kenwood's camp at the side of

Porru; and Meerita was calling to the red mother in the language of the Big Cypress, the name for mother:

"*Wachee! Wachee!*"

It was the first word that Meerita had ever learned of human speech, and Meerita's voice sounded now as it might have sounded when it was still the only word she knew.

With her last breath, Estékenee also recalled a word from that time, and she called Meerita now what she had called her then:

"*Eech-ochee!*"—little fawn.

She smiled. Porru, the Charmer, also smiled; but it was the smile of the happy dead.

CHAPTER XX.

THE FABRIC OF LIFE.

BERNARD CROSSMAN saw his daughter. He saw her this day. But she didn't see him. She was not to see him until a long time afterward, when Bernard Crossman himself was ready for the white man's equivalent of the Big Sleep. And before this time—ever since that day in the bird-warden's camp on the western edge of the Everglades—there had ceased to be a big chief of the plume trade. The trade still went on, spasmodically—of a diminishing popularity, against a growing hostility of public and private opinion.

But this day when Crossman came up into the camp where Porru and Estékenee lay dead, he saw a young woman in the garb of a Seminole who mourned as a Seminole girl would have mourned—with her hair down over her face. It was manifest that the girl saw nothing but her grief and her affection. She was not alone. Kenwood sat by her side. His arm was about her shoulders. To all else she was as blind as Blind Heron himself.

Blind Heron had come into the camp at about the same time that Crossman had arrived there. Blind Heron paused on the edge of the camp, leaning lightly on his cedar wand. In his rolling whisper he asked:

"Where is my brother, Porru?"

Dusk Eagle and the other old Indians who were there had carried Porru and Estékenee away from the place they had fallen, out to a place under the pines, where the grass was clean and undefiled by human feet.

"Brother," said Dusk Eagle, "Porru and Estékenee, his wife, have been summoned by Micco-Pusutke, Chief of the Dead."

He led Blind Heron to where the slain pair lay, and there the blind chief knelt. He put his hands on both. He said:

"They have passed, yet will they tarry with us for a while."

In the form of egrets he meant, perhaps; or in the winged form of creatures even finer than egrets. Among many races such creatures are said to exist.

And all this time, Crossman had been standing there—swaying slightly as he stood—looking across the little pineland at the girl whom he knew now to be his daughter and yet whom he did not dare to claim as such. He did not weep. But in his face there was a look that might have been there had he been looking at the original Sonia and her risen from the dead.

"Where is he who was the chief of the egret-slayers?" asked Blind Heron.

He must have heard the voice of Willy Smith, the renegade, and have guessed who it was to whom Willy whispered things in English. They brought Crossman to where Blind Heron still knelt.

"There is a writing here that belongs to him," said the Heron.

His fingers found dead Porru's belt, and he removed this. With the deftness of the blind, he drew his knife along a sewn edge and extracted a paper. Without a word he held this up to where the white man stood. It was the paper that Porru had kept all these years, the one with the writing on it signed "*Sonia,*" and which Porru had committed to memory.

"Will he keep it?" asked Blind Heron with his soft and melancholy voice. "Or does he wish it to be given to the maiden—who was his daughter—but is his daughter no more until her mourning for these her other parents be done?"

Willy Smith translated. Crossman took the paper; but for the greater reunion he would have to wait. He and his red agent went away.

When these two had departed from the camp, Blind Heron said:

"Lo, we are all spirits. Our bodies are but lodges in which we dwell. The poles crumble. The thatch becomes broken. And presently so shall we each move to a fairer house, even as have Porru, our brother, and she who was our sister, Estékenee. Farewell!"

Kenwood and Meerita lingered in the egret country until the nesting season was past and the white birds had dropped the plumes that so often had been both bridal-veil and shroud. Only a few egrets were now left in the swamp—there where the cypress, hung with moss, was like a cloister for them, where it was eternally dusk, like the interior of a cathedral. In this twilight the white birds shimmered. They undulated through the shadows with a movement that was almost too easy for flight.

Kenwood and Meerita knew all these birds—knew them as individuals—as shepherds know their individual sheep.

But one morning as they went to tell the birds good-by, now that the need of human guardianship was past, they saw a pair of egrets they had never seen before.

"New birds!" said Meerita.

"Young birds," said Kenwood.

And yet the bird-strangers were not afraid. They were a perfect pair.

"Perhaps," said Meerita with that haunting quality in her voice she had learned from her Seminole mother—"perhaps when we die, we shall become egrets for a while. What if these two were Porru and Estékenee!"

"In very truth," said Kenwood, "there are things in life unsuspected of white men."

And there passed through his mind, like the flitting of moths, the odd bits of knowledge that had come to him since beginning life over again here in the wilderness with Meerita. These bits of knowledge were strange and yet they were familiar—echoes of folk-tales he had heard in other parts of the world, shreds of old mythologies.

These newcomers among the egrets were incredibly bright. They seemed to find it enough just to be together. They floated through the aerial gardens. She fled, he followed—down into the caves of green shadows, then back again amid the high branches, with the tree orchids about them and the red and purple bloom of the air plants.

Then they seemed to answer some other call—it was a call to the open sky; and up they went into the first blaze of the sunrise—while Meerita and Kenwood watched them with a feeling of tenderness and envy; higher, higher, until they were but two atoms of light that sped toward the dawn of a new creation.

(The end.)

ʊ ʊ ʊ ʊ

LOSS

AH, little one, so slender and so frail,
How could I dream that I should miss you so?
With wild regret that cannot now avail,
I rail at fate, that bade you from me go!

I laid my hands upon your golden head
A few short moments ere you went your way;
I cherished you! But now all hope has fled,
And sadness blotted out the sun's bright ray.

Will you not touch my blindly groping hand?
In pity I beseech you! I implore!
Come to your rightful place—my collar-band,
Oh, collar-button, somewhere on the floor!

Grace E. Mott.

Twins

by

George Kerr O'Neill

MISS VIOLET McGOWAN fanned her perspiring brow and sighed. In her lap, and overflowing on to the floor, was a mass of magazines and clippings from the woman's pages of the newspapers. The covers of the magazines proclaimed them as of the physical cultural variety, while a glance at some of the clippings elicited such pearls of wisdom as "Fat is Folly," "Obesity a Crime," and much more to the same effect. Only the merest glance was needed to perceive that Violet's classification was No. 1, Class A, in the category of foolish criminals. Once upon a time she could have been described as stout. Now she was fat, and growing fatter. Long had the women, accustomed to see through every feminine subterfuge, known the awful truth; but even the men could see it now.

Violet's sigh was eloquent of hope abandoned. She had read them all twice, some even five and six times, on the chance that some stray bit of golden wisdom might have evaded her anxious eye; but now she knew the worst. Of the multifarious infallible, "one and only successful" methods of reducing superfluous flesh there was none left to her. She had tried them all; and each of them had proved efficacious—in a way. Each of them had succeeded in adding something to her stature—horizontally. She was convinced there was some mistake. The instructions must have been intended for thin women.

Even that most implacable enemy of adipose tissue, Disappointed Love, had striven in vain, in Violet's person, and at last succumbed to the inevitable. Two seasons previously Violet's heart—as tender as the rest of her was sturdy—had been cruelly bruised and lacerated by a heartless, inconsequential person of the male persuasion. Here if anywhere was the needed antifat remedy, or else all the romancers and poets from time immemorial were self-convicted liars. Vain hope. Violet had pined, and the more she pined the heavier she got.

The failure of the acknowledged master of them all had not prevented her trying all the other known and unknown methods. Violet was Irish, and she would not give up while there was a vestige of hope. But now she gazed disconsolately at a seductive picture of the "before and after" variety. The picture was twins, except that one of the twins was as elephantine as the other was sylphlike. Time was when that picture had galvanized into life again the expiring flame of hope in Violet's ample bosom.

Now it merely aroused in her anger, in conjunction with a naive wonder as to how they did it. She was half convinced they had some way of blowing a woman up like a balloon, before the picture was taken. Anyway, it was a fraud—a shameless fraud. Violet ought to know, if any one. She slammed the magazine onto the floor viciously, just as the door opened and Violet's opposite entered.

If Miss Louise Westerly had been a little shorter, any of the antifat people would

gladly have paid big money to get her and Violet to pose for one of the before-and-after art creations. The result would have been in a class by itself. But Miss Westerly was five feet eleven, and looked at least two feet taller, owing to the fact that nature had made her no wider than was absolutely necessary for the accommodation of the usual number of internal organs deemed adequate for the sustaining of life. Had she been cut open it would probably have been discovered that her appendix—as a useless appendage—had been dispensed with to economize valuable space; and that she had been given but one lung, since it has been shown that one is quite sufficient for all ordinary purposes. Also, had it not been for the two feet which descended from the constricted aperture of the latest thing in tight skirts, a spectator would have sworn that she had but one leg, because it appeared impossible that two normal legs could exist and function within the confined limits of the garment. She always carried herself very upright, and when she bent endeavored to do so as nearly as possible her whole length, seeming to have a not unnatural fear of breaking in two in the middle. This stiffness of movement made her resemble nothing so much as a stilt walking around by itself.

She looked at the offending periodical as it struck the floor, and then at Violet severely.

"Some people don't know when they're well off," she sighed disconsolately. Her efforts to put on weight had proved as unavailing as Violet's to discard it. "I wish I had your flesh."

Violet snorted.

"You know you don't mean that," she said sarcastically. "You mean you wish you had *some* of it. Well, so do I. If there was any way of gettin' it onto you, short of skinnin' me alive, you'd be welcome to just about two-thirds of it. But there ain't. These people"—she kicked the offending reading matter savagely—"know as much about reducin' flesh as I know about runnin' an ice-machine. But at relievin' people of their superfluous cash they're wonders—just plain wonders. They've got all the con men that ever robbed a rube of his roll eatin' right out of their hands.

"They can get it away from you almost as fast as you put on flesh under their treatment, and that's some record speed, believe me! No, Louise, we've been goin' the wrong way about it. You want to take a course of this stuff I've been fillin' out on, and you give me the addresses of the people that 've been tryin' to make you fat. Then we might have some luck. Come in!" she called, in answer to a cheerful *rat-a-tat* on the door.

"Oh, it's only Tommy," she said languidly, as a small, wiry youth, who might have been anywhere from twenty to thirty, walked in.

"Yes, Vi," he agreed humbly, "that's all. I expect to be found wanting every time I'm weighed in the balance with you."

"If it wasn't so hot I'd wring your neck!" snapped Violet. "You can be thankful you've got *your* sort of figure—or lack of it—this weather."

The heap of papers caught his eye. "Whazzis?"

He stooped and gathered up a handful of clippings. He shook his head chidingly. "At it again, Vi, I see. Paying real money to these crooks, when I give you good advice, gratis—although I need the money." He ran his eye over the collection. "'Why Be Fat?' 'Obesity Overcome.' 'Who Put the Add in Adipose?' 'If you weigh more than two hundred, something's wrong.'"

"You bet!" agreed Miss McGowan emphatically.

"'Don't Be a Heavyweight.' Ah, there you have it—there's the give-away. Might as well tell me not to be a five-footer. What would you think of me if I handed money to a man who claimed to be able to make me six feet high?"

Violet smiled.

"Just so," agreed Tommy. "And that's what I think of you, Vi. No, my child, it's hard—I hate to break it to you—but there's no hope. Some people are born to be fat, just as others are born to be poets or musicians."

"I wonder what you were born to be, Mr. Burrows?" inquired Violet sweetly. "I never saw you try anything but actin'."

Tommy feigned not to hear this.

"And Louise was born to be thin, just as you were born to be fat. Exercise is supposed to put on muscle and take off fat. Well, if Louise exercised, it 'd take off muscle—or try to; and if you exercised, it would put it on. And if Louise has a profound sorrow, it 'll make her thinner. If you have a profound sorrow, it 'll make you fatter. The natural law. We always get what we don't want, in this life."

"I believe you, Tommy," agreed Violet. "Sometimes you say something."

"Now, you two, instead of spending your hard-earned savings on these people, ought to give thanks that you are as the Lord made you, and capitalize it. You can't change yourselves, so why not team together and strike an average?"

"That'd be a great combination, Tommy. Don't you know that we both turn green when we look at each other? Louise is apt to go crazy almost any day and start to carve a hundred pounds or so of flesh out of my side. And I'd repeat, and try to take her apart to see how she gets that way. No, thank you!"

"Think of it!" he continued enthusiastically, as the possibilities opened out before him. "Think of how it would look in the billing. 'The Polly Sisters—the Siamese Twins of the Twentieth Century. Which is Which? No one has ever been able to find out; even they themselves don't know. No distinguishing marks—the same face, the same figure, and not even a wart to go by. Mixed in the cradle, and mixed ever since!' They'd eat it up. And when you came on you'd be a riot!"

Miss McGowan began to look interested. But her friend regarded life seriously.

"I don't quite see—" she began.

"No, Louise, you wouldn't," agreed Tommy. "But it won't be necessary. The audience 'll do that. They pay for the privilege.

"And then think of it, Vi, when you began to get action. Louise would look like the party booked to furnish the light and airy motion stuff—instead of which she'd stand like a stick while you did a dance around her—like a maypole. Get it? Talk about contrast?"

Violet nodded. The thing was working in her mind, that was plain.

"Thank the Lord, you're light on your feet, Vi. Lots of people can look like baby elephants, but to see a baby elephant dance like a fairy—that's some sight!"

"Look here, Tommy Burrows! If you think it's necessary to insult me every other word you speak, you can take yourself off. I know I'm no featherweight, if I do resemble a feather bed, but you needn't remind me of the fact. As for your bright idea, I suppose you'll want to write the sketch—I believe you do a little of that in your off hours—and won't object to a hundred or so advance royalties to get busy on it. Am I right?"

"Well, Vi, I might as well grab it before the antifat crowd get it away from you."

"Don't worry, Tommy. They've got the last penny—"

"Great Scott!"

—"They're goin' to get out of me."

"Oh," he sighed, "I thought you meant there wasn't any left."

"Don't you worry. But if you get any of it, you'll earn it first. Not that I'm not sayin' you've not got something like an idea to start on."

"Haven't I, though?" he agreed enthusiastically. "And get a line on this—you'd dress just alike, and do your hair just alike, and roll your eyes just alike—see? They'd be in spasms in half a minute. And I believe if Louise took a reef or two in her corsets she'd look even more so. She can go the limit at tightening up—she won't have to do any romping around."

Miss Westerly's mouth opened in unfeigned surprise.

"Are you recommending tight lacing for me?" she inquired severely. "Why, I believe you *are* crazy—just as Violet says."

Tommy winked surreptitiously at Violet as he turned to the door.

"Explain it to her, Vi. I'm off to dope out the scenario while the thing's sizzling in my mind. Leave it to Tommy."

II.

It took some explaining. Louise couldn't see it. The idea appeared to her silly.

Violet lost patience.

"How do I know it 'll make a hit? How do I know I'm fat? When any one's been in vaudeville as long as I have, they know that anything that's "different" is sure fire. Look at how the Brittons and me cleaned up on that loony dance of ours. If Jim hadn't had some money left him, so that, always bein' afraid Lil would get hurt with some of those acrobatics of hers, he decided they'd leave the stage, we'd be doin' it yet. It was a full-grown riot. And so'll this be, if Tommy does the idea anything like justice."

"It seems to me you're expecting a whole lot there," said Miss Westerly sarcastically.

"Well, he's got an idea to start on, anyway, and that's nine-tenths of a vaudeville act. And that reminds me. Keep it under your hat. If any of those fresh guys got wise to this, they'd stick on a cheap imitation before we'd even got rehearsals started, and then sue us for infringement."

"But such work! For any one who has any respect for the art of acting—"

"See here, Louise," said Violet impatiently, "show a little common sense. Lay off that art stuff of yours, for a season at least, and learn what real money sounds like. Then you'll be able to buy a little theater or two of your own, if this thing pans out as well as it promises. What can you do in the legitimate on your own? You've been out of a job for months. You know very well there's few parts any one can use you in. You're in the sad case that for you a fat part's got to be a thin one. And it ain't oftener than once in every twenty years they produce 'Jack and the Beanstalk.'"

Miss Westerly rose to her full height, and elevated her eyebrows in addition—an impressive procedure.

"If you're going to be insulting—"

"Oh, come, Louise, don't be foolish. If you want to knock back, you can't miss me. Even a woman could hit me with a brick at ten paces. And you're going to play a maypole in our piece, ain't you? So keep your hair on. It's too hot to get riled."

Miss Westerly consented to be seated once more, though she still wore an air of offended dignity.

"I must confess," she said at last, "that on other grounds the prospect doesn't appeal to me. It's bad enough of itself to be as thin as I am—but the idea of being laughed at regularly because I'm thin is distasteful, to say the least."

"But think of bein' paid regularly for bein' laughed at for bein' thin," encouraged Violet. "Fix your mind on that, to the exclusion of all else, as the efficiency experts have it. You get laughed at regularly anyway, the same as me, the only difference bein' we don't get a red cent in exchange for the amusement we furnish. It's about time we started in to collect."

Miss Westerly wavered.

"Oh, well, I'll try the thing, any way," she grudgingly consented. "But mind," she qualified, "I reserve entire freedom of action—if it doesn't meet with my approval."

When Tommy read them his manuscript it took the combined efforts of both of them to keep her from backing out. The idea had seemed silly enough; but Tommy's treatment of it she thought the limit of absurdity. But the experienced Violet recognized on the instant what every actor is in quest of—the fool-proof sketch.

No time was lost in getting rehearsals under way. Violet had had two prosperous seasons, and in consequence was occupying a modest apartment of two rooms and a bath, the extreme of luxury for a practical soul that looked into the future and dreaded the day when she would be too fat to fight, in a manner of speaking, so that she salted down what of her earnings were left her after her efforts at reducing. The sitting-room of the apartment was of fair size, adequate for whipping the piece into shape; with the additional advantage that both Louise and Tommy had rooms in the same house, so that all the members of the company were available for rehearsal at a moment's notice.

If the idea had seemed promising in prospect, it was nothing to the reality, when it began to shape up. Louise, mutely protesting at the part she had been seduced into playing, went through her work with

the mien of a Christian martyr; and as her rôle, to be properly amusing, required that she preserve an unvarying seriousness of countenance, she unconsciously made it the more excruciating. Tommy was in high feather. Violet, generous in payment where material promised to be of value to her, all the more when she knew that another member of the "profession" needed the money, had given Tommy an advance, with the promise of a substantial sum if the piece justified their expectations at the try-out. He saw no reason why he should not collect in the very near future.

Also, he neglected to knock wood.

III.

DURING the course of a day's shopping Violet, her arms full of small bundles, turned into a restaurant for a breathing spell and some refreshment. Just inside the vestibule one of the parcels slipped to the floor. She did not fancy picking things up at the best of times. Now, juggling others as she was, she stood and stared helplessly, waiting for the male of the species to help her out of her predicament. Then at the psychological moment through the street door came Amos Pond.

Amos had been in New York just a month. Much taken with the metropolis at first, he had stayed on and on. Gradually the novelty had worn off, and now the city had begun to pall on him. The nostalgia of homesickness clutched him. He longed for the rolling pastures, the sylvan peace and quiet of his mother's Indiana farm. He had decided to go back the next day. Partly as a farewell celebration, partly in obedience to the sentimental feeling that possessed him, he had hied him where, thanks to the kindly tip of a good samaritan of an acquaintance acquired soon after his advent in the city, he had been able to indulge himself in some of the real stuff.

Now, though not exactly spifflicated, he was sufficiently under the influence to be changed from a rather diffident, wordless youth into a gallant man of the world, a cavalier of ready speech pleasing to the ear of femininity.

He stepped forward and retrieved the parcel, contriving to impart to the act of stooping the character of a graceful, sweeping bow. Violet thought she had never seen anything more fetching. But instead of returning it to her, he retained it, and glanced at the others.

"Better let me help you carry 'em in," he suggested. "They look like they might slip."

Violet sized him up. He was about medium height, and rather heavily built himself, and his face was round and good-natured. While he did not look the rube, as depicted on the stage, was garbed like any ready-made New Yorker, there was yet about him a something suggestive of the hayfields and open spaces that appealed to one whose life was spent principally among stage scenery. The innocence of his open face—almost as round as an open-faced watch—won her completely. This was no would-be masher.

"Thank you so much," she said in her prettiest manner, her rosy cheeks dimpling into a smile as she permitted him to relieve her of the larger portion of her burden.

He deposited them on a chair at her side. He raised his hat, about to leave her, though with obvious reluctance.

"Why not sit down and keep me company?" she invited. "It's lonesome eatin' alone. This burg's an awful lonesome place, anyway."

"You've hit it right, Miss—"

"McGowan," smiled Violet.

—"Miss McGowan. I wouldn't have believed, when I first struck this town, and seen all the people rushin' back and forth, that it was the lonesomest place I'd ever struck; but it's a fact. I wouldn't live here for any money."

Violet sighed.

"Some people have to live here," she said. It seemed at that moment a sad, almost tragic condition to Violet, who was one of those who could not have been induced to live anywhere else permanently for anything life had to offer. She felt an unaccountable longing for the scent of new-mown hay.

"I live in the country," he said. It chimed right in with her present feeling.

"It must be lovely to live in the country," she sighed again, luxuriating in this new, delicious mood.

It was past the usual luncheon hour, and they had the place almost to themselves. Circumstances were propitious for conversation. He became confidential.

"Mother owns a little farm in Indiana. I had to come on here—some business of an estate. It's harvest time, but we've got plenty of help; and mother runs the farm, anyway. She wouldn't think of lettin' me interfere. Mother likes bossin' things. Told me to stay as long as I wanted and enjoy myself. Been here a month. Goin' back to-morrow—or I *was* goin' back to-morrow.

"Don't know but what I might stay a little longer now," he added as an afterthought, raising his eyes shyly to Violet's, which, for some unaccountable reason, dropped before his, while her cheeks flushed suddenly.

"If you stay a while longer, why not come and see me? It's a lonesome burg—"

They sat silent, both under the spell of this apparently new but age-old magic.

"You'd look lovely milking cows," he said at last, apropos of nothing. His hand stole over hers on the table and rested there. She did not withdraw her own.

She liked the sound of the compliment. She recalled the milkmaids she had seen in sketches on the boards. They had been exceedingly pretty, rosy cheeks dimpling under sunbonnets, short skirted, gingham aproned, and had danced and flirted and swung empty milk-pails in time to the music. The rôle appeared attractive. Did he think she would look like that? Perhaps she wasn't so stout after all. Her heart warmed the more to him.

"I'd love to milk a cow," she replied.

Again the magic silence enfolded them.

IV.

LATER that afternoon Violet summoned her coworkers to conclave.

"I'm engaged," she proclaimed proudly.

Tommy slumped into a chair as if shot.

"Good-by, old act!" he gasped. "Something like that always happens to me. I never had any luck."

"Just like you, Tommy Burrows, never thinkin' of anybody but yourself. Some people would have congratulated me."

"I never congratulate anybody when I see them contemplating matrimony. I always wait for the divorce," he rejoined gloomily.

"And you needn't worry. I'm gonna play the act this season. That's enough for you, since you get a lump sum for your labors, Master Tommy."

He brightened.

"Oh, if that's the case, Vi—things are not so bad after all. I'm sure you have my best wishes."

"No thanks," she replied tartly.

"We're goin' to be married in two weeks," she explained. "That 'll give us a little time at Atlantic City before the season opens and we have to jump in with the act."

She glanced down at her plump figure.

"Marriage is the only thing I haven't tried yet. It makes thin women fat—maybe it 'll work the other way with me."

"I'm sure you have my best wishes," said Miss Westerly sweetly, echoing Tommy's words, with thinly veiled sarcasm, which Violet was too happy to detect.

But Tommy's relief was succeeded by a vague uneasiness, and on the occasion of Amos's first call on Violet, when she proudly haled them in to inspect her prize, he felt a recurrence of his presentiments. Miss Westerly, who might naturally have been expected to treat the newcomer with somewhat contemptuous patronage, appeared, on the contrary, rather taken with him. There seemed to be something in that atmosphere of the hayfields with a potent appeal for the sophisticated ladies of the metropolis.

"Triangle stuff again!" groaned Tommy. "Two women and one man. The stage is all set for trouble."

It soon became apparent to his penetrating glance, sharpened by anxiety, that Louise, the highbrow with a penchant for the Continental dramatists, whose "a's" were as broad as herself was not, and who said "eyether" and "neyether" with the

superior air common to those who say "eyether" and "neyether," had fallen hard for a rube.

"It wouldn't happen once in a million years," he lamented; "but it had to happen now just because I need the money. A fat chance there 'll be of that sketch of mine ever seeing the boards, if those women are going to fall out over that Hoosier farmer lad, I don't think!"

He was not surprised when his fears began to be realized. Whenever Amos called, Miss Westerly had a way of happening in on Violet also; worse yet, of attempting to monopolize the conversation and the gentleman friend.

Violet chafed, and threw broad hints, which were loftily ignored by Louise, who proceeded in her amorous campaign quite as if Violet were not present. To say that she lay siege to Amos's heart would not describe it. Nothing as slow as that. She was rushing his defenses, sending her charms over the top in mass formation. Violet, for all her ready and biting speech, was at a disadvantage for a time before Miss Westerly's suddenly disclosed volubility.

Tommy, writhing anyway at the frequent interruptions of rehearsals, and Violet's half-hearted work due to the abstraction of love, watched anxiously the duel of hostile glances, from eyes alight with smoldering fires of jealousy, that raged across the embarrassed person of Amos Pond. He cudgeled his brains frantically to think of a way of averting the threatened explosion.

The day set for the wedding was less than a week off when one afternoon Miss Westerly knocked at Violet's door, and entered smiling, then paused, somewhat taken aback.

"No, he ain't here—yet," said Violet sweetly. "But stick around—no doubt he'd come runnin' right along if he knew you were on hand."

Louise, either not noticing or choosing to ignore the sarcasm, sat down.

"He probably thinks he's engaged to you, anyway, by this time," continued Violet, nettled by the other's imperviousness to the broadest of hints. "It must be sorta bewilderin' to the poor man."

Miss Westerly tossed her head. The surface civilities of polite conversation went into the discard in this primitive combat.

"He comes to see me as much as he does you," she said, flushing. "Just because he happened to get entangled with you first doesn't matter. Engagements have been broken before now."

She elevated her eyebrows disdainfully and smoothed her fingers.

"If I had a sitting-room to invite him to, you'd see where he'd spend his time. It's perfectly plain which of us he fancies most."

This was too much for Violet.

"Oh, it is, is it? Then let me tell you, Louise Westerly, I don't want to hurt your feelin's, but Mr. Pond was sayin' only yesterday he wished we could meet somewhere, instead of his comin' here, so's he could have me to himself for a bit."

This was a facer. Miss Westerly went white, and rose.

"It's a mystery what he sees in you," she said acidly.

"He can *see* me, at any rate," rejoined Violet cuttingly, "and that's more than anybody could you—unless they hit you on top with a sledge first so's you'd broaden out a little."

"Somebody must have hit you with a pile-driver," snapped Louise, inspired by anger to a flight of wit beyond her usual capabilities.

Violet turned purple, an appropriate color. The unexpectedness of it dazed her. For once in her life she had no retort ready. This lack of words when she most needed them was so galling to one of her temperament that her glance roved wildly, as if she were seeking something to throw, in default of verbal ammunition.

Just then Tommy, having had no response to his knock, and recognizing the note of anger in the raised voices, entered hastily. One glance at the panting bosoms and flushed cheeks, and eyes darting spiteful glances, told him that the worst had come to pass.

"Girls, girls!" he raved, distracted. "It's not necessary to behave as if you were *real* sisters!"

Then Violet thought of something.

"What man wants a flagpole now?" she said sarcastically. "The war's over."

Miss Westerly's eyes snapped. For a space she could not find her voice. Then she blurted out:

"I'll never speak to you again as long as I live!"

She covered her face with her hands, and hurried, though stiffly and majestically, from the room. In the distance they heard her own door slam.

"Now you've done it!" accused Tommy dolefully.

Violet burst into tears.

V.

TOMMY realized that if the wedding went through as scheduled it was all up with the act, unless some one could be found as well suited to her part as was Miss Westerly; and he had yet to meet any one who even approached her.

"Nature, like Shakespeare, never repeats," he told himself. "Besides, it couldn't be done twice."

No; it was up to him, and only strenuous measures would serve.

But ideas failed him. He found himself on the afternoon before the day set for the wedding strolling disconsolately. He saw no light anywhere. What man can stop a wedding, if a woman has set her heart on it? "What man?" Something in those two words arrested his attention.

He had the odd sensation that in them lay concealed the germ of the idea he was seeking. He paused in his walk and concentrated his faculties on the problem, but the idea eluded him. It hovered tantalizingly, just outside the eager groping fingers of his mind, slipping aside like a butterfly from a child's clutch, just as he fancied he was about to grasp it. Baffled, he desisted. Then it came without effort. "What man?" What man does stop a wedding, when one is stopped? Why, the prospective bridegroom, of course, if he doesn't show up—

There it was, the great idea! The bridegroom must not show up. Very simple—in theory. The execution still presented difficulties. Very well. Difficulties had never daunted Tommy yet. The little time remaining spurred his mind to all the greater activity.

It was getting late, and he felt the need of sustenance. After he had eaten he would plan to some effect.

A moment later he saw that Fate was taking a hand in the game. Just turning into the restaurant was the man most in his thoughts at that moment—and alone.

Violet and her affianced had been in the habit of dining together every day; but to-day, as Tommy was aware, getting her clothes ready for the morrow was taking all her time.

How things were playing into his hands! he reflected. Violet's preoccupation with her wardrobe had given him his opening. Clothes had been the ruin of many a woman; now they were to cost Violet a husband—if he, Tommy, could compass it.

"'Lo, Amos!" he cried, hurrying up as the other stepped across the threshold. "Eating alone? Why not join me?"

Amos assented awkwardly, not so much that he welcomed the prospect of company as because he hardly knew how to refuse. He always felt embarrassed with Tommy, who represented for him the easy assurance of the New Yorker, which he felt he would never be able to achieve.

Tommy, feeling that the stars in their courses were fighting for him, ceased planning with his brain, deciding to await the inspiration of the moment.

He sank into a chair and mopped his brow.

"This feels good," he sighed. "Nice and cool and restful."

Then his inspiration came. He added: "Some contrast to fighting with the Irish. My boy, I hope you never have to rehearse a fat woman in a part. Take it from me, when it comes to real, unadulterated tabasco temper, you're safe in picking a fat woman every time. They're supposed to be good-natured, but I don't know where they got that stuff."

The other stared.

"Why—you ain't—you can't be speakin' of Violet?"

His surprise was pathetic.

"Violet—why not? Why shouldn't Vi

have a temper? Lots of nice girls have tempers. It's nothing against 'em—only all-fired trying for any one that has to work with 'em—or *live* with 'em." He added the last after a pause just marked enough to make it effective.

"But Violet—nonsense!"

"My dear fellow," said Tommy, "I don't want to say anything against any fiancée of yours—but at the same time I must warn you to try to get it through your head that you're marrying a *real* woman, not a baby doll. Of course she's as sweet as sugar with *you!* She would be. *I'm* the goat!"

He hurried on as Amos opened his mouth to interrupt.

"Don't you know that women with their company manners on, and women in the home, are quite different propositions? Haven't you any women in the family?"

"My mother."

"Oh. And of course she spends her time thinking up nice and flattering things to say to you, the same as Violet. Or does she?"

"Well—mother does like to run things her own way, and that's a fact."

"Oh, she does? And so does Violet. That 'll be some team, when you bring home the bride. Believe me, my boy, between your mother and Violet you've still got yours coming to you. Particularly," he added before Amos could come up for air, "if your mother's as strong for stage folk as most country women; and considering that Vi can't stand the country for more than five minutes at a time at best."

Amos stared, flabbergasted.

"Why, she told me—"

"Oh, she *would*. A woman in love 'll say anything. And believe it, too. She has herself hypnotized."

"She told me she loved the country, and she'd never go on the stage again after this season."

"And you fell for that! You'll be telling me next you believe what you read in the papers! Don't you know that that girl is one of the dyed-in-the-wool Broadway Boosters? For that kind there isn't any place on earth but one particular street in Little Old New York. It's harder to pry an actor loose from Broadway than a profiteer from a blind man's pennies. Why, that sort would rather inhabit the back row of the chorus of a cheap burlesque show in the metropolis than play leads in a No. 1 company on the road.

"The only thing that makes 'em leave town at all is thinking about how good it's going to feel getting back. When they go on tour it's for the same reason the coon was butting his head against the stone wall—because it feels so good when they don't. And they spend their last day in town riding around in the subway, so as to have the memory of it to cheer them during the trying time of their absence. When the train pulls into Kalamazoo they wake up and inquire sleepily, 'Conductor, is this Broadway?'

"You must think a lot of your charms if you imagine you're going to change one of that kind into a dairy maid. Did you ever hear of a coke fiend breaking off the habit? Well, take it from me, the Broadway habit's a million times harder to cure. And then it's only temporary. The only sure way to cure it is to plant 'em, and even then it's a safe bet their spooks 'll come snooping around Times Square to see what's happened since the day they took to their bed. A habit! It's a disease! And Violet's got it bad."

Amos looked worried.

"Come, old man, buck up," encouraged Tommy. "Nothing to look sad about. If I had known you'd take it like this I wouldn't have said anything. It's plain you've never been married before."

"No, I—"

"Oh, well, then you'll know better next time—er—I mean to say you'll know more about matrimony when you've tried it a while. I can see you're one of the marrying kind. Some of us are sort of leery of setting foot in jail—but others just rush in."

Amos sighed lugubriously.

"To tell the truth—I ain't been feelin' so good over gettin' married, now that it's come to the point. I'm strong for it when I'm with Violet; but when she ain't around I feel just like a man does when he's thinkin' of investin' his money in something he

ain't quite sure of. He feels kinda uncertain and—*worried.* He imagines things."

Tommy exulted inwardly. Amos's face took on a reminiscent expression.

"It seemed kind of a pleasant prospect two weeks ago—"

"But that was two weeks ago. Just so. I gotcha."

"No," Amos declared with sudden emphasis, "come to think of it, I don't believe I *do* want to get married. In fact, I know I don't."

"Does any man want to get married, when it comes right down to brass tacks? Why should a man want to go through life with an expert at bawling him out and picking his pockets at one and the same time?"

"I guess you're right," conceded Amos sadly.

"Of course I'm right. You can be all-fired thankful you're not married yet."

"But I don't like the idea—it seems kinda hard on Vi—"

"Oh, they soon get over those love-at-first-sight affairs. Anyway, I guess a woman who's been married three times—"

"*Three times!*"

Amos's consternation was pathetic. His jaw hung down while he stared at Tommy aghast.

"Of course," said Tommy cheerfully, now that he had embarked on a career of mendacity resolved to go the limit. "Didn't you know?"

"She never told me a thing," said the other with a sudden surge of indignation. "Not a thing. She led me to believe I was the only—"

"The only man she ever loved," finished Tommy as he hesitated, reddening. "And you fell for that old stuff!" He surveyed him scornfully. "And more than that—I'll wager she never told you of One Punch Casey. Eh?"

"One of her husbands?" ventured Amos, half dazed.

"Worse!"

"What!"

"You bet! He wants to marry her—"

"Oh, I thought you meant—"

—"And he's liable to kill any other man that tries to. She won't have *him*—so he takes it out in beating up anybody else she takes a fancy to. The only thing's saved you so far is that he's been in 'Frisco. But he's on his way back now, and expects to hit town before the end of the week. And then—oh, boy!"

"So *that's* why she wanted the weddin' hurried up. She said she wanted to get married before the season opened—"

"And she was thinking of Casey. Of course—you've doped it out right. She knew if she wasn't your wife before he got back she couldn't be afterward. Now she'll likely be your widow," he concluded cheerfully.

"Great Scott! What sort of a person is this Casey?"

"Six feet high, two hundred pounds, and a regular man-eater. They all look alike to him. One punch, and dreamland. He's killed two men."

"What! How does it come he's at large?"

"Accident. When a man punches you it's an accident if you're so ill-advised as to die from it. Me, I'd just as soon be shot as killed with a fist like a ham."

"This puts a new face on the matter," said Amos heavily. "She never told me a thing about it."

"She wouldn't. When a woman gets her hooks in a man, she's out to land him. And that's the only time a woman can keep her mouth shut.

"However," continued Tommy, taking a diabolical pleasure in seeing how much the credulous Amos would swallow, "maybe Miss Westerly won't leave anything for Casey. A jealous woman is mighty quick on the trigger, my boy. And Louise is deep, deep. I don't like the look of her eyes these days."

Plainly Amos was scared. Still he hesitated.

"All the same, it seems kinda hard to leave Violet waitin' at the church—" A sentimental note crept into his voice.

"What of it? Look at these men around here. Look at 'em. See the unhappy ones. Take it from me, they're the married ones. Now look at the happy ones. They're the single men.

"How do you suppose they got that way

—or kept that way? Don't you think the women tried to rope *them* in? Sure they did. But when those guys got cold feet at the last minute, the same as the married men, they're the only ones that had the nerve to leave 'em waiting at the church. And now they're having their reward."

"By the Lord, I'll do it!" exclaimed Amos, banging his fist on the table with the sudden violence of resolution of the weak man. "I'll do it!"

"Who knows? Casey may be in town right now," Tommy remarked casually.

And that decided Amos to leave town at once.

Tommy resisted the temptation to stick by him to the end. If he were seen at the train with Amos, and Violet put two and two together, things would happen. He permitted him to go off alone, reluctantly. His task was by no means ended; but as there is nothing like success to instil confidence, he felt a conviction that a way would open up for the complete realization of his desires. And once again he discerned the finger of Fate when from the crowd ahead of him emerged Bob Austin, a jovial old character actor—dear old Bob, the very chap for the job!

And Bob would go the limit for Tommy!

VI.

"WE'RE goin', Tommy," Violet announced emphatically.

"Hadn't we better wait a little longer, Vi?" he inquired hypocritically.

"We're goin'."

Violet's announcement had just terminated a period of mental and spiritual torture for Tommy. He alone had accompanied her to the clergyman's. In fact, Violet had told no one but Louise and himself of her approaching nuptials. Whether sensitiveness on the score of her avoirdupois was responsible for her silence, or whether past experience had warned her that one is never sure of a man until he is safely under lock and key, and she was taking no chances of having a large body of witnesses to a possible fiasco, at any rate, unlike most women, she had shown no inclination to make an event out of her wedding. Also, she wore a loose-fitting gown, doubtless having in mind a former occasion when a tight-fitting garment had played havoc with certain cherished matrimonial plans.

Noting her flutter of ecstatic trepidation, ill-concealed under an elaborate affectation of nonchalance, Tommy for the first time had begun to realize the enormity of his crime. And as he had watched the fading of hope, during the seemingly interminable waiting, he would cheerfully have undone all his nefarious work.

He hoped Amos would repent and return, but he did not. So he salved his conscience with the reflection that Amos had not really loved Violet, else he could not have been induced to throw her over so easily. It had been a mercy to save her from a man like that. He told himself that he was merely being cruel to be kind, electing to ignore the mercenary motives that had impelled him to inaugurate his campaign of frightfulness.

The clergyman rubbed his hands uncertainly.

"But—er—suppose the—er— gentleman should arrive after you have left?" he suggested. "Is there any message you would like to leave for him?"

"Tell him to milk his own cows," retorted Violet caustically, and, taking Tommy's arm, departed forthwith, chin in air.

"Tommy," she said, as they neared the apartment house, "I'll never look at another man as long as I live!"

"All men aren't like him," replied Tommy virtuously.

"Oh, ain't they!" scoffed Violet. "Take it from me, Tommy, if I ever get engaged to one of them again I'll lock him in a cage till after the weddin'. Any woman who expects a man to show up at the church without bein' taken into custody and brought there by force is a bigger fool than I'll ever be again!"

It would have been a relief to Tommy that she seemed more angry than hurt, had he not perceived that she was putting up a brave front to keep back the tears. She caught his look and divined his thoughts.

"No, Tommy," she said, with a show of cheerfulness, "don't worry. I ain't goin' into any decline." She stole a disgusted

look at her generous proportions. "Decline! No such luck! I'll thrive on this, see if I don't! I'd end my days in a dime museum—only there ain't any left since vaudeville and the movies got in their deadly work."

She tossed her head.

"But no tears for that shrimp." Violet evidently was thinking rather of his soul than of his physical person, in her characterization of him. "I'm gonna get right back on the job, first thing this afternoon, even if I do have to work with that human walkin'-stick. I doubt if there's another like her in captivity."

Tommy breathed easier. At least one of them had fallen in with his plans, without effort on his part. If only Louise proved amenable to persuasion.

"I'm goin' to take a rest now," explained Violet inside, "so's to be in shape for work. That's the only thing there's any certainty in—I guess I'm hoodooed in this matrimonial game. Besides, there ain't a man worth havin', if you ask me."

And at that moment Tommy believed her.

That afternoon, having summoned Austin to his room by telephone, Tommy prepared for the final move of the game. He delivered himself of whispered instructions.

"Remember," he concluded, "keep the door open a crack, and when you hear me get Louise into Vi's room—Heaven send I can manage it!—slip down and wait near the door. When I whistle, that's your cue. Get me?"

"Right-o!" responded Bob cheerfully.

"And sure you've got the dope in order? It's got to be put across casually—I don't want 'em to spot you for a liar the minute you open your mouth."

"Leave it to me, son—I was an actor before you were born. Leave it to me."

Nodding, reassured, Tommy collected his faculties for the supreme effort, and descended to Violet's floor. He knocked at her door and entered in response to a rather listless invitation.

"Well, Vi," he said cheerily, "how about that rehearsal? Or maybe you don't feel equal to it," he insinuated craftily.

She flared up at once.

"Oh, don't I! If you think I'm grievin' myself any for that pink-faced rube, you've got another think comin'. So stir your stumps, Master Tommy, and bring that animated church-steeple here—if you can," she added sarcastically.

"Oh, that's easy," said Tommy confidently; but he did not feel as jaunty as he looked. However, he had a card up his sleeve.

"Louise," he said coaxingly, when he found himself in that lady's presence, "how about a rehearsal this afternoon?"

"Really!" said Miss Westerly, elevating her eyebrows. "You are strangely deluded if you fancy I would so far demean myself as to be associated in any way, professionally or otherwise, with that person. Besides, I should think," she added ironically, "that she would prefer to spend the afternoon with her husband. I believe she is now a blushing bride." Her tone was acidulous.

This was the opening Tommy had been waiting for.

"She's not married, Louise," he said, wagging his head solemnly. "The groom didn't show up."

Miss Westerly failed to repress the start of joyful surprise the news gave her.

"So better come along and talk it over, anyway," suggested Tommy ingratiatingly.

Louise wavered. But not for long. As Tommy had calculated, the chance to assume the superior "So he couldn't go through with it after all, when it came to the pinch," attitude toward her discomfited rival was too much.

"Oh, very well," she said loftily, tossing her head.

The girls did not trouble to nod. Violet merely sniffed contemptuously, while Miss Westerly elevated her eyebrows and regarded her with just the trace of a supercilious smile that made Violet long to choke her. Tommy perceived that hostilities might ensue any instant, and hastened to break the ice, which promised to require some breaking.

"Come, girls, cut out the movie-drama stuff and get together. You, Louise, what does it matter if you and Vi are at dag-

gers drawn? In a regular theatrical company they all hate one another like poison, so you ought to feel right at home. And if a prospective salary doesn't interest you, at least have pity on Tommy Burrows—I need my share of this thing. Don't you think I want some return for the time I've wasted on you two? You can't throw me down now. Batter up! Play ball!"

"In that case, I consent," said Miss Westerly coldly—"but on condition, understand, that our relations"—glancing haughtily at Violet—"are to be strictly business ones."

"That makes it unanimous," agreed Violet. "Business never had a sweeter sound. Business—with everybody mindin' their own."

Louise smiled scornfully, and lost no time in disregarding the hint.

"I agree with you. Nevertheless, strict justice compels me to state that, all things considered"—she permitted her glance to linger meaningly on Violet's figure—"Mr. Pond was not so very much, if at all, to blame. Some promises are better broken than kept."

"Tommy," said Violet, with ominous calm, "if you're countin' very much on that little commission of yours, you better persuade her to keep her trap shut."

"Come, come, girls," he intervened hastily, "the past is past. The present we have always with us. On with the dance, let joy be unconfined."

He placed his hands on his hips and pirouetted a few steps, whistling a cheerful stave.

The next instant the expected knock sounded.

"Howdy, girls—hope I don't intrude," greeted Bob, with an admirable imitation of hesitation. "Didn't find you in your room, Tommy. Thought you might be here. Just wanted to see you about a little matter—some other time—"

Tommy pulled him inside.

"Only starting a rehearsal of that sketch I told you about. Make yourself at home."

"Sketch, eh?" He settled his chunky bulk comfortably into an armchair, fishing out a pipe of long service, which, with the free and easy manners of the bohemian, he proceeded to fill and light without troubling himself about the ladies.

"Speaking of sketches," he grunted through the unoccupied corner of his mouth, "we had one staged at our boarding house this morning—impromptu." He chuckled reminiscently. "Chap who had the room next to me— You'd never have thought it of him, either—"

He puffed absently.

"Yes," he continued after an interval, during which his auditors waited patiently —"a regular little drama on the door-step. A woman drove up in a taxi, just as the chap I speak of and myself happened to be going out the door at the same time. She no sooner sees him than she lets out a yell and makes a jump for the steps, grabs him by the arm, and starts to drag him toward the cab.

"As soon as I look at him I see he's in a blue funk. The guilty party, all right. Well, he tries to get away, but she hangs on, pulling him toward the cab while she tells him what she thinks of him in a loud voice. It seems she was his wife, and he had left her flat about a year before. She'd been looking for him ever since. Well, she got him.

"He saw that people were beginning to take notice, and in a minute he'd have a crowd around him, so he gets into the cab with her without any more ado, and it drives off. By the look of her face he had his coming to him, all right. Chap you'd least expect it of, too—moon-faced, innocent, countrified-looking Johnny. Name sounded like the country, too. Let me see"—he paused, reflecting—"I have it—Pond—Amos Po—"

Two muffled shrieks interrupted him.

Both girls had fainted.

Alarmed, Tommy and his confederate instituted first-aid measures. They were much relieved when the symptoms of returning consciousness began to manifest themselves.

Louise was the first to regain her voice.

"He deceived us both, darling—he deceived us both! He's a brute—all men are brutes!"

She opened her arms and Violet fell into them. There was not much room, but

Violet pillowed what of her head she could on Louise's bosom, and let her tears flow freely. Locked in each other's arms, they rocked back and forth, mingling tears and consoling endearments.

The two men retreated to the door.

"Did I put it across, Tommy?" chuckled Bob jubilantly. "Did I? Sure fire, eh?"

"Sh! Beat it!" cautioned Tommy, pushing him out the door.

Tommy stood a moment, looking back at the two women weeping their hearts out on one another's shoulders.

"Napoleon was a little man," he exulted. "You've got to hand it to me. 'Most anybody could get rid of a superfluous bridegroom, but the job of reconciling two women is in a class by itself."

He slipped out and closed the door softly. Outside he stood a moment longer, listening to the muffled sounds of sobbing.

"And it's a cinch this won't be such a bad thing for the old act, after all," he concluded, his eye sparkling. "Violet's sure to put on more flesh. *It always affects a fat woman that way!*"

ʊ ʊ ʊ ʊ

THE DREAMER OF DREAMS

OH, the world does not care for the dreamer of dreams
Till the dreamer of dreams is dead:
And, then, when the people have gone for years
Down the road where the dreamer led,
They pause in their rush for a day or so,
And build a huge pile of stone
To mark the place where the dreamer rests—
The dreamer who dreamed alone.

Oh, the world has ever been hard and cold
To the dreamer of dreams, I know;
It's as hard to-day and as cold to-day
As it was in the long ago:
For the world in its ceaseless search for wealth,
In the hurry of life to-day,
Asks only this of the dreamer of dreams:
Will the dreams you are dreaming pay?

But all the things in the world worth while
Were once some dreamer's dream;
A dream in which the dreamer caught
From a better land a gleam:
So Washington dreamed of a mighty state,
Of a nation that was to be;
And Lincoln dreamed of a glorious day
When the slave should at last be free.

So, if perchance you're a dreamer of dreams,
It's a lonesome man you will be;
For the dreamer is far ahead of the crowd
As he sees what they cannot see:
But long years after you're dead and gone,
When the dreams you dreamed come true,
You will have your reward in the hearts of men
And their grateful thought of you.

Augustus Wingood.

My Lady of the Nile

by H. M. Egbert

CHAPTER XXI.

DOLGOUROFFSKI AGAIN.

AS we made our way back into the temple we heard shouting within. Dawn was already at hand, filling the great hall with a faint, diffused light by which we could see Abouna's men, in full panoply, gathered about the doors. And now I could hear a pandemonium of yells from without, as if our enemies were advancing in force to the attack.

The watchers at the slots beside the door made way for me, and through one of these I saw, pushing its nose through the trees, and drawn by eight horses, a huge battering-ram, crudely fashioned from trunks of trees, and swung from twisted armor straps upon a wheelless chassis. It was accompanied by all the horde of warriors, who shook their swords and howled defiance at us.

Quickly Abouna gathered his men into column and gave them the command. He had intended to sally out at dawn; now he would wait until the doors were breached, and take the oncoming warriors by surprise.

Slowly the great implement came on, the horses straining under the lash. Now it was crossing the sward, and I could distinguish it more clearly. It consisted of two huge, hardwood trunks, lashed together, swinging by knotted thigh-straps. The horses turned about, bringing it into position at the foot of the temple steps, within reach of the doors.

I saw Professor Jonas strapping on a breast-plate, and looking extraordinarily picturesque with a large shield on his arm. I saw Lillith at my side. I motioned to her to withdraw; but instantly, amid the yells of the assembled warriors, the great log swung back and back, gathering momentum for its recoil.

Our warriors waited silently in column of fours. I counted a hundred and fifty of them—there must have been more than three hundred without—waiting for Abouna's signal. Not a sound was uttered in answer to the shouts outside.

Through the slot I saw the great pole strained backward and upward, the horses straining with heaving flanks, and every muscle rigid on their sleek sides as they gained the last inch of purchase. The overseer stepped forward and, with a slash of his sword, severed the rope that joined the traces to the pole. He leaped aside, and like an arrow the great trunks darted forward and smashed with fearful force against the temple doors.

The shock flung me from my feet. The iron bolts held, but the wood splintered, and then slowly one of the doors swung from its supports, tottered, and fell crashing down the temple steps, flattening and crushing one of the Abyssinians outside. They swarmed upward with yells of triumph, and at the

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for May 7.

same moment our column ran forward to meet them.

There was a half-minute of furious mêlée upon the steps. I saw Ras Benjamin and Sebastie rallying their men. Then the Tigreans broke before us, followed by the Amhara men, dispersing through the orange-groves.

We cut the ram from its supports and flung it to earth, and then, disregarding Abouna's shouts, our men rushed on after the fugitives.

Instantly the whole scene was dissolved into a series of isolated combats among the trees. In vain Abouna and I ran here and there, trying to draw our followers together. They were mad with the desire for vengeance upon their hereditary enemies; they remembered past defeats and would not hear us.

I saw Professor Jonas, his breast-plate flapping loose upon him, sword in hand, running forward alone; and the old scholar was shouting incomprehensible things in some dead tongue, and man after man turned aside from his challenge and ran.

Yet here and there the enemy were already rallying in little bodies and falling upon our stragglers. Presently we were hard beset again. The tide was turning.

Abouna was everywhere, lending aid to those hard-pressed, dragging back wounded men, gathering the nucleus of his force together to meet a body of Ras Benjamin's men who were assembling for a counter-attack. I ran after the professor and grasped him by the arm. He struck at me with his sword. I caught his wrist, and he stared at me with wild eyes that gradually recognized me.

"The dogs, the cowards; they won't fight," he panted.

"They'll fight too well presently," I answered. "Don't you see that they are playing the same game as ourselves?"

With that his face sobered, and he took in our situation. We had lost a score or two in the wild, ineffective pursuit. Ras Benjamin and Sebastie now had each a compact body of men assembled, while Abouna had hardly more than fifty, some wounded, all gasping under the weight of their armor.

And then a new sight met our eyes. A score of bowmen were advancing from an ambuscade near the temple entrance, pouring a flight of arrows into us, while from behind them the first rays of the risen sun streamed into our eyes.

They were a party of black Gallas who had not been in the temple, and must have been held in reserve from the beginning for some treacherous purpose—their leader a huge black with a cross-bow, probably one that had been handed down since crusading times, for I had never seen such an implement outside a museum.

The great bolts hummed through the air. I saw a man's head shattered to pieces at my side. Already a rain of arrows was falling among our ranks.

I flung myself at the giant as he was fitting another bolt. A thrust of my sword, and he fell writhing at my feet. With a cheer our men drove into the heart of the savage line, which hesitated, and then broke in disorder.

But now the swordsmen were closing in upon us. We were pressed back to the temple steps. A rush of a body of Amhara men cut us off from the entrance.

I heard Lillith cry out behind me, and, turning, saw her struggling in Sebastie's arms. She wore a breast-plate, her hair streamed loose about her, and a dead man's sword was in her hand, with which she was slashing ineffectually at Sebastie, who held her by both wrists and was dragging her down the steps.

As I ran upon him he let the girl go, turned, and faced me. He received my stroke upon his shield, dashed it in my face, and plunged his sword upward. But the blade turned aside, only scratching my side, his shield-arm fell, and I saw Lillith's sword pierce his throat.

Next moment the professor rushed forward and cut him down. Sebastie toppled from head to foot of the temple steps, and lay dead below.

But we were near our end, beset by four to one, and hard put to it to hold the entrance. Ras Benjamin leaped forward. "Come to me, emperor of the moles and foxes," he shouted to Abouna. "Come, and I will give you to your fox-followers

for meat, son of a hired woman and an impostor!"

"Nay, come to me, Benjamin," answered Abouna, "thou who shalt seek and never find! Fulfil thy prophecy, and remember Amalek!"

As he sprang to meet him I saw Benjamin turn to his supporters, for he had never planned to fight Abouna alone. But they shrank back, and I saw the foreknowledge of death come into his eyes. And, nerving himself for the inevitable, he raised his sword with a shout and swung it downward with a blow that would have cut Abouna in twain.

Abouna caught it on his shield, which crumpled like a broken wheel, and clove Ras Benjamin's skull clean through the casque to the lips.

"That for thee, O Mangashe, my brother!" he shouted.

And, placing his foot on the dead giant's throat, he tugged the sword out of the gaping jaws, and for the second time our enemies gave way in flight before us.

The bright sun streamed upon us. We stood there — hardly five-and-twenty of us remaining, and perhaps less than two-score of our opponents. Yet the victory was ours. One more effort—

Then I heard shouts within the temple. Armed men were running down the aisles between the tables, beating back the few whom we had posted at the windows to guard against surprise. Professor Jonas shouted in my ear:

"Take Lillith!" he yelled. "Run hard! The labyrinth!"

"Back!" called Abouna.

We turned to meet the newcomers. At first I thought they were a few of our opponents, who had somehow found a secret entrance from the rear. But there were scores and scores of them, and they filled the whole temple as they pressed forward. At the same time Sebastie's men came on behind us.

We were surrounded now. I reeled beneath a blow that cracked my helm like a teapot. I fell upon my knees, Lillith beside me. I could no longer see Abouna or the professor, for everything was swimming about me. Swords flashed overhead—and suddenly I heard a bellowed command, and a space was cleared about me.

I looked up to see Abouna disarmed and struggling in the grip of a half-dozen men. Before me stood Dolgouroffski and Natalie Caraman.

CHAPTER XXII.

"SHE WHO REIGNS WITH ME—"

SHE was dressed, as at Dar Fok, in a breast-plate, but now there was a gold circlet on her head, and her eyes burned with triumph and disdain. Dolgouroffski was clad in complete chain armor, of enormous weight, over which his white beard flowed down to his waist. He wore a casque of steel embossed with gold, and he swung a ponderous battle-ax in his hand, such as an ordinary man could hardly have lifted.

The sunlight, streaming through the temple windows, shone full upon him, and illumined the gloating face of Arminius behind him, and, like a monkey's beside his, that of Amos.

So I guessed at the end of Andros in the tunnel, and the method of Dolgouroffski's entrance.

"Kill me, and let us die together," said Lillith in my ear.

But my sword was gone, and as I groped for it, still dazed from blows, a peal of ironical mirth broke from Natalie's lips.

"Aye, well you said he was your lover, O Chosen One!" she mocked.

And, raising the whip she carried in her hand, she struck the girl heavily across the face.

Dolgouroffski turned upon her and struck the whip from her hand, saying something in Russian. It would have touched me, under any circumstances but those, to see the humility in Natalie's face. It was clear that Dolgouroffski was all to her—her better nature and her worse also.

Lillith rose to her feet beside me, and stood there, looking calmly on Natalie. My gaze wandered to Professor Jonas, standing bare-headed beside Abouna in charge of two of Dolgouroffski's men. Thence I looked toward the great idol, and suddenly

I understood that there were still more entrances to the temple than I had discovered.

For the whole front beneath the belly of the giant image stood wide open, a great vault, flanked by the circular stairs on either side, with other stairs within, ascending and descending.

With a slow stride the old Russian advanced toward the image and seated himself in Amos's throne, beckoning to the high priest to take his stand at his right hand. On his left stood Natalie, while the warriors, reenforced by the remnants of our late adversaries, now streaming in from the gardens, ranged themselves about them, packing the rear of the temple.

And then, beating their swords upon their shields, there entered the whole body of Mangashe's supporters, almost as numerous, who had taken no part in the battle, and posted themselves around the doors in a compact body.

For a few moments the warriors of Dolgouroffski and Mangashe's men eyed one another. Then Dolgouroffski spoke for the first time.

"I have taken Thoth, and therefore I am ruler of this land," he cried in a deep voice that rumbled through the temple. "How say you, O Amos?"

"You are the true and lawful emperor of this land, O *Negus Negasti,*" answered Amos. At which the warriors set up a shout that rang from wall to wall. But not a sound came from Mangashe's troops, who whispered together, and again Dolgouroffski's men eyed them, and began muttering.

"Long have I suffered deprivation of what is mine," Dolgouroffski went on. "Mine by right of conquest, O Amos, for I know no other law. Therefore bring forth the insignia of the royal kingdom, the crown and jewels, and the gold candlestick, that they may be carried before me to Adis Ababa."

"O *Negus Nagasti,*" answered Amos, "have patience a little while, and surely they shall be found. Very wise was he who hid them, and the clue is hard to decipher. But there stands one who will read them, for which purpose he was brought here to Thoth. And now, O emperor, a petition."

"Aye, Amos," said Dolgouroffski, nodding indifferently.

"This day is the first of Maskarram, whereon it is customary to offer sacrifices to the great Moloch, who watches over the destinies of Thoth. Never have such been lacking, for always some captive or some volunteer has been at hand to give Moloch his meal. But it is especially gratifying to the god that three should be sacrificed to him, and doubtless he will favor our efforts to discover the royal treasures if this promise be made to him. Therefore, let this old, wise man discover them, and then let him he offered unto Moloch, together with the Ras Abouna and this slave of his"—pointing to me.

A pretty program! Old Amos turned and glared at Professor Jonas, gnashing his yellow fangs. "For, when men are so old, surely they no longer love their lives," he piped.

"If this old man can find the treasures, his life must be spared as a reward," answered Dolgouroffski.

"Nay, emperor," piped Amos, "let him be tortured till he find them, and then let him be sacrificed."

"Moloch demands three sacrifices," put in Arminius in halting Amharic.

"That being so," said Dolgouroffski thoughtfully, "let this man be the third."

With a yell of terror Arminius broke through the soldiers round the idol and bolted for the rear, while a roar of laughter went up from all, even Dolgouroffski.

"How do you say, Amos; will two sacrifices suffice you?" inquired the old Russian of the high priest.

"I am a peaceful man," protested Amos, spreading out his hands. "I will inquire of Moloch."

"Nay, but if there be but one?" continued Dolgouroffski. "For I am hardly minded that a chief of the Kaffan tribe, though he has wrought me wrongs innumerable, should perish by fire, seeing that this is contrary to immemorial custom."

At that Abouna stepped forward to speak and, at a sign from Dolgouroffski, the guards released him. "Well spoken!" he cried. "Now I see that the Lion of Thoth is not the Jackal, as some have termed him.

For well you know I am John's son, and lawful heir to the overlordship of this land of Judah.

"Many wrongs I have suffered from you, O Ras, and, since you have appealed to custom, let that be my plea, too. Will the Lion of Thoth, whom none has ever overthrown in equal combat, meet John's son, Abouna, in single combat in this hall?"

Suddenly a roar of applause went up from among Mangashe's assembled warriors; and I saw now that these would be quick to resent, and to avenge Abouna's sacrifice, however they might yield to the decision of ordeal. For they were Kaffans, and the blood instinct stirred in them.

Natalie sprang toward Dolgouroffski. "It shall not be!" she cried.

"Keep silent!" thundered the old Lion of Thoth. "It shall be—aye, it shall be; for never would the royal crown rest on my head unless I knew that I had proved myself the better man and warrior."

He rose out of the throne. "I take up your challenge for the overlordship of Judah's land, O Ras," he cried, "for the wrongs between us are bitter as Dead Sea waters and must be blotted out in this and in no other way. Let the dead be burned on pyres, let peace reign until sunset, and let this hall be cleared for battle between us. As for you, Amos," he added, "I commit these other two captives to your charge; if I live I shall require them of you."

Then his eyes lit upon Lillith at my side.

"And know, all ye," he continued, "that if I live this maiden shall be crowned empress at my side in Adis Ababa."

I saw the horror spring out on Natalie's face. Her past had crumpled, her hopes, her whole life's aim had gone. I never saw the tragedy of a soul so plainly stamped in enduring and ineffaceable lines as hers.

She groped toward Dolgouroffski like a blind woman. "My Lord Alexei," she moaned—and she spoke French now, as if the habit of years had fallen from her—"my lord, you jest, surely. Do you remember that oath we swore together?"

"Aye," he thundered, "and that soul I sold back to the Evil One at your bidding. Shall I forget my oath to God and still remember that which I swore to you?"

And as she stood rocking and watching him:

"Know you not that the years pass, Natalie?" he continued. "She who reigns with me in Adis Ababa must be a young woman, such as a man's eyes delight to see."

And I saw Natalie Caraman become an old woman in those few moments.

CHAPTER XXIII.

IN THE MAW OF MOLOCH.

I HAD expected to be left with the professor, but now, as the assembly broke up, at a sign from Amos, two of the soldiers seized me and began to lead me toward the idol, while a band of the women danced about me, mocking me, and playing some derisive tune on their *ambiltas*, which, apparently well known to all, evoked howls of contempt and scorn, and what sounded like the Abyssinian equivalent for "catcalls."

Surrounded by the howling, cursing throng, I was led to the vault within the great image. I now perceived that the interior of either leg, planted on each side of the circular steps topped by Lillith's throne, was hollow, and contained a slender spiral stairway.

I was hurried up one of these until we reached a small, irregular, and rounded chamber, evidently the belly of the monster. An iron door was opened, I was thrust inside, and, with parting execrations, the soldiers and attendant throng withdrew.

The reverberations of their steps upon the stone stairs of the legs rang in my ears. And presently the room in which I crouched—for the peaked roof was no higher than my head—revolved through a right angle, and I was shaken from my feet by the clash of steel and masonry beneath me.

Then I understood what had happened. The Moloch, like all the doors of the palace, was built upon a central pivot, and, partly revolving on its axis, had uncovered the vault beneath: The mechanism which turned it had again been brought into play, closing the vault and revolving the idol into its old position, facing the temple doors.

Presently, as my eyes began to grow accustomed to the darkness, I perceived a hazy luminosity in front of me. I put out my hands and found that the spherical, metallic walls, which ran smoothly all about me, were interrupted immediately in front by a small disk, apparently of semi-opaque glass.

To my delight I found a catch, pressed it, and swung the peep-hole open. At once I discovered that I was looking out through the navel of the monster into the interior of the temple.

Far beneath me I could see the throngs dispersing toward the doors. Outside the temple the adherents of Dolgouroffski and Mangashe's men were fraternizing. The horses which Abouna had brought to Thoth were being saddled for races, sports were in preparation; in the general anticipation of the night's ceremony I had been totally forgotten.

I wondered whether even Abouna remembered me, and for a few moments of weakness and self-pity I regretted the loyalty that had kept me in Thoth, when I could have taken Lillith away to some place where the memories of that hell would soon have become misty as a dream to her.

Slowly the day passed, while I stifled and thirsted in that cramped prison of mine. None came near me. Outside I could hear the shouts and laughter of the soldiers, the thud of hoofs, the applause that marked the victor.

Inside, when the sun had passed the meridian, and the rays began to straggle through the western windows, attendants set the tables for another feast—the great feast of Maskarram, the feast in honor of the victor at the coming trial by combat. A space was cleared before the idol and marked off with ropes, much in the manner of the setting for a boxing bout. Then the hall emptied once more, and I was left alone with the dying afternoon, watching the patch of sunlight cross the temple floor, dwindle and die.

At last there was a great clamor outside. The warriors came trooping in, uttering loud cries, and quickly assembled into two parties on either side of the cleared space in the temple, before the idol. And thunderous shouts rang out as Dolgouroffski stepped into range of my vision and entered the roped-off ring.

He still wore his chain armor, but now the great muscles of his thighs and arms were covered with plates; he was naked under the rippling mass of steel that gave with every movement of his body, his peaked casque descended to the neckpiece, his long beard made him at once patriarchal and formidable, as if this were some old prince of men, stepping out of the past to show his descendants, who were of an inferior type, what manner of men had moved among them.

In his hand he swung his huge battle-ax, and he had neither sword nor dagger nor shield.

So fearful was his aspect that the cries of Mangashe's men were half-hearted and faint in comparison as Ras Abouna stepped into the ring. The Abyssinian was fully three inches shorter than Dolgouroffski, and of much lesser girth. He was completely armed with overlapping plates of steel, over which he wore a short white *quarry*. He carried his sword and the small, round Abyssinian shield.

In weapons, offensive and defensive, the two men were well matched, but there the comparison ended. For it was plain that a single successful onslaught on the part of the Russian would place Abouna at his mercy.

Yet the old man was stocky and slow, whether from age or build, while Abouna was lithe and supple as a leopard, and possessed, too, of formidable physical strength, though he was as a child in contrast with his mighty adversary.

It was beginning to grow dark; and suddenly, as I watched at Moloch's navel, with a roar the great pillar of fire came shooting up beneath me, tumbling and rising like a fountain, and throwing the whole interior of the hall into the clearest visibility.

Now, looking down, I could see Lillith, seated on Amos's throne, and Amos leering at her side, with Professor Jonas under guard near him.

The girl wore her white robes and the gold circlet on her head. She leaned forward, resting her head upon her hand, and

from where I crouched, I could not see her face.

And then, as the two antagonists saluted each other, I heard a click at the entrance of my cell, and, to my amazement, saw an old woman standing there, wearing a light veil of black. When she threw it back I recognized Natalie Caraman.

But, as if she had lived for Dolgouroffski, and retained all her youth in him, youth and her very personality seemed to have gone out of her. Her proud bearing was gone, her face was haggard and lined, there were dark circles underneath her eyes. She came forward and looked at me intently.

"I have bribed one of the priests," she said in a low voice. "I gave him all that I had raised to help Alexei Dolgouroffski. Clinton Ross, I have never asked for pity in my whole life—no, nor given it. Do you pity me now?"

"I pity you," I said.

"Pity him!" she answered fiercely. "For him I gave everything that I had in life to give. A life-long gift born in dishonor and sealed in blood. Through sin and shame, through triumph and defeat I was at his side.

"When he was broken I left him, only because I knew that the day would come when I could make him again what he had been. And for years I worked for him, not even knowing for sure that he was alive, and yet believing that, had he died, instinct would have told me.

"I gave three fortunes for him, fortunes wheedled out of old dotards with whose love I bore for the sake of Alexei Dolgouroffski. And I came back at last, with money and men, to find him—you know how I found him, Clinton Ross!

"He was in sanctuary at St. Michael's, the scorn of all, fed by charity and alms. I had been in communication with Amos. He dreamed that his old idol worship, the same which Solomon taught Sheba when he turned aside from God—that it should become that of all Abyssinia.

"The compact was struck. Alexei and he were to join forces. I tore Alexei from his prayers, I reddened his shriveled soul with the red blood of a man again. And—you heard and saw. He has cast me off.

"Amos had long besought him to make that imbecile of a girl his queen, in order to cement his power. With 'Sheba' queen in Adis Ababa Alexei would find his power secure against assault. England would bow to the aspirations of these Abyssinian dogs. A pretty dream!"

She was hoarse with passion, and I saw that, if her heart was broken, her fire of spirit burned undimmed.

"Alexei had rejected Amos's approaches many a time. Amos besought me to go to St. Michael's and recall the old Alexei that was lost in the dreaming mystic, the penitent in sack-cloth, beating his breast before the *ikons* of the saints.

"The old black devil played me well. He made a tool of me. And yet, if Alexei planned to wed that girl because of policy, why, I would be content to be his mistress, rather than queen, living unknown, happy in the thought that I inspired his life and actions. But he has discarded me because she has what I flung away for him—youth, Clinton Ross. And that can no more be recalled when it is spent than innocence."

She strode to my side. "I had her in my power and did not suspect," she said, "else had I slain her. But now I have him in my power, and it is not vengeance that fills my heart, but the sure knowledge that neither of us can survive the other. That was our compact when we stood beside my husband's body years ago, in the fatal beginning.

"Your interests are mine now, for, if Alexei kills Abouna, you will die, to satisfy the demands of Amos—you, and perhaps your friend. Whereas, if Alexei dies, Abouna triumphs, and you shall live.

"So leave all to me"—she spoke with studied steadiness—"leave all to me, watch, and be silent. And if, by any mishap, Abouna does not survive, the road is open to you. Run through the gate, pass quickly down the stairs; three turns to the left along the labyrinth, and the priest who sold his faith to me will meet and guide you, for that was made part of our compact."

And she took her station at the little spy-hole beside me, and we watched together.

As the two protagonists faced each other

dead silence reigned. I could almost hear the tense breathing of the spectators, as Abouna circled round Dolgouroffski, watching him like a hawk, poised like a panther; and the Russian turned his massive body to meet him, the menacing battle-ax raised on high.

Round and round Abouna circled, and then, more swiftly than my eye could follow, he sprang. I saw him leaning toward Dolgouroffski, his right arm outstretched; he leaped aside, and as the ax fell on his shield I saw a red stain appear between the [illegible] man's neck—and shoulder-pieces.

A roar went up from all Mangashe's men as the blood welled out of the wound and began to drip heavily upon the floor.

The mighty ax fell crashing on the shield. Abouna had regained his poise, but too late to evade the furious old man, who came on at him like a bull, pressing him back and back. The circling ax was a continuous sheet of light as it struck blow after blow, beating down the shield, hammering on Abouna's casque, on his breast-piece, cleaving great pieces from the flowing *quarry*.

Abouna fell on one knee, he dodged and writhed and twisted, and at last, by a supreme effort, he broke free beneath the Russian's guard, and the two men faced each other, panting and dripping with the sweat that streamed down them.

"If Alexei waits, he loses," said Natalie Caraman in even tones. And I saw that the blood was streaming fast from the wound in his neck. The spectators thought so, too, for they goaded on the contestants and, springing from their places, leaned about the ropes, yelling like furies to their respective champions.

And then I saw Lillith leave her seat and move like a shadow toward the ring.

Suddenly, with a bull's bellow, Dolgouroffski leaped at Abouna and swept his great ax through the air. It cut the Kaffan's casque clean in two, and the top part, with the nodding feather, rolled, clattering to the floor. Before the Russian could recover himself Abouna's sword had gone home in his enemy's side.

And now they joined in the last phase from which there could be no breaking, Abouna's sword thrusting furiously against his enemy's armor, trying to find an opening between the chains, and Dolgouroffski's mighty blows sounding like the hammering of a giant smith as he beat upon shield and armor, striving to break down the Kaffan's strength and agility before he fell, weakened from loss of blood. Of a sudden I became aware that Natalie had drawn something from her robes.

It was a sawed-off carbine, hardly longer than an automatic pistol, and yet evidently adjusted to just that distance, for the weapon was balanced and looked beautifully true. And she was aiming it at the ring.

I tried to seize her arm, but she pushed me away contemptuously.

"Be still, you fool!" she cried. "Will you see Alexei live, and Lillith his bride, and burn in Moloch's belly?"

Her words stunned me, and before I could decide the end came. For, as Abouna's sword again found lodgment, and the old giant reeled and stumbled, and the screaming watchers, breaking through the ropes, crowded about them, Dolgouroffski, opening his guard, received Abouna's sword once more and, with his last strength, clove through the broken helm, cutting his skull to the shoulders.

For an instant Abouna stood bolt upright, tossing his arms; and, as if consciousness remained in his limbs last, as a mechanical continuation of the will, he whirled his sword round and round until it left his hand and flew through the air. The body collapsed heavily upon the floor.

At the same instant I became aware of Lillith, almost at Dolgouroffski's side. She was holding something in her hand, which was drawn back, and all at once I recalled her vow, her threat, her oath of vengeance on her father's murderer.

But before that blow was struck I saw a second shadow that glided past the girl and struck her arm away, and plunged a dagger into the throat of the reeling giant, and fled before the spectators knew what had occurred.

It was the tongueless man.

Then I became aware that Natalie Caraman was at my side no longer.

Dolgouroffski's battle-ax dropped from his hand. He placed one hand across his

eyes and seemed to rub the blood out of them; and, in a strange voice, he called:

"Natalie!"

Then I saw her at his side, holding him.

"I feel you, but I cannot see you, Natalie," he called, as if from a great distance.

"I am here, Alexei. I am with you."

"It is the end, Natalie. Do you remember?"

"I remember, Alexei. That is why I have come."

"Forgive!" he mumbled, stretching out his arms for her, and stumbling blindly.

For one last instant I saw them thus. Then they were blotted out of my sight forever as the awed watchers sprang from their places.

And just as a swarm of bees, bereft of their queen, goes crazed and turns upon the hive, so the last bonds of union among the warriors were dissolved in anarchy. Swords were drawn, and in an instant the whole interior of the temple was packed with a frenzied mob, hacking at one another, slaying with neither cause nor leadership. And others, breaking from their ranks, hammered in fury on the walls, and the great doors, which had been restored that day, and seemed to have been barred from the outside, for none could pass them.

Then, more infuriated, they streamed toward the temple rear and, finding other bolted doors there, turned upon those following behind them, and swords clashed, and chaos reigned here, too. And, in the midst of it all, the light of Lillith's throne suddenly went out.

I ran for the door. Lillith now, Professor Jonas—

The egress was closed. Natalie must have let it lock behind her when she left me. I was a prisoner still.

And, looking down once more from the spy-hole into the darkness, wherein the furious pandemonium went on, with shrieks of madness, and clashing of swords, oaths and groans of the dying, I saw a red glow creeping up the legs of Moloch.

And the room of the belly began to grow hot, and the stench of the heated bronze began to fill my nostrils.

I hammered madly on the walls. I broke my hands against the heavy glass in vain. Each breath of air was laden with the heat of a blast-furnace.

And with that awful clamor in my ears I fell unconscious on the floor of Moloch's belly.

CHAPTER XXIV.

FULFILMENT.

I HAD been so sure that this was death that my first awakening to external things impressed me as a fantasy of a dead man. Hours or days might have passed before the first glimmer of returning consciousness came to me.

I knew some one was shaking me by the shoulder. I opened my heavy eyes and, by the dim light of torches, I saw the white beard of Professor Jonas, and then his kindly blue eyes, looking with great concern into mine.

My mouth was like a kiln, my stomach heaved, and I could hardly move hand or foot. My ears rang still, as if the din of the fighting had been impressed on them forever.

Even the faint torch-light sent the tears streaming down my face. But somehow I felt comforted when the old man said, "Thank God, Ross!" and went down on his knees beside me and began rubbing my hands.

He put some vessel to my lips. "Drink, my dear boy!" he said. In it was an amber-colored liquid, bitter as gall, and yet as sweet to me as honey-mead.

"It is the priests' drink, Ross," the old man continued. "It is an antidote for the naphtha."

I did not understand him, but I drank, and the fluid cleared my throat wonderfully, and my brain, too.

"Where is Lillith?" I asked, a great fear in my heart.

"She is safe, Ross."

"And Natalie?"

He did not answer me, and I knew that the question need not be repeated.

"Where are we?"

I looked about me and saw the rocky labyrinth about me, and I began to remem-

ber those last few moments in Moloch's belly, and the horror of the scene in the temple.

Professor Jonas let me sit up, and kneeled, and put his arm round me to steady me. "We are in the labyrinth below the temple, Ross," he said. "We are safe now, and I do not think there is any immediate danger.

"When the last phase of that scene above us had been enacted I seized Lillith and somehow fought my way with her through the throng in the darkness. I saw Moloch's legs aglow. I knew what was happening. And I found an old priest on guard behind Amos's throne, paralyzed with fear, and yet with some purpose.

"I could not understand him, but he unlocked the vault and gave me access to the interior of the image. He opened the door in the belly. We found you lying unconscious on the floor, and carried you below. He disappeared; I brought you here. That was two hours ago."

"And the rest?" I asked.

"I may as well tell you, Ross. Dead."

"What?" I cried, struggling to my feet and leaning for support against the wall of the tunnel. "All of them? They killed each other?"

"That black devil, Amos, played his trump card, Ross. Since his schemes with Dolgouroffski had come to an end, he meant at least to reign undisputed in Thoth.

"I told you that there was a means of controlling the flow of the naphtha gas. There was also a means of diverting it, unlit, into the temple. Amos filled the whole place with it, and it was a painless death, even if—"

But I could bear hearing no more. The thought of all that dead multitude above me, and all those aims gone out, like Lillith's fire, nauseated me.

Jonas gave me some more of the fluid from the vessel. Then, to my amazement, he passed me my sword, coiled into a flat circle.

"When Dolgouroffski captured Thoth I took and hid this under my robes," he said, "thinking it might prove serviceable. Now we must start at once and try to make our way out of the labyrinth."

He stepped from me into the darkness of the tunnel. In my weak state I felt unnerved at his disappearance. But it was only for a moment.

He returned, bringing Lillith with him. And at the sight of her all my courage returned. I took her in my arms, and for a few moments we forgot all but each other, while Professor Jonas studied the geological tracings of the wall opposite.

"Mine now, Lillith," I said.

She faltered. "My oath, lord—"

"It is fulfilled with his death—".

"The riddle is not solved."

I would not let her say any more. For I felt that not until she had left the spell of that place of death behind her would she come to realization of the sanity of the outside world. And I resolved to say no more until the time came—weeks hence, when Thoth would be a nightmare of the past to her.

"Now, Ross," said Professor Jonas, taking down a pine flare from the wall, "we must be starting. And this will burn for three hours. During that time we must do our utmost to win our way from the labyrinth.

"Our road must bring us somewhere. If it brings us back here we will try again. It seems a difficult undertaking, and yet not a hopeless one.

"I have studied all the known variants of the ancient labyrinth. They are all modeled upon the Cretan. This palace is probably the heart of it. We entered by the gateway. The second half should take us out somewhere in the rear of the *amba*."

"And the treasures?" I asked.

He looked at Lillith and smiled, and I believe the old man felt compensated in the treasure that had come to me.

"If we could find one of the priests—" I suggested.

The professor shook his head.

"They have doubtless made their escape, Ross," he answered, "and it is useless to waste time looking for them."

And so we started, Professor Jonas moving ahead, and I following him, with my arm about Lillith. None of us spoke, for we all realized the seriousness of the situation.

At intervals the mouth of a cross-tunnel would appear, looming out of the labyrinth. Sometimes Professor Jonas took one of these, but always chose his way quietly and without hesitation. It was not until two hours must have passed that the opinion began to grow on me that we were traveling in a circle.

And then I perceived a curious formation in the rock, mica or copper quartz, that I was sure I had seen before. I drew the professor's attention to it.

He stood still and looked at it, and then at me.

"I'm afraid you are right, Ross," he answered. "I have been keeping up hope, and I didn't want to discourage you, but—well, we should have reached the entrance before this. I have kept to the pattern of the Cretan maze."

"It couldn't be wrong?"

"It might be wrong," he admitted. "It depends when this labyrinth was constructed. It must have been the work of successive rulers for nearly a century, in spite of the porous nature of the rock."

"We might—" I hazarded.

I meant we might try to find our way back, but the professor's glance at Lillith confirmed my own feelings on this subject. It were almost better to die there in the darkness than to take Lillith back to Thoth.

Besides I had been sure that the naphtha odor was becoming stronger; and, looking at Professor Jonas, I read the same suspicion in his own face. And the odor was indubitably creeping upon us as we stood there, as if it came from behind us.

Without another word Professor Jonas took up his flare again, now more than half burned down, and we entered upon another of the paths through the rocks. And as we went, halting with less certainty at the crossways, my suspicion grew into a certainty. The naphtha gas was following us at about the rate of our own progression, and filling all the orifices behind us, as if some master-mind was designedly driving us along a particular road.

In fact, when we reached another cross-passage in the rocks, the odor that assailed us was so strong and disgusting that we found it impossible to choose our direction.

Professor Jonas and I looked at each other, and we both looked at Lillith. The girl raised her eyes to mine.

"The All-Seeing One still watches us," she said quietly.

"Nonsense!" answered the professor testily. "The gas is simply filtering down from the palace and filling the blind alleys. That means that by taking the easiest way we are approaching open air."

But I knew he lied designedly; for the gas would be blown back upon us from the open. However, we went on. And presently, to my surprise, I realized that the smell of the gas was becoming less again.

Suddenly Professor Jonas, who had just rounded a projection of the rock, uttered a shout of joy. Far ahead of us lay an unmistakable patch of moonlight upon the widening floor of the tunnel. And now I felt a distinct current of air upon my face.

We hurried on, our hearts thumping with excitement; the patch grew larger; and all of a sudden the tunnel fell away, and I saw the moon and stars high overhead.

We had emerged at the opening of a large amphitheater in the *amba*. In fact, this, and not the palace, must have been the heart of it, for the walls rose high and unscalable on every side. And to our intense dismay we found that we could go no farther.

For we had stopped at the very edge of a circular pit, so deep that we stood halfway between the bottom and the top of the cliffs about us. Round the edge ran a narrow, circular path, no more than eighteen inches wide. And as we stood there we heard shouts across the chasm, and I saw a human figure making its way toward us, clinging to the cliff's side.

As the moonlight fell on its face I recognized Arminius. And now I saw that the continuity of the circular track about the pit was interrupted in the center of either side, as if the natural convulsion which had created this place had made an exact cleavage across the middle.

But that could only have been by volcanic action, as if the subsidence of the glowing, central mass had caused it to fall

slightly apart on either side of the median line of action. In that case this, and not the palace, must be the heart of the volcano.

Then, looking upward, I saw something that sent the blood rushing to my head, and a sense of utter hopelessness came over me. For, above the cliff facing us, I saw the lava walls of the palace itself.

We had circled upon our course and come back to our starting-point. We were almost immediately beneath the palace. The slanting moonlight disclosed the tunnel looming overhead, and the very beginnings of the labyrinth which we had followed. And doubtless the aperture, which now stood open, had been closed against us in such a way that we had thought it a part of the rocky wall.

But who had opened it when we had passed it?

All this while I had been looking upward, and at Arminius, whimpering at the edge of the ten-foot chasm that divided up, but now Professor Jonas twitched my sleeve, and I looked down.

At first, in the darkness, I had seen nothing but the black pit. Now I saw a secondary cone within it, about twenty feet below, flattened at the top, and perhaps as large as a large room. On this stood Amos, his black face upturned to us, jeering and gibbering at what lay at his feet.

It was the insignia of the Kingdom of Judah. There they stood in a steel case with bars—the seven-branched candlestick, the royal crown, the breast-plate of the high priest, from the model of which Amos had fashioned his, glowing and scintillating with great gems; the golden cherubim, images five feet in height, with outspread wings, six in number; the golden ewers and basins of the Jewish Temple.

And all about them lay stretched the skeletons of men, one with a gaunt, bony hand fingering the case of the treasures. And as if preserved in a measure by the naphtha, they had been mummified, so that the skin still adhered to the fleshless bones, and their very clothes still clung to the bodies.

These were the lost adventurers who had sought the treasures in times gone by. Here was a Roman centurion, in unbleached wool, the straps of his leg-pieces still visible, shriveled and twisted, upon the bones, his rusted casque beside him. Here was an Ethiopian, in loin-cloth, with the tattered remnants of a leopard-skin about him; here two youths in Persian garb, their arms locked together. Here was a Spanish don, in ruff and doublet, and here a hardly recognizable form, in a brown surcoat, with wig and three-cornered hat clapped over the skull.

Amos looked up and gibed at us and pointed. He must have known the secret from the beginning; indeed, no clue was necessary, only the knowledge of the spring that released the rock entrance. He pointed downward and up to us.

And, as we stood there, the naphtha gas that followed filled our lungs and throats; the sickening odor made my head reel; it was creeping up the tunnel behind us, and also out of the pit beneath, in which Amos stood, like the infernal deity of that hell. There was no need for us to wonder how those who had come before us had met their end.

At the extreme edge of the rocky path on which he stood Arminius screamed, and stretched out his hands piteously for aid. Time and again he looked toward the pit beneath him, as if measuring its extent to risk a leap. It was not a long jump, but it was impossible to take it running, and without this, it seemed impossible to make it successfully.

I looked at the Levantine, and, perhaps because I was sickened by the wholesale holocaust to which that jeering devil underneath had devoted so many, and my heart revolted at the thought of another victim, or because the man, base as he was, aroused my pity in his hideous plight, I ran toward him. I stretched out my arms.

"Jump!" I called. "It is your only chance. Jump!"

For the stench of the naphtha, rising from below and coming on behind, bleared my eyes and choked my breath. I could only see dimly, I could hardly see Lillith at my side, and the professor, standing at the edge of the chasm, was a blurred figure in the thick fog that swirled about us.

"Jump!" shouted the professor at my side.

And, with a backward look and a despairing cry, Arminius hurled himself through the air toward us. And whether his fear gave him superhuman agility and strength, or whether it was his luck that held, he struck a projection in the side of the circular cave, bounded from it, and hit the edge of the platform, and I caught him, and, almost dragged down myself, held him and pulled him to his feet.

But as he fell he struck the last few inches of Professor Jonas's torch from his hand, and the blazing brand whirled through the air and fell into the depths below.

Instantly, with a roar, a blaze of fire, that seemed to fill the whole pit, shot upward and rushed through the passage behind us. It passed, burning our lungs like flame, and singeing our hair and faces.

Then I saw a sea of fire that seethed about the conical crest below. I heard a shriek from Amos; it swept over him, utterly obliterating him, and the bodies of the lost men about his feet, and the hidden treasures of the temple. And high overhead I saw fire gild the entrance to the rocks, and a great flame leap, as from Lillith's throne.

With a wild impulse we leaped backward, I dragging Lillith, and the professor Arminius, and we found the opening behind us. The naphtha in the tunnel had been burned out.

We plunged madly into the labyrinth; and heard behind us and overhead reverberations of falling stone and masonry, as if the whole Palace of Thoth were falling into the pit beneath.

Then I remembered that this was the fulfilment of the old prophecy.

CHAPTER XXV.

"SOME ADVENTURE, ROSS!"

AND our next stage in that intolerable journey was so long that it seems little more than a dream to me. Hour after hour, through blackness unpenetrated by the least gleam of light, Professor Jonas ahead, I with Lillith, and Arminius in the rear, groping our way blindly, with hardly any hope, and that, too, dying as the hours passed.

Once, as the professor called to me, I fancied that I heard a distant cry, as if in answer, and we stopped and called, but only the echoes of our voices came back to us.

So we went on; and yet as we went, I had the sense of some one following us, and I told Professor Jonas.

"It's odd, but I've been fancying the same thing, Ross," he answered.

Accordingly we stopped again, and I was almost certain that I heard stealthy footfalls some distance behind us. But they ceased almost immediately, and thereafter, though we stopped several times, I never heard them again, nor came there any answer to our calls.

For miles Lillith had trudged beside me, leaning on me more heavily, with Arminius whimpering in the rear; and now at last, beaten, and utterly worn out, we sat down in the labyrinth. Wherever we were, we knew that we might circle endlessly within the *amba,* in itself no more than a small mountain, and only find by a miracle either egress or palace, or the starting-place of the flaming pit. For the labyrinth was so closely built that we passed and repassed old passages traversed hours before, and there was not the slightest sense of direction left to us.

"We'll rest a little," said Professor Jonas, "and then go on."

"Yes," I answered, for Lillith's sake. But she was fast asleep, her head against my arm.

"We'll go on soon," mumbled the professor, and fell asleep himself almost immediately. I closed my eyes. I was parched with thirst, the effect of the naphtha gas, and heavy with stupor. I would have lain there till I died, rather than rise and stagger on again.

Arminius crept up to me. "For God's sake—" he began. I shook him away. He came back. "We're lost," he whimpered. "I tried to find the treasures for you and the professor. Let us go on together.

"We two can walk faster alone than

with the girl and the old man. It's better for two to die than four."

I flung him from me, and he whined like a whipped cur, and began running wildly to and fro, as if seeking an outlet. Presently his screams came floating down the passage.

"Where are you, Mr. Ross?" he cried. "I can't reach you. There's a rock in the way!"

I went toward him, keeping touch of the wall with my left hand. I heard his cries grow fainter. Suddenly they shrilled out again:

"Mr. Ross—help! Help, in God's name! Where are you? I can't find you!"

I ran toward the voice. The tunnel seemed to open. My left hand found only emptiness. I grasped at where I thought Arminius was. Then I heard him call once again, and infinitely far away, as if a wall of rock had risen up between us.

And that was the end. Fearful of going too far from my companions, I cried to him again and again, but it was only my own shouts that came echoing back to me. I must have spent an hour there, calling at intervals.

At last, in despair of finding him, I made my way back toward Lillith and the professor, finding the left-hand wall again, and moving slowly for fear of stumbling over them. I had been walking in this way for several minutes before I realized that I, too, was in the wrong tunnel.

I retraced my steps and tried again. But always I came back to it—there was a knob on the wall at the height of my hand that felt like a child's head to my disordered fancy, and I could not but take hold of it at each attempt.

Then, becoming frantic, I ran to and fro like Arminius, calling. But there came back never a sound.

With the apathy of despair I flung myself down to die. And I must have dozed from very faintness, and when I heard Professor Jonas's voice I knew it was a dream, and would not listen—until a hand on my shoulder drew me to my feet, gasping his name.

And even then I would not believe till I felt Lillith's arms about me.

"Arminius left us," I cried. "I ran to find him—and got lost. Where is he?"

"Not with us, Ross. You did your best for him. I must have fallen asleep; I awoke, and you were not with me. I might have tried to find you, only—well, you see, it was all wrong, the whole business.

"Nobody ever dies in the middle of his own adventure. Why, when the sage Eliezer was buried in the demons' cave the Lord sent him an angel—"

"Damn the sage Eliezer!" I cried in uncontrollable indignation. "He hasn't sent us one anyway, so what's the use."

"Oh, yes, he has, my dear boy," answered Professor Jonas; and suddenly my sharpened senses discerned the presence of a fourth person with us.

"I was starting to find you," continued the professor, "when this man came up to me. At first I thought it was you. But he's an Arab—not one of the priests, at any rate. He brought me to you—"

Of a sudden a calloused hand reached out and took mine in the darkness. The other hand slid softly over the back of mine. And on the wrist I felt a rounded ridge of flesh—and I knew who our savior was.

"He hasn't spoken a word, but he's going to guide us from the labyrinth," whispered Professor Jonas to me as we commenced our journey again.

With that I told him of my adventures in Dar Fok Pass—there had been no time previously; and as we walked we discussed it.

Professor Jonas leaned toward me. "He stabbed Dolgouroffski," he whispered.

"He hated him," I answered. "There was some ancient wrong between them."

"He didn't do it for you, then, Ross, nor save us for your sake."

"Nor yours, professor," I returned.

On we went, the tongueless man going steadily ahead of us, and hardly turning. And now a sense of freshness in the air set my pulses beating furiously, and then—there was no doubt of it. For the tunnel was lightening.

Now I could see Professor Jonas and Lillith at my side, now the breeze blew on us, now the black orifice beyond was filled

with a round disk of daylight; and now we reached the end, and a glorious ray of light from the new-risen sun shone on our haggard faces.

And we forced our way through masses of loosened rock and crawled to our feet beyond the saucer, on the farther side of the *amba*.

We flung ourselves down on the bare hillside, and I stared at the desert land and the far-flung, parched mountains, and never had the world seemed so beautiful to me before. Tears came into my eyes.

I looked at the professor. He was blinking, too, and he put out his hand and wrung mine.

"Say it, professor!" I said in simulated anger. "Go on! I can bear it now!"

"Say what, my dear young friend?"

"One of your parallels out of the Talmud. About the sage Tobit—or Eliezer."

"There isn't any parallel, my boy—not one. The nearest I can remember is about the sage Zephanias in the Mountain of Salt. Only he didn't bring any treasure away—like you!"

He looked at Lillith and slapped me on the back violently.

"It certainly was—was—some adventure, Ross!" he hiccoughed.

I turned to Lillith. She was looking at me with shining eyes, incredulous, like one awakening. And still I forbore to speak again upon the subject nearest my heart and, I believed, her own.

"But we're not yet out of the wood, Ross," said the professor, pointing toward the east.

CHAPTER XXVI.

LILLITH'S FATHER.

OUT of the sunlight a troop of cavalry, with pennons fluttering from their lances, were riding toward us. As they approached we stood up; they came on at full gallop.

There was little doubt but these were Dolgouroffski's men. My heart sank as I watched them thundering down upon us.

But, fifty yards away, they drew rein, and the leader galloped toward us alone. And I recognized him, and shouted for very joy, for it was Andros.

He knew us, pulled back his horse on to its haunches and, bridle on arm, ran toward us, looking from one to another in amazement, and not least at the madman who stood silently by.

There followed a few minutes of rapid interchange of talk with the professor. Andros's guide had taken him to the egress of the labyrinth, after several attempts to escape him, which at the very last succeeded.

He had been pursued by a party of Dolgouroffski's infantry, but had escaped them, had made his way to a friendly village, where Abouna's men were mustering, and had procured a troop to fall upon Dolgouroffski's rearguard. The surprise had been completely successful and, had Dolgouroffski been in Thoth—alive—still he would have been cut off and forced into surrender by Abouna's rapidly increasing army.

But when he learned of the events within the *amba* all his lightness of heart left him.

"This is the end that I foresaw," he said, "for Thoth is accursed, and it is an old saying that none who goes thither in war has ever returned. And now I do not know what I shall do, for rumor reports that already a new claimant has arisen in the Tigre province, and musters his thousands on the road to Adis Ababa. And it seems to me, since our cause has perished with our loved leader, that we shall go to our homes, for we are all tired of bloodshed, and between the Lion's men and ours are many ties of kinship. But where do you go?" he continued when Professor Jonas had answered him.

"Then my men shall escort you across the hills, though there is little danger, except from roving Bedouin. And I myself shall guide you."

He had a camp pitched about a mile away, and led us thither. There, after we had eaten and drunk, we fell asleep in our tents, and it was four and twenty hours before I awoke again, to find the professor and Lillith waiting for me, and our mounts already saddled.

One had been provided for the madman, too, but he declined it, and ran beside

us all that day. By nightfall, however, it was plain that he was utterly exhausted.

In fact, he gave me the singular conception that all his hardships in the desert had been in some way bound up with our journey to Thoth; that, as if destined to rescue us, he had been providentially assigned his wandering life, and that this purpose had been fulfilled.

Next day he rode without offering objection, and so the first part of the next, until, in the afternoon, we reached the cave where he had tended me. Then, since our horses were worn out, and there was still the desert journey before us, we decided to rest there.

Once in the cave the madman's strength suddenly seemed to leave him. He fell back on his pallet and lay there without moving for a long time.

When I approached him toward evening with some food I was shocked at the change in him. His face was gray beneath the bronze of the desert sun, and his cheeks damp with sweat. It was obvious that he was fast approaching dissolution.

I told Professor Jonas and Lillith, who went quickly inside. He was already half unconscious, plucking restlessly at the dried grass of his bed.

What was he? Professor Jonas drew me a little way aside. "That man is not an Arab," he said.

"A Turk possibly," I suggested.

"Andros was looking at him when he was riding. He says that he has served in the British army—in the cavalry. He does not rise in his stirrups. The Turks do."

Cries from outside drew us to the cave's entrance, leaving Lillith to minister to the dying man. Approaching us across the hills was a troop of camel-men.

Andros quickly drew his men into line, prepared for any possible encounter. But as the newcomer neared us it was plain that they were Soudanese; and at their head rode a white man in a sun-helmet.

The sight of a European face was sweeter to me than I could have dreamed. Nor was my delight sensibly diminished when, riding forward, the officer proved himself to be the assistant police chief of Khartum.

He knew me immediately and, after a few words of greeting to Andros, rode up to me and touched his helmet.

"Good day, Mr. Ross; good day, Professor Jonas," he said. "Shooting pretty good this time of the year?"

"Passable," I answered; and then, remembering the scenes in Thoth, I shuddered.

"Good thing you changed your route," he said. "The rains along the Blue Nile have been worse this year than ever.

"Gentlemen," he added seriously, "you are—excuse me—a couple of damned fools. I know where you've been, and the government's embarking field-guns—half a battery of them—in case I don't succeed in bringing you back with me by this day week. And that," he added disgustedly, "is what it means to get a nice, soft, snappy sort of job in the Soudan. *Phew!*"

He wiped the moisture from his head beneath his helmet. Just then Lillith came running out to tell us that the man within was dying.

The police chief shot a keen glance at her, and then went into the cave with us. He doffed his helmet and stood reverently beside the pallet, while Lillith kneeled and wiped the sweat from the madman's face. Suddenly he uttered a great cry and fell upon his knees, looking into the dying eyes.

They opened on his, and a look of recognition came into them. The lips moved feebly. The police chief took the man's hands in his and bent over him.

"Shall I tell her?" I heard him whisper.

The dying man began to fumble with a little wallet that hung from his neck. The police chief took it from him and turned to Lillith.

He whispered in her ear. I saw her start and tremble. She fell on her knees beside him and pillowed the madman's head on her arm. She pressed her lips to his forehead, and her eyes, fixed upon his, seemed to devour the last sight of them.

A minute later the chief of police arose and drew us outside.

"You know who that was, gentlemen?" he asked in a low tone. "Captain Branscombe—my first friend in Egypt years ago. The girl is his daughter. He was taking

her from an outpost for safety with his column when he was cut up by the Dervishes."

CHAPTER XXVII.

IN THE END.

INSIDE the wallet was the second half of the clue, but it was with little interest that Professor Jonas and I examined it in Khartum.

"What do these hieroglyphics mean?" I asked.

"My dear Ross," he returned irritably, "I shall think all our journey wasted unless you learn not to call cuneiform hieroglyphics. The translation is, 'The north hath sought and found the south and is united to her.'"

The very words of Lillith's vow! I cried out in delight; but Professor Jonas looked at me indignantly over his spectacles.

"I don't see that that's much of a clue," I said. "But then, of course, I don't know anything about it."

"You seem to know as much as I do," he retorted. "The first inscription—here it is—means, 'In the south seek, and thou shalt find.'

"Now, what the devil—pardon me, my young friend—but if any other Assyriologist can make a clue of those two preposterous sentences that will explain the site of the Jewish treasures to the uninitiated, he's smarter than I consider myself to be. But don't worry your brains," he added sarcastically. "As the sage Joseph of Babylon remarks, 'Set not learning before the hungry, nor demand riddles of the bridegroom.'"

My thoughts went out with a sudden rush of tenderness to Lillith. It was four weeks since we had returned to Khartum, and all the while Professor Jonas had been worrying over the inscriptions, while I thought only of her who was to be my bride.

For, as I had surmised, of Thoth and her vow she retained hardly any memory at all, since she had been all the while in an abnormal state, or as psychologists say, in an "alternating personality" there.

And all the events of her childhood had come back to her as if of yesterday. All in Khartum knew her story, and kindness and sympathy had been showered on us.

At present she was living with the family of the assistant police chief, and every effort devoted to making her renew her normal life and to forget the past. At the first, even I had been allowed to see her only a few minutes daily.

But I was the one part of Thoth that she did not forget.

She had been twelve when she was captured, and it was not hard to pick up the threads of civilized life again. Indeed, as Lillian Branscombe, she was blossoming out into a very modern young lady, and my adoration would have been tinged with deepening fears of losing her had not our wedding day been set for the dim and misty future—in fact, just three months away.

But, though she had forgotten much, I did feel that I should like to remove the last imagined obstacle. And in the solution of the puzzle north would verily have come unto south and would have been united unto her.

So I looked at the two inscriptions as they lay side by side upon the table before me, and suddenly I swelled, I bulged, I gasped with inspiration.

"My dear professor, the whole thing's simple enough," I said with affected unconcern that I was very far from feeling.

"Eh?" asked the professor with a stare.

"You see, professor, we look at these inscriptions with different eyes. To you they are writing. You see them as symbols of ideas."

"Yes—well—what?"

"But I see them simply as a confusing assortment of arrows, of all sorts and shapes and sizes, bundled in all sorts of ways, and pointing north, south, east, west, and maybe north-northwest by the compass.

"So when you tell me that the north—that's the Jerusalem one—is united unto the south—why, naturally, I want to do what I'm told to do. Do you see?"

And I placed them one above the other on the table.

"It's the plan of the labyrinth," I said.

(The end.)

VISION

I SAW Puck, I did,
Where he hid
Underneath a swaying spray of fragile Queen-Anne's-lace;
Tiny body, emerald-clad,
Bluebell for a cap he had,
And all the mischief in the world concentered in a face
Like a ripe brown nut. I know
Why he hid, I saw him throw
Cherries at an oriole that flashed above the place;
When the angry streak of yellow
Darted toward the little fellow,
He dipped among the grass, and so quite useless was the chase.

I know some one who'll believe it,
Who has insight to perceive it,
A certain little maid,
Star-eyed,
Sun-crowned, unafraid,
Who has tried
Very many summer days to catch him sporting there,
Eating berries,
Drinking dew,
Juggling cherries,
Clambering to
The backs of jet-marked butterflies and coasting thru the air.

We have not grown old and blind,
We can find
On a knoll all wood-encircled, fairy rings.
Frost-pearls looped in gleaming strings,
Purple wings
Made in dresses worth the coffers of a hundred elfin kings.
We have seen on summer nights
(Such brave sights!)
When the court is met beneath a moonlit sky.
You have never glimpsed them dancing?
Romping, prancing?
Well—we love the Tiny People, she and I.

Florence E. Burrill.

It All Depends

by Jack Bechdolt

AT five o'clock of any business afternoon the office force of the Hayden Advertising Agency considered its day done. There were high-salaried executives, copy-writers, visualizers, contract men who, for weeks at a time, forgot there was such an hour as five and worked as long as business demanded or as strength permitted. Old Oscar Hayden himself never knew the meaning of "quit" while there was anything left to be done. But the force of girls that sat clicking on typewriting machines all day knew.

At nine in the morning, when they came to work, five o'clock was the mental picture that nestled under their coiffures. By noon it had moved into the forefront of their thoughts. By four thirty the big room where they worked was electric with the concentration of fifty female minds on a single idea. One on the physical plane of a garbage man, brought suddenly into that room, could tell immediately what they were thinking about.

Five o'clock was their magic hour, the hour of release from inconsequential things. Then they were free to attend to the serious business of life, and that, to forty-five out of every fifty girls who ever clicked a typewriter for Oscar Hayden, means men and marriage. Then they were free to go home and overhaul their wardrobes for the future subjugation of men; or to go to the movies for pointers on men; or to stay home and read and dream about men; or to work with the laboratory material already at hand.

They were nice girls, good girls, and clever girls. Their fingers were as quick as any on the keys, their brains active, and their hearts set on giving Oscar Hayden his money's worth of service. But they were young, and—nearly all of them, anyway—they ran true to kind. Five o'clock was their hour. Why not? From bedtime to gray morning the assured monotony of sleep; from gray morning through the day the assured monotony of wage-earning; but after five o'clock—

Myrtle Rowe, crowded tightly against Norma Case in the packed, descending elevator, giggled, "He'll be there; I'll bet you a whole pound of chocolates he will. Oh, Norma!"

Norma seized Myrtle's arm as if she were dragging her from danger. "You won't!" she exclaimed. "Myrtle, surely you won't!"

"Won't I?" Myrtle demanded, tossing her head. "Don't go betting any money on that hunch. And why not?"

"A man you never met!" Norma protested, her voice low and shocked. "Why, Myrtle—"

"Never met! What of it? I'm going to meet him, and I can tell in five minutes if

he's— Ugh!" The elevator stopped with sickening abruptness at the street floor, and they were squeezed through its grillework gates into the big corridor. Myrtle recovered her hold on Norma and drew her aside from the crowd. Both girls glanced quickly about them, searching.

"There he is!" cried Myrtle. "Look—near the doors—leaning against the wall. Anybody can see he's safe as a church. Come on, Norma—he won't bite us."

Norma shook her head, "No."

"Oh, don't be a goof!"

"That's just it. I don't propose to be a goof. I'm not going to know any man I'm not properly introduced to—a man who's not vouched for by somebody I can trust—"

"Wait, Norma dear! I can write your ticket, with just a little editing. You keep that up, and it's going to read, 'I'm never going to know *any* man.' We've been six months in New York. How many men friends have you?"

Norma flushed and said nothing.

Myrtle answered her own question.

"Three! That's how many. Three, including old Mr. Haydock in the cut room, and Eddinger, who's married and father of six kids and wears a tie I wouldn't use to lace my shoes. Three! How many do I know?"

"Oh my dear!"

"'*Oh my dear!*' you said it. Why? Because I've got some faith in my own judgment, and I take a chance. And I can have a good time every evening I want to, and you—you stay home and mope—and are homesick—and lonely—"

"I am not!"

"No! You were crying when I came home the other night because life's so gay, I suppose? Why, look at him, Norma—you can see he's a decent kid. And he asked us *both* to go to dinner with him. Doesn't that show— Oh, come on!"

Norma Case wavered visibly. She looked long and carefully at the handsome stranger who waited so patiently by the big doors, scanning the faces of the girls who swirled out of the elevators. Across the air well, facing the big windows of the Hayden Agency, where Norma and Myrtle sat at their machines, was a many-windowed apartment used by the artists of a fashion magazine. The stranger had appeared among the artists three weeks ago. For two weeks he had been communicating with Myrtle by the simple process of writing messages on his drawing-board and holding them to the window to be read. Their window flirtation to-day had culminated in the invitation to both girls to dine with him.

Norma had to admit he seemed a decent enough fellow. There was nothing fresh in his manner of dress nor his bearing. He was distinctly good-looking. Secretly she was much taken with his smile. Why not dine with him, she and Myrtle? Safe as a church? Of course he was! Why not, for once, do a foolish thing—take a chance—spend one gay evening to atone for so many that were drab? Wasn't she, after all, a silly, bound by outworn conventions? Six months in the city that had promised so much. Time was flying—

"No," said Norma aloud, "I won't. I don't know who he is, and I won't take a chance. Probably I'm wrong again, Myrtle dear, but it's the only way I know—"

Myrtle tossed her head. "All right—*mouse*. I will, and I'll have a good time, too. Look for me home when you see me."

Norma saw Myrtle approach the handsome stranger. She watched their greeting. How nicely he lifted his hat—and stood holding it while he talked to her—real courtliness! She saw his look about and his question; Norma's shrug. He was asking about her, she knew. Then both laughed and passed out of the doors. Presently Norma was in the street and hesitating.

For all her good resolutions, she was not happy. Five o'clock had struck, she was free, the whole evening was before her—and it promised nothing more than score on score of evenings that had gone before. She felt cheated, indignant, hurt.

She would not go home, not yet! Soon enough when night drove her in. She went up-town to the main library. She procured a file of business-system magazines and sat in the reading-room, concentrating on them.

She hated them, but they were good for her. Finally, when she could stand no more, she went out to dine at a side-street restaurant, where she simulated gaiety by adding pie *à la mode* to a sensible *menu* of soup and a meat order.

From the restaurant she walked as far as Broadway and looked at the bright lights of Times Square. Even under the influence of pie *à la mode* this diversion was not completely satisfying. The streets were swarming with the theater crowds, pavements completely filled with the slow-moving throng; roadway a mad confusion of honking cars, the traffic policeman's whistle, the reflected gaiety of a million incandescent bulbs on wet asphalt and the glistening roofs of cabs; pedestrians tangled among the vehicles, dodging and skipping; boys and girls, men and women everywhere—in twos—laughing, well dressed, eager for pleasure.

She wished she could go to a movie, almost yielded to temptation, and remembered she couldn't afford it. She had seen a movie last night. She returned to the public library, and went into the art museum, determined to get some solid good out of fine pictures. Culture, thank Heaven, cost nothing! Culture cost nothing, and for cheering a lonely heart it was worth the price. Defeated at last, she went home.

Norma and Myrtle "bached" together. Their room was on the second floor, rear, of a nice old house on a nice old street in a nice old forgotten corner of Manhattan known as Chelsea Village.

It was a reasonably large room with two windows, which looked over a tin roof of what had once been a rear porch and was now part of the house, and so into a back yard. The architecture of the next dozen houses was the same, the one-story-high veranda, their roofs joining in a long promenade, each house fenced to itself by a small barrier.

The room could be lighted by gas from a heavy, old-fashioned chandelier, but Norma did not exercise her option. She knew what the room looked like without using gas. She could describe every detail of it—learned on many a dull evening spent there. She knew where the table stood, and the three chairs, and the bed, and dresser. Automatically her foot avoided the entangling tear in the rug as she went to the little rocker by the rear window and seated herself with a sigh.

The window was slightly open and admitted the night air, warm and filled with a fine spray, more mist than rain. The night was murmurous with the hooting of traffic on the Hudson—ferry-boats, tugs, passenger and freight steamers everlastingly moving about and moaning for right of way.

She sat in the familiar rocker, looking steadily into the familiar dark, and let the accumulated loneliness of six months, a poignant ache, have its way with her. "Be good and you'll be lonesome," said some flippant philosopher. There was truth in that; she *was* lonesome, good and lonesome. "And yet I'm right—I know I'm right," she insisted savagely. "I'll never do such a thing—never! Going out with a man I never met, never even heard of—"

"I beg your pardon. Er—I—I do beg your pardon!"

The voice was a man's voice. It came from the dark close beside her. From within the room, her own room! Norma cowered in the chair. Her mouth opened to call for help, but she did not call. She only gasped.

"I'm here, over here by the door." The voice was slightly nervous in timbre, evidently meant to be reassuring, and not at all unpleasant. Outrageous as the circumstances were, already Norma was prejudiced in favor of the owner of that voice. He spoke again:

"I didn't know I was getting into a lady's room. I'm sorry. But I had to come in—and yours was the first open window—"

Norma gasped. "You came through my window! Broke in—"

"Yes—but I'm not a robber, or—or anything like that. I was—getting away. They're after me now— Please, will you promise not to call for help or talk loudly? I guess I'll have to ask you to help me."

"Well!"

"Yes—I know—kind of unusual. Suppose—well, suppose you light the gas and

take a look at me—but draw the blind first!"

"Well!"

"Please do! I'm in a tearing hurry, too. Got to get away. Yet I can't get away without your help. Will you? I won't shoot—or anything!"

Norma Case rose. She drew the window blind. She found a match, turned on the gas, and the room grew bright. She saw facing her, against the door, a young fellow in cravenette coat and soft cloth hat. He removed the hat politely and revealed close-cropped light-brown hair, a lean, keen, intellectual face marred by a fresh scar across the temple which had dribbled a streak of red down his cheek, and an earnest smile. She saw that he was carrying a leather portfolio, hugged close.

"Why, you've hurt yourself!"

"It's nothing. Really—"

Norma dived behind a screen, reappeared with a cloth moistened at the wash-stand, and began dabbing at the cut.

"It's nothing—honest! And I must hurry—"

"Just a second—sticking plaster!" Her fingers trembled with excitement as she cut a square and fixed it over the cut.

She was conscious that her visitor was staring in a manner that was eloquent not only of gratitude but admiration. Norma was worth admiring—a slender, girlish young woman, with a great deal of black hair that defied her attempt to keep it demure. Her slender neck and throat, revealed by a low collar, were delicious. Her shoulders had a slight droop, very appealing.

He said hurriedly: "Thanks awfully! Now, can you take me down-stairs to the street door, quietly? I've got to get out, quickly!"

She led the way without a word. In the dim hall her hand on his arm guided his steps. They reached the street door.

"One thing more," he whispered. "Mind stepping out first—as if you'd come out to see if it's raining, say—and looking around casually? If there are cops anywhere near—police—let me know."

She left him in the vestibule, stepped to the top of the old-fashioned stoop, hesitated with outstretched hand, and eyes that apparently searched the heavens; she returned to whisper eagerly: "There are three policemen—two standing before the house five doors down, one near the street corner."

He said something that sounded like "Damn."

Norma did not have time to rebuke him, if she meant to. A door opened, and Mrs. Lukens, her landlady, materialized with a sharp look for both.

Norma smiled readily. "Oh, Mrs. Lukens, this is Mr.—Mr. Walters, a friend of mine from the office. May we wait in your parlor a few moments? Our taxi seems to be late—"

"Of course you may, my dear. Right in here, Mr. Walters. I'll light up."

Mrs. Lukens left the spurious Mr. Walters seated primly on a horsehair sofa; Norma in an atrocious knobbly carved chair. As soon as the door closed Norma moved beside him on the sofa.

"Now you've got to think fast," she prompted.

He looked about uneasily, and she reassured the unspoken fear. "No, she doesn't listen—much. She—I think she trusts me."

"She would! Uh—anybody would! Say, you're splendid!"

She felt herself flushing deliciously, conscious she had earned the praise.

He hurried on. "Why, there isn't one girl in ten million would play up as you did! Not one in ten million! And when I slid behind the door as you came in—"

"You were behind the door? Oh!" She blushed again.

"Yes—and scared stiff. And when I saw it was a woman I was scared worse. But you— Listen, I can't explain it now. I can't stop to tell it. If you knew how I had to hurry—all that depends on my getting away from those cops. Will—will you trust me some more? You'll have to! Go out again, pretend to mail a letter. See if they're still there!"

She reported back in five minutes. The police had not moved.

Her guest sprang to his feet at this news. He began to pace hurriedly back and forth

across Mrs. Lukens's crowded parlor, scowling anxiously.

Norma watched him. Her face reflected his anxiety. Who he was—what he was—she had no idea. He had come, unannounced, through a window. His background was the night—a mystery. Already she had taken him on faith, dared much for him. She felt she was going to dare more. It was all wrong—everything! If only she could get away for a few minutes, find a breathing space, and collect herself. While he stood before her she lost all judgment, all sense of proportion. He loomed so large he shut out all doubts—

"Look here," he said earnestly, "I guess it's up to you! I've got to trust you—take you on faith—and looks. That's good enough for me. You're the kind that 'll go through in spite of anything; I can see that. It's all right, I tell you; nothing crooked and nothing disgraceful. But there is something to be done, and done before half past eleven to-night. It's got to be done by then. You'll help me? You will?"

He stood facing Norma, close to her. His hand touched her sleeve entreatingly. "Look here," he cried, "you've simply got to help me!"

Norma Case, the wise virgin, wise in the the knowledge of books and precepts, cognizant of every don't in a woman's category, nodded assent. "Yes. What must I do?"

"There are papers in this portfolio. They are—never mind that now, better you didn't know! Do this: You know Gansevoort Market? Yes! Take this, walk out of here minding your own business. If the police stop you—but they won't! Not you! Go to Gansevoort Market, to Little West Twelfth Street. There's a restaurant there—one of those all-night places—Nick's Place, that's the name.

"Go there and wait for me. If I'm not there by—let's see, ten thirty, ask the man at the cash-register for Tony. Tell Tony that Hazelton sent you. He'll know what to do. You can trust Tony absolutely—as much as you can trust me. Remember, he's as safe as if I was along. He'll show you the rest—"

"But you?"

"I'll meet you. Probably at Nick's. Meantime I'm going back through your window, over the rear fences, out by the other street. There's a passage between two houses I know. If the police find me, I'll give them a run for their money. Don't worry, I'll manage to find you, and—and if I don't, I'm going to trust you. You'll go through with this, I know you will. Good-by!"

He was at the door, paused, and came back to her. He took her by the shoulders and his blue eyes looked squarely into her wide brown ones.

"You're a marvel," he said rapidly, "an absolute marvel! God never made another like you! I never saw you before, don't know who you are—but I trust you. I'm proving it by this!"

He was gone again, through the hall. From the door Norma watched him disappear up the stairs. Then she slipped into the street, pattered away rapidly, nodded a good evening to an obese policeman lingering near the corner, and hurried toward the nearest L station.

Her heart sang a little song of gladness all the time. "I trust you—I trust you—proving it by this—I trust you!"

Gansevoort Market, dark and mysterious and idle as she had never seen it. In the square a huddle of market wagons and motor trucks, shrouded with canvas, and here and there a muffled figure moving about them or huddled down asleep.

Nick's restaurant was lighted and warm and patronized by half a dozen or so night workers. She ordered coffee and doughnuts and waited with eyes on the door, then on the clock. At exactly half past ten she asked for Tony.

Tony was produced from the kitchen—a squat figure in a faded pea-jacket, cloth cap, and boots. He was not prepossessingly handsome, nor even inspiring of confidence, but she gave him her message.

"Allaright," said Tony briefly. "Come along."

She followed him into the drizzle. Tony paid her slight attention. He swung on ahead and left her to patter after. Across silent West Street and into the shadow of

the big docks. Tony was hurrying and Norma panting. He turned into an open slip, a public dock where ash-scows were loaded from a dump. He paused and, when she joined him, pointed to a launch, dimly seen as it rubbed the piling below. Then Tony swung over the stringpiece, felt his way down a ladder, and stood in the rocking boat, awaiting her.

Norma hesitated.

This was sheer madness. Had she lost all sense of decency—all instinct of self-preservation?

"I trust you—trust you—trust you," sang her heart, chanting the words of the man who called himself Hazelton.

"Come ahead," grunted Tony.

Feeling with her hands across the cold concrete and water-soaked wood, she found the topmost rung of the short ladder; swung herself onto it; felt her way downward. Tony caught her and swung her beside him in the launch.

"Sitadown," he growled, and thrust her into the stern, giving all his attention to the gas-engine.

They waited what seemed an age—or all the ages since creation.

"Whata time, that ferry clock?" Tony demanded, suddenly anxious.

"Ten minutes of eleven—just."

"Allaright."

He loosed the moorings, seized an oar, and shoved the launch clear. He stooped over the gas-engine to twirl the wheel, and the mechanical *pop-pop-pop* began. They moved away.

"Tony!"

A shout from the dock. She knew it was Hazelton.

Even as she knew it she saw him dimly in the murk—saw him leap from the stringpiece.

The launch dipped crazily as he struck it, dipped its gunwale under water and righted again. Her skirt was soaking.

They shot clear of the dock, and behind her Norma heard the trill of a police whistle; then a shot.

Hazelton's arm thrust her down.

The boat had speed. A lumbering ferryboat was just clearing the slip ahead of them. The launch darted across the blunt, broad bows, bathed in the startling radiance of the steamer's many lights. Crouching, Norma saw it loom above them like a giant wall; saw the cataract of foam off its black hull; heard the roar of its tread on the water.

Then they were out of harm's way, tossing with the swift-running tide that lapped up at her black and mysterious and icy when its spray licked her cheek.

The launch headed for the Jersey shore, tearing a path across the Hudson, leaving a dimly whitish, phosphorescent scar behind.

Hazelton spoke jerkily in her ear.

"We'll make it now—bound to! I had a long run. Bumped into a cop as soon as I was out of the house. Beat him to a fence by a leg. Glad *he* didn't try any shooting. Wasted a lot of time putting them off the track, though. I was afraid—but, shucks, I might have known I could count on you!"

"Where are we going? Why? Don't you think—"

Questions came bubbling now. It was high time she asked them. How long did he suppose she would go on—

"Jersey. Not much farther then—just to catch a train. Then you'll see—"

"Allaright, boss," said Tony sharply. "Taxi at the corner."

They were in the shadow of other docks, and had slowed their speed. The launch bumped against a concrete wall, some low basin for its kind, and Hazelton had her by the arm, helping her up.

Evidently the taxi was waiting. It started as they entered, and the driver asked no questions. They bumped over cobblestones, crossed many railroad tracks, speeded outrageously down a well-paved road.

The lurching pace threw them together. His arm was fast about her shoulders, holding her from harm. They did not try to talk any more—just hung on and wondered—wondered how long before the inevitable smash.

The taxi stopped with a suddenness as terrifying as its speed. They untangled themselves from the corner they were thrown into, and stepped out. A railroad yard, with many tracks glistening faintly

and many winking little lights of purple, green, and white. Engines were switching, and in the distance electric trains purred and left a wake of blinding sparks dripping off their trolleys.

Hazelton led her directly to a single car, standing on a side track. She saw that it was a Pullman as they climbed its step. A white-jacketed negro greeted them with a wide grin.

"Senator waiting?" Hazelton asked.

"Yassuh, yassuh! Powerful anxious to see yo'-all."

"Alone?"

"Yassuh. Come right in!"

He went before them down the usual Pullman passage, and knocked at the partition door. Norma heard him announce, "Mistah Hazleton, Senatah. Mistah Hazelton and a—a lady."

She heard a grunt of astonishment; then Hazelton had urged her through the door, into a combination library and business office, cozy, light, and comfortable with padded chairs.

A ponderous figure of a man was rising from a small desk. His fingers were patting the broad bow of an old-fashioned string-tie. His heavy eyebrows worked with surprise.

"Senator Jaswick, Miss—Miss—" Hazelton turned on Norma with a comical look of surprise.

"Miss Norma Case," she supplied.

She had seen that heavy, statesmanlike face in the newspapers. She tried vainly to remember who and what he was.

"Charmed," said the Senator heavily. He forgot her at once to demand, "Eh, Hazelton, the—uh—"

"Safe!" Hazelton answered. "Thanks to Miss—eh—Case. Will you please hand him that portfolio, Miss Case?"

Norma complied.

Hazelton went on earnestly: "Senator, the whole blamed thing is her work. Did it on trust, too! Took a chance— A chance? Good Lord, she risked her life for us! She—she—say, if you knew all she did!"

"I'm going to know, all of it," Senator Jaswick boomed. "And Miss Case isn't going to escape my thanks, either. But, eh, Hazelton, just twelve minutes until we leave. And Miss Case—well, we can't take her with us very well, eh? Not but it would be a pleasure! If you could see her to a local train that would get her home—or to some safe place?"

"My idea exactly. If you'll trust me a little further, Miss Case?"

"Then one moment!" Senator Jaswick took Norma's hand and pressed it. His heavy eyebrows worked portentously. "Miss Case, Hazelton will explain to you just how you've helped us. I think we owe you that much of our confidence. And I sha'n't forget what you've done. Help *us?* You've done more—you've helped your country. A deed of patriotism, nothing less! Good night, my dear young lady. Good night, and believe me I shall not forget your goodness!"

Crossing through a subway to the local station Hazelton held her arm and talked rapidly.

"The Senator means that—every word! Ponderous, maybe, but he's on the square. You see, I'm his secretary. He's head of the Congressional committee investigating building graft, you know—or did you know? Well, he is. And a fighter! Lord, how the crooks hate him! We got word of evidence, certain records that would cinch our case against—well, against certain very powerful people. But we had to get the evidence for ourselves.

"The Senator couldn't very well appear in it. It was up to me to do the work. I got it—and they—our powerful friends—found it out in time to get a warrant for my arrest. Charge, breaking and entering. It was my responsibility entirely! The Senator couldn't be mixed into it. Naturally!

"And it looked blue this evening when the police found out where I was. Looked as if I was done for! Then you—Norma! —Norma Case, if you hadn't been what you are I'd be cooling in a cell right now! I'd be there without any friends, too. You saved me. You took me on faith. And here I haven't got time even to thank you! Your train's coming. Mine's about to go. But, Norma!"

Hazelton captured her hands and drew

her close. He looked down on her tremblingly earnest.

"I'm coming back in a few days," he said rapidly. "Washington's not so far off, thank God. And I've got a lot to say to you—a powerful lot. Will you—will you see me then—and listen to it all?"

Norma Case returned his hungry glance. No time now—no time to coquette or dissemble.

"Yes," she said, "I'll be glad to hear—whatever you want to tell me. And you—you will come back—surely?"

"Will I?"

A second she was held fast in his arms, then thrust into the Manhattan-bound train—conscious that her cheeks were burning—acutely conscious he had kissed her.

Myrtle was home. Myrtle was lying across the bed, sobbing. At Norma's shocked exclamation she roused and thrust herself into Norma's embrace.

Norma held her fast and encouraged her to cry it out. Patiently she smoothed Myrtle's hair, quieted her, and waited for coherency to return. Finally Myrtle's grief was revealed.

"You were right! Oh, Norma, you were right! I'll never do it again—never speak to a man I don't know—never look at one. I know now what a dreadful thing I did—what an awful chance I took—"

"Myrtle!"

"He was a rotter, Norma—a rotter. I h-hate him. Took me to dinner, then—then he tried to g-get fresh. With me! W-wanted to k-kiss me. He tried to. And I slapped his face, and Norma—"

More sobs and more incoherency. Finally, "Norma, he got sore then. Got sore and walked out of the place; and left me to pay for the dinner! Left me to pay—and it took all I had. I walked home. *All alone!*"

Like one taking a most sacred oath Myrtle raised her eyes to heaven.

"But I learned my lesson. Yes, I did. Never again! Never! So long as I live I'll never trust a man who's not properly introduced. I'm through taking chances. Hereafter and all my life I'm going to be cautious like you, Norma—just like you!"

ʊ ʊ ʊ

THE MARVEL

AT evening, when I think of thee
So far away—so very far—
Often thou seemest unto me
The spirit of the evening star.

At midnight, when in waking dreams
Thy sweet face woos me to repose,
Though starry, more to me it seems
A dream—a vision of a rose.

At morning, when the rosy day
Begins her petals to unclose,
Thy face of love—so far away—
Is radiant star, is glowing rose.

How strange it is, I strive in vain
Through the sweet mystery's cloud to see;
But stranger still my unearned gain,
The marvel that thou lovest me!

Henry Austin.

The Fairest Flower

by John Charles Beecham

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

CHAPTER XXIV.

ERSKINE'S STORY.

"AS I see it," Erskine summed up, at the close of a careful analysis of their situation, "we have these alternatives. We can either wait here until the taboo is removed, return to the coast, and make a fresh start at Sandakan, or we can recross the watershed at this point and attempt to find a less hazardous crossing of the swamp that will bring us back into the unexplored jungle."

"The former course would practically be surrender, wouldn't it?" Bruce pointed out quietly. "We could not return in time to make good on my wager."

"That is true," Erskine assented. "Would you miss the ten thousand very much, Bruce?" he inquired with a smile.

Homer Westfield's son had Homer Westfield's jaw. It closed with a snap.

"It isn't the ten thousand," he replied firmly. "It's the acknowledgment of failure. I sha'n't go home until I bring with me the 'fairest, rarest flower that blows.'"

Erskine's glance wandered toward where Rambuta was sitting, a thoughtful pucker on her brow, as she assimilated as much of the conversation as she was able. He smiled affectionately. The wild creature of the forest had captured the staid lawyer's heart, and he watched over her as tenderly as though she were his own daughter.

"I have talked with Kaya Meribong," Mynheer Kantoor announced after a solemn preliminary flourish and trumpeting with his kerchief. "The kjai informs me that he will give us ten of his best warriors as guides on condition that they be privileged to leave us the moment we reach the first friendly village on the Sibuco."

"The Sibuco?" Bruce exclaimed in amazement.

Kantoor did not reply directly. He met the lawyer's sternly questioning gaze with a bland smile.

"The Sibuco, *precies, mynheer!*" he emphasized. "After crossing the watershed we shall travel due westward for many leagues ere we strike south. In that way we avoid the great swamp, which I have no desire to enter again, nor have you, I believe. We shall be in mountain country much of the way, but it will be healthy. Striking south eventually we shall enter the boundaries of Kotei. It is a longer journey, but safer, and just as apt to supply us the orchids we seek. Moreover it is not likely that we shall be delayed as here by a taboo."

Erskine considered the proposition. Presently he turned to Westfield.

"What's your opinion, Bruce?" he asked.

"I rather favor another try at the Kini Balu country," Bruce declared, for once dissenting with Kantoor. "We know there are orchids a plenty there, and somewhere in the profusion we should find the bloom we are seeking."

Rambuta stole timidly forward.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for April 30.

"What is it that you seek, B-r-ruce?" she asked timidly, with a delicious little burr in her voice that gladdened Westfield's ears each time he heard it.

"A flower, Rambuta," he explained. "A blossom, such as those you found for me in the treetops, only one that is infinitely rare and infinitely more beautiful than any of those we have seen. I do not know exactly what it is like, but I would venture as a guess that it would be a rich, velvety black, not a perfect jet black, but a maroon so deep that it would seem it has been covered with the curtains of night. Then it must possess a fragrance all its own, a fragrance both delicate and entrancing. In short, it must be the empress of all flowers. To find this bloom we have come over the sea. Have you ever heard of it, or seen it?"

He asked the question eagerly, with a catch in his voice. A premonition—it might have been something in the girl's eyes—told him that she had.

Rambuta's lids lowered. Her glance darted to one side, and then to another, like a trapped offender. Her bosom fluttered, and she lifted a startled hand to check the utterance on her lips.

"No, no," she cried desperately. "There is no such flower."

Bruce looked at her in amazement. It was obvious that she was concealing something. He glanced at Kantoor. The little Dutchman's nostrils were dilated, like a hound sniffing at a scent, and his sharp gray eyes danced with excitement. Bruce's glance strayed to Erskine. The lawyer regarded him coolly and collectedly, like a chess player watching his opponent's next move.

Bruce pulled up his shoulders. It was a peculiarity of his, when facing an unpleasant task—Homer Westfield had possessed it too.

"Rambuta," he said. There was a change in his voice, some of the coldness of authority in his tone. The girl shivered.

"You have heard of a flower, a rare and beautiful flower, unlike any of those you have brought me. Won't you tell me where it is to be found?"

"There is no such flower," she cried distressedly. "Ask Laki Sadahana. Ask—" She bit her lip.

"You are keeping something from us, Rambuta," Bruce accused sternly. "If you will not help us, then we must seek it alone."

"No, you shall not!" Rambuta cried, fear springing suddenly into her startled eyes. She leaped toward him and clutched his arm. "Promise me that you will not," she begged.

"Why should I?" Bruce asked smilingly.

Rambuta glanced about despairingly. Inspiration came to her.

"Because," she breathed fearsomely, "it is the flower of Taman Rikung, sacred to the messengers of death. It is the flower of night, the flower the spirits of the dead wear, when they enter *teluan*. It blooms only once, when the soul of a good man leaves him, and then it perishes. The bud opens at night, and only at night. It smiles at the stars a while, and withers before the dawn."

Bruce looked skeptical.

"How do you know this, Rambuta?" he asked.

She perceived his doubt. Her eyes flashed.

"Because I have seen it, B-r-ruce," she returned spiritedly. I have seen it on dark nights, when I was a child in Tama Kwayyang's long-house, and stole out because the jungle was full of music, and the night-birds sang to me and called me to their homes in the treetops, and the monsoon blew gently and smelled of the sea. It was such a flower as thou sayest, large and beautiful, and black as the heart of a hurricane, when the fire-gods have ceased to cast spears. And its fragrance is like nothing else in the world."

Bruce's glance flashed to Erskine. There was a look of triumph in the younger man's eyes. Erskine's answering look was noncommittal. Kantoor's face, however, glowed with approbation.

"Tama Kwayang's village," Bruce murmured. "How far is that from here, Rambuta?"

The girl perceived that she had betrayed herself. She flung herself upon Bruce.

"You shall not go, *tuan*," she panted,

reverting in her excitement to the name by which she had first known him. "You cannot—he will kill you—" She checked herself abruptly, biting her lips in her confusion. Mingled distress and anxiety were in her eyes as she regarded him.

"Who? Tama Kwayang?" Bruce laughed. "I fancy we can take care of ourselves against him."

A thought occurred to Kantoor.

"Neen, neen, *mynheer!*" he cried, skipping forward. He pulled Bruce down and whispered into his ear.

"Do you mean Borgeson?" Bruce demanded of Rambuta, in sudden enlightenment.

She dumbly nodded assent.

Bruce turned to Erskine. "You heard," he observed laconically. "What do you think about it?"

"I wouldn't be surprised at all if she had guessed rightly," the lawyer replied.

Bruce considered the situation. There was a pregnant pause while the others awaited his decision.

"We're well-armed again," he observed. "We're three white men against him and his Malay, and I doubt if they have a rifle between them. We might ask Kaya Meribong for twice the number of Kayans. Then, if we were attacked, we'd be on more than equal terms."

"That is all based on the hypothesis that he hasn't recouped his fortunes and gathered together a fresh band of scoundrels," the lawyer pointed out.

"He's scarcely had time for that," Bruce argued shrewdly. "Besides, if he had, it would hardly be likely that he would be hiding in the interior."

Erskine smiled, and suddenly sobered.

"Whatever you decide, Bruce," he said. "But I'd suggest that you consider the wishes of Miss Rambuta pretty seriously. Having adopted her, in a way, you have some responsibility."

"If she's unwilling to go, after I have presented the situation to her, all the orchids in Borneo couldn't tempt me to go contrary to her wishes," Bruce flashed back.

Erskine smiled quizzically. As the others left, the lawyer, overcome by a sudden emotion, placed a fatherly arm about Bruce's neck.

"Watch over her carefully, Bruce," he breathed huskily. "She's a fair and fragile bloom herself, and one that would wither quickly without proper care."

Losing his grip he stalked abruptly away, leaving Bruce looking curiously after him.

Rambuta finally consented to accompany them. It was more, however, the fear that her *tuan* would come to harm if she were not near to watch over him than his offer of protection that persuaded her. But of this Bruce was blissfully ignorant. Thus he was saved a severe blow to his self-esteem.

They set out the next morning with a score of Kayans in their company. The entire village turned out to bid them farewell. Kaya Meribong assured them a dozen times or more that his *pangah* would always be open to them and accompanied them several miles into the jungle. Thus their departure was not without its regrets, for they had quite won the hearts of the simple natives by their unfailing friendliness and generosity.

That evening, as they clustered round their fire, Bruce turned to Erskine.

"Do you realize, uncle," he observed whimsically, "that we have exactly seventy days left to win the wager?"

Erskine glanced up in surprise, and made a rapid mental calculation.

"I had not realized that the year had flown so swiftly," he confessed. "We'll need every one of those days."

"With luck we might make London thirty days after reaching the coast," Bruce commented. "We'll probably have to wait for a packet, however, and there may be a further delay at Batavia. Forty days would be a safer allowance. Then there is the trip across the Atlantic, another week gone. That leaves us at the most twenty-five to thirty days to find our orchid and reach the coast. It will mean fast work."

Erskine regarded him quizzically.

"I presume losing the bet will be a big disappointment?" he hazarded.

"I should not like to fail in the first serious thing I have attempted to do," Bruce returned quietly.

Erskine noted the steady determination in the gray eyes, fixed unwaveringly on the glowing coals, and the firm set of the jaw. Bruce was Homer Westfield's son, he reflected.

"A great many of us have built the foundation of success on earlier failures," the lawyer commented. "Experience is a hard teacher, but just—" He paused.

Bruce glanced at him in frank surprise.

"Are you preaching, uncle?" he chaffed. "Because nobody has ever connected failure with the name of Erskine."

The lawyer's face became grave. "I went all to pieces once, Bruce," he rebuked subduedly. "But that was long ago."

His teeth clicked sharply. With a strained smile that was obviously forced, he remarked with an assumed lightness of manner.

"Of course we shall stay until we have found the orchid Rambuta describes, if it still exists. We may be a trifle late to win the wager if fortune fails to smile on us, but we'll produce a flower that will bring fame to the Westfield name."

"There is no doubt but what it exists!" Bruce affirmed stoutly, his very positiveness revealing that his own faith was none too firm. Engrossed with his own doubts he failed to notice the lawyer's agitation.

"I believe that Rambuta has told us the truth," Erskine assured. "She has a poetic temperament, and her life among the Dyaks has developed her imagination and inspired flights of fancy. The orchid may not be all that she describes, but I am confident that it will not be disappointing if we do not set our hopes too high."

He paused and studied his associate with fond regard. Bruce was staring moodily into the fire, fatigue and the depression engendered by the gloomy jungle, rank with mouldy things, inspiring doubt.

"If we should fail, Bruce—which I don't think we shall," he observed gently, "we have one compensation. We have saved a girl from a fate too dreadful to think about. She is a girl who to all appearances comes from splendid stock, and would have been your equal or mine if fortune had not dealt so unkindly with her."

"Do you believe that too?" Bruce broke in eagerly, lifting his eyes to meet Erskine's.

"What? That she—"

"That she comes from good blood," Bruce interrupted impetuously. "I've watched her day by day, while she was teaching me Malay and I her English. Her progress has been amazing! I thought I was fairly keen myself, but she has made me feel like a dullard. And she has a marvelous appreciation of good poetry."

Erskine smiled at the latter admission.

"I have never doubted her white origin from the first," he acknowledged. "Laki Sadahana insists she's a Karen-child, and some of these Kayans do have a remarkably light color. But their features are Mongol, not Caucasian. Rambuta is totally unlike them."

Hearing her name uttered, Rambuta, sitting across the fire from them, lifted her eyes and smiled. Bruce returned the smile while his eyes dwelled intently on her features. She flushed and lowered her head. Conscious of his rudeness he turned away with like heightened color.

"I'm glad to hear you say that, uncle," he acknowledged in a low tone. "I was afraid that you might accuse me of a romantic imagination if I mentioned my ideas to you; but frankly, I have felt that there is a tremendous mystery centered about her. She was brought up a savage, yet she is an aristocrat to her finger-tips. Her carriage, the fine delicacy of her features, her slender hands and her little feet, and her marvelous suppleness and agility — those are not vulgar traits. Only blood gives them. No amount of grooming will convert a nag into a race-horse; nor will neglect and inattention serve to conceal the fine points of a thoroughbred. I wish there were some way of solving the mystery."

He stole a wistful glance at Rambuta. Erskine followed it with a look of pain in his eyes.

"We may never be able to solve it," he replied hopelessly. "At the same time our duty is plain. We must restore the child to her rightful station in life, even though we cannot account for her parentage."

"I expected to do that, of course," Bruce declared. They looked at each other, pos-

sessed by a common thought. The child must have a name; her lot would be hard until her family was ascertained. Society might open its doors at their behest, but there would be acid in every sip of life's wine the girl drank in her new surroundings until the mystery was cleared away.

"Isn't there some way to make the witch-doctor talk?" Bruce asked desperately. "Bribery won't do it; I've tried it, and he sticks to his story. He is too old, and we are too much bound to him to use force. There must be some other way."

"We have one hope," Erskine returned; "her foster-father, Tama Kwayang. I shall question him when we reach his village."

"What if he refuses to talk?" Bruce demanded.

The lawyer's lips closed firmly. "There are means, and methods," he returned ambiguously. "The wrong he has done this girl must be righted in some way."

He stared at Rambuta, who was crooning a low tune to Laki Sadahana on a Dyak harp. There was a fierce intensity in his gaze, an ache and a yearning that told of a heart that was hungered and not fed. Looking up, she observed it. A troubled look came upon her features. She had seen him in this mood before. Rising, she walked around the fire and bent swiftly, placing her cheek next to his.

"Daddy Erskine," she said brokenly, airing her latest acquisition of English, "don't cry."

A fit of trembling seized the lawyer. A hoarse sob rose in his throat. Rising abruptly, he left the fire and stepped swiftly into the shadows beyond, on the side opposite where the Kayans slept. Rambuta gazed after him pathetically, glancing at Bruce to see wherein she had offended.

Bruce ceased stirring the coals and followed his friend. He found Erskine choking with sobs.

"Uncle," he said, placing an arm affectionately about the older man's shoulder, "this thing has gone far enough. I've seen you suffer for days, weeks, without knowing the reason why. If it's not a secret that you are in honor bound to keep, let me hear it and help you bear it."

Erskine whirled on him and seized both his shoulders in a grip that caused the younger man to wince with pain. The lawyer's eyes burned like a tiger's in the darkness, twin lamps of lambent flame—

"Tell me, Bruce," he whispered hoarsely, "do you see any resemblance in Rambuta to any one you know?"

Bruce did not answer for a moment in his astonishment. Erskine's fingers cut more deeply into his flesh.

"That thought has occurred to me," he replied haltingly, at a loss to know how much he dared say. "You remember we discussed it once. Of course it's very vague, and probably only a notion of mine—"

Erskine did not let him finish. He drew Bruce nearer to him. In the same hoarse whisper, but more subdued, he asked:

"Consider carefully now, Bruce, before you answer. Do you think"—he choked—"do you think she bears any resemblance to me?"

Doubt of Erskine's complete sanity suddenly entered Westfield's mind. The lawyer had been acting queerly, he reflected swiftly; had the sufferings he had undergone unbalanced his mind?

"I don't know," Bruce replied warily, seeking to pull away. "I've never given the matter a thought, of course. Come, let's—"

"You don't know what this means to me, Bruce," Erskine breathed earnestly. In swift intuition he divined the younger man's thought. "No, I am not crazy," he asserted, negativing the idea. "I am as sane as you are. Listen. I shall tell you something — something no one but your father knew about me. He saved me from myself. That's why I feel I owe so much to you; why I first agreed to go here with you, although I had sworn I would never see the Indies again.

"You know me as Erskine, the lawyer. That is all New York knows. It doesn't know I had a wife once, and a daughter! I left them, when my child was a baby, a few months old, in a foolish fit of temper—God forgive me, I did! I went to Singapore, for I had some business and connections in the east. There my wife wrote me.

I had repented by then, and I answered her letter, asking her to join me. She came over on the first boat, a tramp freighter. She didn't mind the inconvenience; all she thought of was me, waiting at Singapore. She had a heart of gold! A typhoon came —ship was never heard of—oh, my God!"

The stricken man buried his head in his hands and sobbed his repentance to the silent stars. Bruce stood silently by, staring into the gloom. Presently he pivoted slowly and looked long and searchingly at Rambuta, waiting beside the fire.

She stole forward timidly. He met her half-way.

"Rambuta, once you told me the story your mother related to you on her deathbed," he remarked earnestly. "Tell me the story again, particularly concerning the prau from over the sea that brought you here."

Rambuta repeated the tale Sababa had told her, weaving fact and myth concerning her Karen ancestry so inextricably that Bruce was no more enlightened than before. A thought occurred to him.

"Was anything taken from the prau?" he asked. "Anything that might identify the ship?"

Rambuta met his eyes clearly. "There was nothing," she declared tranquilly. "Tell Daddy Erskine I am sorree, there was nothing."

But when Bruce had turned away she silently wrung her hands and glanced piteously toward the bent figure of the lawyer.

CHAPTER XXV.

ERSKINE'S REQUEST.

TWO days thereafter the fate that so frequently overtakes explorers in Borneo came upon them. Their Kayan escort stopped at the brink of a small stream, and the leader of the party announced that he and his mates could not accompany them farther.

His regret was so apparent that they readily perceived they had no mutiny on their hands, such as they had experienced before. It was Rambuta who explained the difficulty.

"A *manang* has pronounced the *negri* on the other side of the stream *malan*, which is taboo," she announced. "You will see the signs all around us." She pointed them out, broken branches placed crosswise, and cabalistic signs on fallen tree trunks spanning the ribbon of water.

"Can't we go around?" Bruce inquired in dismay.

Rambuta shook her head regretfully.

"The creek runs out of the swamps," she declared. "The road is barred to us."

Bruce turned to Kantoor.

"How far is it around the swamps?" he demanded.

"To circle them means circling Lake Kini Balu," the little Dutchman replied. "That would mean several hundred miles journey through the thickest sort of jungle. It would take six months at the very least. I am afraid, *mynheer*, that we shall be compelled to turn back."

Tears gathered in his eyes. He averted his face to hide the keenness of his disappointment.

Bruce knew the uselessness of offering the Kayans money to disregard the *malan* signs. Yet he made the effort. But, eager as they had been to receive the white man's pay, they now looked on it with indifference.

"It is *malan*," they said, pointing across the stream. That, to their minds, was an all-sufficient reason for remaining on the near side.

Bruce persisted to the point of making himself obnoxious. Erskine finally called him aside.

"It's useless, Bruce," the lawyer pointed out. "They are Dyaks, and superstitious. It is a matter of religion with them. Religion is the one subject on which the average man can't be induced to change his mind, probably because he knows so little about it anyway. As Mynheer Kantoor says, we have reached the end of our rope."

"There's nothing to prevent our going on without them," Bruce declared after a pause. There was a challenge in his tone. Their eyes met.

"You forget Borgeson," Erskine replied quietly.

"No, I haven't forgotten him," Bruce

returned firmly. "Nor have I failed to consider that he'll probably have the support of the Kayans in his neighborhood."

"Do you think it fair to Rambuta to place her in such peril?" Erskine pursued in even tone.

"I don't intend to have her accompany us," Bruce returned quickly. "She must go back with the Kayans and Laki Sadahana. When we've found the orchid we can rejoin them. A few days more ought to put us into that country. A bold dash, a quick search, and we can be out of Tama Kwayang's precincts before he learns we've been there."

Erskine regarded Bruce steadily.

"You don't propose to take any further steps then to help Rambuta ascertain her parentage?" he asked coldly.

Bruce's eyes softened. He saw the pain in his friend's face. He placed his hand on Erskine's shoulder and gripped it warmly.

"No, Wilfred," he negatived gently, "you haven't let me finish my story. Rambuta and the Kayans will wait here until we get back. We'll leave the orchid with them with instructions to convey it to the consul if we don't come back in a given time. We'll also leave a letter, asking the consul to forward the orchid to Jimmie Allemann, with explanations. Then we'll go back to Tama Kwayang and Borgeson, if he's there, and force the truth out of them."

The lawyer scanned the opposite side of the stream with eyes that burned brightly. Bruce perceived what was going on in his mind.

"It's madness!" he exclaimed hoarsely. "There's only one chance in a thousand that we three whites, ignorant of the country, can meet and best a Dyak chief, backed by a white scoundrel, on their home ground. It's better than this uncertainty, though. Anything's better than that."

"Then you'll do it?" Bruce exclaimed eagerly.

"God forgive me if I fail in my promise to your mother," the lawyer gasped. "Yes, I'll do it, Bruce. We'll go alone, leaving Mynheer Kantoor with the Dyaks."

They told the little orchid-maker their plan. He listened attentively until the end, when Bruce cautiously explained that they would leave him in charge of the camp.

"*Verdampt*, no, *mynheer!*" he roared, bellowing a round Dutch oath. "*Pot ver dikkie*, have I shared all your adventures with you to be cast aside like an old shoe at the end, when we have victory in sight? I will follow you if I have to go alone, and I warn you I shall find the orchid first."

"Never mind, old chap, you may come with us," Bruce declared soothingly, interrupting the explosion when the peppery little Dutchman paused for breath. "We did not intend to leave you behind, but at the same time felt chary of inviting you into danger when it wasn't necessary."

Kantoor looked at them reproachfully.

"You should have thought of that before we left the piers of Hoboken behind us," he pointed out. You must remember that I have spent many years on this island. I know its dangers far better than either of you."

Bruce's plan rapidly underwent another modification. When he told Rambuta what they proposed to do, she violently objected to being left behind.

"But we can't permit you to go with us," Bruce remonstrated, pointing out the danger. "Borgeson may be there."

"Then you must bind me hand and foot with thongs that cannot be worked loose," she returned spiritedly. "Where you go, I go, B-r-ruce. I will follow you through the treetops, if you will not have me walk beside you; but accompany you I shall."

"I can't consider such a proposition for a moment," Bruce declared, exasperatedly. "Your place is here with Laki Sadahana and the Kayans."

"Is it?" she interrupted. A flush of color mounted to her cheek. Tears of shame and mortification filled her eyes. She turned to dart away, but before she could move Bruce had grasped her arm.

"Don't misunderstand me, child," he began placatingly, but she turned on him in a flash.

"Child?" she cried passionately, her brown eyes flaming through the tears. "Why do you call me child? Was it a child that saved you when you nearly died of hunger in the swamps of Kini Balu?

Was it a child that guided you through the jungle to the *padang batu?* Was it a child that watched beside you in *lobong angin,* the great wind cave, and called the Kayans to your rescue? Was it a child that counseled you in your dealings with these Kayans, so that you might win and hold their friendship? At my age most Dyak girls are wed. Many of them had children. I might have been wed, too, had I been willing; he was a good man and died for me." She choked. "Now you, of my own people, mock me and call me 'child.'"

Sobs shook her lithe body. Bruce looked on in dismay. He was amazed at and bewildered by the sudden storm he had provoked. A puzzled look gathered on his face as he studied her, her face buried in her arms, and her bosom heaving.

"By George, she isn't a child, she's a young woman," he muttered under his breath, in the manner of one who has just made an astounding discovery. "Just about Janet's age, and the very picture of Janet in one of her tantrums. Janet would be furious if I called her 'child.' They must be all alike!"

He rallied to the occasion.

"Rambuta, I misspoke myself, I'm sorry," he declared penitently. "You see, on account of the few years that separate us, I've gotten into the habit of thinking of you as a youngster, and myself as one much older. I hadn't realized how you've grown these last few months. You'll forgive me, won't you?"

She stole a clandestine glance at him, buskening her eyes in the healthy brown tan of her arms. His dolorous expression provoked an uncontrollable desire to laugh. She was compelled to conceal her features more deeply into the curves of her arms.

"Don't be angry, Rambuta," Bruce pleaded, eager to make amends. Somehow he found her marvelously attractive, now that she had suddenly asserted herself for the first time in their acquaintanceship.

"Will you let me go with you?" she demanded.

Obstinacy was a dominant Westfield trait. Bruce was rarely willing to concede a point to an adversary.

"I'm sorry, but I cannot do that," he insisted. "It wouldn't be right to expose you to the danger."

Rambuta's scornful laugh did not permit him to proceed.

"Danger, B-r-ruce?" she asked mockingly. "Tell me, which is in the greater danger, the slow-waddling buffalo, that has strayed into the jungle, or the gaper flitting among the trees? Which will the tiger strike down first, and the leopard mark for his prey? In the jungle, B-r-ruce, you are the buffalo, and I am the gaper. I travel a mile, while you cover a few rods. You are blind as a nightbird, while the horizon alone limits my view. If Tama Kwayang and his Kayans should stalk you, who could give you warning but me? Do not I know every jungle path in that *negri,* as well as the tree lanes? If you went alone you would perish as certainly as you would have perished at the swamp's edge, had not I found you. Of course I shall accompany you."

There was no gainsaying the logic of her argument.

"But when I first proposed that we go into Tama Kwayang's country you were afraid," he countered weakly.

Rambuta flushed and lowered her eyes.

"I was afraid for you, B-r-ruce," she acknowledged subduedly. "You and Mr. Erskine, and Mynheer Kantoor," she hastily amended. "You cannot go where I go, you cannot hide where I hide."

Bruce was blind to her confusion.

"Very well," he acknowledged, beaten. "I shall talk to Mr. Erskine. We'll let him decide."

Erskine at first demurred, but Rambuta's pleadings soon won him over. It was obvious that he found it impossible to deny her anything. In Kantoor the girl found a warm ally. The little Dutchman was insistent that without her help they must inevitably get lost in the thick jungle.

Laki Sadahana announced that he must return to his hermitage. He gave his foster-daughter a sorrowful farewell. He was well aware that he would never see her again. To her protestations that she would return, he replied with gentle firmness:

"No, my daughter, other days and other

skies await thee. It is Djath's will. Thou art not one of us; thou wert never one of us. Let us hope that we shall meet in *Teluan.*"

Early the next morning they crossed the river. The Kayans waved farewell, promising to await their return.

They made rapid progress that day, for the country they passed through was largely old jungle, comparatively free from undergrowth. Rambuta was their guide. The girl had the unerring instinct of a homing pigeon, and although Erskine and Bruce frequently checked her with the compass, they never found her in error.

Rambuta was a puzzle to Bruce that day. She seemed to have developed shyness and reticence, and a newfound reserve, without warning. She continually avoided him, and rarely answered his interrogations directly, preferring to speak through Erskine. When he tried to engage her in conversation alone she darted away in pursuit of an imaginary fruitbat or monkey, or deftly included the others.

At first he thought it was a passing mood, a fit of pique because he had been unwilling, at first, to have her accompany them. Janet would have sulked thus, he told himself, until she thought she had sufficiently punished him. But as the day wore on and she continued to avoid him, a marked resentment rose within him. She was carrying her pique too far, he told himself. Like a spoiled child, she needed chiding. He virtuously resolved to take the first opportunity that presented itself for her correction.

It came just before sundown. Erskine and Kantoor were securing wood for the evening fire, leaving Bruce and Rambuta to look after the cooking. Bruce asked for some brushwood which Rambuta handed him. Their fingers touched. The girl hastily drew her hand away, dropping a bit of the brush into the spider. Bruce flecked it out and turned upon her sternly.

"See here, Rambuta," he demanded, "have I done anything to offend you?"

A ruddy flush mantled the girl's cheek. She drew back hastily.

"No, B-r-ruce," she faltered.

"Then why have you avoided me all day? You have not spoken ten words to me directly. You've treated me as though I were in disgrace."

She paled before his severity.

"I do not know, B-r-ruce," she responded timidly. "I have not avoided you. I am your friend."

"Your meat is burning, Bruce," a quiet voice back of them spoke. Erskine had returned with an armful of wood. Bruce hastily turned over a slice of muntjac venison that was smoking in the pan. As he did so Rambuta silently glided into the woods. Erskine watched her go, but said nothing.

After supper the lawyer called Bruce aside. Kantoor and the girl were studying English from Kantoor's pocket Bible by the firelight.

"I heard you speaking to Rambuta just before supper," the lawyer began. "I wouldn't be too severe, if I were you."

"I'm afraid we have paid her too much attention," Bruce rejoined. "Did you notice how peculiarly she acted to-day?"

"In what respect?" the lawyer asked with a dry smile.

"Why—in general," Bruce floundered. "She wasn't as cordial and friendly as usual. Of course I had to tell her yesterday that we could not let her come with us. She has sulked since. She's only a child yet—"

"Is she?" Erskine interrupted decisively.

"She's not more than sixteen—"

"When many a girl is as old as a man of twenty. Have you thought of that, Bruce?"

Bruce looked at the lawyer with a puzzled air. "You don't mean—" he began.

"That is precisely what I do mean," Erskine interjected. "There is a marvelous change going on in the precious bit of humanity we have discovered in these wilds. The orchid is opening, the bud expanding into blossom. She is not only developing mentally at a wonderful rate, she is developing physically. We found her a child; to-day we have a young woman on our hands."

Bruce looked at him dazedly.

"I can't believe that," he replied slowly. "Why, she's only a youngster. She frolics

about like a kitten. To see her in the trees, making mock of us, reminds me of Janet five or six years ago, only, of course, she's infinitely more agile and at home in the trees than Janet ever was."

"You're thinking of the yesterdays," Erskine declared. "You haven't seen her so frolicsome of late, have you?"

"We're nearing Tama Kwayang's country, you know," Bruce pointed out. "She is naturally more timid."

"It's not the timidity that arises from fear," Erskine rejoined. "I have watched her carefully for these many days. You know I have a reason."

He choked. His eyes misted. After a pause he continued in a low, hoarse voice:

"You can't conceive how poignantly she reminds me of my wife. She has Laura's eyes, though she hasn't her features. I can't help but feel that she resembles me somewhat in that respect. She has Laura's elfin grace. Certain gestures remind me of Laura, that trick she has of lifting her face to let her smile flood you like a burst of sunshine is one of them. I swear she's my daughter, Bruce. I'll never believe otherwise."

He grasped Bruce's arm with fingers of corded steel.

"We've talked some in a desultory way about your adopting her and giving her an education," he continued in a hoarse whisper. "That's utterly impossible now, you know. She's mine, you can't have her. Let that be understood between us. Whatever our investigations may disclose, I shall make her my daughter."

Bruce met the lawyer's burning eyes levelly.

"Of course, under the circumstances, you have the prior claim," he agreed. "You would be a more proper guardian in any event."

"Thanks, boy," Erskine responded brokenly. "Let us consider her my daughter, then, henceforth. She has become very precious to me, Bruce; she is all I have in the world, except you."

He paused and looked fondly toward the fire, where Kantoor's gray, peaked face and Rambuta's glowing features were bent close together over the book. Bruce's eyes followed. A thoughtful pucker gradually developed on his brow.

"Do you know, uncle," he observed presently, "these new developments, the change that's happening in Rambuta, and the fact that she may be your daughter, creates an awkward situation, in some ways. I've never mentioned the subject to her; didn't think it necessary as long as she was a youngster; but she ought to have some clothes."

Erskine caught his arm and whirled him around. The lawyer's eyes held a steely glitter.

"Don't you ever mention that subject to her," he warned. "When the time comes, I'll see that she is properly provided."

His eyes softened. "We made a mistake, Bruce, in not including an order for a young woman's outfit in the letter we sent to the consul. But it did not occur to me. She's wholly innocent, and that is her best protection. Not knowing the conventions that govern in civilized society, she won't suffer through false modesty. You must consider her as a sister; I think I may ask that of you, may I not?"

He scanned Bruce's face searchingly. Westfield's gaze did not falter.

"Absolutely, uncle," he declared with frank candor. "We have always considered you as a member of the family."

Erskine breathed with relief.

"Thank you," he said simply. "I knew I could rely on you, Bruce. I don't want her to develop any sentimental notions until she has had a chance to see the world. It might spoil her life. Frank comradeship is the best thing you can give her. And be patient. A girl budding into womanhood is a strange and perverse creature with unaccountable moods and fancies. She needs the steady hand of a true friend."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE OPENING FLOWER.

BRUCE lay awake a long time that night pondering on what Erskine had told him. He perceived that the lawyer was right. Rambuta had changed.

She was no longer the fairy, elf-like creature they had found shrinking in terror of the trader on the slopes of Kini Balu. She had become a woman. That explained her curious constraint, the occasional swift rushes of color to her cheeks, and the new look of understanding that had come into her eyes. Adversity, like a summer's rain, had speeded the bud to flower.

He recollected that weeks had passed since she had taunted him to a race and sped ahead of him, swifter than a pheasant in flight, to pelt him with orchids from the treetops while he looked bewilderedly about in search of her. In the first few gladsome days of their acquaintance she had been the spirit of play incarnate. But gradually, as the world outside unfolded itself to her through his descriptions and anecdotes, she had become less boisterous, less the tomboy, casting aside her former enjoyments in her zeal for knowledge. In his blindness he had perceived only the awakening of her mind. He had not seen the soul expand to womanhood.

He considered the inevitable change in their relationship. He could no longer treat her as a child. He could no longer romp with her familiarly, and chide her with the brotherly superiority he had displayed. She was Erskine's daughter.

Man-like and selfish, he considered first whether the change would be agreeable to him. Rambuta had been good fun. She was a hoydenish little comrade, the spirit of mischief was rampant in her. Always a bit in awe of him, she had generally waited until he began their play by a bit of teasing, or hiding from her when she called him. But once he had challenged her, she threw herself into the game with a tempestuous abandon that sometimes frightened him.

Those days were gone, he perceived. Rambuta was Erskine's daughter, by adoption at least. She must be treated with deference.

"Drat the luck," he muttered under his breath; "I wish she hadn't grown up. As a kid, she was fun. As a young lady she'll be a devilish awkward inconvenience."

He went to sleep thinking of the lovely Julia who had rejected him.

When he awoke the next morning Rambuta and Erskine were gone. They returned while Kantoor was preparing breakfast. Rambuta tendered a shy "Good morning." Bruce's response was painfully precise. He looked at Erskine, wondering what had passed between him and the girl.

"You and Mynheer Kantoor take the lead, Bruce," the lawyer directed after they had broken camp. "Rambuta and I will fellow. The course is due east; you can't miss it."

Bruce perceived that Erskine intended to monopolize Rambuta. It was to save her from embarrassment, he knew. Yet it nettled him. He started out sulkily. Kantoor's long-winded discourses did little to soften his mood.

After luncheon that noon, while the two elder men rested, Rambuta came to him.

"Are you angry with me, B-r-ruce?" she asked in a low voice, as she squatted down beside him and timidly placed her hand on his.

"Why do you ask that, Rambuta?" he inquired after a moment's pause.

"I don't know," she faltered. "Only—you were different yesterday."

Bruce stole a glance at her. She was looking away, but the wobegone expression she wore spoke more eloquently than words. Her lips trembled. A bit of moisture gathered in the corner of her eye.

Bruce melted. He perceived how cruel and unjust he had been. Rambuta was not responsible because his girl playmate had vanished. She needed his friendship, his comradeship. To refuse it would be like stepping on a fragile flower lifting its loveliness to the sun.

"Why, you little kitten," he rejoined merrily, "there are others who are a bit different too. Do you realize that you've given me some surprise? You seem to have grown up overnight, and I can't quite realize that I have lost my old playfellow."

It was the wrong cue. He regretted his words as soon as they were spoken.

Rambuta did not answer at once. She sat staring at the forest.

"Am I so much different, B-r-ruce?" she inquired after a pause.

"Not exactly that," he returned, choos-

ing his words carefully. "But you're not so playful as you used to be. I haven't seen you climb a tree for several days."

Color slowly mounted to her cheeks. She looked away. After another pause she asked timidly:

"B-r-ruce, do the young ladies in America climb trees?"

The question took him by surprise.

"Why, no, not as a general thing," he acknowledged. "You see, their clothes would bother them." He bit his tongue—"I mean," he amended hastily, "we don't have trees like this in America. We have roads, such as I told you about, and motor cars, and trains to take us about."

Rambuta's brown eyes fired themselves upon his thoughtfully.

"How do they dress?" she asked.

Bruce silently cursed his slip. "They wear skirts," he rejoined vaguely. "Baggy things. I can't describe them, but we'll get you an outfit when we reach the coast. Then you can decide whether you like it."

"Would you like me better in skirts, B-r-ruce?" she asked.

The brown eyes were fixed upon him in grave concern. Bruce felt decidedly uncomfortable, and wished he could escape.

"I don't know," he replied guardedly. "It would depend a great deal on the clothes you chose." Hopeful of ending the catechism, he added. "I like you pretty well as you are."

Her color heightened a trifle, and she half averted her face. Bruce cast about for a less dangerous topic of conversation, but before he could collect his wits she had another question.

"Are the women of America beautiful, B-r-ruce?"

"Some of them are and some aren't," he rejoined laughingly. "I know a lot of pretty girls that you will meet when you get over there."

"They will not think me beautiful," she observed sadly.

Bruce grinned. The child was more clever than he had thought.

"Yes, they will," he rejoined gallantly. "You are as beautiful as the most charming of them. There was one girl whom I once thought was the prettiest in the world, but I'm frank to confess that her charms are no greater than yours."

"How did she dress, B-r-ruce?" Rambuta demanded.

Driven to cover, Bruce made a man's defense. He took out his watch hastily and glanced at it.

"Time's up, we must be going," he announced, springing up. "Hie, uncle!" And to Rambuta: "I'll tell you about it later, when we reach the coast. But don't you fret about America. We shall all be proud of you."

Her eyes glowed happily.

"I have something to tell you also, B-r-ruce," she rejoined. "To-morrow we reach Tama Kwayang's *negri*. Then you shall have your orchid."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE ASSAULT ON THE LONG-HOUSE.

PERCHED in the branches of the tall tapang that had been Rambuta's refuge in the old days when the hags and viragos of Tama Kwayang's village made life a burden to her, Bruce and the girl gazed across the rolling billows of green jungle that dimpled and swelled with each curvature of the earth toward the distant slopes of Kini Balu.

"Where is Tama Kwayang's long-house?" Bruce asked.

"In the hollow over there," Rambuta replied, indicating a depression two miles south.

Bruce made a mental note of the direction.

"It's strange that we haven't seen anything of his Kayans," he observed.

"The *paddis* lie below," Rambuta explained. "They do not often come here, for the jungle is too thick for game. Rattan hunters come here occasionally, and young men in search of honey."

"Where will we find the black orchid?" Bruce asked, unable to restrain any longer the question that had been struggling on his lips ever since Rambuta announced that they had reached the end of their journey.

Rambuta's hands clasped nervously.

"I cannot tell you that, B-r-ruce," she replied in a low voice. "It grows near the village of the dead. One whom I loved lies there; it is not good that a stranger should enter. Let us not offend the *hantu*, even though you say they do not exist."

Bruce smiled inwardly at the paradox. Much remained to be done before the girl's earlier training was overcome, he perceived.

"I'll climb down and wait for you with the others," he replied. "You won't be long?"

"An hour, B-r-ruce," she replied. "Lend me your hatchet, please."

Their hands touched. Her touch was like a brush of warm silk, Bruce reflected swiftly. It sent a thrill through him such as he had not known since the days when he courted Julia Langholme. He looked up to find her dancing away. She flashed a mocking smile at him and swung lightly as a flying squirrel into the extended arm of a neighboring tree.

He rose abruptly, as if to follow, and checked himself. He had given his promise. Moreover, to attempt to follow her in the trees was as foolish as to try to follow a parrakeet. He climbed down and rejoined Erskine and Kantoor.

The lawyer flashed a keen glance at him. "Lovely view?" he asked dryly.

"Magnificent," Bruce rejoined. Erskine's pains to keep him away from Rambuta amused him.

"Where is Rambuta?"

"She'll be back in an hour, she said," Bruce announced.

"I hope she hasn't gone far," Erskine replied with grave concern.

"She's gone to get the orchid, uncle," Bruce explained quickly, perceiving the older man's anxiety. "She didn't want me along, so I promised we'd wait here for her."

They established a temporary camp and began preparations for the noon meal. Erskine paced up and down the glade restlessly. Presently he stopped before the fire, where Bruce and Kantoor were taking turns manipulating a pan of fried duck.

"Hour's up," he announced sharply.

Bruce glanced at his watch. He looked into the trees, but saw no sign of Rambuta.

"I'll climb up and meet her," he volunteered.

"We'll both go," Erskine declared.

"It's a hard climb; you'd have trouble to make it, uncle," Bruce warned. "Besides, she'd be surprised if she didn't find you here should she come by some other route."

"I'll stay," Erskine amended. "Halloo if you see her, won't you?"

Bruce began the laborious ascent, so easy to Rambuta. It took him a good quarter hour to reach the top of the tree. He scanned the country about. There was no sign of her.

"Rambuta?" he called cautiously.

There was no answer. He called again, louder. Still silence.

A presentiment that evil might have befallen her came upon him. He tried to banish it by telling himself that she was as much at home in this country as any of the woods creatures inhabiting it. But he could not shake off the depression.

He thought of following her; but that was quite impossible, he perceived. Only a Punan or Bukit could have followed the trail she left through the trees, and even these jungle dwellers would have been sorely taxed to make the daring leaps and swings she made from branch to branch with the swiftness and sureness of a gibbon. There was nothing to do but wait, he saw.

He descended again. As he neared the ground he saw Erskine pacing back and forth in anxiety, while Kantoor flitted from side to side, peering through the thin-lit forest aisles.

"Any sign of her?" the lawyer snapped the moment he saw Bruce descending.

"None at all," Bruce replied. He strove to keep his own dejection out of his voice, but succeeded indifferently.

Erskine resumed his pacing. From time to time he looked at his watch. The duck, neglected, burned to a crisp. None of them noticed it.

"We'll wait thirty minutes more," Erskine announced at the close of the second hour. "If she's not here, then we'll go in search of her. Have you any idea of the direction in which she went, Bruce?"

Bruce was suffering miserably. "I should not have let her go alone," he reproached himself. In his wretchedness he did not hear Erskine's question. It was only when the lawyer repeated it sharply that it captured his attention.

"She told me that the orchid grew near the Village of the Dead, which I suppose is their graveyard," he announced.

"That would be only a short distance from the long-house itself," Kantoor announced. "If we only knew where that lay, now."

"I know where it is," Bruce supplied quickly. "Rambuta pointed it out to me."

"Then we'll make preparations at once," Erskine declared. His lips trembled as he spoke. Bruce saw the agony he suffered.

"Your fault," he whispered to himself. "You've got to bring her back safe."

Leaving the glade, they soon stumbled on a thinly worn forest path. It led them on a winding course, circling fallen logs and clumps of thicket and bamboo toward the shore of a small stream. On its farther bank, in rude order, rose a series of elaborately carved posts whose tops were fat-jowled Buddhas and grinning gargoyles. A rude framework crowned each group of four, and on it rested a wooden sarcophagus with fantastic dragons and *hantus* carved in low relief upon its polished surfaces.

"The Village of the Dead," Kantoor said. "There is no sign of her here."

Bruce uttered a low exclamation and bounded down the bank. With graying features he pointed silently to the print of a man's booted foot in the soft, black mud.

"Borgeson!" he breathed.

Erskine's form trembled. There was a light of madness in his eyes.

Bruce sprang back on the rise of the bank.

"Steady, uncle," he cautioned soothingly. "We'll bring her back. Let's do nothing rash now."

"Rash?" Erskine gasped thickly. "With her in his hands?"

He pulled himself together with a powerful effort.

"You're right, Bruce," he breathed in a low voice. "But we've got to act."

"There's only one thing to do," Bruce declared. "That is to put a bold front on it and go into the village. "If there are only he and his Malay there, we may overawe the Kayans by a show of strength. If there's more—"

He paused and stared down the trail.

"We can at least make it damned interesting," he concluded.

The look in his eyes made further explanation unnecessary.

They approached the village warily. The trail was plainly marked, and there was little chance for them to go astray. As it broadened near the clearing they took to the woods. They paused at the edge of the undergrowth.

There was a huge commotion inside the long-house. But not so much as a dog appeared in the clearing.

"Our chance," Bruce whispered hoarsely to the others. "A quick dash now, and we'll surprise them."

They darted across the clearing. Bruce dashed up the rickety steps of the long-house and sprang through the open door.

Rambuta sat on the floor in the middle of the long hall. Her arms were bound behind her, and corded rattan was wound about her ankles. She was looking steadfastly upward into the eyes of Borgeson, standing before her. The trader stood with feet apart and head slightly lowered. He was rubbing his chin, and the gloating cruelty in his eyes was not pleasant to see. The villagers gathered round like a Roman holiday crowd, eager to see what form the trader's vengeance would take. They held their breaths with expectancy as they crouched back of him like a pack of dogs waiting to be unleashed.

The sight stung Bruce to fury. Throwing his rifle to his shoulders, he pointed it on a line with Borgeson's temple.

"Hands up, Borgeson!" he cried shrilly.

The trader wheeled. Sixscore heads turned swiftly, and sixscore bodies were frozen stiff by what they saw.

A look of deadly hatred flashed into Borgeson's eyes. His right hand moved toward his holster, which held a pistol. It stopped when several inches away. He had seen Bruce's finger tightening on the trig-

ger. His hands slowly rose till they reached the level of his shoulder. There they stopped.

"Higher!" Bruce commanded sharply. "As high as you can, Borgeson, or I'll shoot!"

The trader's teeth ground together. But his hands moved upward in response to the command.

Bruce stepped forward. "Cover him, uncle," he called, "while I relieve him of that pistol."

He advanced steadily.

In the thick press back of Borgeson, where the light was dimmest, there was a sudden flurry. Too late Bruce saw the flash of a pistol and the fierce face of Serif Massar, the Malay, back of it.

The pistol flamed. Bruce reeled, clutched at a post for support, and fell heavily.

There was a shrill yell from the Kayans. Rambuta's piercing shriek rang above it all. Borgeson, bellowing a savage oath, started to drop his hands, but bethought himself in time to look at Erskine. It was well for him that he did. The lawyer's finger had contracted about the trigger; an instant more and the rifle would have spoken. The trader's hands shot sharply upward again and he stood rigid as one of Tama Kwayang's grinning idols.

Out of the surging mass Serif Massar hurtled. He leaped straight toward Bruce, who was stirring and struggling to rise. There was a long, gleaming Dyak knife in his hand.

Erskine's rifle wavered the veriest fraction of a second. In that space of time he saw Kantoor flash by him to meet the Malay's charge. Kantoor had a knife also, the long-bladed clasp-knift he carried with him to cut epiphytes out of the trees in which they had taken root.

The two met in mid air. The shock of their impact sent both reeling. Kantoor had been prepared for it, otherwise he must inevitably have been bowled over, for Serif Massar was fully eight inches taller and nearly twice the little Dutchman's bulk.

The Malay recovered instantly. His bronzed, heavily muscled arm swept downward in a stroke that was intended to annihilate his pygmy assailant. But Kantoor was not there. Springing lightly aside, in the manner of a boxer, he avoided the killing thrust that would have split him open from chin to waist and cleverly slashed the Malay across the wrist.

Serif Massar leaped back. Blood was spurting from the wound, revealing a severed artery. The frightened Kayans scurried out of reach of the two combatants.

Then began the strangest battle ever seen in that country. The pygmy Dutchman, seeming like a doll beside the bulky Malay, dodged stroke after stroke that should have sent him reeling to the floor. The Malay fought with the cunning and skill of a man habituated to the use of a blade from childhood. He had strength and a rough-and-tumble proficiency, acquired in the wild life he had led.

But Kantoor was winged lightning. He darted in and out of the Malay's strokes, cutting under his adversary's guard, and never failing to inflict damage, although unable to drive home a disabling blow. His skill in parrying such blows as he could not avoid was marvelous. The Kayans looked on agape with astonishment, and even Borgeson forgot himself in watching the amazing struggle.

Erskine wavered in an agony of indecision. Kantoor was between him and Serif Massar. The movements of both were so quick that he dared not fire for fear of injuring his comrade. Therefore he was compelled to let the battle run its course.

The end came swiftly. Following a mad rush in which he had sought to grapple his agile opponent, Serif Massar's knees began to tremble. He ceased attacking and was wholly on the defensive. Kantoor sprang in once or twice, inflicting minor cuts, and then stepped back. The huge bulk of Serif Massar sagged, his bronzed features turned several shades lighter, and he sank in a heap on the floor.

Kantoor whipped out his handkerchief. Knotting it about the Malay's right arm with professional celerity, he produced a tourniquet.

"A little blood-letting won't do him any harm," he announced cheerily. He'll be all right again in a week or two."

The Kayans kept away. They shrank

against the walls, staring in wonderment at the diminutive *orang blanda* who had suddenly assumed the dimensions of a demigod in their eyes.

"Just a little trick of fence," Kantoor airily explained. "I learned it, *mynheer,* when I was a student at the University of Leyden. There are famous fencers there."

Bruce struggled dazedly to a sitting posture.

"If you'll relieve that scoundrel of his gun and untie Rambuta, we can look after my boy," Erskine suggested.

"*Voorzeker, mynheer!*" Kantoor assented jovially. "It will be a pleasure indeed." He advanced toward the trader.

It left Erskine's flank unprotected. He felt a movement in the crowd beside him. Too late he perceived the look of understanding and satisfaction that flashed into Borgeson's eyes. A round muzzle of steel pressed itself against his back, and a shrill, female voice announced:

"I guess we've had enough of this farce. Put down that gun or I'll introduce some hot metal into your circulation. Give it to me."

A fat, florid hand, with stubby fingers, grimy and unwashed, flashed in front of him and took the gun from him. He dared not resist, with the pistol boring into his back. He looked despairingly toward Kantoor.

The little Dutchman had popped out of sight like a weasel. Borgeson was swinging toward them, his face exulting.

"Good work, Ann!" he cried. "You've turned the tables."

At the far end of the hall, at Borgeson's back, Tama Kwayang rose and signaled to the Kayan warriors surrounding Erskine, Bruce, and the woman.

"Look out, Ann!" Borgeson bellowed, rushing forward. His warning came too late. The stout arms of a Kayan pinioned the woman's arms to her side. Another deftly took pistol and gun away from her. She screamed, and a third silenced her by placing a dirty hand over her mouth.

In his mad rush Borgeson failed to note Bruce. He stumbled over the latter's outstretched feet and plunged headlong to the floor. Three Kayan warriors hurled themselves upon him. He writhed and twisted, and it was not until one of them sat on his head and ground his face into the rough planking that they were able to restrain him.

Erskine and Bruce fared little better. Bruce's rifle was picked up and added to the one taken from the woman called Ann. But at the far end of the hall Mynheer Kantoor, standing next to Tama Kwayang, nodded with satisfaction.

"Very good," he observed. "It is proper that you be ruler in your own house, *kaya.*"

Tama Kwayang called in a shrill falsetto to the warriors holding Borgeson. The Kayan sitting on the trader's head got up with evident reluctance. The scuffle had been good fun while it lasted.

Borgeson rose slowly. His face, cut and bruised by the rough edges of the bamboo floor, was livid with rage. One sleeve, torn open in the struggle, disclosed huge knotted cords of muscle contracted under a powerful effort at self-control. His fists were clenched so that the nails bit into the palms, and his teeth were on edge. He walked with slow deliberation through the crowd of Kayans toward the hearth where Tama squatted on a block of wood.

"What's the meaning of this, kjai?" he demanded thickly in the Malay tongue through set teeth.

Tama shivered a bit. The white man loomed so formidable. Moreover, he had all the secret fear of the savage for the superior race. But Kantoor supplied him with courage.

"Merely that our host has decided to keep his house in order," he piped cheerfully in the same language.

There was an audible breath of relief among the Kayans, followed by a low titter of laughter. Fickle popularity had shifted to the doughty little champion who had so indubitably demonstrated his prowess with their favorite weapon, the knife. Tama's shoulders straightened and he glared back at Borgeson defiantly.

"It is as my brother says," he returned in a shrill, cracked voice.

Baffled fury made Borgeson inarticulate for a moment. He struggled with himself, and only the reflection that Kantoor

was still armed with his redoubtable knife restrained him from hurling himself bodily on the frail figure of the aged kjai.

"If that's the case," he growled hoarsely, "give us the girl and let us go."

Tama wavered a moment. Borgeson's demand was reasonable; he had bought and paid for Rambuta. But Kantoor, sensing his decision, made a swift protest.

"Is it not a law of the Kayans, *kaya*, that what a man loses in battle is no longer his?"

Tama squinted at him shrewdly. "It is," he conceded.

"This man lost the maid to the young raja"—he stressed the word—"in fair fight. Therefore she is no longer his."

Tama grinned at Borgeson. The trader had brought no gifts with him on this trip; he was out of favor in the *pangah* of the Kowang Dyaks.

"It's a lie!" Borgeson snarled. "I bought the girl from you at a fair price, kjai. If you don't give her to me, I'll send some white soldiers up here."

Kantoor grinned at Borgeson. "To let the white soldiers judge betwen us would be wholly agreeable," he assented suavely.

Tama squirmed uneasily. To have the Sabah government called in was the least of his desires. Selling one's daughter was not permitted by the *orang blanda* along the coast, he knew. But the woman whom Borgeson called Ann saved him from giving a reply.

"Don't you do it, Rolf!" she cried shrilly. "We don't want any government men snooping around. Leave the girl alone and let's go."

"Shut up, will you?" Borgeson snarled furiously.

The woman broke away from the grasp of her Kayan guards. They let her go. Erskine thus received his first glimpse of the female who had turned the tables on him. She was what her voice proclaimed her to be, a woman of the beach, the mistress of any man whose fancy she chanced to catch just so long as his money lasted. She was large and coarse and gaudily dressed in a faded blue satin that scarcely contained her ample form. The hem of the skirt was caked with mud.

"No, you don't, Rolf Borgeson," she returned sharply, approaching him. "You've dragged me down here, and you ain't going to throw me aside for that chit of a girl. You come along now."

Borgeson's eyes retreated as they turned on her. They were mere pin-points of venom when she looked into them. Her step faltered, halted. Some of the florid coloring left her painted cheeks.

"You'll keep out of this," the trader warned in a low voice full of repressed fury. "You hear me now."

Frightened, the woman wavered. She made one more effort.

"Rolf, deary," she pleaded.

"Get out!" he bellowed.

Her face drooped. Cringing, she slowly turned and walked with unsteady step to a low bench along the wall. She dropped on this heavily.

There was something in Borgeson's eyes as he turned back to Tama Kwayang that seemed to say: "You see how I treat those who try to cross me." But Kantoor did not permit him to speak.

"You are a bigger cur than I thought you were. Do you always fight with women?"

The words were in Malay. They were intelligible to more than half the Kayans in the house. Another audible titter rang out.

Knotted ridges of blue stood out in Borgeson's forehead. He lifted his fist to strike, but dared not bring it down.

"Put down that knife, and I'll show you," he gasped in a voice so inarticulate with rage as to be scarcely intelligible.

Kantoor grinned at him. Borgeson had spoken in English, but the little Dutchman now translated the words into Malay for the benefit of his auditors.

"He wishes me to put away the knife and to fight him with my bare hands. The giant is brave, is he not?" he jeered, and the laughter that followed testified that the shot had told.

Borgeson edged aside, with intent to leap in and wrest the knife from Kantoor unawares, but the latter's keen eyes followed him mockingly. Had he not seen how agilely Kantoor had evaded Serif Massar's

rushes the trader might have attempted a grapple. But now he dared not.

Kantoor's eyes fell on Bruce, who had risen and was wiping the blood from his face.

"Are you hurt, *mynheer?*" he cried.

"Only a skin wound," Bruce returned. "The shot creased my skull and knocked me silly for a minute."

Kantoor turned swiftly toward Tama Kwayang.

"I have a proposal to make, *kaya,*" he announced. "*Kutu,* this louse, wants to fight one of us. Well, let him fight the young raja again, as soon as the latter gets well. That will decide who shall have the maid."

A delighted assent rose from a hundred Dyak throats. "*Ingeh, ingeh* (yes, yes)," they shouted.

Tama Kwayang considered sagely. He looked up at Borgeson.

"Will you do that?" he demanded.

"With guns, yes," Borgeson snarled. He was a good shot, and he did not doubt his ability to disable Bruce. A plot was already forming in his brain that would give him all the advantage in such an encounter.

"White men do not fight that way," Kantoor swiftly opposed. "He challenged me to fight with his hands. He must fight the young raja the same way."

Tama Kwayang considered. He yearned to see a fight with guns, to see how white men coldly slaughtered each other at a distance. But such a fight would entail trusting Borgeson with a weapon. There was no telling what the trader might do with his gun should he prove victorious, he reflected. A fight with hands to the death would have its fascinations also. Then an idea occurred to him. He grinned with satisfaction.

"Let the fight be with hands," he decided. "If none be overcome to death, then on the following day the battle shall be finished with the *parong latok.* One day they fight as the *orang putei* fights. The next day as the Dyak fights."

"*Ah doe! Ah doe!*" the Kayans shrilled delightedly.

"I beg thee, let me take the young raja's place the second day," Kantoor broke in. His voice betrayed his anxiety.

Tama Kwayang grinned at him shrewdly. "No, long knife," he declined, "thou art too ready with the *pisau.* We have already seen thee fight. Let us now behold the young raja."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE WOMAN CALLED "ANN."

THAT afternoon Erskine, Kantoor, and Bruce held a conference in the forest a short distance from the long-house. Their movements were not interfered with, but they were not permitted to carry weapons. Tama Kwayang knew that without their weapons, the white men would not stray far.

Rambuta was not with them. They were not permitted to see her. She was kept confined in the women's quarters of the long-house, where the jealous tribeswomen had full opportunity to vent their spleen. But of this Bruce and his companions had no knowledge. They thought she was safe. It galled them, though, to learn that Borgeson's companion, the woman called Ann, was permitted to visit her and instil poison into her mind.

Erskine summed up the situation.

"There is no use for one of us to try and reach our Kayans," he said, "because they wouldn't come anyway. Even if they did, we would probably find them indifferent allies. We haven't time to make a break for the coast. We can't leave Rambuta. There's practically no chance of getting her out of their hands and making our way safely to Ambong or Brunei. It seems to be up to you, Bruce."

"I'm satisfied," Westfield responded grimly. With a streak of adhesive tape and absorbent cotton across his forehead, he was very much himself again.

"Tama has fixed the date for your fistic mix-up for a week from this day," Erskine observed. "I'm not particularly afraid of that, although you'll have to watch him carefully or he'll play you foul. The sword play comes the next day."

"Unless Mynheer Westfield disposes of

the scoundrel the first day," Kantoor observed.

Bruce smiled lugubriously. "There is small chance of that," he remarked. "I'll be lucky to hold my own with him. He's got the height, weight, and reach. All I've got is a bit more science. That skull of his is too hard for a man to crack with a blow."

"You could knock him groggy and then strangle him," Kantoor observed. "But I presume," he said, shrugging his shoulders, "you would not consider that a fair fight. That is what he would do, were he in your position."

"No, I couldn't do that," Bruce declared decisively. "I'll have to take my chance with those bloody Malay cutlasses. I haven't the least idea how to handle one of those weapons."

Kantoor sighed. "I wish the kjai had let me take your place," he observed. "I could fence once, when I was a student at Leyden. And I'm familiar with the saber. The *parong lafok* is not much different, except that it has no point."

They sat in thought for a while. Then Kantoor resumed:

"There is only one thing to be done, *myn heeren*. I must give Mynheer Bruce some lessons in the use of the saber. Are you strong enough to take your first lesson now, *mynheer?*"

"Certainly," Bruce agreed.

"Then I shall see our friend, the *kaya*, and borrow a couple of parongs from his collection," Kantoor announced, rising. "He has some fine Negara blades, I have noticed."

Tama nodded when Kantoor made his request. It tickled his vanity to find that the "young raja" took the combat seriously. He was pleased with his perspicacity in decreeing a double battle. There would be two days of rare sport, he was certain. He let Kantoor make his own choice of weapons.

Kantoor and Bruce labored an hour. At the end of that period Bruce was exhausted and dripping with perspiration, while the little Dutchman was scarcely warm.

"You have a great deal to learn, Mynheer Westfield," Kantoor encouraged, "but you'll find that you'll pick up the tricks rapidly, once you accustom yourself to the feel of the blade. A week will make a big difference."

When alone, however, he shook his head. Bruce was no swordsman. It would take months, rather than days, to teach his wrist firmness and the mysteries of cut and parry, he knew.

The next morning Bruce obtained a glimpse of Rambuta. She was on the opposite side of the clearing, where Tama had permitted her to take a bit of air. Borgeson's mistress was with her. The sight of the pure girl, dressed in the simple costume of the Bornean jungle, in the company of the painted creature Borgeson had brought with him stirred a passion of anger in Bruce's breast. He started to approach them, but a Kayan guard, armed with a spear, peremptorily warned him away. The woman grinned at him maliciously, and whispered something to Rambuta. The girl blushed and hid herself behind the woman's ample form. Bruce could guess the nature of that confidence. It made him sick at heart. Furious at Tama Kwayang's injustice at permitting Borgeson's ally access to Rambuta, while he barred them, he besought Kantoor to see the kjai. He related what had occurred.

To Bruce's surprise, Kantoor refused to speak to Tama.

"The girl is pure; the woman can do her no harm," he said. "Let her alone; she is wiser than you think. If we ask too many favors, we court refusal. We must not let Tama think we are wholly dependent upon him."

For the next six days Bruce was fated to see the two, the woman of the beach and the pure girl of the forest, almost constantly in each other's company. He watched them covertly, fuming and fretting, and sick at heart because of his helplessness. Erskine watched with him. The lawyer came to him the same morning that he spoke to Kantoor and pointed to the two together.

"I don't like that," was Erskine's curt observation.

But Bruce knew the anxiety the lawyer's gruff exterior concealed.

"I spoke to Kantoor about it and asked him to speak to the kjai," Bruce replied. "He says it would be inadvisable."

"So he told me," Erskine responded briefly. "Can't help it. Got to make the best of it."

On the third day it chanced that they met Rambuta and the woman, and a Kayan guard, on one of the jungle paths. Rambuta flushed and pulled the woman ahead of her. The Kayan warned them into the brush.

Erskine's lips contracted sharply. He strode away with averted eyes. Bruce followed. The lawyer walked rapidly, plunging into the thick jungle, until Bruce laid a restraining hand on his arm.

"Better turn around, hadn't we, uncle?" he suggested mildly. "We might get lost in this brush."

Erskine relaxed. "It's horrible," he gasped. "My own daughter, and to be in the company of a woman of that type. It must be stopped."

"Rambuta's too fine a girl—" Bruce began, but Erskine cut in sharply.

"Of course. I'm thinking of the humiliation she's suffering. That vile creature has been talking clothes to her. It's a terrible way for her to learn the requirements of civilization." He pressed both temples with his hands.

Bruce was silent. He could give no comfort.

"Somehow," Erskine resumed after a pause, "I feel that this woman is gaining an ascendency over Rambuta in some way. Rambuta is spending too much time in her company. She's never had the acquaintanceship of a white woman, and she's not competent to judge. No doubt the woman is doing all she can, under Borgeson's instructions, to win Rambuta's confidence. We must separate them."

The same thought had been troubling Bruce, but he had feared to mention it.

"Kantoor is our only chance," he observed. "We must persuade him to see the kjai. He's the only one of us who has any influence in that direction."

"Exactly!" Erskine agreed vigorously. "Let's look him up at once."

Kantoor advised against the step. But he was won over by their joint persuasions. He could not refuse Erskine when he saw the anxiety that oppressed the latter.

Tama listened sagely to the little Dutchman's plea. Then he considered the matter for a time.

"Let the maid decide for herself," he eventually decreed. "She is old enough to choose her own companions among the women."

He called Rambuta, and in Kantoor's presence told her what her friends desired. She listened with a burning face. When he concluded her lids dropped and her head lowered.

"What is your decision, my daughter that was?" Tama demanded with an affected emotion.

She hesitated. "Let me remain with her," she faltered in a low voice. "I do not want to be left alone."

Kantoor turned away. He did not see the agony and pleading in her face as she lifted it toward him the next moment, or the arms she reached in his direction. Her Kayan guard brought her back to the woman's quarters.

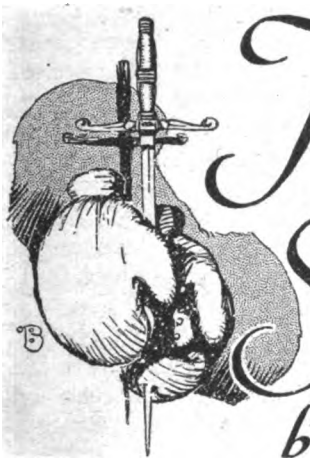
Bruce received the news with a smothered ejaculation. With Erskine it was different. The lawyer's face turned as white as bleached cotton. He said nothing, and walked into the woods. Kantoor perceived the iron that had entered his heart. He followed quietly, signaling Bruce to remain behind. It was more than an hour before they returned. Erskine's eyes were red and bloodshot.

The next morning Rambuta appeared in a dress of yellow cotton. It was baggily fashioned and crudely spliced together with threads of *bamboe doeri* fiber, but it clothed her. Erskine glanced at her for a moment and strode into the jungle. When Bruce found him he was sitting on a log, his face in his hands and his body shaken with sobs.

"Sometimes, Bruce," the lawyer cried brokenly, "my punishment is almost greater than I can bear."

So passed the days until the morn Tama had fixed for the first encounter.

(To be concluded NEXT WEEK.)



The Man Who Scared Him

by George Mariano

KNOCKOUT DANNERS, staring over the rail of the tug that bore him from the ship across the harbor to Hong-Kong, hadn't needed a sight of the devil himself to take his heart out. The vision of a whole bay dotted with ungodly looking boats full of yellow-looking Chinese-talking people was enough to discourage a man who had no more than he had left of courage.

The sporting pages of the Frisco papers had always said that Danners lacked the brains for real championship, even during the brief spell he had owned the belt of the West coast. He had taken that good naturedly. Fighting brains sometimes battered him up a bit; but his two heavy fists had finished the battles. They had called him slow. He knew it was true. No use to get sore about that. The fast boys hurt him. But he landed on them in the end, and they went to sleep, and he took the long half of the purse.

But now the West coast—his West coast—was saying that he was yellow. They said he had thrown his fight with the Australian Terror. They said it loud and hard and often, with the vehemence of men who have bet money on a sure thing and lost it. Rather, they had said it. Things had got so now that nobody mentioned Knockout Danners at all. O'Conners had tried feebly to get him a chance at a come-back. Then O'Conners had told him to hunt a job.

"You never had no brains nor speed," his ex-manager had said sourly. "Now you ain't got no nerve."

O'Conners had told him that when he went, as a last resort, to beg to be put on once more with the Australian Terror. O'Conners ought to have seen from that, how little afraid he was. He really hadn't known that the Terror had already sailed back toward home, and was making Hong-Kong a sort of center whence to liven up the Asiatic coast with the rare sight of a regular near-champion in action.

"That boy's makin' some real coin for him an' Perce Hopper to take back home with 'em," O'Conners had mentioned as if it grieved him.

Maybe Danners had felt more relieved than pained to learn of the Australian's departure. Maybe it had been Rosie Tracey's idea that the only way to show them all he wasn't what they said he was would be a return match with the man who had knocked him out in a single round. That didn't say he was afraid of the Terror.

But the Australian was fast. He hadn't Danners's punch or the weight behind it. But he had landed the punches he had too often and one of them in the wrong place. And fooled Danners besides, rushing the first round like a crazy amateur.

Still Danners was not afraid. He had been knocked unconscious before; and come to and set the other fellow unconscious for the full ten seconds. That didn't hurt as much as the blows which had twice broken his nose; or that one which was responsible

for the cauliflower ear. He had knocked out all three of the givers of those painful raps.

No, he was not afraid. But Rosie had insisted on his setting out after the Australian. That wasn't good sense. Of what use to take rather more than an even chance of being knocked out all over again? Rosie couldn't see that. She was all for his taking a regular job, too. But she had stuck out for his giving the k.o. to the Australian Terror first. She had stuck so hard that she had made him take all the money she'd saved up and spend it on this trip. Said she'd wanted it only to spend on a home. If he beat the Terror, he would be able to pay her back. If he didn't—well, she wouldn't need a home. People weren't going to say her man was yellow and crooked.

And here he was. He wasn't afraid of anybody or anything. But a heathen place like this certainly didn't set one up so he had to look for trouble to use his surplus courage on.

Afraid of the Australian? Yes, he was afraid he couldn't get a fight with him. In Honolulu he'd found a man who knew all about the Terror and Perce Hopper. And the man had said he would not get anywhere with Hopper unless he could put up at least a thousand dollars as a guarantee of appearance.

He was afraid of that all right. But of any man—

He stopped short. The passengers on the tug had begun to throng toward the gangway. He had unconsciously started to move with them.

And, without the slightest warning, a fist shot up at his face. He jerked his head backward; but his training told him intuitively that he had been saved the most terrific blow ever aimed at him by some one, beyond his assailant, who had jerked the fist's owner away in time. And then he saw—

A man he was afraid of.

II.

No, it was not the man's physical size and strength and a certain suppleness of bearing that hinted of dread-speed of action even through clothing. Danners noted all that by a sort of professional instinct; and he knew the man would class well up as a heavyweight. But that had not scared Danners. If the fist had held a pistol pointed between his eyes, it could not have produced the shock of fear he felt. As a matter of fact, Danners had learned, all in his first glance, that the backward drag which had saved him had come from a handcuff on the side away from him. A huge, fearless-looking officer of the law had the other link of the steel bracelet and was able to handle his prisoner. But that did not check Danners's fear.

That fear was for something in the eyes that glared into Danners's with a malignant hate so inhumanly beyond anything the prizefighter had ever imagined that—well, he had raised his fingers to cross himself when the husky policeman slightly shook the spell by introducing merely natural action into the scene.

"Damn you!" the officer roared, and dealt the criminal a better blow than the one that had missed Danners. "He didn't get you, did he?" the prizefighter was then questioned in a strongly English accent. "I say—did he hit you?"

"I will next time—Knockout Danners," hissed the ugly face.

"Mighty near it," Danners answered the officer. "What's the matter with him anyhow? Crazy?"

"Bad, sir—just bad. He's wanted a lot, this bird. I say—would you come along and make out a complaint for assault?"

Danners instantly drew in. He had never had trouble with the police; but his business is one which still eyes them with more or less caution. And—he didn't know what sort of government they might have in this heathen town.

"No—no," he stammered hastily. "He didn't get me anyway."

"But I will," snarled the criminal. "They've got nothing to hold me on here. I'll be free in three hours. Then I'll get you—you damned, crooked, double-crossing, yellow whelp! I'll get you—"

"Shut up!" bellowed the bobby with another blow that would have been cruel to

an ordinary bad man. He turned again to Danners:

"I say—you'd better come along and make a complaint. This bird—"

But he made the suggestion sound a shade too much like a command. Danners hurried away in the crowd and out of it.

Within an hour he wished he had obeyed the suggestion, hint, request, or command—anyway it had been meant. It was a wish that grew on him steadily for a week.

He had to wait that long for his unhopeful interview with the manager of the Australian Terror. Perce Hopper had pulled off a bout in Canton so successfully that he was taking both fighters up to Lo-ting for a return match. The few white men in those towns were ready to go wild over almost any sort of pugilistic exhibition. And Hopper had played straight, to the extent of taking on such talent as could be matched against the Terror and keeping his bets on his own man no matter how heavy the odds he had to give.

If Danners had not got that final touch of terror at his landing, he might have picked up a sailor or two and let his curiosity overcome his fears of the place, strange enough to hint of dark mystery though it was. If he had been back at home he might have forgotten the ugly face that had leered deadly hate at him. But the uncanny heathen strangeness fitted with the diabolical wickedness of his unknown enemy. He grew as despondent as a comedian out of a job, and as jumpy as a prima donna with a job she wants to quit for a better one without a suit for breach of contract.

He knew now that the venomous-eyed prisoner had spoken the truth in saying he could not be held in Hong-Kong. It was to get a ground for holding him that the policeman had been so eager for Danners's complaint. And that man would fulfil his promise to get Knockout Danners. His hate was too hellish for men to hold.

As for fighting and beating the Australian Terror, Danners was but waiting to go through the form of asking. Perce Hopper wouldn't touch him. And Danners would have advised his best friend to bet four to one against him if he got the fight. He wrote more letters to Rosie Tracey than he had ever written in his life before. He had just too much sense to send any of them. Confession of defeat afterward would be bad enough; advance confession of defeat would be unforgivable proof of cowardice.

He got to where he felt that he was probably as yellow as he'd been accused of being. He looked under his bed before he climbed into it. One night he got up and looked again to make sure he had looked before.

He had come to the British-Chinese town with the stolid courage of one too insensible to fear or pain to keep out of harm's way. A week of waiting in Hong-Kong and a glimpse of a bad Eurasian beachcomber's face turned him into an almost hysterical neurotic.

He went up to the hotel on the mountain looking the way he felt. Mr. Percival Hopper—who was a big, fat Cockney and not a regular Percy at all—had been drinking. Otherwise he probably would have made shorter shrift with the timid offer of the unmanaged, easy first-victim of his champion.

"An' tell me this 'ere, you," he bellowed. "Just tell me this 'ere! Where does I come in for a bit? Gawd knows you're that blighted yellow you'd never stand up long enough to give the b'yes a show f'r their quid apiece. 'Oo p'ys for the hall and all? Hi wants to know."

"How much you want?" Danners asked hopelessly.

"Two hundred at the cheapest," the fat man spoke in near derision. Danners felt a spasm of something that was rather the opposite of hope.

"I've got a hundred an' forty-two," he said.

"Eh—eh—eh?" The Terror's manager was considerably surprised. "Hi say, I'll have to see them, you know."

Danners dug into his clothes and the money-belt about his thin waist. He produced a book of travelers' checks. Mr. Percival Hopper gave one look—then roared.

"My Gawd! Dollars! *Dollars!*" He called to half a dozen blear-eyed fit com-

panions for his kind. "Look 'ere—the blighted Yankee's been readin' 'is blasted papers till 'e thinks that there's real money! Look 'ere, you—see this bit of piper? Two 'undred o' them there, my boy—as a guarantee that you'll show in the ring—an' Hi'll give the Terror another chance to beat you. Hi'd want a thousand of them things you've got."

Danners walked out amid a gale of laughter that affected him as our British cousins seem always to affect us. He was mad—mad enough to have fought the Australian Terror, mad enough to forget the caution with which he had got to passing every conceivable lurking-place for an enemy, mad enough to miss the fact that the tropic day had ended in darkness with an unexpected suddenness, too mad to look at the chair coolies who besought his patronage, or to stop when he reached the head of the inclined tramway.

Yet it was not a mad to win fights with. It was the mad of a man already whipped, but goaded by insults to make his conqueror pay a little for victory. And it couldn't even hurt the victor in this case. It seldom did. The same feeling had made many a too-green fighter the easier for Danners to finish. It made them take foolish chances. And then he knew it had done just that for him.

He had heard nothing behind him. The sting of the knife was his first warning. It had been mere luck that a stumble had made him lurch forward enough to get the blow as no more than a scratch on the shoulder.

He wheeled, knowing whom he would face and what. Save for these last moments of wrath, he had been watching for just this with an alert wariness such as he had never displayed in fighting the cleverest of ring opponents. But his week of imaginary terror had not kept up to a sufficiently vivid picture of the venomous ugliness that was heightened now by being visible only in shifting parts, by the shivery gleam of an arc sifted through the waving foliage of a palm. Now one eye, now the other flashed its hate, now one corner of the wicked mouth showed, now the too heavy nose.

How Danners dodged a second blow of the knife and ran into a clinch was more than he could have figured out. It had taken a quickness of leg and arm work he had never shown in a fistic fight. It was born of a desperation he had never known anywhere before.

"Oh, I've got you. I said I'd get you," the hate-hoarse voice snarled in the pugilist's ear. "I'll teach you to lay down in a fight I've bet my money on. Two hundred pounds—a thousand dollars—I lost on you—you! And it killed the best thing I've ever had a chance to pull."

Danners was gripping desperately at a wrist that supported a hand holding the dagger. The wrist was bearing down against his thrust. The man was too strong for him. The voice continued to hiss fury—

"Left me flat for the—bulls to nab—and bring me here. They couldn't hold me here—yet. That Bangkok copper was British, and this is British soil—but the only papers he had were for America. I told you they'd let me go.

"Now I'll prove the rest of what I told you. You can lay down next in a shovel fight with the nearest coal-heaver in hell. Hell—that's where you're going—hell—you!"

He flung off Danners's grip, lifted the knife again. It was as wicked a knife as Danners could have dreamed—a dagger with a blade that wriggled half-way up its length. But Danners did something else to surprise himself. He turned that hurled-off grip into a fist and shot it under the other's ugly jaw. He did not hurt the murderous brute much. But he saw an opening and got his other fist free and into the pit of the stomach.

That brought an oath of the other to a grunting end. But it brought more and swifter oaths to replace it. The man fought as he swore. He was as fast as any man Danners had ever tackled; and he was big enough for a heavyweight. And he had the knife.

Danners felt that knife again—and again. The next moments were a lurid red in his brain. He wasn't killed yet; he wouldn't die until he was. He dodged the knife—he dodged the fist the other aimed at him—he watched for opportunities—he took ad-

vantage of such as he would never have counted opportunities before. He was fighting for his life.

He did not know how long he was lasting; it was longer than he had a right to last against this man, had there been no knife. And he was getting a little revenge. Blood streaked down from the corner of one of the gleaming eyes; a nostril flapped red and loose; a patch of skin was off the heavy chin.

It meant little enough. Clever boxers had done as much to Danners again and again, and left enough of a wallop in him to lay them on the mat at the end. This man's superiority of strength was greater than his had been over those others'. And this man had the knife.

Yet this was Danners's own game. His nearest to clear quick thinking had come to him in fighting. And he now had to think faster than it had been worth his effort to think for any other fight. And it came to him that there was something different about this fight from those in which he had been the heavy man taking fast punishment while waiting the chance to give a slow but finishing blow.

It was worse than it had been for those clever boys. For this man was clever as well as heavy. Ten seconds had told the prizefighter that the murderous criminal had learned more of the boxing art than any one had ever dreamed of teaching K. O. Danners. It was worse—Danners tightened up on his energies. His desperation became a shade more desperate. He fought yet a little harder. He was fighting for life.

Yet he was vaguely conscious that he was fighting better than any one thought he could fight. He was doing things he had but wished he could do. He wished O'Conners might have seen this last fight. Of course it would be his last. He had known that—

Then he knew better. It had never taken thinking to show Danners when his man was gone. He knew instinctively that the hold on that knife had lost its tenseness; the man he fought was fighting dizzy darkness as well as himself. And the brutal training of the game set him mechanically at the rest—to finish his man. Just once, Danners had neglected that—in the first round of his first fight. And the man he might have knocked out had given him the count in the third.

Wonder came back to Danners. There was his man sprawled on the ground. They stayed, when they fell that way.

He suddenly realized that he himself was spinning giddily. Instinctively he reached for ropes. His hands waved in the air.

"I've got you!" a voice cracked in his ear. He tried to turn around. A sharp blow cut his cheek.

The next he knew he was in a wagon. If the peculiar construction of the interior was not sufficiently enlightening, one of the uniformed men sitting on a bench over him supplied all that was needed.

"Lie still, you—or I'll tie you up like the other one. And save your talk for the captain."

He lay still until they dragged him into a building which bore abundant resemblance to a police station. He had got a mortal wound from that knife.

"They were fighting, sir, fit to kill each other. Jolly well near did it, too, by their looks, sir. The other's a horrid mess, sir. But we had to tie him up entirely. Here—"

But Danners saw the captain leap up suddenly. "By jove!" he shouted. "That's him! I say—how did you find these two?"

"This one was on his face on the ground, sir. And this one was just dropping aboard him—when—"

"But, who—" broke in the other of the two officers who had brought the prisoners in.

"Mardle, man—Mardle!" cried the captain. "If you two had a hopeful bit of intelligence you'd have known him in spite of the bruises."

"But—oh, by jove! That's right—better trot him right over the hospital. He's all in."

III.

DANNERS had been battered up before. They had called him a model patient at St. James's Hospital in Frisco. A few hurts more or less didn't matter much to Knockout Danners.

Danners was thinking. Not very fast or hard—or cheerfully. He was putting together the memories of a fight that had stamped itself very clearly on his mind. He was still wondering about that fight.

Somehow it had been a little too good. He had never fought like that before. Fast. Yes—he had shown speed. If he had shown a third of it to the Australian Terror last winter, he would still be the West coast champion middleweight. If he had ever shown all of it—O'Conners would be backing him against the best in the country.

Well—what he had shown he could show again. It was just a matter of trying hard. He could see it now—he had simply had to try his very best. If he did that again—

He would. He'd show up that Australian Terror for a fourth-class sparring-partner of a has-been. He'd go back home and take the belt right away from Fighting Duffy. Then he'd make O'Conners take him East. He'd—

Oh, no, he wouldn't. He was a prisoner here in this hospital. Lord knew what they did to men for fighting in public. This was a heathen town. He couldn't prove anything about the other chap. And—

Even if they let him off, he couldn't get a fight with the Australian Terror. He'd go back as stoker on a ship. He'd have to tell Rosie.

"Going to the fight to-morrow night?" It was one of the doctors asking another.

"Hardly think so," was the response. "This Australian Terror is no wonder. But the boy they've got for him is too much worse. I'd like to see the scrap the Terror wil. get out of Red Hawkins next month, down in Bangkok. Hawkins is a real boy. Too bad they didn't fetch him on here."

Yes—that settled it, if it wasn't already settled. The Terror would be gone before he could even try to—but there was nothing to try anyhow.

"How's the patient?" the doctor turned to ask him.

"Where's this here Bangkok?" Danners made the last hopeless try.

"It's a hole in Siam—Siam's capital, in fact. It has something over a half-million human inhabitants and a lot over two million mangy dogs. The only good thing I know of it is the fight they're going to pull off down there in about three weeks. Ever go to fights?"

"Been to a few," Danners admitted.

"You've been in one. I'd say, if I was a rich man, I'd back you to lick this Australian Terror all over Hong-Kong. But—you'd better take him in while you're down in Bangkok."

"Who—me?" Danners asked. "I'm not going to Bang—what you call it? I can't afford—"

"You're not going!" The doctor sounded surprised. "I say—not going for your two hundred?"

"My two hundred—what?" Danners uttered in a cross growl. Two hundred reminded him of something unpleasant.

"Pounds, man—pounds! No—it's better yet—gold ticals. But—what the deuce did you take that devil for, if you didn't want the reward? Do you mean to say you didn't know they'd offered an extra two hundred for his recapture, after he got away on the extradition slip-up here? But—fiddlesticks! You're the sick man. If you want to play innocent, amuse yourself. I certainly wouldn't try to stop you if you were as well as you'll be in a fortnight."

"Say, doc—come back here," Danners called. "I—I got to send a telegram or something."

"Well—I'll send an orderly in to get it," said the doctor. Danners had forgotten to be respectful. "Don't say you're hurt much—for you're not."

"I won't," Danners assured him. He didn't. About five o'clock that afternoon Miss Rosie Tracey got a boastful message, though it hadn't been any boast at all to the man who sent it:

> Going to Bangkok. Be back soon with money and Australian Terror's number. Just cleaned up a heavyweight for practise, and a thousand bucks. He could of killed Terror with one mitt. Feeling fine. This here's a great place. Mostly Chinks. Love.
>
> DANNY.

"Gee!" Rosie exclaimed. "He must 'a' done it. But he needn't 'a' blowed it all on a cable." Then she kissed the last word on the blue slip.

$1.00 Down

20 Year Guaranteed Aluminum Set

An amazing value. Each utensil stamped with manufacturer's brand, "Lifetime Ware." Each piece made of heavy gauge pressed sheet aluminum of a grade never offered at this price before. *Seamless.* Not thin like ordinary aluminum ware. Will not crack, chip, or peel. Heats quickly. Polish can't wear off. As easy to clean as glassware. Cooks and bakes better than any other kitchenware. *All pieces (except pie plates and bread pans) are highly polished, made of genuine pure sheet aluminum, extra hard, absolutely guaranteed for 20 years.* Yours for $1.00 down, $2.25 monthly. Price $21.90. *Satisfaction guaranteed.*

30 Days Trial—Easy Payments

Try this set in your home 30 days. Our guarantee protects you. If not satisfied, return it at our expense and we'll refund your $1.00 plus any freight or express you paid. If satisfied, pay balance in small monthly payments. We trust honest people anywhere in U. S. No discount for cash; nothing extra for credit. No C. O. D. Open an account with us.

Free Bargain Catalog

Shows thousands of bargains in furniture, jewelry, carpets, rugs, curtains, silverware, stoves, talking machines, porch and lawn furniture, women's, men's and children's wearing apparel. Send the coupon today.

Everything in the Kitchen of Pure Aluminum — 27 Pieces

Combination tea kettle and double boiler (3 pieces) 5-quart size, 8 1-4 inch inside, with a double boiler, 2-quart capacity; one Colonial design coffee percolator (2 pieces) 8-cup size with welded spout, dome cover, fully polished; one roaster, consisting of 9 pieces, measures 10 1-2 inches wide and 6 inches high. These 9 pieces have dozens of different uses, including bread or bake pan (7-pint capacity), stew or pudding pan (7-pint capacity), pudding pan or mixing bowl (4-pint capacity); egg poacher, 5 eggs at a time; muffin pan; biscuit baker with 6 custard cups or jelly moulds; deep locking self-basting roaster; double boiler cereal cooker or triple steamer. This outfit also includes 6-quart preserving kettle with cover, 2 bread pans, 1 lip stew pan (1-quart capacity), 1 lip stew pan (1 1-2 quart capacity), Combination cake and pudding pans (2 pieces), consists of 2-qt. pudding pan with cake tube; two 9-inch pie plates; 2 9 1-2 inch extra deep cake pans; 1 collander with 9-inch top, 5 1-8 inch bottom and 2 1-4 inch depth (can also be used as a steamer). Shipping weight about 15 pounds. **All pieces (except the pie plates and bread pans) are highly polished, made of genuine pure sheet aluminum, extra hard, absolutely guaranteed 20 years. Order by No. A5439JA. Send $1.00 with order.**

Cut Price!

Rock-bottom prices now. Lowest since before the war. So send the coupon at once with only $1.00 and we will ship you this 27-Piece Aluminum Set on 30 days' trial. Money refunded if not satisfied.

Straus & Schram
West 35th Street
Dept. 9275 Chicago, Ill.

Straus & Schram, Dept. 9275 W. 35th St., Chicago

Enclosed find $1.00. Ship special advertised 27-piece Aluminum Kitchen Set. I am to have 30 days' free trial. If I keep the set I will pay you $2.25 monthly. If not satisfied, I am to return the set within 30 days and you are to refund my money and any freight or express charges I paid.

☐ **27-Piece Aluminum Kitchen Set No. A5439JA, $21.90.**

Name .....

Street, R.F.D. or Box No. .....

Shipping Point .....

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

If You Only Want Catalog, Put X in Box Below:

☐ Send me your Free Bargain Catalog

Sensational Bargains on Sport Skirts

Direct to you from Manufacturer

I have built up a personal business among women who come to me because I give them finest styles at sensational prices. I am now extending my business, and as my introduction to you I am making this extraordinary SPECIAL INTRODUCTORY OFFER of Stylish Longware Sport Skirts at the low wholesale prices quoted below FOR A LIMITED TIME.

WHAT WE MEAN BY WHOLESALE PRICES These prices are WHOLESALE which means A dollar saved or lower prices than storekeepers or mail order houses ACTUALLY PAY.

Gorgeous Flowered Satin Striped GEORGETTE Pleated Skirt, Only $9.98

Full accordeon pleated. A marvelous value. Very newest style. Hangs in soft, graceful pleats, giving popular silhouette effect. Flowing belt of self material adds chic and vivacity. Delicately blended colors and superfine georgette silk material make this skirt most appropriate for all occasions, especially when you want to be at your best. You will rave over this gorgeous georgette skirt. Fifth Avenue stores get at least $20 for same quality. Our wholesale price only $9.98 plus postage. Colors: White, Turquoise, Ecru, Harding Blue, Navy Blue, Brown, Black. Sizes from 25 to 32 only.

Stunning Genuine BARETTE SATIN SPORT SKIRT $4.98

A delightful stylish sport skirt for Spring and Summer wear. Made of high lustre, durable Genuine Barette Satin. Has separate belt, two neat bias-cut flap pockets. Pearl buttons. Skirt full cut and roomy over hips and drapes gracefully on any figure. If you can duplicate this skirt for less than $7 send it back and you will not be out one penny. Marvelous value at our wholesale price of only $4.98 plus postage. Colors: White and Harding Blue.

READ THIS LETTER!—"I received my skirt and was pleased with it. It is a great bargain, so I have two more on the way. Thanks."—Mrs. E. Walker, Crystal, W. Va., Apr. 27, 1921.

SEND NO MONEY

Simply select the skirt or skirts you wish. Write a letter stating size and color wanted. Each of these Longware Sport Skirts comes 24 to 32 inches waist measure and 28 to 40 inches in length. (Extra sizes from 32 to 38, 50c. extra.) SEND NO MONEY. When the postman delivers the skirt pay him the wholesale price quoted here, plus postage. Examine your wonderful bargain. Show your friends. If they and you are not convinced that this is the rarest bargain you have ever seen, return and your money will be refunded at once. You take no risk. You be the judge. SEND NO MONEY. ORDER NOW.

I GUARANTEE That the prices of these skirts are lower than charged for skirts of equal quality anywhere in America. COMPLETE SATISFACTION OR YOUR MONEY BACK.

Satin Plaid Poplin Sport Skirts ONLY $2.99

Satin plaid combinations are among the most stylish and popular skirts for the summer's sportwear. I am delighted to offer this classy satin plaid poplin Sport Skirt for only $2.99, plus postage. Illustration cannot show the beauty of material in this skirt. Colors: Harding Blue, Navy, Taupe. Novelty pockets, button trimmed. Detachable belt gives a dash of youthfulness that is fascinating and becoming to every figure. A real bargain which cannot be duplicated even at wholesale. Only a very limited number of these wonderful Skirts at $2.99, plus postage.

2 Beautiful Plaid Skirts $3.98 FOR BOTH

Each of these Plaid Longware Skirts is worth $3.98 by itself, but on my Special Introductory Offer you get *two* of them for only $3.98, plus postage. Charming, smart serge weave, strikingly patterned in soft harmonizing color combinations of black and green and blue, and black and red and gray. Separate belts, slashed pockets with turned-back tabs and pearl buttons. A wonderful wholesale bargain for $3.98, plus postage, for TWO.

Ruby Morrison & Co Dept. 175 440 Fourth Ave New York