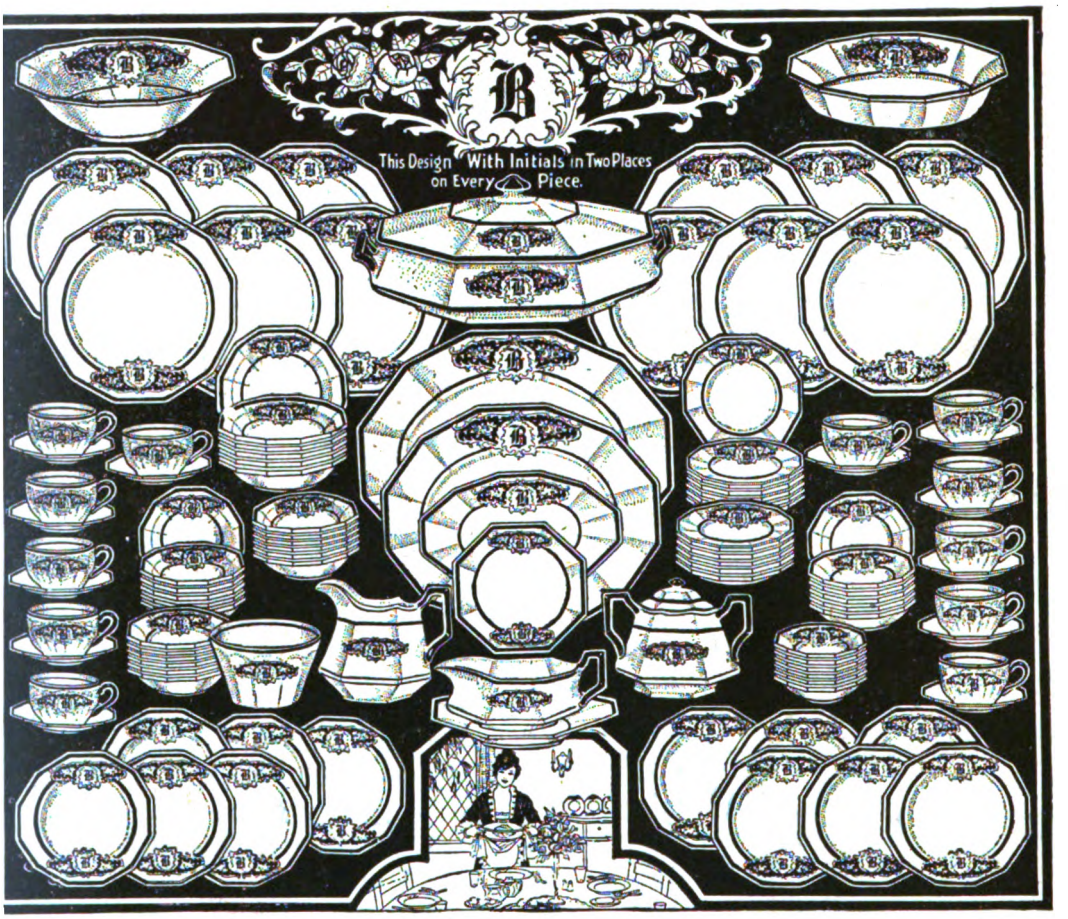
ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY

Clash Between Avarice and Love

The Age-Old Kingdom

by Captain Dingle

10¢ PER COPY AUGUST 19 BY THE YEAR $4.00



his Superb 110-piece Set, with ini-al in 2 places in wreath with 6-color ecorations on every piece and gold overed handles, consists of:
2 Dinner Plates, 9 inches
2 Breakfast Plates, 7 inches
2 Cups
2 Saucers

12 Soup Plates, 7¾ inches
12 Cereal Dishes, 6 inches
12 Fruit Dishes, 5¼ inches
12 Individual Bread and Butter Plates, 6¼ inches
1 Platter, 13½ inches

1 Platter, 11¾ inches
1 Celery Dish, 8¾ inches
1 Sauce Boat Tray, 7¾ inches
1 Butter Plate, 6 inches
1 Vegetable Dish, 10½ inches, with lid (2 pieces)

1 Deep Bowl, 8¾ inches
1 Oval Baker, 9 inches
1 Small Deep Bowl, 5 inches
1 Gravy Boat, 7¼ inches
1 Creamer
1 Sugar Bowl with cover (2 pieces)

$1 Brings 110-Piece Gold Decorated Martha Washington Dinner Set

368-Page Book FREE

Send only $1 and we ship the full set—110 pieces. Use it 30 days. Then if not satisfied, return them and we refund your $1 and pay transportation charges both ways. If you keep them, take nearly a year to pay on easy terms.

Your Initial in 2 Places on Every Piece; 5-Color Floral Decorations and Gold

Wonderful artistic effect is given by the wreath and rich design surrounding the initial. Your initial appears in 2 places on every piece.

All Handles Covered with Gold

Every handle is covered with polished gold. Shipping weight about 90 lbs.

Important!
Hartman guarantees that every piece in this set is absolutely first quality—no seconds. This is a standard or "open" pattern. Replacement pieces may be had of us for three years. Each piece wrapped in tissue paper. Excellent packing to prevent breakage. Shipped without delay.

Order No. 324DDMA13. Bargain price, $32.85. Pay $1 now, $3 monthly.

HARTMAN Furniture & Carpet Co.
Dept. 4678 **Chicago, Ill.**

FREE Bargain Catalog
368 pages of bargains in furniture, rugs, stoves, silverware, washing machines, kitchen ware, gas engines and cream separators, etc. —all on our easy terms — 30 days' FREE trial. *Post card or letter brings it FREE.*
"Let Hartman Feather YOUR Nest"

HARTMAN FURNITURE & CARPET CO.
DEPT. 4678 **CHICAGO, ILL.**

I enclose $1.00. Send 110-piece Golden Martha Washington Dinner Set No. 324DDMA13. I am to have 30 days' free trial. If not satisfied, will ship it back and you will refund my $1.00 and pay transportation charges both ways. If I keep it, I will pay $3.00 per month until full price, $32.85, is paid. Title remains with you until final payment is made.

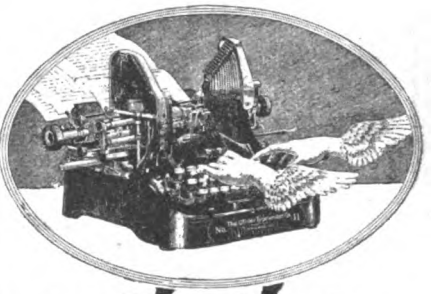
Name.....
Street Address.....
R. F. D.....Box No.....
Town.....State.....
State Your Occupation.....Color.....

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ Give Initial Wanted (Any One Letter) .....

FREE TRIAL EASY TERMS

To introduce the latest in Olivers, we ship it to you for five days' free trial and inspection. In the privacy of your own office or home, you can put it through every test and make comparisons with other standard typewriters. You will realize quickly that the Oliver Speedster, our latest model, fulfills our policy of "the finest typewriter possible at the lowest price always."

OLIVER



The Latest Model—No. 11

Speedster

Celebrating the production of our *millionth* Oliver, we announce a wonderful new model, the climax of 27 years of development. Its advancements are many. Its superiorities are countless. No description in mere print can do this super-typewriter full justice.

That is why we send it to you. We let it prove its own case. And we send it to you without the slightest obligation on your part to buy.

To see this Oliver Speedster and to operate it is to experience a new sensation in typing. To the operator it brings many welcome surprises.

No Longer $100

While this is a standard $100 typewriter, and while we sold Olivers at that price for years, we now ship direct from the factory to the buyer, eliminating many "in-between" expenses and extravagances.

This new plan of selling saves you $35, for we price this Oliver Speedster at only $65. If any typewriter is worth $100 or more, it is this remarkable new model. Sold the old way we would have to charge $100. Only by this new short-cut can we save you the $35 which formerly went into a complicated selling system.

Remember, we offer a brand new Oliver—not rebuilt, not second-hand, but our latest and finest model—speedier, quieter, more durable.

Here is our offer: We ship the Oliver to you if you mail us the coupon below. Try it for five days. Then if you agree that it is the finest typewriter, regardless of price, and want to own it, send us $4 after trial and then $4 per month.

If you prefer to pay $100 for some other typewriter, ship the Oliver back at our expense.

That is all there is to our plan. The Oliver must sell itself. You must be the judge. No one need influence you. You deal direct with the manufacturer.

Thousands have bought this new way. Over 1,000,000 Olivers have been sold. It is the favorite of big businesses as well as individuals.

If you prefer further information before ordering, note that the coupon may be checked for EITHER a Free Trial Oliver or Further Information.

SAVE $35

Why pay $100 for any typewriter when you can get our latest and finest for only $65? Why rent? Why buy a rebuilt typewriter? This Oliver offer is famous the world over. It set a new day in typewriter distribution. Mail the coupon at once.

The Oliver Typewriter Company
37-B Oliver Typewriter Building Chicago, Ill.

Mail Now

THE OLIVER TYPEWRITER COMPANY
37-B Oliver Typewriter Building, Chicago, Ill.

☐ Ship me a new Oliver No. 11 Typewriter for five days' free inspection. If I keep it I will pay $65 as follows: $4 at the end of trial period and then at the rate of $4 per month. The title to remain in you until fully paid for. If I make cash settlement at end of trial period I am to deduct ten per cent and remit to you $58.50. If I decide not to keep it, I will ship it back at your expense at the end of five days.

My shipping point is .....

☐ Do not send a machine until I order it. Mail me your book—"The High Cost of Typewriters—The Reason and the Remedy," the Speedster catalog and further information.

Name .....

Street Address .....

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

Occupation or Business .....

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOL. CXLV CONTENTS FOR AUGUST 19, 1922 NUMBER 1

FIVE CONTINUED STORIES

NOVELETTE AND SHORT STORIES

MISCELLANEOUS AND POETRY

Starting next week—a seven-part sensation

THE SIGN OF THE SERPENT

BY JOHN GOODWIN

In which a beautiful girl joins forces with her disinherited brother to thwart scoundrels—only to find herself a victim of one of them.

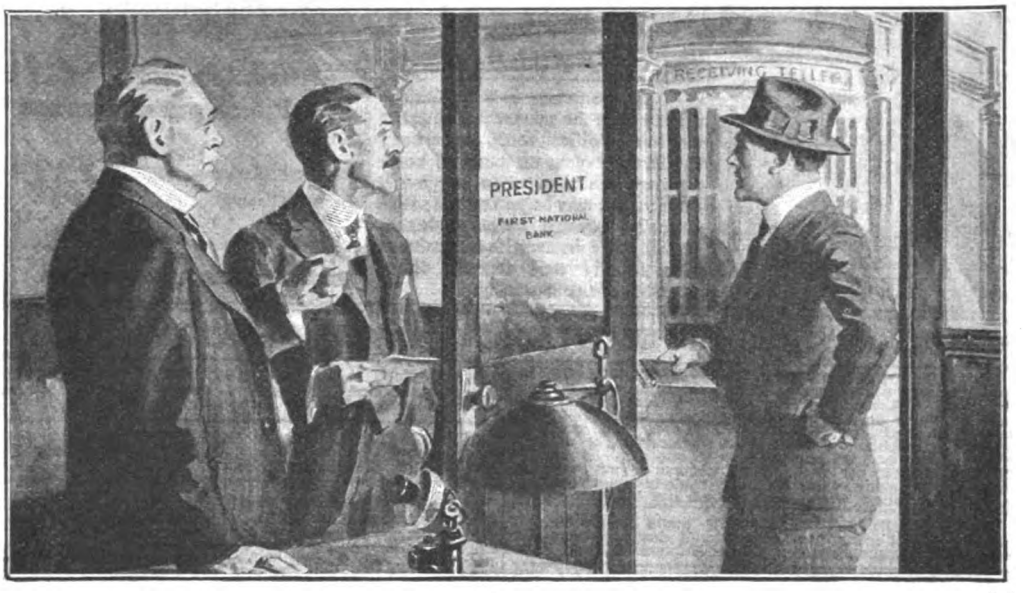
THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, and TEMPLE HOUSE, TEMPLE AVENUE, E. C., LONDON

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



"He Deposits $500 a Month!"

"SEE that man at the Receiving Teller's window? That's Billy King, Manager for the Browning Company. Every month he comes in and deposits $500. I've been watching Billy for a long time—take almost as much interest in him as I do in my own boy.

"Three years ago he started at Browning's at $15 a week. Married, had one child, couldn't save a cent. One day he came in here desperate—wanted to borrow a hundred dollars—wife was sick.

"I said, 'Billy, I'm going to give you something worth more than a loan—some good advice—and if you'll follow it I'll let you have the hundred, too. You don't want to work for $15 a week all your life, do you?' Of course he didn't. 'Well,' I said, 'there's a way to climb out of your job to something better. Take up a course with the International Correspondence Schools in the work you want to advance in, and put in some of your evenings getting special training. The Schools will do wonders for you—I know, we've got several I. C. S. boys right here in the bank.'

"That very night Billy wrote to Scranton and a few days later he had started studying at home. Why, in a few months he had doubled his salary! Next thing I knew he was put in charge of his department, and two months ago they made him Manager. And he's making real money. Owns his own home, has quite a little property besides, and he's a regular at that window every month. It just shows what a man can do in a little spare time."

Employers are begging for men with ambition, men who really want to get ahead in the world and are willing to prove it by training themselves in spare time to do some one thing well.

Prove that *you* are that kind of a man! The International Correspondence Schools are ready and anxious to help you prepare for something better if you'll simply give them the chance. More than two million men and women in the last 30 years have taken the I. C. S. route to more money. Over 130,000 others are getting ready in the same way right now.

Is there any reason why *you* should let others climb over you when you have the same chance they have? Surely, the least you can do is to find out just what there is in this proposition for *you*. Here is all we ask: Without cost, without obligating yourself in any way, simply mark and mail this coupon.

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
Box 2152-C, Scranton, Penna.

Without cost or obligation, please send me full information about the subject *before* which I have marked an X in the list below:

BUSINESS TRAINING DEPARTMENT

- ☐ Business Management
- ☐ Industrial Management
- ☐ Personnel Organization
- ☐ Traffic Management
- ☐ Business Law
- ☐ Banking and Banking Law
- ☐ Accountancy (including C.P.A.)
- ☐ Nicholson Cost Accounting
- ☐ Bookkeeping
- ☐ Private Secretary
- ☐ Business Spanish ☐ French
- ☐ Salesmanship
- ☐ Advertising
- ☐ Better Letters
- ☐ Foreign Trade
- ☐ Stenography and Typing
- ☐ Business English
- ☐ Civil Service
- ☐ Railway Mail Clerk
- ☐ Common School Subjects
- ☐ High School Subjects
- ☐ Illustrating ☐ Cartooning

TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL DEPARTMENT

- ☐ Electrical Engineering
- ☐ Electric Lighting
- ☐ Mechanical Engineer
- ☐ Mechanical Draftsman
- ☐ Machine Shop Practice
- ☐ Railroad Positions
- ☐ Gas Engine Operating
- ☐ Civil Engineer
- ☐ Surveying and Mapping
- ☐ Mine Foreman or Engineer
- ☐ Steam Engineering
- ☐ Radio ☐ Airplane Engines
- ☐ Architect
- ☐ Contractor and Builder
- ☐ Architectural Draftsman
- ☐ Concrete Builder
- ☐ Structural Engineer
- ☐ Plumbing and Heating
- ☐ Chemistry
- ☐ Pharmacy
- ☐ Automobile Work
- ☐ Navigation
- ☐ Agriculture and Poultry
- ☐ Mathematics

Name.....
Street Address..... 8-29-22
City..... State.....
Occupation.....

Persons residing in Canada should send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada.

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.		

Sept. 23rd Argosy-Allstory Forms Close August 26th.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

WANTED: TAILORING SALESMEN—MAKE BIG MONEY from the very start—opportunity of your lifetime to get into your own business. We are the largest made-to-measure tailoring house in the country, furnishing elaborate sample equipments, including 500 all wool fabrics, and guarantee absolute satisfaction—perfect fit, best workmanship, or no sale. Write for line and all accessories to be sent free. Earn from $75.00 to $200.00 per week. State whether or not you have experience in taking orders for men's made-to-measure clothes. A. Raymond Arthur, Sales Manager, Lock Box 483, Chicago, Ill.

LARGE SHIRT MANUFACTURER wants Agents to sell complete line of shirts direct to wearer. Exclusive patterns. Big values. Free samples. Madison Mills, 503 Broadway, New York.

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.

LIVE AGENTS MAKE $10 DAY SELLING EUREKA STRAINER and Splash Preventer for every water faucet. Takes on sight. Widely advertised and known. Get details today. A. D. Seed Filter Company, 73 Franklin, New York.

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

$1.95 FOR MADE-TO-ORDER PANTS—Special 30-day offer to prove our marvelous values in made-to-measure tailoring. **Agents Wanted.** Earn $30 to $35 Extra Every Week, taking orders for our high-class, made-to-measure clothes. No experience necessary. Write for samples today. THE PROGRESS TAILORING CO., Dept. H-104, Chicago.

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. W. Hillyer Ragsdale, Drawer 93, East Orange, N. J.

$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.

MAKE 600% PROFIT. FREE SAMPLES. Lowest priced Gold Window Letters for stores, offices. Anybody can do it. Large demand. Exclusive territory. Big future. Side line. Acme Letter Co., 2800 F Congress, Chicago.

A BUSINESS OF YOUR OWN—Make sparkling glass name plates, numbers, checkerboards, medallions, signs; big illustrated book FREE. E. PALMER, 500 Wooster, Ohio.

AGENTS: Suits tailored to order $17.25 and up. $4.25 to $11.30 profit on each sale. No experience needed. Write for free sample outfit and instructions. AMERICAN WOOLEN MILLS CO., Dept. 1762, Chicago, Ill.

DO YOU WANT AGENTS AND SALESMEN to sell your merchandise? Men and women who are educated in personal salesmanship and know the house-to-house, office, and store canvassing proposition. These advertisers are getting them year in and year out, and there are thousands more for you among the 3,000,000 readers of The Munsey Magazines. Our Classified Service Bureau will gladly show you how to use this section most profitably and at the least cost. Write to-day to the Classified Manager, The Argosy Combination, 280 B'way, N. Y.

AUTHORS—MANUSCRIPTS

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.

AUTOMOBILES

AUTOMOBILE MECHANICS, Owners, Garagemen, Repairmen, send for free copy America's Popular Motor Magazine. Contains helpful instructive information on overhauling, ignition wiring, carburetors, batteries, etc. AUTOMOBILE DIGEST, 500 Butler Building, Cincinnati.

HELP WANTED

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

WRITE NEWS ITEMS and Short Stories for pay in spare time. Copyright book and plans free. PRESS REPORTING SYNDICATE, 433, St. Louis, Mo.

SELL US YOUR SPARE TIME. YOU CAN EARN FIFTEEN TO FIFTY DOLLARS WEEKLY writing showcards at home. No canvassing. Pleasant, profitable profession, easily, quickly learned by our simple graphic block system. Artistic ability unnecessary. We instruct you and supply you work. Wilson Methods, Ltd., Dept. G, 64 East Richmond, Toronto, Canada.

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, 1710 Market Street, Philadelphia.

HELP WANTED—MALE

ALL MEN—WOMEN OVER 17, willing to accept Government Positions $135 (Traveling or Stationary) write MR. OZMENT, 198, St. Louis, Mo.

BE A RAILWAY TRAFFIC INSPECTOR! $110 to $250 monthly, expenses paid after three months' spare-time study. Splendid opportunities. Position guaranteed or money refunded. Write for Free Booklet CM-30. Stand. Business Training Inst., Buffalo, N. Y.

BE A DETECTIVE—EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITY; good pay; travel. Write C. T. Ludwig, 126 Westover Building, Kansas City, Mo.

MOTION PICTURE PLAYS

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

MICHIGAN FARM LANDS FOR SALE

$10 to $50 down! Starts you on 20, 40, or 80 ac. near hustling city in Mich. Bal. long time. Only $15 to $35 per ac. Write today for big FREE booklet. SWIGART LAND CO., Y-1245 First Nat'l Bank Bldg., 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 record of invention blank. Send model or sketch and description for our opinion of its patentable nature. Free. Highest References. Prompt Attention. Reasonable Terms. Victor J. Evans & Co., 762 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

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

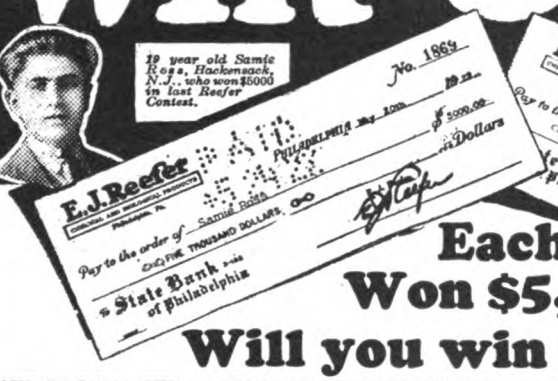
TELEGRAPHY

TELEGRAPHY (Morse and Wireless) and railway accounting taught thoroughly. Big salaries. Great opportunities. Oldest, largest school. All expenses low; can earn large part. Catalogue free. Dodge's Institute, Yale St., Valparaiso, Indiana.

Classified Advertising continued on page 6.

Win $5,000

19 year old Samie Ross, Hackensack, N.J., who won $5000 in last Reefer Contest.



Mrs. B. R. Young of Girard, Pa., is another winner of a $5000 contest prize.

Each Won $5,000

Will you win this time?

Big Picture FREE On Request

Can You Find More Than 15 or 20 Words in This Picture Beginning with Letter "R"?

There is Road, Rake, Rope. How many more can you find? Write them down and send them in. See how easy it is! This is a game of skill. Effort will help you win.

Costs Nothing to Try!

Just send in your list of "R" words. If the judges decide your list is the largest which correctly names the visible objects beginning with "R" they will award you first prize.

Win the $5000

You don't have to buy anything to win a prize in this contest. If you have bought nothing, first prize is $50. If you send $1 for Yeast, and win first prize, you get $750. If you send $2, first prize is $1500. But if you send $5 for 5 packages of Reefer's Yeast, and your list is judged best, you win $5000. Which do you want, $50 or $5000?

OBSERVE THESE RULES

1—Any one excepting our employees and their relatives may enter this contest. There is no entrance fee of any kind.

2—All word lists must be received through the mail by E. J. Reefer, 9th & Spruce Sts., Philadelphia, Pa., and envelopes must be postmarked by post office closing time, November 15, 1922.

3—Contestants who have sent lists or orders before November 15th will be qualified for the higher prizes provided orders for Yeast are received through the mail, postmarked on or before November 30th.

4—Only English words will be counted. Obsolete, hyphenated or compound words will not be counted. Only the singular or the plural of a word will be used, but both singular and plural will not count. Each article or object can be given only one name. Single words made up of two separate words or objects, such as teaspoon, teapot, or teatime will not count. Webster's International Dictionary will be the final authority. Where several synonyms are equally applicable to an object shown in the picture, a person submitting any one of such synonyms will be given credit for one word only.

5—The largest list of words which correctly name visible objects beginning with the letter "R" will receive first prize, and so on down the list of 105 prizes. The winning list will be made up from among the words submitted by the contestants, and not controlled by any predetermined list of words selected by the judges as being the "correct" or "master" list.

6—For each wrong word a percentage will be deducted from the total number of correct words.

7—Two or more people may co-operate in answering the puzzle. However, only one prize will be given to any one household or any one group.

8—If a contestant sends us more than one list under an assumed name or pre-married name, then all lists of such contestant will be disqualified.

9—You must use only one side of paper. You must number each page and object in a consecutive rotation. Your full name and address must be written on each page in the upper right hand corner. It will aid the judges materially if you will arrange your words alphabetically, and if you will use paper size about 6 in. by 9 in. Failure to do so, however, will not count against you, nor will neatness or handwriting affect your score. Typewrite your list if possible. An enlarged picture will be furnished free upon request.

10—The final decision will be made by three judges entirely independent of and having no connection whatever with the E. J. Reefer Company. They will judge the answers submitted and award the prizes at the end of the contest. Each participant entering this contest agrees to accept the decision of the judges as final and conclusive, without argument or question. All answers will receive full consideration, whether or not merchandise is purchased. At the close of the contest, when all lists have been graded, the list winning first prize and the names of the prize winners will be published, and a copy of such list and prize winners' names and addresses will be sent upon request to any participant who sends us a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

11—An additional prize of not over $600 for promptness, as specified above, will be awarded.

12—In case of ties for any prize offered, each tying contestant will receive full amount of the prize so tied for.

$11,500 in Prizes	If no Reefer's Yeast Tablets are ordered	If one $1 pkg. Reefer's Yeast Tablets is ordered	If two $1 pkgs. Reefer's Yeast Tablets are ordered	If five $1 pkgs. Reefer's Yeast Tablets are ordered
1st prize	$50	$750	$1500	$5000
2nd prize	35	375	750	2500
3rd prize	25	200	400	1250
4th prize	25	125	250	600
5th prize	25	75	150	400
6th to 55th prizes, each	2	4	8	25
56th to 105th prizes, each	1	2	4	10

$600 Extra! Your word list may be mailed any time up to Nov. 15, but for every day before Nov. 15, that your Yeast order is received, a special prize of $10 for each day (not exceeding $600) will be added to any first prize you win.

Yeast Tablets

A wonderful scientific tablet, combining all three natural vitamines. Helps build up vitality, strength, endurance. Try this way to bring back the freshness of youth—the natural complexion all women long for. Try Reefer's Vimogen — and also qualify for the $5000.

No goods bought in this contest are subject to exchange, refund or approval.

E. J. Reefer, Dept. C227
9th and Spruce Sts. Philadelphia, Pa.

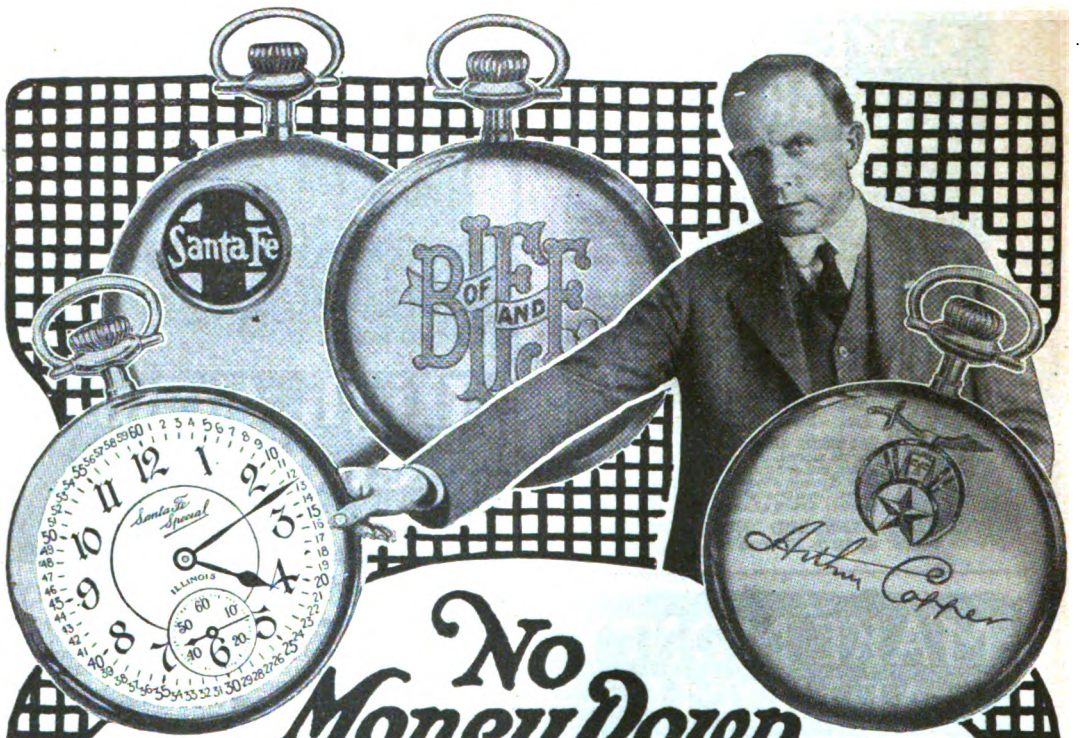
Classified Advertising continued from page 4.

SONG POEMS WANTED

STAMPS AND RARE COINS

TRADE SCHOOLS

TYPEWRITERS



No Money Down
Sent on Approval

Our determination to this year double our sales of the world famous *Santa Fe Special* and *Bunn Special Watches* prompts this matchless offer.

While other watch dealers are raising their prices, asking you for larger monthly payments, and making payment terms harder for you to meet, we are offering you our new model Santa Fe Special, and the famous Bunn Special, no advance in price, no money down, easier terms and smaller monthly payments. WE realize the war is over, and in order to double our business we MUST give you pre-war inducements, better prices, easier terms, and smaller payments.

LOOK! Santa Fe Special AND Bunn Special Watches

Without one penny of advance payment let us place in your hands to see, to examine, to inspect, to admire, to approve a real masterpiece in watch creation.

Page 12 of Our Watch Book Is of Special Interest to You!

Ask for our Watch Book free—then select the watch you would like to see, either the famous Santa Fe Special or the 6 position Bunn Special, and let us explain our easy payment plan and send the Watch, express prepaid, for you to examine. No money down.

Santa Fe Watch Co., 857 Thomas Bldg., Topeka, Kans.

Please send prepaid and without obligation your Watch Book free, explaining your "No Money Down" Offer on the Santa Fe Special Watch.

Name.....

Address.....

State.....

REMEMBER No money down—easy payments buys a master timepiece—a 21 Jewel guaranteed for a lifetime at about half the price you pay for a similar watch of other makes. No money down—a wonderful offer.

Santa Fe Watch Company
857 Thomas Bldg., Topeka, Kans.

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOL. CXLV SATURDAY, AUGUST 19, 1922 NUMBER 1

The Age-Old Kingdom

By CAPTAIN DINGLE

Author of "Silent Martin," "The Levanter," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE GREEN-EYED MONSTER.

IN the entire expanse of a wide lawn, upon which two sets of tennis were in vigorous play, and around which sat or lounged twoscore summer-clad men and women looking on, there was but one figure visible to the deeply tanned, good-looking young fellow who suddenly appeared at the gate and halted, his eyes gleaming with inner elation.

"She *is* perfect," he muttered, his gaze fastened upon the one visible figure. "Queen of them all, by gracious!"

Starting forward, in the direction of the nets, he stopped with a little gesture of shyness wholly out of keeping with his appearance, and flung himself on the grass. From his position the lawn was in fullest view; still his vision saw but the one figure, that of a laughing girl of nineteen, with flashing eyes and tumbled hair which caught and held prisoner every glint of sun that touched it, who played robust tennis with the grace of a sprite and the skill of a professional.

If Ernest Cotterell was unable to visualize more than one figure at a time—and he had excellent reason—Doris Mar-

riot was keener or more embracing of vision. She had seen him arrive; and now, the game at an end, she left her partner and opponents with a laughing excuse and ran to him, panting slightly after her exercise, charmingly flushed, the spirit of glad welcome.

"Oh, I'm so glad you came to us first," she cried, flinging down her racket in order to take his hand in both of hers. "Tell me quickly—have you passed?"

"Yes, Doris," he replied soberly, for all the glowing joy in his eyes; "I pulled through quite easily. I'm a full-fledged master mariner now."

"Then come over and tell the others. You know how delighted Gerard will be to hear of it. Come along, and I'll get you some tea."

Cotterell followed, for she ran impulsively ahead to carry the news. Tea was about the last thing on earth he desired just then, with its inevitable company and futile chatter. He tried to make the girl hear that he wished to speak to her alone, but her gratification at his success was too genuine to permit her to pause before she had carried the tidings to everybody. The sailor soon found himself in the midst of a congratulating crowd, some of whose good wishes rang true, while others sounded as empty as they no doubt really were.

But out of the crowd stepped one whose slap on the back was eagerly awaited by the embarrassed mariner. Dressed in white flannels, still warm from his tennis, Gerard Harper almost matched his friend in manly appearance. He was tanned, yet his dark color was too deep for mere tan. Physically he was a man to attract attention among women and to force other men sometimes to look twice at him. But there was a subtle difference in the two chums, if one with experience of men looked closely.

A curious circumstance in the life of each perhaps had a great deal to do with this difference. Ernest Cotterell was the son of a preacher of the Gospel, and he had taken up the sea for his life work with his father's blessing after long self-communion had convinced him that he could never conscientiously follow in the old man's footsteps. The honesty that prompted his choice of the hardest life on earth, in preference to the easiest, simply because of a doubt which most men would quickly smother, showed in every line of his bronzed, strong face.

Gerard Harper, on the other hand, was the son of a hard-bitten old sea captain, who aimed at making his boy a gentleman by the very route that Cotterell had declined. People whispered, and sometimes said aloud, that his own career had been so gaudy, so utterly out of bounds, that he felt the need of squaring himself before he died. He would have his son a parson, so that by his good act, and with the added weight of a living advocate left behind him, he might squeeze through that fabled needle's eye which had bothered him so much of recent years.

Young Harper was the sort of fellow to fall in with the proposal. He loved ease, was not too bright, and the prospect of that future congregation, with hundreds of bright, adoring eyes turned up to him rather than to the One he served, thrilled him to the quick. Yes, undoubtedly it was the true inward nature of each, peeping through, which made that subtle difference in the two friends.

"I'm so glad to hear of your success," was Harper's greeting in a voice which already gave evidence of a cultivated unction. "Won't you have some tea, old chap?"

Cotterell briefly gripped the rather limp hand thrust at him, and made some sort of stumbling reply which led to his arrival at a little table surrounded by fluttering females and spread with the materials for tea. But his eyes sought Doris. Nothing in his world was farther from his desire just then than to be caught and tied down to a tea table leg.

Doris flitted from group to group, as became the hostess, and Harper was speedily immersed in talk with flattering women around him, so that the sailor's uneasiness passed unnoticed for a while. But presently the girl stopped at a group near by, and the moment she left them Cotterell got up and ran to her.

Then Harper found time to notice his friend more closely; and there was little

of gentleness or humility in the embryo preacher's face as he caught sight of the young couple walking slowly toward the garden, very close together.

" Now tell me all your plans, since you have become such a great man," laughed Doris. She had detected in Cotterell's open face his intention to speak to her on matters not at all connected with his work, and, girl-like, while she was curious to hear it, she would not let him say it right away.

" My plans were not in my mind, Doris," he replied, regarding her intently with a shy, embarrassed air. " I want to speak of you—"

" Oh, I am of no importance, surely! Tell me what you are going to do, first; then, if I have time, I may let you tell me what else is on your mind." She smiled up at him, then suddenly let her eyes fall, while a faint blush deepened the healthy color of her face. " Tell me—are you going away to sea immediately?"

He made his reply in the tone and much of the manner of a boy repeating a school piece, because he had to, eager to get it over.

" I am offered the command of a steamer sailing next week for Manáos, Brazil. The vessel is chartered by some sort of an expedition going into the wilds of Bolivia or somewhere—looking for Inca relics, or something." He paused briefly, as if to clear his mind of one subject before launching out on another much nearer his heart. Then: " Doris," he said, awkwardly, taking her hand, " I don't know how other men would say this. I'm not much of a hand at talk. But I love you, and I want you. When I go to sea, may I take you as my wife?"

" Good gracious!" She laughed merrily, standing still and staring straight into his face. " Isn't this somewhat like carrying by boarding, or whatever the sea term is? Why, you've never said one word before about such a thing." Then, more seriously, seeing the pain in his eyes: " Ernest, I like you very much indeed, but it would be impossible for me to jump into so serious a thing at such short notice. It wouldn't be right. I'm not sure of my own mind."

Silently he turned with her and they walked slowly back toward the lawn. He was fumbling for speech, and at last it came in a rush, as his declaration had come.

" Then, will you consider it, Doris, and give me an answer before I sail?"

Coming rapidly toward them now was Harper, and his face was dark and frowning, more in keeping with his father's character than his own cultivated one. Doris flashed a look at him, then answered quickly:

" Please don't speak of this again—until you come back from your voyage, Ernest. I'll tell you then."

" But—"

" Not another word, please!"

She waved a hand airily at Harper, and ran down a side path leading to the house, leaving the two men face to face. As he came up, and realized some of the thoughts that were fuming in his head, Harper assumed a smile which reached to his lips, but left his eyes unsmiling.

" Come up to my room, Cotterell, and have a smoke," he invited. " It's quite a long time since we had a good, quiet chat together."

" Glad to, old chap," assented his chum. " I'm curious to hear how you're progressing."

In the snug den of the student of theology, better fitted in its frivolous appointments to a sybarite than an ascetic, the sailor was soon aware of some stress of mind between them, and it was not coming from his side, he knew. Harper sat, smoking strong tobacco in a long clay pipe, as one might easily imagine his hard-bitten father doing, and the smoke jetted from his lips in sharp, swift puffs.

Cotterell became uneasy; his own tobacco tasted sour. In their schooldays they had been close chums, sharing honors and escapades alike, and then Harper had been simply a robust, passionate boy, not particularly quick at study, not especially liked at times because of a fiery temper which flew out frequently to the disaster of the game he happened to be playing. But those flashes were brief; all in all Cotterell had liked him. He liked him now, although since attaining manhood he seemed to have changed in a way entirely contrary to what

should be expected in a man entering upon the profession he had chosen.

"What's up, Gerard?"

"Nothing."

Another short interval, filled with growing stress, then:

"But something's worrying you, surely. Aren't you doing well at the college?"

"Fine!" Harper laughed harshly. "I expect to be ordained day after to-morrow. Don't you think I'll make a bully good parson?" The false laughter in his eyes failed to cloak the fierceness of his tone.

"I've no doubt of it at all. But what makes you so glum, then? In trouble?" The question was put in a quiet, kindly voice which placed the hall mark on the sailor's sincerity.

"Trouble? No!" Harper sprang to his feet and stood over his friend. "No trouble but a friend who's playing snake-in-the grass!"

"That's rotten! Who is it? What's he done?"

"It is rotten! To think that one's best chum is no more of a man than to try to cut him out with his sweetheart!"

There was no longer any mistaking Harper's meaning. The sailor got up and faced the glowering student.

"I understand now," he said quietly. "May I ask if you and Doris are engaged?"

"None of your business. Just leave her alone, that's all. She's mine."

"I'll talk to you when you're calmer, Gerard. So-long."

Cotterell took his hat and cane and went out of the door. After him shrilled the warning again:

"She's mine. I warn you to keep away from her."

He left the house and grounds, returning to his own place with none of the elation that had warned him when he set out. Behind him he left a raging fury who slammed and locked his study door and gave himself up to childish exhibitions of temper, which, however, had the intensified bitterness of ungoverned manhood.

Evening fell, and repeated calls to come down to dinner were ignored by the gloomy student. Knocks on his door elicited no response, for, savage though he was, Harper was still sensible to the fact that he was a guest in the house of Doris's people, and yet more sensible of his character as a to-be minister of the church. He dare not show such a face. About eight o'clock a heavy step on the stairs, accompanied by a rumbling, deep-sea growl that passed as a voice, and followed immediately by a thundering, peremptory assault on the door, warned him that his father was paying him a visit. He knew better than to refuse admittance to him.

"Now what's amiss?" the old man demanded, entering the room like a hurricane out of leash. "Damme if you don't look like a hell-fire sort o' parson, skulkin' here like a woman in the sulks! What's bitin' ye?" He seized his son's arm fiercely and swung him around. "Ain't failed to pass, have ye? Or is it the bit o' muslin as is turnin' ye sour?"

"Doris refused to give me an answer. But that isn't—"

"Then ye've failed?" The old man's growl rose to a bellow, threatening, ominous. "Don't dare to tell me that!"

"No; I'm to be ordained in a day or so."

"Then, for the love of the salt seas, what is the fuss? Here be you, goin' to be a full-rigged sky pilot"—the ancient mariner chuckled throatily—"with bell, hook an' candle, or whatever is the gear parsons bend on, and glum as a Straits thunder cloud in midsummer."

"I can't tell you anything, father. Please go away. In the morning I shall be all right. I've been overstudying, I think."

Harper's explanation brought the old man to an abrupt stop in his inquisition. Rugged, fierce of face, gnarled of limb and body, he was the embodiment of passionate old age which held deep in the heart of it a spark of genuine love for the one being left to call it forth. His wrinkled face softened, if such a face could ever be said to soften, and he fumbled in his pocket.

"Here, son, I only came to say how-do, and bring ye some money. Can't let ye run short o' ballast, can I? But ye surely do look tired, now I look close, and I won't bother ye no more. I'll come to see ye

to-morrow. Get a spell o' sleep now, and ye'll be all right. Overstudy, bless the boy!"

More softly than he had come old Harper stumped out, and as the door closed his son pounced upon the money left on the table. Some of the dark passion left his face, and he smiled, a crooked, sophisticated smile.

"Yes, it must be overstudy," he muttered.

Then he flung himself into a deep lounge chair before the window and chuckled, playing with the money in his fingers like a child with a gorgeous toy.

"Just about enough to square up with," he mused, after counting and recounting the money. "That's all right, but—"

Again his face darkened, the frown deepened, there was a startling likeness now to the parent who had just gone, whose past was too dark for publicity. For an hour or more he sat still, gazing into some distant vista only seen by himself. Then he rose and undressed, getting into bed with a remark not in the least like a benediction:

"Roll on, two days! Roll on!"

CHAPTER II.

DEAD SCANDALS BREATHE.

"PAPA! I wish you wouldn't keep on speaking about Gerard. I'm sure he's nothing to me."

Her father had taken Doris into his library on the morning after the tennis party, and was trying to discover exactly what her feelings were toward the young fellow whose behavior of the preceding evening had seemed so strange in a guest. He gazed long and intently into the girl's rosy face, and shook his head, for he knew that, in spite of her assertion, she did think, or had thought, a whole lot about young Harper.

"If that is really so, girly, I am very well satisfied," Mr. Marriot said. "At one time I thought Harper had a bright future to look forward to, but lately he—well, he's changed a lot, and has grown more like his roaring, uncouth father every day."

Doris sat on the arm of his big chair, and her arm was around his neck; but she kept her face averted, and once her slim shoulders quivered. Her father was quick to notice these things. For a moment he averted his own face, when a memory of the girl's dead mother flashed across his brain. Then he put a question to her with quiet kindliness:

"Are you sure Gerard is nothing to you, Doris?"

The girl twisted herself around, slipped into his lap, and burst into tears.

"I don't know, father. Oh, I can't be sure of myself. At times Gerard is everything to me, then at other times I feel afraid of him—I hate him."

He let her have her cry out. The kindliest of fathers, as he was the gentlest of men, he understood exactly the problem with which his girl was faced, and he sought a solution.

His gentleness did not rob him of a shrewd sense of values. His life had been wholly successful because of the combining of his two dominant qualities. He owned, or held leases or concessions on, vast rubber territories in the Amazon country, and it was a byword in commercial circles that Marriot's rubber smelled less of blood and grief than any other that came into the market.

When Doris seemed less troubled he spoke again.

"Look here, girly, I think it won't hurt you to go away for a while. If you don't see or hear anything from young Harper for a few months you will have a chance to learn how your heart really feels toward him, won't you?"

Doris nodded without speaking.

"Then," her father went on, "suppose we take a good long holiday together—go down to our rubber plantations, eh? Best time of the year on the Amazon just now."

Doris was suddenly interested.

"The Amazon? Oh, young Cotterell has just secured his first command—you know him surely—Ernest Cotterell? He sails for Manáos next week. That's on the Amazon, isn't it?"

Marriot smiled indulgently.

"Yes, I know Cotterell quite well. I knew his father, too. An excellent man, and his son looks as if he were going to be

as good a man. But why of all careers did he choose the sea?"

"I think he couldn't see quite clearly the things he was supposed to believe in before he could become a minister."

"H-m! Can't imagine young Harper having scruples like that. But there, let's forget for the time. Perhaps his father owes him more than a career—more than he has a suspicion of. Young Cotterell, though, that seems to be about what we want now."

"We can go in his ship?" The question was full of glad anticipation. She had refused Ernest his answer to a question which meant more than life to him, but she liked him more than she cared to confess, and the prospect of a voyage lost all threat of weariness when it was projected in his ship.

Then the sudden thought came which clouded her gladness.

"But I don't expect we can get passages," she said. "Ernest told me he was chartered to carry an expedition to Manáos."

"That may prevent us going with your friend, of course. But"—the old gentleman's eyes twinkled—"I usually get what I want, if it's getable in a legitimate way, and I'll see about it. Could you pack in the time?"

"I can pack for a year in two days! Oh, I do hope we can go!"

Doris danced away, her recent tears quite swept up by the sunny smile which now turned her fair face into a picture framed in the tawny glory of her unruly hair.

Mr. Marriot called his town car, and, while waiting on the wide veranda, he saw Harper walking swiftly along a path to a little gate half hidden in the greenery. As he went out through the gate another man joined him, and after a brief scrutiny Mr. Marriot stamped his foot with mild anger. He rarely permitted himself to show or even feel anger, believing rightly that the dark emotion tended to shorten and distort life. But what he had seen, following upon his daughter's admission that she did not know how her heart was in respect of Harper, sent the blood in a hot wave to his temples.

"Confound the fellow!" he muttered angrily. "This is about as much as I care to endure. He shall not remain here one day longer, by Jove!"

The fact was, Peter Gordie had been a roommate of Harper's in college. Gordie, like his roommate, perhaps, ought never to have entertained ambitions to the ministry. He was utterly unfitted for such a life. In fact, he had formed a little circle of kindred spirits in college, and what they did not do in the way of ungodly things was scarcely to be done. Harper was not known by Mr. Marriot to have been one of this circle; and when the cancer was cut out by the wholesale expulsion of the delinquents, Gerard had escaped by means best known to himself, and his character, at least publicly, had not suffered.

The man whom he had just gone to meet with such evident eagerness and welcome was Peter Gordie. And since his disgrace Gordie had fallen into devious ways of living with brazen impudence and disregard for the opinions of those who had known him in better days. Mr. Marriot left for town seething with indignation, and it was not until he reached the docks and found Cotterell that he regained his equanimity.

As for Harper, he joined Gordie in the side lane, and they walked briskly toward the little piece of woods behind the grounds. Then, when the shade was reached, Harper realized for the first time that his companion had scarcely spoken to him. Gordie walked beside him with a smile on his face, but with tight-clenched teeth, and as they neared the place where he at length halted he whistled tunelessly through them. Abruptly seizing Harper by the arm, he held out a paper without a word.

Gerard well knew what it was.

"Oh, yes, of course, old chap," he said, with a trace of uneasiness. "Give me a few days more, will you? I want to take my ordination before I ask the old man for more money, you know; then I can gouge him for a bigger lump, d'ye see?"

"This note's due long ago," Gordie snapped. "Take it up now, or—well, perhaps there won't be any ordination for you any more than there was for me."

Gordie laughed harshly, bitterly.

"But, old chap, I can't take it up at this moment. Don't you realize that it will be

much easier, say, in three days' time? I will willingly increase the interest on your note for three days more grace."

Gordie pondered for a brief space, and when he faced his one-time comrade his expression was that of a calculating devil.

"Look here," he snarled; "you were as much in the mess as any of us in that college affair. How you got out of it beats me; it beat us all. Now I'm—well, what I am, and most of the rest of the bunch are either down and out, or driving trucks or something. You, the smug son of an old son of a shark, are to take orders to-morrow, become one of fashion's darlings, and you're sweet on old Marriot's girl. I suppose she's sweet on you, too, for you were always smooth with the ladies. Now listen. Marriot's got all kinds of cash. Speak to him. No, I will give you until this evening. Meet me here, with the money, or the church will lose another damned fine preacher."

"But—but, dash it all, man, Mr. Marriot's gone into town!" blurted Gerard, fear beginning to bite at his soul. "Do be reasonable, old fellow."

"I've been too reasonable, Harper. If you can't get to the old man, get to the girl. She's got money, or if she hasn't I expect she knows where he keeps his house funds. Get it, anyhow, for I won't wait a minute after eight this evening. That's final."

He turned and swung off through the woods, still whistling tunelessly. For a moment Harper glared after him as if about to follow and beat the life from him. In that moment there was a devil out of hell blazing from his eyes. His face went so dark that it looked black in the shadowy woods. With a great effort he shook off his longing to feel life oozing from between his fingers, and the revulsion changed his face to blank, deathly white.

He retraced his steps to the house, trembling like a leaf, and went to his room and bathed in ice cold water to restore his poise. Then, after long consideration, he went in search of Doris.

"Miss Doris is busy now, sir." The maid spoke curtly.

The world again spun about him. There was no mistaking the maid's tone. At other times the servants had been ready to serve him at all hours, rather glad to oblige the handsome young man who might one day have to marry them and baptize their offspring. But Doris's own maid, who had often received a tip from him in his more generous moments, and who usually would even disobey her mistress in a harmless way to oblige him, now spoke to him and looked at him, as if he were out of bounds in that house where he was a guest.

Gloomily he went back to his own room, and locked himself in. From a drawer in his writing table he took out a small book, and pored over pages of accounts for hours. Every page in that small notebook represented a debt to somebody outside either house or college. The money his father gave him the night before just about covered all the amounts.

He had forgoten Gordie, and his ominous note, though that ought never to have left his mind until settled, for Gordie, in that note, held over him a portentous threat.

No man whose habits were such as to call for a note of hand like that could be admitted into the church, and now he realized it with full, terrific force.

No amount of thought gave him anything but a black outlook. His father, he knew, would want to know the reason if he made a request for money so soon after an allowance had been paid him. As for asking Doris, now that the impulse had cooled, even his hardened conscience quailed at the idea.

To ask Mr. Marriot himself was equivalent to anticipating failure, for the old gentleman knew very well that Harper senior made his son very ample allowances, and a student of theology may fairly be assumed to possess no expensive habits at least.

A walk, during which he sought for Doris in every part of the grounds, failed also to comfort him. With something like despair in his breast he took one of the estate boats and let himself drift about the small, reedy lake.

Hour after hour passed, with the sun beating down upon him. His temper smoldered ever more fiercely as his puzzle grew denser. He heard the car return from town,

and knew by the shadows that it must be getting near time to dress for dinner. Still he drifted on, back and forth, only exerting himself to push the boat away whenever she nosed into the reedy margins.

The first bell rang in the house, and he aroused, not for dinner, but because eight o'clock was nearer hand than he cared to think. Peter Gordie would keep his threat, that was certain.

"I'll let the rest go and offer him what cash I have," was the decision he at last arrived at. The amount of funds he had received from the old man did not one-quarter cover Gordie's demand, but it was the best he could do, and in a measure the decision calmed him. He was certain, when he dared think of it, that Gordie would scarcely rest satisfied, but he hoped that he might persuade him, by some of the eloquence which was in future to bring him his daily bread and honey, to have patience at least for a while now that he had part of his debt in hand.

Those other debts were not of a sort that could safely be ignored, either. With the ordinary college student, perhaps, they might have been glossed over as representing the peccadilloes of exuberant youth, but a man who essays to represent the great and lowly Nazarene is expected not to possess quite the worldly vices and predilections of the commoner herd.

There was a goodly strain of egotism running through Harper's make-up, and he fondly persuaded himself that what he did must either be right, or could be made right.

The calm that had followed his inadequate resolve induced him to go down to dinner when the bell rang, and he was greeted by some of the guests like a beloved friend who had suffered an illness. By others he was regarded with strange coolness. Most conspicuous of all were the Marriots, father and daughter, who greeted him as if they barely knew him, but were constrained by common courtesy to be polite. That was what stung. Politeness from Doris!

He went through dinner smitten by a sense of calamity. And Mr. Marriot's steady gray eyes, seemingly ever fixed on him, held a promise of more to come.

With a shock he noted the time and immediately rose from his chair, making his excuses to Doris as hostess. It was already ten minutes to eight. Peter Gordie had said eight o'clock. He would not wait.

"One minute, Harper. I want to speak to you. Wait a few minutes, and—"

It was Mr. Marriot speaking, and the tone more than the words increased Harper's already overwhelming uneasiness.

"Pardon me, sir," he stammered, his hand on the back of his chair, "but I have a most important appointment at eight o'clock, which I had forgotten. I can just make it if I hurry."

"What I have to say to you is rather more important, I imagine. Please—"

Harper sat down. The tablecloth turned black before his eyes. Out of a foggy curtain, which unaccountably pervaded the brightly lighted room, the laughing, healthy faces of his friends leered at him like death's heads; innocent fingers cracking nuts were pointed at him *in grim accusation!*

CHAPTER III.

EVIL FACES.

COTTERELL—Captain Cotterell now—was in a state of elation again. As he stood on his bridge the day after Mr. Marriott's visit, watching the busy scene on decks and wharf, his world seemed shrouded in a golden mist, out of which peeped promise of untold good things to come.

Men who passed him, and his two officers especially, stole sly glances at him from a distance, for every few minutes he would slap his thigh and whistle, not tunelessly, like Peter Gordie, but with a note of happiness such as a bird welcomes the morning sun with.

"By gracious! It's all coming my way at last," he chuckled. "What a piece of luck old Brickley isn't a bear. Gave up rooms to Marriot like a lamb—and now Doris won't be able to run away from me for weeks!"

His happiness made him think of the welfare of others. Gone was all memory of his chum's surly dismissal. There was no

room in his heart for anything but good feeling. He thought of Gerard's ordination, and remembered that the great event was to happen to-day—had happened, in fact. He ran down the gangway and hurried to the dock office to telephone.

When he emerged, much of the joy had gone from his face, giving place to doubt, fear, then sorrowful unbelief. He had called up the Marriot's house, and learned with a shock that Harper had been asked to leave. No explanation was given; merely the bald statement made by the butler, who didn't know where the gentleman had gone, but supposed he had gone to his own home near by.

He went back, and called up the Harpers. For a moment he had a wild notion of calling up the bishop, but he repressed the idea, knowing that a solemn affair like an ordination was rather outside the realms of daily business. But at the Harpers he got no further ahead. Old Harper himself answered the telephone, and his growling voice made the receiver vibrate again.

"How the devil do I know where the boy is?" came the growl. "Ain't he bein' made into a full-rigged parson to-day? What? No, of course he ain't here! He's stayin' at the Marriot's place. Oh, go to blazes! I'm busy waitin' for him to come home in his new war paint. G'-by!" And the talk was summarily cut off at the other end.

Duties called him away frequently, and Cotterell forgot all about his chum's affairs for several hours. But when the day's work was done, and the steamer lay quiet and dim in the gathering dusk, he bethought himself again of Harper. He sent his boy ashore to buy the papers, which he knew took interest in church doings, and eagerly scanned the list of newly ordained ministers.

The first perusal only caused him to frown in annoyance at the poor light. A second perusal under the bright lamps of the saloon brought a cry of unbelief from his lips.

"It can't be that they've plucked him! The reporters have left his name out by accident. Just what they would do," he laughed, "when everybody is waiting to read the news."

The one fact outstanding was that Gerard Harper's name was certainly not among those of the newly ordained clergymen. Cotterell ate his supper in silence, thinking it over; then ship's papers claimed his attention until bedtime, for in the morning his charter party were due to arrive with all their paraphernalia.

Promptly at nine o'clock next day the leader of the expedition showed up, accompanied by another man and followed by truckloads of cases and personal effects.

"Can I see you for a few minutes, captain?" smiled the leader.

Cotterell led him below and ushered him into the large stateroom retained for him. Jabez Brickley was a big man in every visible way. Taller than Cotterell, who stood nearly six feet, he weighed probably two hundred pounds; and apparently his life had been passed in pleasant places, for his ruddy, chubby face was one huge smile. His pudgy hands were smooth and well kept. Upon the forefinger of the right he wore a curious silver ring, set with some strange stone not in the catalogues of jewel merchants. He had a pair of small, twinkling, blue eyes which struck the captain as queerly cold. His red, thick lips were parted in a smile, showing even, white teeth, one of which was stopped with gold.

"When do our passengers come aboard?" he asked.

"To-morrow evening, sir. We sail on the morning tide the next day, unless you have other orders."

"Excellent, my friend; excellent. It's good to be able to help out a fellow man, isn't it?"

"I think it very good of you to permit Mr. Marriot to take passage, sir." Cotterell could have ignored the cold quality of his employer's blue eyes even if they had been icicles; for by his favor Doris was to sail in his ship, his first charge.

"Oh, that's nothing—nothing at all," beamed Brickley. He rubbed his pudgy hands together softly. "I know something of Mr. Marriot, of course, or I might not have consented. He's quite a power in the financial world, I understand. And hasn't his daughter grown into a lovely woman? I haven't seen her since she wore short frocks."

"She has, indeed, sir. She is one in a million."

"Ha! So you see I might have been influenced, hey?"

Cotterell glanced sharply at the big man. There was a note in his remark which jarred. But his wide, red face showed nothing except smiling good humor, and immediately he swung the subject around to business.

"All my stuff is on the dock now, captain. Skeats is looking after the stowing of it. Have you attended to the berths for the men?"

"Twenty bunks put up in the 'tween-decks, sir, and I think we've made the place comfortable. Rather difficult, you see, to change a cargo hold into living quarters at such short notice."

"It 'll serve—it 'll serve, my friend. We must attend to any further conveniences on the way. And the berths here?"

"Mr. Marriot and his daughter have the after starboard cabins. This, of course, is your own, and Mr. Skeats and the three other gentlemen have the port side rooms."

"And yours? Your officers?"

"All on the bridge deck. My room is under the bridge itself."

"H-m! That's all right, then. Now, this is a perfectly innocent expedition. No filibustering, or anything like that." Brickley's smile broadened. He oozed innocence. "But these museum folks seem to think all such explorations ought to be left to them, you know, and I don't want them nosing into my affairs. There's too much at stake. Got a lot of inside dope on the Inca relics down in Bolivia, d'ye see. So—how far can you steam without coaling?"

"At a fair speed, say eleven knots, I think we can make Manáos. I've taken in extra fuel in the after hold, that being empty. It helps trim the ship."

"Then that's about all, captain. Stick to your sailing time. It's quite satisfactory. Now come on deck and let me introduce Mr. Skeats to you. He's my lieutenant, you know, and quite a character in his way."

Skeats was indeed a character. Cotterell's first sight of him gave him a shock. He expected to find the chief aid to such a man as Brickley at least a gentleman in appearance. Skeats turned out to be a withered, cunning-faced little cockney, speaking a queer jargon, acting like nothing so much as a deckhand of the commonest type. Redheaded he could scarcely be termed. He had no hair at all to speak of. Instead, his scalp was covered with a pale, pinkish fuzz, which lay like baby-down close to the skin. Across his forehead, reaching one eyelid, which hung partly over his eye, was a lurid scar that made his wizen face look more monkeylike than ever.

"Pleased t' meet yer, guv'nor," he rasped in accepting Brickley's introduction. Cotterell then noticed that the hand the little cockney held out was horribly disfigured and distorted. "Beg y' pawdon, cap'n, I got a pile o' work," he added, and left abruptly, returning to the hatch down which the expedition's impedimenta was vanishing smartly.

"Queer chap, that, sir," remarked Cotterell, following Skeats with his eyes. "Known him long?"

"Oh, yes; years. Jerry Skeats is a rough diamond, you'll find. But he's just the man I want for this trip."

"Looks more like a beachcombing sailor to me, sir, if I may say so without offense."

"He'd probably agree with you, my friend—without offense. But one cannot always judge fairly by looks, remember."

Long afterward Cotterell remembered those words, and the low, chesty rumble of laughter that accompanied them.

That evening he was seized with an almost uncontrollable desire to visit Doris. Then the thought that the house must be in an uproar of packing restrained him. But he again thought of Harper, and decided to run out to his home and try to find out what had happened.

The train took him there quickly, and he walked up to the house, which stood back in wide grounds. An oppressive sensation assailed him as he entered the great front gates—a sensation similar to what he had once experienced upon entering an old tomb.

No lights shone in the windows. There seemed no life about the place. The trees whispered in the soft breeze as if to warn

the intruder back. Cotterell shivered as he rang the door bell, and waited anxiously for a response. Faintly he heard the pad of feet in the hall. Then arose the old seaman's voice in fury.

"Keep that door shut! Don't dare to let anybody in here this night!"

The footsteps receded, and again silence descended over the house. Then a window in the upper story opened cautiously, and Cotterell stepped back to look. He saw the old man's head and shoulders protruding, and called out quickly:

"Captain Harper, it's Cotterell. Ernest Cotterell, Gerard's chum. Is Gerard at home? Did he take his—"

"Get out! Out, I tell ye! Leave me alone, ye damned interloper. Are ye goin'? One—two—"

"Why, what's the matter?" stammered Cotterell in amazement.

He was answered in startling fashion by the blazing roar of a shotgun. The gravel beside him was churned up by the shot.

"Now are ye gettin' out? And if ye see that whelp o' Satan who calls me father, tell him the other bar'l's waitin' fer him."

Utterly mystified, Cotterell departed. He had no doubt at all that the old scoundrel would blaze away again if he stayed, and perhaps to more purpose. All the way back to the ship he worked over the puzzle, but could not unravel it. There was a deep and unwholesome mystery hanging over young Harper, that was certain. But what it was proved beyond him. The one thing clear was that whatever had happened had turned old Harper into a raving maniac with regard to his lately idolized son.

"I'll sleep on it," decided the young sailor, as he turned in late that night.

Morning brought too much work for his attention to wander often to his late chum. The Marriot's baggage came down in midforenoon, and he saw it deposited himself. Then there were the books he had selected, to be set in Doris's room as soon as the carpenter had completed the bookcase. And during the afternoon the remainder of Brickley's expedition arrived in ones and twos, giving plenty of work for the ship's crew. They also gave the young skipper much ground for thought.

The three men who were to travel in the saloon were outwardly of the type to be expected on such a voyage; even more than Brickley did, they seemed to emanate an aura of good-natured ease. But they were sunburnt, outdoor men, lathy and agile, strong of hand and bright of eye. They caused no uneasiness in the breast of Captain Cotterell. Rather, he felt drawn to them, more so than to Brickley.

But the men, twenty of them, who slung their bags and chests into the hold, and followed after to take up their berths, were a mixed lot, indeed. Some of them undoubtedly were sailors. Their manner of descending the hatch showed that. Others were as indubitably old soldiers, stiff, precise in their movements, alert in every muscle and fiber. Then there were a few whose faces, turned aft for a moment before going down, revealed souls which could hardly relish the embarkation upon so peaceful an expedition as Brickley said this was.

"By gracious, that's a tough lot!" A soft laugh at Cotterell's shoulder answered him.

"Again, my dear captain, one should not judge by looks," purred Brickley.

CHAPTER IV.

THE STOWAWAY.

THE Madeira was clear of the harbor and steaming out into the broad ocean before any of the passengers came on deck next morning. Cotterell paced his bridge in ecstasy, not entirely due to the thrill of taking his first command to sea. Doris Marriot had thanked him so prettily the evening before for his thoughtfulness in providing the books for her, and had given him so bright, so frankly, friendly a smile, that now, in the early dawning of a glorious summer day, his horizon was bounded with a quiet rapture proof against whatever might turn up in the way of surprises or untoward events.

The clanging of the breakfast bell awoke him from his colorful day dreams. With a brief order to the second mate regarding the course, he left the bridge and went to his room to tidy himself for the saloon

meal. He was singing softly to himself as he shut the door and poured water into the basin. Then, turning to hang up his coat before washing his hands, his song was stopped, he stood with the coat half raised to the hook, and his lower jaw dropped.

"Gerard! How did you come here?" he stammered.

Harper crawled out from the wardrobe, where he had been hidden all night, and stumbled forward with hands outstretched and a look of agonized appeal on his face.

"For God's sake, hide me!" he panted. "Don't give me up."

He was dirty with the grime of road and dock. His hair hung disheveled over his blazing eyes. His clothes looked as if he had ridden countless leagues under a freight train. His lips quivered piteously.

Cotterell locked the door. Then he led Harper to the settee, and made him sit down.

"How did you get here?" he repeated. "What has happened? I tried to find you at home—"

Harper laughed harshly, mirthlessly.

"Don't waste time now, old chap. What I want you to do is to hide me. I wasn't at home. I wasn't ordained. The old man has gone back on me. *I've killed Peter Gordie!*" The assumed coolness left him. His face went drawn and haggard again, and he reiterated: "For God's sake, keep me out of sight until you lose the land."

In Cotterell's character was a deep stratum of loyalty, which impelled him to shelter a friend even though that friend had transgressed. Gordie he only knew by reputation. But what he had heard of the man only strengthened his purpose now. Any other procedure save that of helping his chum never entered into his calculations for one minute. He rang for his boy, and met him at the door.

"Bring my breakfast up here," he said. "Explain to Mr. Brickley that I am unable to come down for a while. And when you come back bring me a tin of cabin biscuit and a big piece of cheese. Always keep some in my room, understand?"

"Yes, sir." The boy locked the door behind him again.

Cotterell thought deeply while waiting for the breakfast to be brought. What could he do with Harper? The boy must sooner or later enter the room to clean it and make up the bed. There was no outlet except through the one door. Any one passing from the room must pass one of the bridge ladders and a companionway door.

"Of course you must stay on board now, Gerard. But what to do with you I don't know. Did you know that the Marriots are on board?"

Harper leaped to his feet, fear and shame battling for expression on his face. "No! You don't mean that! Tell me—" He babbled in broken, halting sentences.

Cotterell nodded.

"Don't let them see me! I daren't let them see me! Don't you understand, Cotterell, what this means to me? Doris to see me like this, a fugitive—"

The boy knocked on the door, and the captain took in the tray, locking the door again and telling the boy not to come back until he was sent for. Then, curtly bidding his unwelcome guest eat, he fell to pacing the floor, deeper in thought than ever. Harper fell upon the food like one famished, while his friend, upon whom his very life depended, as it seemed, nibbled a dry biscuit and strove with the problem. He knew very well that Harper had looked upon Doris as his own. Had it not been hurled at him in Harper's own den? For one dark moment the temptation came to reveal his disgraced chum's presence. That would effectually clear his own way with the girl. The thought was put from him fiercely.

He stood before the round port glass facing forward, trying to find a solution of the puzzle, and as he stared along the decks Jerry Skeats hopped up over the hatch coaming and hurried aft, delayed from his own breakfast by attention to the comforts of the men below.

Sight of him gave Cotterell an idea. He saw that Harper had almost cleared the dishes.

"Finished?" he asked. "Then come along with me quickly. At present all who know you as Gerard Harper are in the saloon. They will be up shortly, though.

Hurry up, man! I'm not going to put you in irons."

Suspiciously Harper followed him. They went over the bridge deck, down to the main deck, and over the hatch which led to the quarters of the expedition's rank and file. As they stood on the lower deck they were greeted with muttered remarks concerning ship masters who could not wait for inspection until decent men finished eating.

" See here, men," began Cotterell, " who is your leading hand?"

" No such thing, skipper," replied a man with his mouth full of bacon. " No leading hands here, barring Brickley and Skeats. All equal this trip."

" So much the better. See, here's a man who was working late last night and went to sleep on board. We can't put back to land him, and I've no room for him anywhere. Can he stay down here? I'll have a bunk put up for him and see to it that rations are added to your stores for him."

" S' long as he behaves himself he won't bother us. If he does, it 'll be his own funeral, cap'n. Where d'ye say he slept—in the dust hole?"

" You'll be all right here," Cotterell told Gerard. " I'll send down some clothes. And "—he dropped his tone—" if I were you, I'd make friends with these chaps. They can either make you comfortable or run you out, d'ye see?"

The warning had been necessary, for Harper had forgotten his status for the moment and was inclined to look superciliously upon these rough and ready voyagers.

With a vast load off his mind, the skipper returned to his cabin and finished up what food was left. Then he felt free to meet anybody who appeared, for there remained no outward sign of the presence on board of the amazing stowaway.

Impatient though he was to see Doris, Cotterell paced the bridge far into the forenoon before he received the reward of his waiting. On the foredeck the lower deck passengers had gathered in groups, apparently undecided how to pass the time thus early in the long voyage. Presently they formed smaller parties, and speedily a half dozen card games were under way. That these were true adventurers was evident; for the stakes were real money, and gold glittered among the cards.

As the games and the time went on, each man's individual peculiarities became manifest. Laughter and joking contrasted with growling and cursing. Once a knife flashed swiftly into sight.

" Drop that!" rasped a voice from the lower bridge deck, and the knife was put back, the man who had drawn it slouching over his cards like a whipped slave.

Before Cotterell could even think who the owner of that authoritative voice was, a little cry floated up to him from just beneath his feet:

" Oh!" and a ripple of enjoyment followed.

He leaped down the ladder in two jumps and landed beside Doris. She greeted him gladly, and her face was glowing with pleasurable excitement.

" Did you see that?" She laughed again.

" Not afraid, are you?"

" Afraid? Not a bit. That was simply splendid, Ernest—I mean Captain Cotterell." She flashed him a saucy look.

" But I heard you cry out."

" Yes, in sheer enjoyment. Do you know, I've been looking over the books you so kindly put into my room, and in 'The Woman in White' I saw a description of a fat man called Bosco, or Fosco, or something, who beat his wife and made canaries do tricks. Well, this reminded me of that."

" I must be dense this morning," he laughed. " I don't get the joke."

" Stupid! Didn't you notice the whiplash in Mr. Brickley's voice just now?"

" Oh, it was Brickley, was it? That's surprising, too. He doesn't look as if he could speak like that, does he?"

" I'm not sure now. I watched his eyes at breakfast. Anyhow, he reminds me of the canary man, whatever his name was. I believe he could, on occasion, beat his wife and eat his children." Doris laughed again, looking as if her expressed belief was purest fiction. " And you saw how he made his birds do tricks, didn't you?"

" I see," smiled Cotterell. " But they look very unlike canaries, don't they?"

"Perhaps; but there are other birds, you know."

Brickley and Mr. Marriot were heard talking together on the other side of the chart room, and presently both appeared. Mr. Marriot greeted the skipper cordially. Brickley took Doris by the arm and led her away, chatting gayly, to the skipper's annoyance. He could not show his chagrin, however, for the man was his employer, and Mr. Marriot exhibited an inclination to be sociable.

"What do you think of the expedition, captain?" the old gentleman smiled, proffering a cigar.

"So far as I can see, they are plain, rough men, sir. One expects such fellows on such errands. Mr. Brickley and his friends in the saloon seem to be gentlemen, I think."

"Oh, yes—particularly Brickley. He's the most interesting talker I have met in some time. Knows about everything, and has the Amazon and Bolivia at his finger ends. His head is a veritable map of that most bewildering region around the river. But Fraser and Stubbs and Percy, his associates, are quiet men. I don't believe they spoke three words apiece at breakfast. They're snooping around the engine room now. They can make friends if they can't talk. Perhaps one thing explains the other."

"How about Skeats, sir?" Cotterell grinned softly, for he was curious to know Mr. Marriot's opinion of the withered little man.

"That's the most astounding member of the party!" Mr. Marriot gave a little shrug. "He scarcely opens his mouth except to put something in it, yet when he does speak even Brickley shuts up. I positively thought I once saw fear in Brickley's eyes when Skeats snapped at him."

Perhaps the most disquieting thing that came to Cotterell's notice was the intimacy that sprang up, mushroomlike, between the wolfish little cockney and Harper. On the second day out, feeling entirely at peace with the world after sundry delicious moments spent with Doris, Cotterell began to calculate how he might render Harper's lot less like that of a prisoner. He was too human not to feel a little bit glad that his rival was temporarily out of the way, but he was too loyal a chum not to see the awful lonesomeness of that hidden life below decks, in company with strangers of the kind which constituted the passenger list down there.

The only way to brighten things was to give up an hour or so of his own time after dark, and get Harper out on deck somewhere out of the way of intrusion by those who knew him. This he did. After the saloon supper, that second evening out, when the decks were cloaked in soft, whispering darkness, he walked forward, leaned over the coaming of the hatch, and called down for Harper.

"What is it?" demanded Harper in a tense whisper. His face, illumined faintly by the hanging lamp swinging to a beam near by, showed panic. It required no very keen perception to see he was suffering violently from nerves. Not yet was the land so far astern that he could feel entirely secure. Besides, there was that in his dark soul which forbade him believing wholly in his friend. There was wireless overhead, ports at hand, and police—

"What's the matter, Cotterell?"

"Come up, man. I want you to get some fresh air and have a smoke with me. You must be almost crazy bottled up below there. Come on up. The decks are clear now. You can enjoy security for an hour at least. I've brought you a pipe and some of the hard tobacco you used to like so."

"Cert'nly! Go up, mate. 'S all right, give yer my word."

The voice struck Cotterell literally all of a heap. It was the voice of Jerry Skeats, and on top of it appeared the pink-fuzzed head of the little man himself, his piercing, tiny eyes glinting as he grinned at the skipper.

"Sort o' took to this chap, we have, guv'nor," he volunteered. "Proper sport when we got 'im to spout a piece, we found 'im. 'E's all to the kiff, no error. Leave 'im to me and the chaps below."

Harper clambered out, forestalling any further confidences of Skeats, and joined Cotterell with slightly exaggerated eagerness. Skeats grinned after them, then left

them to return to his men in the hold; for though he was a cabin passenger, and apparently one of the most important, his time seemed spent almost entirely in the company of the men whom he most resembled in type.

The skipper cut up a pipeful of plug, filled a new pipe, and handed it to his friend without remark. Together they paced the fore deck for a while, Harper's pipe blazing fiercely, his hands sunk deeply into his pockets. It was not a part of Cotterell's intention to pry into the other's soul. He felt a keen curiosity about the causes of Harper's running away, but though he had heard sufficient from his own lips to whet his curiosity still more, he refrained from questioning him. All in good time the thing would come out.

At the third or fourth turn aft Harper suddenly stopped, gripped Cotterell's arm, and made a statement which staggered the skipper.

CHAPTER V.

A STRANGE PROPOSAL.

"COTTERELL, I didn't crib!" he said fiercely. "I played the giddy fool, disgraced myself in a hundred ways, made a mockery of the holy business I was entering—but that thing I did not do."

"Why, I don't understand, Gerard—"

Harper went on as if the other had not spoken.

"I played cards with the Gordie crowd, for stakes far too high for me. We all drank, and altogether it was a shameful sort of life we lived in college—just that little crowd. We ought all to have been stricken dead or paralyzed, if justice were done. But I swear I did not crib those papers and copy them!"

Cotterell remained silent. Thus, he felt, might he best come at the reason for that forfeited ordination.

"Listen, Ernest. I got into a mess with Gordie. I owed him a lot of money—owed money all around, in fact, but nothing I couldn't settle except to him. I wanted him to wait. After his expulsion he needed cash and began to press me. He was not inexorable until the time approached for me to stand before the bishop. Then he came down on me like a ton of bricks. Gave me a definite time in which to pay, with the threat that if I did not stump up there would be no ordination for me.

"I had got a little money from my father that day, and I had decided to try to induce Gordie to take that on account, waiting a while for the rest; for I knew, once I had taken orders, the old man would give me almost anything I asked for. Then Mr. Marriot prevented me keeping the appointment with Gordie—kept me beyond the hour politely to rake over my faults and ask me to quit his house!"

Harper laughed bitterly. "A dog and his bad name—you know the story! Next bolt to fall out of the sky was a plain message from the bishop's chaplain himself, to the effect that it might be well for me to refrain from attending the ordination. It had been discovered, and proved, that my last examination papers had been cribbed, stolen. Oh, you know the trick; a schoolboy doesn't do it in these days.

"I think I went mad. I know I sought the chaplain out, and demanded an explanation in angry words which soon got me gently placed outside, leaving within the sure conviction that I was guilty. From there I sought Gordie, and until I came on board here I never slept or entered a house. I found Gordie where I expected to, in the gambling den he keeps. He taunted me. I took him outside—I fought him like a beast—and left him on the ground with a bloody pool under his head."

Harper shuddered, his grip tightening hard upon his chum's arm. Cotterell's mind was in a daze. He had never imagined that his friend, wild though he knew his boyish passions had been, would go so deeply into the mire while preparing himself for such a profession. It occurred to him that there was, after all, some method in old Captain Harper's madness on that last night visit.

"They told the old man, of course," Harper went on in low, sullen tones. "I heard that by chance. And I haven't a friend in the world now. Maybe I deserved it, Ernest"—he gazed wistfully into the

other's face—"but I didn't cheat in my papers. Gordie gasped that confession out under my own hands. He planted the germ in the old bishop's brain, and supplied the evidence when I failed to keep the appointment to pay him my debt. But I didn't crib—I didn't cheat, by God, I didn't! Cotterell, don't look at me like that, man! Don't you believe me?"

"Hush! You'll attract attention," Cotterell warned. "Of course I believe you. But it seems to me that the fault you deny is scarcely the one which threatens you with consequences. The Gordie business is the—"

He was interrupted by the swift, silent disappearance of Harper down the hatchway. For a moment he was bewildered, for he scarcely imagined that mere mention of Gordie would send his chum into panic. Presently he knew the reason for that sudden flight. Brickley came down the ladder from the bridge deck, and with him Doris, chatting gayly.

They approached the hatchway, near by which the skipper stood irresolute, and then it was too late for him to think of avoiding them. He had wished not to be found forward at that hour by Brickley, simply because Brickley was emphatically not a fool, and he would certainly ask questions, since it was scarcely part of a master's duties personally to dig into the forward end of his ship's business while he had two very able mates.

"Oh, here's Captain Cotterell." Doris's escort replied in a tone which revealed annoyance, but she went on, speaking to Cotterell: "Mr. Brickley is going to take me down to see the men's quarters. He tells me they are quite wonderful men."

"I wouldn't do that, Mr. Brickley," the skipper said hastily.

"Why? My men are as harmless as tame cats, captain."

"Perhaps they are, sir. But this is no time of the day for a lady to intrude upon their privacy. I'm sure neither they nor Miss Marriot will thank you for it."

By every possible means he must prevent Doris going down there, now or at any time. Cotterell moved until he stood over the hatchway ladder.

"But they won't mind a bit, captain. I'm their employer, you know—as I am yours," he added with a little bite in his voice. "Miss Doris will enjoy meeting them. You've no idea what interesting rascals I have down there."

"In daylight, then." Cotterell sparred for time.

Brickley waved him aside with a laugh, and beckoned Doris to step over the hatch coaming. His red face was smiling, his blue eyes twinkled in the starlight.

"I want to go, Ernest."

Doris flashed up at Cotterell a staggering little smile which all but routed his determination to prevent her. But he thought of Harper, cringing in some dark corner, like a hunted animal, fearful of being found in such straits by the girl he had loved, still loved, would love forever.

"I'm sorry, Miss Marriot, but I cannot allow this," he stated decisively. "Some time, when I inspect the quarters, you may come. But not now. Mr. Brickley, please don't insist. You are my employer, it's true, but you placed me in command of this steamer, and this is my ruling. Miss Marriot cannot go down there until I have assured myself that the place is in fit condition for a lady to inspect it."

This last reason came to him in a flash, and he seized upon it. Brickley's little eyes glittered coldly, but he never lost his smooth smile nor his calm. He acquiesced to the skipper's ruling with a laugh, turning with an apology to Doris.

Cotterell felt that his victory was a doubtful one. He sensed the true state of Brickley's feelings, and knew that he had perhaps made an enemy. But far more vital to him was the knowledge that Doris left him, on Brickley's arm, pouting and angry with him for preventing her exploration of the hold.

"It's always the way," he muttered grimly. "Do your best for people, and they misunderstand you and somebody else gets the reward."

His opinion seemed destined to prove the right one. As the days flowed tranquilly by, and the steamer made rapid southing, it became more and more evident that he had lost Doris's favor. Hour after hour

she spent in the company of Brickley, and her laughter was ever to be heard in chorus with his smooth voice as he related to her stories of travel weird and enthralling.

Mr. Marriot, too, fell under the spell of the big leader, spending much of the time in his company, with Doris or without. Cotterell was alone, except for his daily associations with his officers, and his nightly walk with Harper in the shadowy parts of the fore deck. The three members of the expedition, Fraser, Stubbs and Percy, were apparently thoroughly established with the engine room force. Except at meals, they were rarely to be seen, unless going or coming between the engine room and their cabins.

Jerry Skeats spent most of his time below with the men. He would have been far more at home had he taken his berth with them. Cotterell found himself wondering at times why the withered little man did not change his quarters, until one day in the northern tropics he got a hint.

"Came past the hatch, sir, and peeped down, hearing sharp voices," the second mate said with a grin. "That pink-haired little cockney's drilling 'em, sir!"

"Drilling them?" echoed Cotterell incredulously. "Drilling them at what?"

"Like soldiers, sir. Just the same as a sergeant with an awkward squad; only these men are no greenhorns at the game. They handle their guns like veterans, sir."

"Guns? Are you dreaming, or crazy?"

"Neither, I hope, sir. They were drilling with real modern rifles and bayonets. And the way they jumped when that little man spoke to 'em made me laugh. Yes, sir, he spoke quiet and low, but there's something devilish in his voice that makes a man take notice."

Thankful for the first time that Harper was on board, the skipper waited impatiently for night, in order to question him. He lived all his days down there, and must know or have seen something. When he joined Harper at last, far forward by the spare water tanks on deck to avoid all possibility of eavesdropping, he went straight to the point.

"Gerard, what's this drilling business going on below?"

Harper hesitated. Then he glanced, slyly it seemed, into the skipper's troubled face and laughed shortly.

"Isn't it just what one would expect of an expedition going into the wilds? I've seen nothing down there except the natural expectancy toward the outcome of the venture to be looked for in such men. Drill? Yes, they drill every day, with rifle and bayonet, and I can tell you, old fellow, they're the real thing."

"So it seems. Here"—Cotterell suddenly laid his hand on the other's shoulder and peered into his eyes—"I am shielding you at grave risk to myself. I don't want trouble in my ship. In your case I am willing to go on taking risks, for friendship's sake, but I won't stand any queer business from others. Tell me straight, are these men plotting anything against the ship?"

"Why, you suspicious old hero? Of course they are not. If they were, don't you think I would tell you, with Doris on board? Look, it's you who are arousing notice now. Be easy."

For the rest of the time he spent with the stowaway the skipper kept his thoughts to himself. When they parted at the hatchway Cotterell took aft with him an uneasy feeling that Harper was insincere.

The South American coast was within a day's steaming before anything occurred to strengthen his doubts as to the true purpose of that expedition. His nights had been rendered sleepless for many a watch after the discovery of those drilling sessions; but nothing happened, nothing seemed likely to happen, and gradually he fell into a state of watchful waiting for something to which he dared not put a name. Eventually, when his first port, Para, was within reach, he persuaded himself that his fears had been without reason.

"After all," he argued, "what is there here for a gang to turn pirates for? All there is in the ship is theirs, and it isn't likely that Marriot carries enough cash on him to pay for such a big outfit. It's doubtful if any ransom he might pay would make it worth while to go to such an amount of trouble."

Mr. Marriot himself lived his daily life devoid of suspicion or fear. In Brickley

he had found a congenial fellow voyager, and when the big, florid man found time to spare from his almost hourly promenades with Doris he spent it with her father, spinning him endless yarns of the wilds and their denizens.

Apparently, as the end of the voyage drew near, Brickley opened out more, for one afternoon, when Cotterell was smoking a cigar on the after deck, Marriot joined him. Lately, since a day or so after he had refused to permit Doris to go below, Cotterell had noticed a slight coolness grow up between Mr. Marriot and himself. In his anxiety over Harper he had allowed it to pass, not caring, or perhaps not daring, to open a subject which might lead to awkward explanations.

He wondered, too, why Harper's existence had not been revealed through Skeats. If Brickley knew of it, he had made neither sound nor sign to announce the fact. If he knew, it was patent that the knowledge did not bother him in the least. Now, with Mr. Marriot showing an inclination to talk, he expected to hear something worth while.

"Captain Cotterell, have you ever noticed anything peculiar about Mr. Brickley's associates?" the old gentleman began.

"I thought so once, sir, but I have swept all such notions aside. It seems to me that I, the master of this steamer, am more in the dark than anybody on board. Even my passengers know more of the business of the expedition than I."

"Oh, I don't mean about the expedition. I mean about the men individually. Haven't you heard anything of their expectations? Aside from Inca relics, I mean?"

"I have heard little; nothing of any value. In fact, I have decided to carry on as skipper of the ship, not bothering my head about the charter party. In that way I get more sleep."

Mr. Marriot was silent for a moment. He peered slyly at the skipper, then remarked with a smile, half incredulous, half whimsical: "So you don't know that friend Brickley expects to find himself a nation to govern, or that his comrades in the saloon are filled with ambition to become generals, admirals, counselors, and what not?"

"Rot!" Cotterell laughed heartily. "That sort of thing was played out years ago. Nobody wants to form an expensive party like this, chartering his own ship, to capture the brass crown of a lot of muddy, swamp-smelling Indians."

"But I understand the crowns may be gold, and that the Indians may not be muddy or swamp-smelling, but white!"

"Fiction!"

"He's asked me to invest some money in it," pursued Mr. Marriot thoughtfully. "You see, he's going into the country behind the region where my rubber plantations are, and he says his newly discovered territory is thick with rubber trees, besides having other resources. I'm half inclined to take a flyer."

"I think you are too shrewd to buy a gold brick, Mr. Marriot. Let this queer expedition alone, is my advice. I shall be glad to have 'em out of the ship, for one."

"But I understand you will be retained in Manáos, at least for six months, until Brickley decides that his venture is to pan out right. So you won't be rid of them, you know."

It was not until the ship had entered and cleared the port of Para, and was stemming the wide, yellow tide of the Amazon, that Cotterell had occasion to consider the expedition again. Now, past the seaport and coast, securely embarked upon the interior waters, Jerry Skeats no longer kept his men sweating in their quarters to drill. Out on deck they came, and their appearance was astonishing to those who had seen nothing of the daily martial exercises. Like veteran soldiers of a real army they carried themselves, answering to the vicious bark of the withered little cockney with machine-like precision, yet retaining that subtle human self-reliance which makes all the difference between a machine-made soldier and a real one. Obviously their errand was a serious one, whether Mr. Marriot were right or whether some other deeper motive had drawn them south.

That first evening on the river Cotterell left Harper to himself, and went into the saloon instead, where Brickley, Skeats, the three engine-room enthusiasts, and the Marriots sat about the table in close audience.

They listened breathlessly to Skeats, who was telling a tale; even Brickley's face, turned eagerly to the little man, showed an interest which acquaintance had not abated.

"An' I sees it wiv me own eyes," barked Skeats in his uncouth, snarling sentences. "There's a big bloke outside, an' 'e looks at me jest like I was an inseck. So I parses time o' day wiv 'im, civil like, an' 'e sort o' grins, but 'e don't move away from the 'ole in the ground where the money is. I looks sort o' scared, an' stares past 'im. 'E turns 'is 'ead, an' I sticks me knife into 'is wishbone, an' the stuff's mine. But I ain't a camel, gents. It's still there, for all I knows."

"Tell Mr. Marriot what the people looked like, Jerry," suggested Brickley softly.

"White! Whiter'n you or me. Looked like bloomin' pantomime Robin Oods, they did, wiv their six-foot bows an' arrers, an' spears like a burlesque chorus gal's. Fair gear, they was, mister."

On Cotterell's appearance the party soon separated. It was as if they distrusted him. Brickley held him a while, talking business of the coming disembarkation, then he escaped and went back to his bridge, fuming inwardly, for even Doris had stared at him as at an intruder. It was clear that she was half fascinated by the florid charms of Brickley.

But along near ten o'clock, when the ship was still and dark and the distant forest sent across the muddy river the multitudinous voices of the jungle night, he was aroused out of a reverie by the fluttering of a dress behind him and the painful sound of agitated breathing. Then a pair of small, hot hands fastened upon his sleeves, and Doris whispered brokenly:

"Oh, Ernest, I'm afraid of Mr. Brickley! I don't ever want to see him again."

"Why, what's happened now?" He smiled down at her. There was little of joy in his smile; bitterness only partially went out of his soul at her visible distress; but every convulsive clutch of those little hands on his arm drew him nearer to sanity.

"He proposed to me! And in such a way—I—" She seemed embarrassed.

"I should judge, from the past several days, that might be expected, Doris."

"Oh, no! Not as he put it. Never! Why, the man is as cold as a fish when you see him as he really is. He says he is going to be a king, or emperor, or something, and I must—yes, he said I must come and be his queen."

"And what does father say to this sudden rise to power?"

"Oh, please don't laugh at me!" She was almost in tears. "He's talking to father now. He insists that I shall go with him, and that father will agree."

"Doris, I want you," came up Mr. Marriot's voice from the saloon door.

The girl gripped Cotterell tightly for a second, then, muttering "I won't go," snuggled closer for protection.

"Doris," the voice repeated.

"You had better go," advised Cotterell gently. "If you want me to help you, call on me. I'm your friend, you know."

She ran down the ladder without another word and accompanied Mr. Marriot below.

For an hour or more Cotterell paced the bridge. Then Jerry Skeats, whom he had not seen go forward, came from the hatchway and called up as he passed:

"Guv'nor, the stowaway bloke wants to talk wiv yer."

Harper waited at the hatch, and when the skipper reached him he said:

"I've joined this expedition, old chap. You will be able to help me get ashore without the Marriots seeing me, won't you? Jerry Skeats has been telling me of what they are seeking, and it fits in with my mood. Who knows"—he laughed gratingly—"I may yet in time be made a bishop!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE DARK STRANGER.

A FAR more gorgeous, more wonderful country opened out as the great river was ascended. Strangely enough, no one of the entire ship's company seemed interested in the awe-inspiring beauties of jungle and stream, floating islands, and bird-peopled sand bars.

An atmosphere of stress fell upon the steamer as the miles spun behind and Manáos loomed nearer. Brickley's face was still florid, his eyes still a pale, cold blue, but his laugh was less frequent, and it rang with a note of anxiety in it. Jerry Skeats grew more monosyllabic in speech, more virulent in temper with the men, and his gaze was rarely settled on any one object; but perhaps he was the most composed of all the members of the expedition.

Mr. Marriot retained the poise of the balanced man of affairs; but Cotterell's peace of mind, or that which he might have had, vanished piece by piece as the port drew nearer and with it the necessity of planning Harper's clearance.

It occurred to him that he might take Mr. Marriot into his confidence; even ask him to give Harper work on his rubber estates. The idea was discarded when he recalled the circumstance of his chum's being requested to leave the Marriot house. He decided to leave the event to fortune.

A few days later he was too busy unloading the effects of the expedition at Manáos to give further thought to the Marriots for a while. He had not taken quite seriously Harper's statement that he intended to go with the Brickley party. He was soon to find out that it was so.

Brickley, Fraser, and Percy went ashore together on some important business concerning their venture, but all the rest of the expedition, under Jerry Skeats, immediately left town, marched along the river banks a while, and went into camp without interest apparently in the town.

"H-m! That alone shows this is no common outfit," Cotterell mused, watching the party form into marching order and swing off like picked troops. "Bound to be a few rummies in a crowd like that, but they don't show it. That's Skeats's drilling."

Mr. Marriot left the steamer as soon as she docked, to pay a visit to his agent, and Doris went with him. Then seemed to be the time to get Harper ashore unseen. Not even the mates knew of his presence in the ship, but there had been, and still were, so many shore people running about the ship, that another man might easily be produced from anywhere and walk ashore without arousing more than a glance from the officers. They would think him one of the shore people. The shore folks would think him one of the ship's company. Cotterell went down into the empty quarters, calling softly for Harper.

There came no response, and he called again, louder:

"Harper! Oh, Gerard, hurry up, and I'll put you ashore. Nobody about now. Marriot has gone, and Doris with him."

The hold echoed his call. His words rumbled back hollowly from dim recesses where undoubtedly Harper had at times hidden, but there came no answer.

It was then that Harper's announcement recurred to the skipper's mind.

"By gracious! Then he must have meant it."

Cotterell spoke aloud. He was uncertain what to think of it. Since Doris had run to him in trouble over Brickley's proposal he had felt his dislike for the man strengthen, and the dislike was not merely attributable to Doris's announcement. He felt sure that he had disliked the man for a long time, and tracing back, he decided it dated from that evening when he had prevented Doris from going into the men's quarters.

But from Harper's point of view, perhaps Brickley and his expedition might prove eminently satisfactory. And so Cotterell, anxious for his chum's welfare, forced himself to believe that the very best thing possible had been done, and that Harper was at least as secure as it was humanly possible to make him.

As he returned to his room, and prepared to go ashore himself on ship's affairs, satisfaction grew stronger in him, and another side to the question was revealed. Now he could tell Mr. Marriot, and Doris, too, that Harper had sailed with them. Now he would be able to explain to them his reasons for keeping them out of the hold.

That was very desirable; for he had noticed their recent coolness toward him, and it was easy to guess that it was all on account of that refusal to permit Doris to go below with Brickley, who had doubtless made capital out of it to Cotterell's disadvantage.

The skipper went into town with a lighter

step and a brighter outlook on life than he had been blessed with on the voyage. He expected to find Brickley at the office, or at least to receive some instructions concerning the steamer; for he could hardly understand keeping a vessel of such palpable earning value lying idle at a dock or swinging to anchor in the river for six months. But he found nothing of Brickley, nor message, except a brief line signed by the man himself:

Carry out terms of charter.

BRICKLEY.

Now the terms of the charter called for the delivery of the expedition and effects at Manáos, or such port as Brickley called for; the holding of the ship at such point until further orders, up to six months from date of landing the party, keeping the vessel in trim for sailing during all that period.

Cotterell scanned the terse line over again, glanced at the clerk who gave it to him, put the paper in his pocketbook and left the office. There was not the slightest interest evinced in that office concerning him or his ship. He rather wanted to puzzle his head about this circumstance, but then his knowledge of ship's business came to the rescue of his wisdom and saved him the foolishness of puzzling over a clear-cut matter which was not even a problem.

"Of course," he laughed, "no agent wants to handle a steamer which is certain to be tied up for six months, bringing no freight, carrying few passengers, and due to sail after all in the same condition, or almost so. No profit in that sort of business."

He was turning into the square, undecided whether to go on board or to finish the day out in exploring the town, to which he had never been before, when the Marriots drove up in a victoria.

"Oh, there's Cotterell!" Mr. Marriot stopped the carriage and invited the skipper in.

Something especially gratifying had happened to him, judging by his elated face and almost boisterous manner. Doris made room gladly. In her eyes still lurked uneasiness, which marred her fresh beauty as one blown leaf mars the freshest rose.

"Have you seen Brickley?" The question was to open conversation rather than an inquiry, for Mr. Marriot had unaccountably subsided into silence. He seemed to be peering into the distance at something beyond the physical horizon for the moment.

Doris answered the question hurriedly.

"We saw him with two of his friends a dozen times this morning. He was everywhere we went, it seemed. Those cold eyes of his followed me and bored frozen holes into me. How I hate that fat, smiling, cold-eyed man! He reminds me more of Fosco than ever. I shall be very glad when father leaves here for his plantations."

Marriot came out of his trance. He smiled indulgently.

"All in good time, girly. We shall not stay here long. But aren't you a little too harsh on Brickley? I think him a most interesting fellow—clever, polished, handsome—eh? I'm not sure yet that I won't invest quite a sum of money in his expedition."

"I hate him!" repeated Doris angrily.

Cotterell laughed.

"Divided camp, it seems. My advice would be, sir, if you asked it, don't put money into any such venture."

"You're prejudiced!" Marriot retorted with heat. "During the voyage you showed it, and at times I thought we were to be included in your inexplicable aversion to Mr. Brickley. I'll ask for your advice when I require it."

Mr. Marriot turned his head and breathed hard. But it was not for long. His real nature would not permit him to harbor anger or annoyance, and besides, he liked Cotterell. He turned around, smiling again.

"Pardon my foolish heat, Captain Cotterell. I've had wonderful news from my agent to-day, good and bad, and perhaps I'm a little irritable. Now I want you to come to lunch with us. Doris, you add your invitation to mine, then perhaps Cotterell will forgive my hastiness of a moment ago."

In a little while they were seated in a cool, shaded court at a well-ordered table. For the first time since meeting her Cotterell noted her old gayety of expression return to Doris's face. She chatted and laughed and played hostess in a way that charmed his senses and made him wonder if he might not

now press her for an answer to that sidetracked question of almost two months ago.

Mr. Marriot was unwontedly quiet. He seemed to enjoy Cotterell's company, but there was something on his mind which prevented him showing open amusement.

At a table just across the court a man sat alone who exerted a compelling influence over the little party which neither of them could explain. Of deeply bronzed complexion, with short, curly, black hair, he had the appearance of a high-class Portuguese gentleman. His hands were strangely white, as compared with his face, and the long fingers were almost feminine in their slenderness.

When he glanced up his face was lighted by a pair of softly beautiful brown eyes shaded by long lashes. In other dress he could easily have masqueraded as a woman. Never permitting his glance to rest rudely upon the party he might have passed as a solitary guest who felt a mild curiosity regarding his fellow lunchers, but for a queer sensation which his mere presence affected them with. They glanced at each other in mute question, then Doris said in a low tone: "Is there something in this country which makes one suspicious of eyes?"

"Why, have you noticed anything?" smiled her father.

"Oh, I can't give it a name, but somehow, whenever I look away from that man over there I feel those dark eyes of his boring into my back much as Brickley's cold blue ones bored into me, except that his glance is as hot as Brickley's is cold and chilly."

"I rather liked his eyes," remarked Cotterell thoughtfully. They proceeded with their lunch a while in silence, until the feeling of awkwardness prompted Cotterell to break the quiet.

"By the way," he said hesitatingly, "I want to tell you a secret. Gerard Harper came down in the steamer with us—stowaway, you know."

"The deuce!" exclaimed Mr. Marriot, all his air of reflection gone in a moment. "Why, he ought to be in jail!"

"Oh, surely not, father!" Doris protested; then, sensible that she was coloring deeply, she relapsed into silence.

Her father looked at her intently, and went on:

"A young scamp, that's what he is. Had some sort of disgraceful row just before he was to have been ordained a minister of the gospel and almost murdered a man—you know him, Peter Gordie—with whom he was as thick as thieves the day before."

"Almost?" queried Cotterell eagerly. "Didn't he kill Gordie then?"

"I can't say whether Gordie died afterward or not, but I can easily find out. I'll ask my secretary when I write." Mr. Marriot stared hard at the skipper for a moment, and his face took on an unwonted sternness. "And did you know he was in the ship, Cotterell?"

"Yes, sir. That was why I prevented you and Miss Doris going down in the hold. He was hidden there. I thought perhaps you misunderstood my motives."

"We did. But that's of little account now, Cotterell. Am I to understand that you harbored a man you thought a murderer in the ship which carried me and my daughter?"

"He was my friend, sir, my chum," replied Cotterell simply.

"And where is he now?"

Doris's eyes were soft and troubled. Her gaze never left Cotterell's as he answered:

"He came ashore here before I knew it. I went to get him when the coast seemed clear, but he was gone. I can only say with certainty that he's in Brazil."

A cloud had fallen over the table again. Mr. Marriot began to get ready to leave, pushing Doris's gloves over to her suggestively. Cotterell was too uneasy to want to prolong the sitting. His eyes roved about the court, anywhere rather than meet those of Mr. Marriot. He caught the stranger's look fixed intently upon him and hastily withdrew his own. Then, through the wide, doorless entrance sauntered a big, florid man, who quickened his step instantly and came toward their table.

"Here's Brickley," the skipper remarked.

The next moment Brickley had taken a chair beside Doris, and in a moment more the air of gloom fled to give place to a forced animation intended to meet the jovial mood of the newcomer.

"Tried to find you all over town," he smiled fatuously. "I wanted you all to lunch with me, but I see I'm too late, eh?"

"Oh, yes, Brickley, we've finished," Marriot stated.

Brickley chatted with an air which left no doubt in his companions' minds as to his chagrin at the disappointment. Even Doris found means to meet his jovial mood, for the strain of the past few minutes had been heavy upon her.

Cotterell alone kept silent. He would have left them, but for a natural feeling of what was due to his host in the way of politeness. He noticed Brickley's hand lying close to Doris's gloves. The queer ring he wore on his forefinger flashed with a dull light that seemed to come from hidden fires. It was not the flash and sparkle of a diamond, or any other known precious stone, but a glow, rather, which revealed beauties of carving not hitherto noticed.

Letting his eyes rove further the skipper caught a glimpse of the dark stranger opposite. Emotion, almost imperceptible, moved the stranger at sight of the ring. He gave a second look at it, then resumed his outward calm. Rising, he left his table, passed closer to Brickley, and left the court; but as he passed he left in Cotterell's mind a feeling that this was not to be the last time they would see that dark, tranquil face with its soft brown eyes and red, full lips; that black, curly hair which appeared so silken in texture on closer view, and those slim, white fingers so utterly at variance with the man's bronzed complexion.

"Do you know that gentleman?" he suddenly asked Brickley. The big, smiling adventurer glanced up carelessly, gave a glance at the disappearing figure, then replied shortly:

"No. He's just one of the regular wealthy idlers, I suppose."

Brickley turned again to Doris. Cotterell shivered at the blue eyes which had rested for an instant upon himself. They had become mere points of icy light, venomous as a snake's. Only when they returned to Doris's bright face did they lose that cold quality and assume a human quality.

"Well, friends, since you disappointed me at luncheon you must dine with me this evening," smiled Brickley presently. "Can you? You must—you, too, Cotterell."

"We shall be glad to, Brickley," replied Mr. Marriot. He showed little pleasure in the skipper's inclusion.

Cotterell nodded his assent. Brickley instructed them as they rose to leave.

"I'm staying at your own hotel. Suppose we say eight o'clock there? They put on an excellent dinner, I know, especially if one orders it in advance and doesn't forget to tip the chef. Is that all right?"

It was agreeable to everybody, and they separated, the Marriots to their own pleasures, the skipper to go to the ship to finish up some business before dressing, and Brickley none could say where.

All the way down to the wharf Cotterell puzzled over a vague foreboding of evil which he could neither place nor explain. It was not alone Brickley's cold, blue eyes, nor the evident interest the dark stranger took in Brickley's unique ring; it was not the assertion that Brickley did not know the stranger, which the skipper marked down a plain lie; but all together made a maze of doubt which was trackless and impenetrable.

He arrived at the ship in an unenviable state of mind, and mounted to his room on the bridge, scarcely knowing how he had got there. Instinctively, as becomes a seaman, he swept the visible horizon with an embracing glance before entering the room. On one side lay the hot, noisy town; on the other rolled the vast river, muddy and yellow, dotted with boats as muddy-looking and yellow as itself. Astern lay other ocean craft and river boats, and ahead—

"By gracious!" he exclaimed. He looked again, then got his glasses. "By the Lord Harry, they've gone!"

He rubbed his eyes furiously. There was no mistake. *The camp of the expedition had vanished, leaving no sign!*

CHAPTER VII.

THE SECOND LIVID SCAR.

ALL Cotterell's doubts returned redoubled. Never feeling entirely easy in mind about Brickley since the first day he came on board, he now suspected the

florid, fat, smoothly smiling man of some far deeper intent than had worried him before. He hurried through his business, scarcely conscious of what he was doing, impelled by method and habit rather than by thought; then as hurriedly dressing, he left the steamer and hailed a carriage, ordering the driver to take him to the hotel where the Marriots stayed.

"Miss Marriot is out driving, and Mr. Marriot is resting," he was told in answer to his inquiry.

"Has Miss Marriot gone out alone?"

"No, *señor*. She is riding with Señor Brickley."

What could he make of it? One day Doris had run to him in distress because the fat Fosco man had proposed to her; now she was out carriage riding with him. Only that noon she had said his little cold blue eyes bored into her like icicles.

"Tell Mr. Marriot I must see him. On important business," he insisted. The clerk shook his head.

"The *señor* left orders to leave him undisturbed until six o'clock, captain."

Suddenly realizing that his grounds for apprehension were very slight, and in any case scarcely warranted him in supposing that Brickley would not keep his dinner appointment, Cotterell went out and wandered about the town for several hours, looking in at any place where the carriage riders were likely to stop: shops, tea places, even a theater which advertised a matinée.

He at the same time kept a keen eye lifting over the many vehicles that rolled past in the busy streets, the playa, and the park. At last he gave up the quest and returned to the hotel, arriving there at the moment when Mr. Marriot, dressed for dinner, came down into the lounge to smoke a cigar in peace before his host and his daughter arrived.

"Oh, Mr. Marriot, I called to see you some time ago," said Cotterell, standing before the old gentleman flushed and anxious.

"What's the trouble now, captain? You look as if you'd lost something," smiled Mr. Marriot, his eyes twinkling.

"I wanted to tell you that the expedition had broken camp, sir."

"Well, what of it? Hasn't it a right to?" Marriot's tone was impatient; his eyebrows lifted.

"But—but Brickley is still here!".

"Oh, stuff and nonsense, Cotterell! Soon I shall think you're a little bit crazy. What on earth has Brickley to do with us, except that we're to be his guests at dinner tonight? Is he not a man, full grown—and cannot he follow his party at will?"

"I can't explain, sir, but I feel in my bones that there's something queer about the man," returned Cotterell rapidly, striving to keep coherent. "I'm sure he knew that dark stranger in the court at luncheon; I detected a glance of recognition pass between them—"

"And must a man reveal all he knows? Hasn't he a right to have business affairs which are not common property? My dear man, I don't let my clerks, or even my secretary, know everything I know, or do, either."

"But it shows he's not aboveboard, sir, and—and Doris is out driving with him."

Mr. Marriot laughed outright. Then his face became serious, and he said:

"Look here, Cotterell, let me give you some good advice. Don't fret yourself with matters which don't concern you in the least. Mr. Brickley is your employer, remember. He's also, at present at least, my friend and Doris's. Pretty soon, in less than half an hour, he will be the host of all of us here at dinner. Keep your dark suspicions to yourself until something happens to strengthen them."

"I hope nothing will happen, sir," replied Cotterell quietly. "All the same, I hope, too, that you haven't put any money into his venture."

"That again is not your affair, my young friend. If it interests you to know, I shall put quite a considerable sum into this expedition. Now, please drop the subject and try to look less like a suspicious sleuth before they come in."

Mr. Marriot offered Cotterell a cigar, and they smoked in silence for a while. Then the clock pointed to fifteen minutes to the hour, and the old gentleman glanced at the door uneasily. He smoked on until his cigar went out, then went over to the desk.

"Has my daughter returned?" he asked.

"Not yet, *señor*."

"And Mr. Brickley?"

"Not yet."

"Cotterell, I had better order that dinner put back a bit, don't you think?"

"Apparently you had, sir. They surely won't be long." The skipper, mindful of the old gentleman's advice, had succeeded in assuming, at least outwardly, an air of ease which he was far from feeling. Every minute that the clock ticked brought pain to him and confirmed his suspicions of Brickley. He watched Marriot as he returned from the dining room, and saw that the old gentleman was put to subterfuge to maintain his own calm.

"I wonder what's delayed them, Cotterell?" he said, puffing fiercely at a cigar.

"Can't say, sir. My own suspicions apparently did not meet with your approval, so I have dropped them."

"By Jove! You can't mean to say that you suspect— No, it can't be! Brickley has no reason in the world for—"

"I know he proposed marriage to her. And Doris told me he insisted that she would one day fall in with his wishes."

"Oh, yes. But what object could the man have in disappearing with my daughter in these wilds? He has every inducement to wait. I have money to invest with his outfit, and he knows I have only good feelings toward him."

The old gentleman sank into thought, and Cotterell watched him narrowly. Gradually he saw stealing over that dignified old face an expression of fear, then panic. The clock pointed to an hour after the time set for dinner.

"Get something to eat yourself, sir. You will need it to keep your spirits up. I'll go out and make inquiries around the town and come back here to you the moment I find out anything."

Without waiting for an answer, Cotterell took up his hat and left the hotel. He went directly to the police office, and stated his errand. The official knew nothing, but would send out searchers. Cotterell put in the time while waiting for results in scattering small silver coins and asking questions of every carriage driver and street urchin he met. Returning to the police office in two hours, he received his answer.

"The lady and gentleman were seen driving, yes, *señor*. They were driving out along the river road."

"When?" Cotterell barked the word.

"Oh, many times. They went, and returned, and went again."

"But when?"

"It is not reported. In the late afternoon, I think."

Cotterell stormed out in a rage. Now all his suspicions resurged, too strong to be subdued at the behest of anybody. He hailed a carriage and drove toward the hotel. As he got out at the curb a ragged, shoeless, hatless vagrant sprang to hold the carriage door, touching his forelock in salute and expectancy of a tip.

"Evening, cap'n," said the waif.

In spite of his turmoil of mind, Cotterell gave the man a keen glance as he reached down for a coin. The fellow's eyes were bright and merry, for all the desolation of his appearance. And his face and hands were clean, marvel of marvels. At the feel of the silver dollar in his hand, the smallest coin Cotterell had, his face lighted up amazingly, and as he slammed the carriage door he shuffled alongside the skipper and said in a low, husky tone:

"Been lookin' for you, sir. You lost a young lady, ain't you?"

"Who are you?" snapped Cotterell. "What do you know?" He seized the other's arm harshly. "Hurry up! Speak!"

"All right, sir. You needn't chop a fellow's fin off. Leave go, and I'll tell you what I seen."

As he released the man, Cotterell noticed his right hand. With a shock he recalled the hand of Jerry Skeats. The two were twins in appearance. The clawlike fingers were crookedly bent in upon the palm; across the back of the hand was a livid burn-scar horrible to look at.

"Where did you get that?"

"Oh, that 'll wait, cap'n. There's others with fins like this," the man grinned. "But you ain't all boiling up with impatience about this yere hand. What you want to know is what I know."

"Speak up, man! You're wasting time."

"No, I ain't. How and ever, I seen a big, fat, red-faced fellow with a pretty little lady riding out along the river. I was working at the camp that just shoved off for the Madeira River, putting gear in the boats and like that, and after the crowd had left there comes down a new stern-wheeler, puffing like mad, and into it goes Mr. Red Face and the lady. And—"

Cotterell dashed into the hotel, looking around and calling for Marriot. Marriot was not in sight.

"I knows something was up, mister, because the little lady went aboard easy enough, but she tried to come out on deck when the boat started, and she cried out when Red Face hauled her back and locked the door on her."

The vagrant had followed inside and finished his tale. Then the clerk took him and gently propelled him outside the hotel.

"All right, cap'n, I'll wait for you," he bawled over his shoulder, and took up a position just off the sidewalk, where not even the manager of the hotel could molest him.

When Cotterell reappeared, followed by Mr. Marriot, whose white face had suddenly become aged and haggard, the little man trotted after them as they hurried toward the docks. His bare feet padded tirelessly along, and he kept at a respectful distance; but he never let them get so far away that he could not, in a few strides, overtake them. Presently they stopped in uncertainty, and Marriot said:

"But what's the use of trying to follow them with your sailors? Might as well take native policemen into those wilds as take sailors."

"That's true, too. And I had forgotten that military drill Skeats put them through. We need soldiers."

"Beg pardon, gents," the little man put in, closing up to them, "but perhaps I can help a bit. I ain't what I used to be, 'count of this crippled fin; but I got good eyes and scent yet, and I know these rivers and forests like a book. You don't want no soldiers—leastwise, not these Brazilian kind. You want natives—good, lean forest Indians—and I can get them if you say the word."

"Who are you?" snapped Marriot, scanning the disheveled vagrant coldly.

"Oh, it's the chap who told me where Doris had disappeared to," Cotterell stated, starting a little at the thought that this silent follower had been so near to them unknown.

"I seen Brickley—I mean the red-faced man—"

"Oh, you know Brickley, do you?"

"A bit," the little man grinned, caught napping. "Might as well out with it, I suppose. I know all that bunch except about ten of the understrappers. It was along o' them I got this, same time Jerry Skeats got his." He held up his crooked hand. "And I got a good guess where they're bound for, and what they're up to."

"Aren't they seeking for Inca relics, then?" Mr. Marriot put in.

"Oh, yes—relics, that's it! And a gaudy lot of 'em, too. But it ain't relics as brought Brickley back here, mister. It's bigger than relics, I give you my word. But how about them men? Shall I get 'em?"

Cotterell whispered to Mr. Marriot, and the old gentleman nodded impatiently.

"Can you get twenty?" the skipper asked.

"Fifty, if you want 'em. And a boat, too. You want a steamboat, a wood burner, mister; and you'd better take plenty of men. I'll tell you why when we're fair started."

"But I don't think we'll need you with us, my man."

"You can't do without me, mister. I'll tell you why that is, too, when we're away." The little man suddenly dropped his voice and spoke with deadly earnestness. "This is the biggest thing you ever heard of. Your girl ain't simply been took off by a man as wants her. I know. I been there. She ain't going where a white woman ought to go, and that's a fact. See, mister, I just got to go. *I got a score to settle, too!*"

He glared at his hand, and into his face crept a cold fury which must have projected itself through space and sent a shiver to the heart of the object of it.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

The Man Who Wouldn't Remove His Hat

By PHIL LE NOIR

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

CHAPTER I.

A MYSTERIOUS QUEST.

THE blazing Arizona sun had twice branded its arc of fire across the face of the soft, cerulean skies since the morning Smoldering Sam Ramsey, top-hand of the border-abutting Arroyo Ranch, had drawed his time and headed arrow-straight for the international line.

During the year and a half of Ramsey's stay on the Arroyo Ranch he had received but one letter, but thirty minutes after receiving that letter, he was packed and spur-prodding his little pinto toward the Mexican town of Agua Prieta.

While Ramsey rode he read the letter which had caused him so suddenly to pull his freight. As he devoured each word there clouded over his even normally stern caste of feature a look of iron, implacable resolve. His stone-boned jaw grew taut; his lips, well shaped in repose, puckered to a colorless gash; while his smoldering gray-blue eyes, from their bushy, raven brows, scintillated streaks of yellow fire, much as does a perfect Mexican opal when placed against a coal-black background.

Taciturn, Sam Ramsey had volunteered no explanation of his sudden leave-taking, and in the fashion of the range, was asked to give none. With a gruff cordiality Jim Sands, the owner, had boomed after him that he had been a damned good hand an' a job was hisn any time for the askin', and the square-shouldered, sun-tanned cowboy had disappeared from the Arroyo Ranch as quietly and as unobstrusively as he had appeared there one June sundown eighteen months before.

And now, Ramsey, above his faithful pinto, the same careful-footed pony that had carried the desert-raised cowboy over many a desperate trail, was making his cautious way through the very heart of the rugged, rock-pocked Nacozari Mountains of old Mexico. Ramsey had not spent the greater portion of his life on the border not to know of the hidden dangers that lurked in the land he was then traveling, the selfsame dangers, he told himself, as he scrutinized each suspicious-looking rock which in the form of sneaking, knife-fisted Yaqui Indians, had swooped down upon many a poor, unsuspecting American prospector whose names even then were posted on the bulletin of missing men in the American consulate at Agua Prieta.

Ramsey, too, well knew that all the chances were not against the stranger, for he had witnessed times without number the efficiency and fearlessness of old Porfirio Diaz's *rurales*, Mexico's crack mounted police, an organization second only to the law on horseback in the Canadian Northwest. And yet the big cowboy, with his habit of facing facts as they were, realized the human impossibility of the *rurales* covering even the smallest area of that vast mountainous country he was then traversing, many miles of which had not felt the first crunch of man's invading boot.

Ramsey stopped his horse to get his bearings. He had topped and ridden down into a box cañon, at the bottom of which trickled a ribbon of mountain stream. Now, he told himself, he was sure his trail had petered out as he found himself on the side of a rock-strewn cañon, over which his horse had great difficulty in making its way. But he wondered as he gazed across to the opposite wall if that fairly well defined trail over there might not be the one he ought to travel.

Even as he gazed he found himself mechanically fishing in his pocket for the now creased and much blurred pencil-written letter. As Ramsey read, the deep, hard lines of his face slowly melted into a smile—a smile which reflected as upon a light struck mirror a golden quality of heart few dreamed ever existed in the make-up of the silent, stone-faced cowboy.

He nodded and murmured half aloud: "She—she says Nacozari Mountains all right, an' at the bottom—at the *bottom* of the Devil's Keyhole."

In those forty-eight hours of ceaseless day and night riding Ramsey had cautiously inquired many times as to the location of the Keyhole country, and, too, he had not missed the second surreptitious glance given him by the Mexicans as he passed on. Once a fatherly native had gone out of his way to warn Ramsey of *El ojo de la llave del diablo.* "The Devil's Keyhole — she mucha bad country. Horse t'iefs, Yaquis—bad hombres—she keel you!" This followed by a violent negative shaking of his gray old head.

Ramsey immersed in thought contemplatively, tenderly folded the blurred little note and pushed it carefully into the depths of an inside coat pocket.

"Pore little kid—down there—alone—all alone—all—"

With a jerk he was brought out of his reverie by the jingling of spurs and the dull thud of hoofs coming from the other side of the cañon. Looking across he saw topping the opposite ridge the clearly silhouetted figure of a mounted, sombreroed Mexican *rurale.* The next instant the *rurale,* apparently spying Ramsey, thundered pell-mell down the side of the cañon and came to a sharp stop on the trail below.

"The top o' the mornin' to ye," called the unmistakable voice of a son of Erin. "Come on over and let's get acquainted. You're on a blind trail, inyway."

With a slight wave of his hand Ramsey reined his horse around and headed down the side of the cañon. As he came to the ankle-deep stream he deliberately allowed his pony to stop and drink. From that moment on Ramsey never took his eyes from the face of the *rurale,* and as he began climbing toward him, he could not but help admire the meticulous neatness and sheer picturesqueness of the man's outfit.

His glance took in the spotless, gray, bell-bottomed trousers, the *bolero* roundabout coat and vest to match, the polished boots each heeled with a sparkling silver spur with rowels the size of an American dollar, the bandoleer of cartridges over the

left and under the right shoulder, the vivid red silk necktie, tied windsor fashion, flaring above the gray vest; the businesslike six-gun, the glossy, black, high-headed horse, and giving the final picturesque touch, the huge, conical, bowl-brimmed, gray sombrero with its shining silver eagle on the side, and dropping from behind to hold the hat in place, a gray silken braid, from which in turn dangled a cue of the same material.

As Ramsey climbed and watched he was conscious that the *rurale* was in turn inspecting him just as keenly.

"Sergeant Jerry O'Neil, at your service, soor," said the *rurale,* bringing his hand to a little salute and crinkling up his stubby black mustache into a friendly smile. "I'm down here tryin' to teach these chili gintlemin a few little tricks I learned while with Canadian Northwest Mounted."

"Glad to know you, sergeant," replied Ramsey as he brought his pony to a stop, and then waxed into his habitual silence.

"Now, I'm not the kind," went on the garrulous, good-natured sergeant, "to be a-pryin' into your private affairs, soor, but I'm a bit curious, personally, ye understand, and not officially, to know what brings an American cow-puncher down into this original God-forsaken country where the divil himself stalks about in the form of murderous Yaquis."

Ramsey caught the canny drift of the little Irishman and realized that some sort of logical excuse must be given for his presence in what was considered the most dangerous zone of old Mexico.

"Well, sergeant, I'm—I'm prospectin'."

"H-m! Gold?"

"Pure gold, sergeant."

"Well, now, they do be thim that says there's lots of the rainbow stuff in these mountains, but I'm tellin' ye straight, me boy, it's not the loikes o' me to be a-putterin' around with a pick with one o' thim greasy Yaquis a—"

"You'll just have to excuse me, sergeant," broke in Ramsey in a half-nettled voice, "but if I've answered your questions satisfactory I'd like to be a-ramblin' along, for I'm sure in one hell of a hurry. Happen to know if this trail hits around the Devil's Keyhole country?"

"Oh, ho! So it's the Divil's Keyhole you're bound for?" spoke up the sergeant, his eyes sparkling with interest. Then leaning forward on his saddle he said good-naturedly: "Me frind, there's no gold down there. That's the no-man's country of Mexico. I've niver been there meself, but the boys was a-tellin' me that if iver a man saw a picture of hell on earth itself, he saw it when he gazed down through that Divil's Keyhole. And hot? Phew! It makes me backbone tickle with sweat to think of it.

"The Mexicans call the hole itself *La taza del infierno*—the Bowl of Hell. Some say it's an extinct volcano crater, others a deserted prehistoric bull-ring where old Nick himself played the part of the matador, only the bowl is a hundred times bigger than iny bull ring you ever saw. But the most ginerally accepted story among the natives is that the divil once got lost up here on earth and was lookin' for a nice quiet, homelike place to rest, whin he happened upon the Bowl. So he takes his pitchfork and busts a hole in the side of the circular wall and walks down into the Bowl niver to be seen again."

"Any one livin' down there—now?" asked Ramsey, thinking of the letter in his pocket.

"Why do you ask, sorr?"

"Oh—just curious."

"H-m! To tell you the truth, me American frind, there's thim that's been sayin' that the Bowl is bein' used as a hidin' place for a gang o' horse thieves. The Yaquis, before they took to the open country, used it when pressed too hard by the Mexican soldiers. Ye see, there's only one way in and one way out of the Bowl, and that's through the Keyhole.

"The Indians would retreat through the Keyhole and thin stand down there in the Bowl with a few rifles and keep off the whole Mexican army if necessary. And yit thim yellow divils always seemed to make their git-away through some exit other than the Keyhole. Must have been through a cave or a tunnel, but whatever it is, it's niver been discovered."

Ramsey, now thoroughly interested, allowed himself to relax in the saddle.

"You spoke about horse thieves."

"Yis! We boys got rumors just the other day of a couple o' hangin's by a bunch of American ranchers, Texans sojournin' in Mexico for their health, but me a-knowin' the Mex's love for the Texan if they iver catch thim longhorns in the act o' stringin' somebody up, I'm a-thinkin' it 'll go harder on the Texan than it will on the horse thief. Howiver, the Texans have asked headquarters for a squad of *rurales*, and that's what I'm goin' into Fronteras now to see about."

"Well, sergeant, I'm sure much obliged. Did you say this was the right trail to the Keyhole country?"

"Yis, yis! Ye can't miss it. The Bowl shoots right up out of the earth like the Colosseum of Rome, about a mile from the trail. But to git to the Keyhole you'll have to make a detour to the south."

With another "much obliged," Ramsey spurred his pony down the trail.

"Oh, I say!" yelled the sergeant after Ramsey.

"Yes?"

"Do ye happen to be knowin' Sandy Cassidy, of the Nogales Ranch, over in Arizona?"

"No. Heard of him. Fine man to work for."

"Yis, he is a foine man. If you iver see him give him me best regards. He was a frind o' moine up in the Calgary country."

"Sure will, sergeant," called back Ramsey over his shoulder.

"And—and, say!"

"Well?" rasped Ramsey's impatient voice.

"If—if I find yer prospectin' pick, I'll—I'll sind it down to ye by one of the boys."

And before Ramsey could form a reply the *rurale*, chuckling to himself, was climbing the side of the cañon headed in the general direction of the headquarters town of Fronteras.

CHAPTER II.

THE BOWL OF HELL.

TWO hours later found Ramsey in his saddle, sitting statue-still and gazing off in a southwesterly direction at the mile-distant, sky-reaching walls of the Bowl of Hell. From his position the Keyhole could not be seen. Only discernible were the sheer, unbroken walls of the Bowl, and as unclimbable, Ramsey told himself, as the spires of Chapultepec Castle.

Ramsey left the trail and headed cross-country on an easy lope. Down he bobbed through a little draw and then gradually made his way over a rolling country toward the south wall of the Bowl. Now he was laboriously climbing due north on a hill so steep that he had trouble keeping in the saddle.

Halfway up he stopped his horse to puff. He looked up and involuntarily exclaimed. Before him, a quarter mile distant, at the top of the incline, silhouetted against the sky was a huge gash across the face of the Bowl walls. It resembled, uncannily, a monster, jagged keyhole.

Ten minutes of hard climbing brought Ramsey within a few feet of the aperture he knew to be the Devil's Keyhole. Dismounting, he walked to the opening and looked down. "My—*my* Gawd!" he gasped. "Why, it's hell—hell itself!"

Across his mind flashed the words of a bit of verse he had read in a Douglas newspaper:

> Sed it shorely did remind him of a desolated hell,
> Whar only rats an' rattlesnakes an' evil spirits dwell.

"Reckon that feller," thought Ramsey, "must 'a' got an eyeful of this here place when he wrote that piece."

Before him yawned a bowlish hole a half mile deep and fully a mile to the circular wall on the opposite side. The bottom and sides of the colossal bowl were strewn with a sea of angular, gray-green rocks which seemed literally to surge in all directions to the base of the wall.

There were tons—countless tons—from the size of an ordinary table top to that of a cathedral; wedge-shaped, knife-edged rocks and all radiating waves upon waves of shimmering, blistering heat. The almost perfectly uniform circular wall all but clouded out the sky.

And nowhere a sign of life, not even the inevitable Mexican cactus which ordinarily has the faculty of sprouting out of the very

rocks themselves, nor of that heat-defying bundle of feathers and bones, the carrion-seeking buzzard. But why a scavenger, thought Ramsey, in this awful pit where life itself has fled?

And the silence—the mocking, singing silence—all the yawning hush of the Grand Cañon, all the flesh-parching heat of the Mojave desert, poured into this—yes, Bowl of Hell was right, he thought, for Bowl of Hell it was. No other name could describe it.

Once again he began fingering in his pocket for the frayed little note. Carefully, slowly, word for word, he read it.

"Ain't no question, Pinto," he told his pony, "she says plain as a bear's track in the snow, 'At the bottom—at the'—yep, there it is written—see it?—'I am at the bottom of the Devil's Keyhole.' But, Gawd! A human—a girl—*her*—down there—"

Cupping his eyes with both hands Ramsey strained his gaze into every corner and crevice where he thought a shack might possibly be erected. But the green-pocked, heat-breathing face below only seemed to leer back at him the utter uselessness of it all. A quick step behind made him whirl.

He found himself looking into the face of his faithful pony.

"Phew, Pinto! You shore gave me a scare. What's the matter, ol' feller?" He rubbed the nose of the horse. "Gettin' tired o' waitin'?"

Ramsey had placed his left foot in the stirrup preparatory to mounting. Perhaps from the eminence of the saddle he might obtain a better view. As he felt for the horn of the saddle he bored his eyes again into the Bowl below.

Suddenly he started—then jerked his foot loose and leaped through the Keyhole. No, his eyes had not deceived him. At the very bottom a thin, wavering wisp of smoke was seen struggling up through the shimmering heat from behind what seemed to be the hugest rock below.

With a bound Ramsey had started down the rocky declivity. Then he came to a sliding stop. Ought he to take his horse? In a flash came the answer: Yes, yes, of course! She might be desperately sick; anyway, wasn't right to ask a girl—to ask *her*—to climb over those razor-edged rocks. He scrambled back to his pony.

"Sorry, ol' Pinto. Hate like hell to ask a reg'lar horse like you to make a trip like that. But we'll take it easy an' careful. You see, ol' feller, she might be sick an'—oh! You're rubbin' my arm to let me know you understand. All right! Let's go!"

Reins over right shoulder Ramsey led the horse through the jagged Keyhole. Step by step, step by step, he picked his way down the steep sides of the Bowl. Never had man or beast trod a more soul-trying trail. Soon Ramsey's boots and trousers were slashed and ripped as by a steel-edged blade, and every step became more and more a step of pain.

Pinto, the pony, with much sliding and not a little snorting, plus the exercising of his native trail instinct, had escaped thus far with only a few blood-oozing scratches, but his gingerly feeling ahead before making each step evidenced that his hoofs were becoming more tender every moment.

Ramsey tried to pick out a rock-to-rock route which would not expose him unnecessarily to a possible shot from behind the smoking bowlder. He had not forgotten the *rurale's* story of the Bowl being used as a rendezvous for a gang of horse thieves, and he did not intend to be caught napping.

Once he was nearly lifted off his feet when a hissing rattler struck at and missed the panic-eyed, rearing horse, and then slid off into a near-by crevice.

Ramsey found himself nearing the rock from behind which the smoke was now flowing in increasing volume. He stopped to rest. The glare nearly blinded him; the heat was terrific; sweat rolled from his every pore while the heaving pony was lathered from head to foot with a white foam. Not a breath stirred the stagnant, suffocating air.

Carefully the cowboy circled around the bowlder, and then when he had gained a vantage point to one side, he stopped—and grunted—grimly grunted at the utter folly of the soul-trying weariness he had exercised in making the descent of the Bowl.

"Shucks!" he told his pony. "A feller—why, hell, Pinto, a feller could 'a' potted

us any time after we walked through that Keyhole."

In the side of the huge rock was a hole large enough to admit a man's body. That hole had doubtless been cut there purposely to command the perfect and uninterrupted view it did of the Keyhole above. A man with a gun could have held at bay a small army, as the *rurale* had told Ramsey, had it attempted to come through.

The gigantic bowlder itself served as the south wall of the rock-walled, tin-roofed shack, built in typical lean-to fashion. Facing the north was a rickety, dilapidated door closed as tightly as its warped edges would permit. Through the roof peeped an awry tin stove pipe, from which belched a respectable-sized stream of smoke.

Ramsey rock-screened his horse from Keyhole view and then crept toward the window hole on the other side. With his hat removed he peered inside. At first only a black blur greeted his glare-filled eyes. Then as he became accustomed to the darkness within, he distinguished a little mail-order iron wood stove over in the corner standing awkwardly on its three legs.

In the center of the room he could see the outlines of a rough table littered apparently with empty tin cans, tin cups, *and* tin plates. Over to the left, width-wise, was what appeared to be a low wooden cot.

Ramsey concentrated upon the cot.

In his heart he hoped and prayed it held no living being. The thought of a human —of her—in that hell-hole made his head reel. And yet there was the smoke still creeping toward the sky. Some one must— Then it was that Ramsey's heart gave a mighty jump as he saw a small, white hand slowly—oh, so slowly—making its way from under a dark-colored horse blanket, and then groping, reaching down and painfully pulling up, and up, and up, another blanket over a pair of pitifully thin shoulders.

Ramsey had swung around the shack and was through the warpy door, it seemed, in one side-long bound. The light from the doorway illumined, as with a searchlight, the startled, fever-flushed face of a girl in her early twenties. Ramsey was down on his knees at the side of the cot in a flash.

"Mary! Mary! You pore little girl— you pore little girl, down in this hell-hole all alone. Why, girl, you're sick—you're—"

With a whimpering cry the girl threw her arms around the neck of the cowboy and drew him down to her pillow.

"Sam, Sam, dear old Sam. Is it—is it really you? Oh, I knew you'd come. I knew my prayers would be—answered. Every day I have kept the fire burning so you couldn't miss me. But this morning, Sam, I—I was weak—so weak—could hardly crawl to the stove. And then always the nightmare of hearing—footsteps. Wondering if it was Andy—and knowing if it was, that he would beat me again for making a fire in the day time. Only let me make fire at night for fear—for fear—"

"Hush, hush, now! You mustn't waste that precious breath. You can tell me all about it later. I know Andy Walker—God! *Don't* I know him! I knew him when he married you, Mary, and that's why I said to send for me if you ever needed me. But I never thought the skunk 'd bring you into a hole like this."

"Wasn't so bad at first, Sam," went on the girl. "Andy was foreman of a large ranch near Fronteras. Then—then something must have happened, and one night he brought me—here."

"How long have you been sick?"

The girl propped herself up on her elbow. "I don't know. A week, perhaps—maybe longer. Seems like months, years, since Andy left me. He left cursing me for double-crossing him, he said. I tried to get out—away—see my torn dress—those scars on my hands? I couldn't, just couldn't, climb over those terrible rocks. Then that prospector wandered in here, and he—he promised to mail the letter to you. Since then have lived only to keep the fire burning, so you—you, Sam—you—" and the voice of the girl trailed off into a pathetic, a panting whisper. Her head dropped on the pillow and she lay quite still.

Ramsey gently shook her.

"Mary! Mary! Listen, girl—I've got to get you out of here. Where's Andy now?"

Summoning all her strength, Mary sat straight up in bed, the red spots on her cheeks flaming, her eyes far apart, terror

stamped in their depths. Her voice became high-pitched, hysterical.

"You're right, Sam. I—I'd forgot. Andy may come any minute. He'd kill us both if he caught us here. Quick, Sam! Through that door by the stove—in the wood room and get my suit case. I'll be gathering my clothes."

Ramsey plunged madly into the wood room and began noisily to rummage around for the suit case.

"Mary, oh, Mary!" came his muffled voice. "Sure it's in here? Can't seem to locate it in all this herd o' junk. Mary, oh, Mary!"

But Mary, who had left her bed and was making her way toward the wood room door, never replied. At a crunching sound she had turned and stood transfixed in the center of the room. Both her hands were clutching her fiery cheeks, while her wild eyes were fastened on a shadow in the doorway.

There stood the figure of a half-crouched, heavy jowled man. His face was covered with a stubble of red hair, his rat eyes glinted like pieces of polished coal. He looked part animal and part man.

He was half laughing, half snarling, and *pointing a gun at the heart of the girl!*

CHAPTER III.

THE MANIAC.

"DON'T move!" commanded the man's raucous voice. "Or I'll—"

"Andy—*you!*" screamed the girl, and then wheeled and fell in a heap on the floor.

The next instant Ramsey stood in the wood room door. Slowly he raised his hands as Andy Walker swung the gun from Mary and covered the cowboy.

"Oh, I see!" snarled the man in the doorway, taking a step nearer to Ramsey. "So it was for you the fire burned. You damn, mangy coyote—couldn't steal the girl when I was lookin'. Had to sneak down here when my back was turned—Stand still there, Sam Ramsey—for I'm goin' to bore that yeller heart—I'm goin' to kill you like a common—"

"Andy! Don't—don't!" The girl half crawled, half flung herself across the floor. Then, as Walker tried to push her away, she slid down, down, and clung to his leg, crying and pleading: "Please, please—Andy! Don't—don't kill him. He only wanted to—"

"Shut up, you—you slut!" he cursed as he kicked loose the girl and hurled her to the cot on his right. "Now lay there and shut up till I finish with this wife thief over here. In a minute, Sam Ramsey, ol' man Colt here will do fer you, but before he does I want to tell you what sort of a woman you wanted to steal. Every hour of every day since I married her an' brought her down here to live she's whimpered and whined like a yeller puppy cur. She ain't been no more a wife— Keep up them hands, Ramsey, an' don't move a hair, or I'll—"

Walker's heavy, guttural voice went on: "An' that ain't all, by Gawd! After all I did fer her, after I gave her a home, I found she'd double-crossed me from the beginning. Yes, double-crossed me, and double-crossed you, too, Ramsey. You don't know what I mean, eh? Well, I'll tell you. Look at them red spots on her cheek. See 'em? Now do you savvy? An' she kept it from me till I—"

"Andy Walker, you lie!" cut in the voice of the girl. "You know you lie. I didn't *have* to tell you. You knew all the time—you knew—"

"Knew hell! Your doctor told me you were a cure. Course he told me because you bribed him to tell me, so you could git your hands on the soft money I had then. An' now when I'm broke an' fightin' to make a livin'—"

"*How* are you fighting to make a living?" asked the girl. "Is herding in with a gang of dirty greasers, stealing cattle, horses, anything you can get your hands on, stealing from American ranchers down here because you think they can't fight back—is *that* fighting to make a living? Why, Sam, this very shack is the headquarters for—"

"Shut up!" roared Walker. "You keep your trap closed till I do fer this wife stealer here. Now, listen to me, Sam Ram-

sey, I'm goin' to kill you like I've wanted to kill you fer a long time. I'm goin' to kill you like a common, crawlin' snake. As fer her"—Walker jerked his head in Mary's direction—" I'll not touch a hair on her head.

" Take her with me? Hell, no! After you claw the dust, Sam Ramsey, an' after *I* hit the trail, she stays here in this shack; she stays here with that door nailed tight an' that rock winder sealed with a bowlder; she stays here in company with your bullet-filled body, Sam Ramsey—an' her own double-crossin' lungs. Hold up yer head there, Mary Walker, an' see your lover—see how a yeller coward dies with—"

Andy stopped in the midst of the sentence and quickly glanced up through the rock-framed window. Something outside had attracted his attention. Still covering Ramsey, he crouched, and again peered through the hole. Then like a gust of thunder-laden wind the roaring, maniacal laughter of Andy Walker filled the room.

" Haw, haw, haw!" he bellowed. " By Gawd, that's great! Great, I tell you—greatest thing I ever saw in my life. Come out from that door, you wife stealer, an' you too, down there on the cot. Now both of you stand over there and look through that rock winder. See 'em? See 'em up there in the Keyhole? See the posse of Texas ranchers that's been chasin' me fer a week? They never did git to see my face, but they *did* see my yeller coat an' my yeller sombrero an' my yeller horse. Haw, haw, haw! Now do you understand why I laughed?"

Ramsey and Mary riveted their eyes on the shadowy forms of a dozen Stetson-crowned horsemen bunched just outside the Keyhole and looking down.

" Now both of you git back to that doorway—quick! Now do you ketch my drift? If that posse had caught me they'd a strung me up sure as hell. But I was too slick fer— Look! They're dismountin'! They're comin' down! Yes, they see the same smoke that signaled you down here, wife stealer. In fifteen minutes they'll be in this shack. Do you understand, Sam Ramsey—in *this* shack! An' who will they find? Me? Not by a damn sight! I'll be burnin' the wind straight fer the line. I'm the only man in the world that knows how to git out of this hell hole without goin' through the Keyhole.

" It's a tunnel my Yaqui friends showed me. An' who, Sam Ramsey, will the posse find? You—you sneakin' woman rustler, an' you, you double-crossin'— Step back there, Ramsey! One more move like that, and I'll save the posse the trouble o'— Haw, haw, haw! Now I see you savvy what I'm gittin' at. Yes, I've changed my mind.

" Bein' dropped by a forty-five is too good a death fer a rattlesnake like you. Quick now! Off with that hat, an' that coat, them boots, that gun—that *gun,* I say—the cartridge belt. Quick, do you hear? Or I'll bore you sure as hell. Throw 'em over here. Now ketch this coat an' this sombrero—these boots. Put 'em on. Put 'em *on,* I tell you! Button the coat *tight*—the posse knows that coat. No buttons, eh? Make the woman cut slits an' tie it tight with this string!

" Haw, haw, haw! Now you both bear the brand of Andy Walker, savvy? My Gawd! That's great! Haw, haw, haw!" Walker suddenly stopped laughing and advanced within a foot of Ramsey and Mary. " Now," he snarled, showing his hideous, yellow teeth, " I'm goin'! If you two show your heads in that doorway under five minutes I'll save the posse the trouble o' takin' care of you. An' when you, Sam Ramsey, are swingin' under a cottonwood I won't be far off to make damn sure the posse's done a good job, by stabbin' your carcass with a hundred forty-fives."

And before Ramsey and Mary realized it Andy Walker had flung himself through the doorway and, almost in the same second, it seemed, his clattering horse could be heard making its way over the rocks in an opposite direction from which the posse was coming.

Ramsey waited a few minutes and then rushed to the door. Andy had disappeared. Ramsey, calling to Mary to get her things together, darted out into the glare of the Bowl. Then he was heard to groan.

" What is it, Sam?"

" He's stole my horse, Mary—good ol'

Pinto—an' left behind a nag that can't last a mile."

Mary came out and stood by his side. "Then you must hide in the rocks, Sam. The posse 'll be here in five minutes. I'll hold them off some way. I'll—oh, I know—"

"No use, little girl—no use at all. Even if I had a good horse, I—"

"I know! I know, Sam! Show them the letter I wrote you—" And now both groaned as they realized that the letter had been carried away in the exchanged coat.

Mary was the first to recover.

"Sam, listen! My suit case in the wood room. There's a gun in it. I'd forgotten. I'll get it, and you—"

Despite Ramsey's protests the girl, with the agility and strength born of high fever, ran through the shack door. She had hardly disappeared, and the pursuing Ramsey had placed one foot on the door-jamb, when he heard behind him the drawled command:

"Put 'em up, young feller!"

Ramsey turned. Then laughed as he calmly shoved his hands deep into his pockets.

"Put 'em *down*, gents. I ain't heeled. Come on in the house an' be—sociable."

The six-gunned posse, fifteen strong, clambered over the rocks toward Ramsey.

"You'll stand outcheer," commanded the leader, "while we all look inside—first."

Ramsey, with a gesture of resignation, stepped to one side and watched half the posse file into the shack. A moment later the leader appeared at the door.

"Walt, lend me yore flashlight. Door in thar looks suspicious."

"Now you two fellers," Ramsey heard the leader saying, "you two stand behind with yore guns ready. An' you, Leatherwood, you kick open the door while I shoot in this here flashlight."

Ramsey edged to one side to command a better view of the wood room door.

"All set! Turn loose, Leatherwood!"

Ramsey heard the crash of a heavy-heeled boot against the rickety wood room door; saw the door fly open; saw a flood of brilliant light stab the darkness within and fall full within the face of a fever-cheeked girl frantically trying to open what appeared to be a securely locked suit case. So astounded were the posse at the revelation that it was several seconds before any one spoke. Then:

"Sorry, man, but we'll hev to ask you all to step outcheer."

Mary reluctantly pushed the suit case from her lap, rose unsteadily to her feet, and shambled wearily through the door to the side of her cot. There she slowly, slowly, as in one movement, sat down on the edge of the cot and buried her burning head in the palms of her frail little hands.

"Bring in that feller out there!"

Ramsey calmly stepped in the room, perched one leg on the table—and waited.

"Well—what you all got to say for yourse'f?" asked the leader.

"Nothin'! Except if you figger me Andy Walker, the horse thief, you've got the wrong man."

The leader burst out in a loud guffaw, his companions joining in.

"Got the wrong man, eh? Wall, that's purty rich, fellers. We got the wrong man when we ketch a man with a yaller coat an' a yaller sombrero right in the act o' misbrandin' a bunch o' calves. We got the wrong man when we see him jump above Tawm Leatherwood's flee-bitten yaller hoss an' make his git-away! We ketch up with that yaller coat an' that yaller sombrero an' that yaller hoss, we even see his blood-trail in them rocks out there, an' then—an' then— Oh, hell! What's the use o' wastin' time? Colter, bring—"

The leader did not finish his sentence. With mouth agape he found himself gazing into the blazing face of Mary Walker.

"This man has told you the truth! He *is* innocent. The man—you want is—is Andy Walker, my husband. He was here a few minutes ago, and left on Sa—on this man's horse—leaving his own behind."

"You-all will jest hev to excuse me, lady, but that there's plumb funny. Why, every greaser from Agua Prieta to Mexico City knows there ain't but one inlet and one outlet to this here hell hole, an' that's through the Devil's Keyhole up there, an' we're right smart sure no one passed *us* when we came in a few minutes ago."

" But there's a secret entrance—a tunnel —a—"

" Where?"

" Why—why—"

But the words would not come. The girl was appalled, then struck dumb, with the sudden realization of her utter helplessness. This thing Circumstance was closing, closing in on her. She felt its clutch, felt it crushing her very heart.

There *was* a tunnel. Had not Andy—and yet— She turned and flashed a mute appeal to Ramsey for help, but help which the girl herself knew the cowboy could not give. Her head dropped and she was seen to sway.

The next moment Ramsey had gathered her into his arms.

" No use, Mary—it's no use. But you're game, little girl, the gamest little woman in the world. *God* knows I'm innocent, and *you* know it, so what else matters?"

Ramsey turned to the leader.

" All right! Have your man Colter bring in the hemp. But before—"

" Hemp, hell!" broke in the leader. " We ain't stringin' 'em up any more. We got a safer an' quicker way," tapping the barrel of his drawn six-gun. " To the greaser a hangin' means a Texan, an' trouble fer us, while the work of a forty-five is what you-all might call a leetle more international like."

" That's up to you! Don't matter one way or the other to me. What I *do* want from you men is a promise that this girl gits back to her folks in the States."

" Wall—stranger," drawled the leader, half grinning around the circle of men, " we'll take her to the line, but that's as fur as we—"

Again the big, raw-boned Texan found himself looking down into the face of Mary Walker. This time she was quite pale, the vivid red spots on her cheeks had dulled as though the fire within smoldered. Down her face rolled a stream of uncontrollable tears.

" Please, sir," she said in a low, plaintive voice—" please, sir, you can't, you just *can't* take Andy from me. Yes, yes, sir, I lied a moment ago—when I said my husband had escaped. He—he hasn't. No, he's here. This is Andy—this man standing here—he's Andy Walker, and my husband, and I love him above—"

Ramsey made a step toward the girl and then stopped. Mary had turned and was pointing her finger in his face. Her voice became high-pitched, thrill: " You are Andy Walker; you know you are! You lied when you said you wasn't a thief! You are a thief—a cattle thief, a horse thief. You and your gang of greasers used this very shack to hide in! But you stole, Andy Walker—you stole—"

For a moment the girl paused; her hand dropped to her side; her eyes sought the floor, where they remained for a full minute. Her lips trembling, she again faced the leader and the circle of men. Her voice had now grown small and tired and pathetic.

" But he stole, gentlemen; you men of families, you husbands—he stole to save me. Can't you see? Can't you men see how terribly—terribly sick I am? Please, sir, put your hand on my cheeks. And you—and you—and you. They're hot, aren't they? Yes—fever; fever that is consuming me hour by hour. You see, Andy stole to get money—to get money so he could take me to a hospital over in Texas—El Paso—where I might—might have a chance. But you men know what a sanatorium means to one as sick as— Oh, can't you see—if you kill Andy you—will—kill—me—too? Gentlemen, please, please, please—"

The last word was whispered as the sigh of a dying wind.

Ramsey caught her as she fell and carried her to the cot, where he tenderly placed her on the blankets. A moment later when he looked up he saw that every man of the posse had removed his hat. The big cowboy tenderly pressed his lips on the girl's fevered forehead. Hot tears were rolling down his cheeks. Slowly he pushed himself to his feet and stood gazing into the shaft of light coming through the doorway.

" Men," said the low-voiced leader, " I'm willin' to take a vote on this, if you-all are."

Every bared head nodded in the affirmative.

" We'll step outside an' talk it over."

After an eternity the muffled rumble of voices ceased. The door opened, and the leader, still with hat in hand, spoke:

" Please, ma'am, if you-all will kindly step outside a minute we'd like to say a few words to you alone. Then we'd like to talk with yore husband in the house—alone."

Ramsey helped Mary to the door.

" Walt," said the leader, " you stay outcheer an' tell her, while we're inside havin' our session with the—her husband."

The posse filed into the shack and closed the door.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

SILENCE—the stifling, roaring silence of the Bowl of Hell—multiplied a million times in the ears of the waiting Mary. Walt cleared his throat and said something to the girl. She looked at him with startled, terror-stricken eyes. Then from the inside of the shack came two sharp, pain-born groans.

" God! Oh, God! Not that—not that!" screamed Mary as she ran to the door and began pounding it with both fists. " Let me in! Don't—"

The door suddenly opened, and the girl fell at the feet of Sam Ramsey. His face was chalk white, his lips pain lined. He leaned over and tenderly lifted the girl to her feet. His voice trembled as he spoke.

" Go inside, little girl—and pack—the things you—want, while I—get the horse."

Twenty minutes later saw the clearly outlined figures of the mounted posse, of Mary and Ramsey, just outside the Devil's Keyhole. Mary was mounted on Andy's near-spent horse, her face and shoulders hooded and shawled with a horse blanket.

Ramsey, afoot, was coatless, but still wore Andy Walker's straw sombrero and was carrying Mary's imitation leather suit case. The members of the posse silently, grimly watched Ramsey as he busied himself making the girl comfortable. They returned his nod of farewell as he picked up the reins of the horse; they gallantly, respectfully raised their hats to Mary's smiling, gratitude-freighted " Good-by."

Their eyes blinked a little as their gaze followed Ramsey leading the horse with its pathetic little burden down the Bowl hill, cross country through the rolling draw, then up and up and up, to the northbound trail a mile distant on the other side.

Ebbing afternoon found Ramsey and Mary in the rock-pocked cañon where, that very morning, the cowboy had met up with the Irish *rurale*. Ramsey was gayly, laughingly relating the incident to the wan-faced girl in the saddle.

" That Irish *rurale* sure got my number right now," said the cowboy, chuckling. " Said if he found—*found* my prospectin' pick, he'd send it—"

A terrific crash split the air, and a bullet went whining past Ramsey's head. Almost with the shot came a burst of harsh, mocking laughter.

Looking across the cañon, Ramsey and Mary saw the hate-distorted features of Andy Walker leering at them from behind a rock.

" They let you go, did they?" he snarled. " Well, by Gawd, that's more'n I'm goin' to do."

And again the roar of an explosion, amplified a hundred times by the cañon's walls, echoed and reëchoed like receding thunder. This time fear-stricken little Mary was seen to jerk violently in her saddle, and then slowly, wearily slip from the horse and fall to the ground below.

Ramsey had her head pillowed in his arm in an instant.

" It's all right, Sam—slight wound. Gun—gun—in the suit case."

With a sigh, her head dropped to her breast, then sagged sharply on her shoulder, where it remained quite still.

Ramsey looked once into the lifeless face, gently pillowed it on the blanket, and with a cry of rage leaped for the suit case. With a mighty effort he ripped it open, quickly extracted the loaded gun, and commenced carefully firing at the man on the other side.

Andy, believing Ramsey unarmed, found himself a perfect target, and as Ramsey's second shot cracked the air Andy was seen to wince, clutch his left shoulder, and drop behind a rock. Then when he saw that

Ramsey was advancing toward him, rock by rock, he clambered above his horse, and, with Ramsey's bullets striking all about him, disappeared over the cañon's crest.

Ramsey, now within a few feet of the little stream, filled his straw sombrero with the cool mountain water, hoping and praying it might not be too late. As he turned to climb the cañon's sides he stood rooted to the spot.

On the opposite ridge, almost precisely at the same spot he had first seen him that very morning, was the profiled figure of the *rurale,* Sergeant Jerry O'Neil.

Ramsey arrived at the girl's side a few seconds ahead of the *rurale.* Both men read at a glance that the girl was past all help. Their eyes met. O'Neil bowed his bared head. Ramsey, distraught, inarticulate in his grief, again tenderly pillowed the girl's head on his breast. Neither knew how long the silence continued. Then Ramsey spoke:

"Dead, dead, sergeant, by the hand of the man who promised God—promised *God* —he would protect her. And he never gave her a chance."

"Tell me how it happened," asked the kindly *rurale.* "I was returnin' from Fronteras—heard the shots—got here as soon as I could."

"He killed her, sergeant, from behind that yellow rock over there. I'd—I'd got her out of the hell-hole down below, and we thought we were safe when Walker opened fire on us. I plugged him in the shoulder and the dog ran, but not before—he had—he had—"

And then all the enleashed emotions of Smoldering Sam Ramsey seemed to burst their bounds. He sobbed—sobbed only as a strong man can.

"Mary—Mary! Poor little girl. He never—never gave you a chance, did he? God—oh, God! I ask you—I pray you to let me live long enough to feel in my two hands the soft skin of Andy Walker's neck —to feel—"

"I'm sorry, me frind, mighty sorry," broke in the *rurale,* "but I'm afraid you'll have to be a-comin' with me to headquarters. As for meself, I believe you, but what with no witness but yourself to the—to this; an' you a-ridin' a different horse, a-wearin' different clothes than this mornin', an' me at this prisint moment a-standin' here a-lookin' into your face an' a-handin' you yer hat, I—"

Ramsey, with his free hand, snatched the straw sombrero and crushed it on his head.

"Sergeant, you don't mean they'd think I—*I* killed Ma—her?"

The *rurale's* voice was now crisp and businesslike.

"Mount my horse an' I'll lift the girl up to ye. Then I'll follow on the nag."

And thus came to Sam Ramsey his hour of Gethsemane.

It came to him as the molten sun slipped behind the spike-crowned peak of old Nacozari; as the curtain of somber, gray dusk began to creep and creep into the Cañon of the Shadow of Death.

At a sharp turn in the trail Ramsey stopped his horse. For a full minute he gazed off in the direction Andy Walker had ridden. Then bowing his head on the breast of the still form he carried across his arms, spurred himself around the enveloping cliff.

A moment later Sergeant O'Neil, carrying a gray sombrero in one hand and a rope-tied suit case in the other, came to the curve in the trail. He, too, stooped. Slowly he turned and looked back; then sighed—sighed the sigh of the tender-hearted. A tear sparkled on his leathery cheek. With a jerk his shoulders came back to attention and his gray sombrero swung to his head where it perched at a rakish angle.

The next moment he was urging his drooping mount in the wake of the prisoner ahead.

CHAPTER V.

THE STRANGER.

SEVERAL years passed by.

One day Lute Chaney, foreman of the J. D. Horn ranch near Nogales, Arizona, sat his horse in the shadow of a mesquite-covered hill.

He was boring his gaze in the direction of the neighboring range of Sandy Cassidy, the same Sandy Cassidy Sergeant Jerry

O'Neil had asked Sam Ramsey about that fateful morning in the cañon of the Nacozaris. Also was it the same Sandy Cassidy who had been losing, lately, with a painful regularity hundreds of his best blooded cattle. But that morning—that very morning an hour before sunup he had ridden down upon his own foreman, Rat-eye Gregg, and caught him in the act of obliterating one of Sandy's brands in the foothills bordering the J. D. Horn ranch, and but a few miles from the Mexican border.

Gregg happened to see Cassidy first and got the drop. Then when he had forced Cassidy out of gun range, Rat-eye had mounted his horse and hit for the line, while Cassidy had burned the wind for the ranch-house and the inevitable posse.

It was for Rat-eye Gregg that Lute Chaney waited.

Had this precious pair been possessed of a business card it would have read:

CHANEY & GREGG
Cattle rustlers
Special bargains to Old Mexico buyers
Best Hereford stock furnished from the Cassidy and Horn ranches
Nogales, Arizona

Suddenly Chaney bent forward in his saddle. A man on horseback was bobbing and dipping toward him at breakneck speed. Chaney cupped his hands and yelled, then waved his hat. The rider saw and swerved his horse. With a great plowing up of soft sod the horse came to a sliding stop within a few feet of the waiting Chaney.

"What's your hurry, Rat-eye?"

"Lute, the game's up! Sandy hisself caught me this mornin' usin' the hot ir'n on one of his calves. I got the draw and forced him to the ranch. Come on, we ain't got a minute. Sandy and the posse 'll—"

"Where do you git that 'come on' stuff?" snarled Chaney. "I ain't been ketched, have I? I ain't been—"

"Hell, you ain't! And you the ring-leader of the gang. By Gawd! Lute, if you show the yeller—"

Rat-eye didn't finish. There was a reason, a good and sufficient reason: the cavernous barrel of a forty-five within a foot of his gaping mouth.

"Now use them spurs," commanded Chaney, "and git the hell out o' here before I plug you! Beat it—beat it to the line! Then after this thing blows over and I pull another shipment, I'll join you and we'll hit for Mexico City."

"I'll go, Chaney, but if you quit the gang, if you double-cross us, I'll come back—I'll come back and git you if it's the last—"

"Gwan, now," cut in Chaney, "before I tech off this hair-trigger!"

With a curse Rat-eye spurred and jerked his horse around. The horse snorted and reared straight up in the air, then leaped into a gallop which never diminished as long as Chaney watched.

A few minutes later Chaney leisurely headed for the Horn ranch. He had timed his entrance well. Even as he eased off his saddle Sandy Cassidy, at the head of a dozen punchers, thundered in the ranch yard in a cloud of yellow dust.

"Where's J. D.?"

"In the house—I'll call him," replied Chaney.

But Horn already was coming out the front door.

"Horn, git the boys together. We're after Rat-eye. Caught him myself—"

"Who?"

Cassidy wheeled.

"Who'd you say?" repeated Chaney.

"Rat-eye Gregg!" rasped Cassidy, "What about it?"

"Oh, nothin'. Jest wisht I'd knowed."

"Why?"

"Well, hell, Sandy!" said Chaney with a half-mocking grin on his face. "I seen Rat-eye not over a—an hour ago ridin' hell-bent straight fer the Mexican line."

"Why didn't you stop him?"

"How'd *I* know?"

Pregnant, eye-boring silence greeted Chaney's half querulous reply.

"Well," said Cassidy as he deliberately removed his Stetson and raked a gnarled, weatherbeaten hand through his tawny hair, "in the first place, Chaney, it ain't been *forty minutes* since I rode up on Rat-eye; and in the second place, you know—*know*

a hell of a lot more than you're willin' to tell at this here pre-ticular time."

And, then, before slit-eyed Chaney could reply, Cassidy had turned to two of his cow-punchers.

"Toad, you an' Sid hit for the cañon trail. Prob'bly too late, an' Rat-eye's likely across the line by this time. But if you boys *do* run onto him, remember what the Canadian Mounted always—"

"Bring him back!" shouted the two punchers as they plunged from the scene.

Cassidy then turned to Horn.

"J. D., we've got to the point where we ranchmen have got to organize. It's a cinch the rustlers already are. I'm callin' a meetin' of all the Nogales County stockmen to meet at my place week from to-day. Are you in?"

"Sure am, Sandy," replied Horn.

"All right! Bring the boys over the night before, an' the women, too, an' we'll have a little dance at the schoolhouse."

"Yeh," yelled Slim Kelly, who was then talking to Horn's daughter Helen, "an' go strong on that wimmen bizzness."

Both the Horn and Cassidy boys yipped a "second the motion" and Sandy, at the head of his outfit, reined around and headed for home. As Slim Kelly passed through the gate, Lute Chaney was there to close it. Chaney stopped Slim.

"Listen, kid," he growled so the others couldn't hear, "hands off that girl, savvy?"

"You beat me to it," laughed Slim. "I was jest goin' to tell you to brand them same words on yerself."

At the ranch Cassidy found his winsome, red-cheeked wife anxiously awaiting him.

"Sandy, and sure there's the strangest man in the house. He says he wants to see you on important business. He's a quare-looking one sitting there as solemn as a church full of undertakers. And while he's courteous," went on Mrs. Cassidy, as the couple walked toward the ranch porch, "and gentlemanly, yit he sits there in me own parlor without aven *offering* to take off his hat!"

"He won't take off his hat, eh?" growled Sandy, on edge from his experience with Rat-eye. "I'll soon show him if he won't be respectful to ladies and—"

But even as Sandy spoke a low, pleasant voice called behind them:

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Cassidy, and I apologize."

Sandy and his wife nearly collided in turning around.

Standing on the porch, half leaning against a stuccoed pilaster and calmly smoking a cigarette, was the figure of a man all of six feet tall and as straight and as stalwart as a young pine. His face had been sun-tanned to a deep, pigment brown; his lips were well shaped, and adorning the upper lip was a short, parted black mustache.

But that which dominated and immediately made one forget all the rest, was a pair of gray-blue, opalescent eyes which seemed to scintillate streaks of yellow fire. From under the great gray cloak he wore peeked two silver-mounted spurs; while on his head rested, with becoming picturesqueness, a huge, gray felt sombrero.

"I *would* like to speak with you a few minutes, Mr. Cassidy," said the stranger, respectfully touching his hat.

Mrs. Cassidy, still speechless, made a quick bow and darted around the side of the house. Sandy opened the front door and he and the stranger entered. In the sitting room Sandy noticed that the man still kept on his hat, but said nothing.

"Mr. Cassidy," said the stranger, "I've been travelin' for over a week to get to your place. Arrivin' here this mornin' Mrs. Cassidy told me you had lost your foreman. To me that is good news, and I reckon from what I can hear it is good news to you, too."

"Yes, damn his hide, it is! But there's no tellin' how many head he an' his gang have stolen, to say nothin' of the finest horse on the ranch he was ridin' when—"

"Where did he come from, and what did he look like?"

"I got him from Old Mexico—Sonora, near Fronteras: Sold a greaser a bunch o' stuff down there an' saw this feller Gregg workin'. Good hand—damn good hand—so I hired him. Never felt Gregg was his real name, somehow, but the rat-eye part fitted him like a glove, and it stuck because the boys tied that handle to him an' made it stuck."

"Then I take it you'll be needin' a new foreman?"

"Yes. Kind o' figgered Slim Kelly for the place. Good hand an' faithful an'—"

"No doubt," cut in the stranger, "and Slim ought to have the job, *but*—for the present your new foreman is looking at you from under this sombrero."

Sandy Cassidy's Scotch-Irish jaw tightened and a flood of anger suffused his face. Such impertinence! The stranger smiled, then chuckled:

"Perhaps you'll understand why, Mr. Cassidy, when I tell you I carry recommendations from your old friend, Captain Jerry O'Neil, of the Mexican *rurales*, formerly of the Calgary Station of the Canadian Northwest Mounted."

Sandy's face broke into a delighted grin at the mention of O'Neil's name. With a quick motion the stranger pulled out a paper from his cloak and handed it to Cassidy to read.

CHAPTER VI.

SUSPICIONS.

LATE afternoon, before the Vigilante Dance—as the affair had been dubbed by the ranchmen—found J. D. Horn's cow-punchers and women at the Cassidy ranch. Chaney and the Horn boys immediately ganged in with the Cassidy outfit just outside the bunk-house for a good old-fashioned "gas."

"Slim," spoke up Chaney in apparent friendliness, "hear you-all's got a new foreman."

"Yeh!"

"What his handle?"

"Dunno."

"Well, hell, ain't you-all been interduced?"

Slim Kelly, grumbling something about it being none of Chaney's damn business, slouched out the yard toward the ranch-house.

"Nice sociable feller, ain't he?" said Chaney. "What's eatin' him? Sore because he didn't git the foreman job?"

"Noo—ugh," spoke up drawling Toad Curtis, unfolding his sleepy frog eyes. "Noo, ain't that at all, Lew-ute. What I mean is, that if *you*-all keeps a-cottonin' up to old J. D.'s gal, wouldn't sur-prise me to see Slim"—a long range Johnstown at a city of ants—"to see Slim a-chawin' an' *a-eatin'* on you-all—Lew-ute."

"Aw, fergit the girl. I'm interested in this here new foreman o' yourn. What's his name, Toad?"

"Why, Lew-ute, the boss, he ain't never said. Jest kind o' brought the feller out an' said: 'Boys, this here's yore new foreman.' From then on it's been Mr. Foreman this an' Mr. Foreman that, so I reckon"—another pause, another flood of tobacco juice—"so I reckon Mr. Foreman might be the feller's name."

"What's he look like?"

"Luuu-ook—like?"

"Yeh!"

"Wall—now, let's see, Lew-ute. He's right smart of a good-lookin' feller, I would say. Brown skin, little black muss-tache parted in the middle, rides a hoss like one o' them there Arabian Knights an' always—*always* wears a big fifty-gallon yellow straw sombree-ro 'bout the size of a young pup tent."

"Ain't Mex, is he?"

"No, Lew-ute, he hain't, though he shore looks like one, but *I'll* say he speaks purty straight U. S. A. langwidge, leastwise he did to me t'other day when I came nigh breakin' a steer's neck when I th'owed him. But what's got us fellers kind o' guessin' an' pawin' the air, Lew-ute, is that there big yeller hat o' hisn. Ain't that right, fellers?"

The squatting, listening heads of a dozen punchers nodded.

"Ye know, Lew-ute, that feller's been here nigh onto a week an' he hain't wunst—*wunst* took off that yeller hat. No, sir, I *know*, 'cause I been watchin' him clost. Heerd the boss's wife talkin' 'bout the same thing. Said the feller walked right in her parlor and sot there without even *movin'* to ree-move his hat. An' then one night I got kind o' cur'yuss an' peeps th'u the winder where he sleeps.

"There he was settin' in his underclothes with that big yeller hat pulled over his eyes, an' a-lookin' at some pitcher—nope, wasn't of a gal—a-lookin' at a pitcher just

like—jest like the whale must o' looked the minnet before he swallowed Jony. Wall, he was still wearin' that hat when he blowed out the light."

"Well, what's the answer—what's the ketch?" asked Chaney's raw-edged voice.

"Ain't none, Lew-ute. Ain't none, fer he's wore that hat every minnet sence. We alls got our thee-rees 'bout it. Me, I says, as how he must 'a' met an' married one o' them Yaqui squaws, an' one night she got peeved an' jest kind o' kazzulee grabbed him by the forelock an' skelped him. The other fellers, they say as— Look, quick! There he comes down the road now. Watch when the boss interduces him to the wimmen folks."

The punchers rose and watched the stranger, the brim of his straw sombrero flapping and bobbing as he came easily loping through the upper gate of the ranch. Lute Chaney had glued himself against the board fence and was not missing a move the stranger made. Lute saw him swing gracefully from the saddle and approach Cassidy and the visiting women.

"Now, Lew-ute! *Now* see if he takes it off!"

They saw Cassidy introducing the new foreman, saw the stranger bow low to each introduction and respectfully touch his hat, saw him shake hands with Horn. Lute winced when the fellow began a good-natured conversation with little Helen Horn.

Through it all the stranger's yellow sombrero *remained upon his head!*

"Wall—Lew-ute," drawled the vindicated Toad, "what you-all think?"

"Looks like a damn greaser to me," growled Chaney as he reluctantly left the fence and joined the seated circle. "Is he comin' to the dance to-night?"

"Shore is," replied Toad. "Tole me he expected to have the time of his young life. Now, Lew-ute, some of us boys"—again the watery grave for another colony of ants—"some us boys has been doin' a leetle gamblin' on that there hat o' hisn. I bets he keeps it *on* durin' the dance. Slim an' Sid an' Red, they bets—"

Chaney's voice bit in.

"Bettin' he keeps it on, are you, Toad? Well, you kin kiss your money *adios*."

"Meanin'?"

"Meanin', an' I want all o' you here to listen. Meanin' that damn greaser *does* remove his hat at the dance to-night. If he don't—well, I'm layin' ten to one on my end. Any takers?"

The clanking of a frying pan and the sandpaper voice of the cook interrupted any further conversation.

"Come on an' git it—come an' git it or I'll toss it to the orphaned coyotes!"

In the clamor and the roar and the steam of the low-ceilinged mess-house, Lute Chaney found so many takers that he was forced to make a record of the bets on a piece of paper bag. No money was passed. The winners would get their money on the following pay day.

The hour of the Vigilante Dance had "come alive."

The red-tinged Arizona moon was creeping its eerie way over old Boot Hill, and like a huge, heavenly spotlight, seemed to focus its brilliance on the shingle roof of the small, churchy looking, dobe schoolhouse down below.

Already the muffled snorts and dull stampings of a dozen saddle horses tied at the long hitching post could be heard. From every direction came covered carryalls, buggies, and some men afoot, all headed for the little schoolhouse. Shouts of hearty greeting, male and female, could be heard on every side, and here and there were gathered groups of range families, many of whom had traveled all that day to make the dance, indulging in a hand-pumping, back-slapping, laughing, carefree reunion.

Sandy Cassidy and his cherry-cheeked, Erin-eyed wife stood in the doorway breezily welcoming the guests. The floor of the one-roomed schoolhouse had been cleared of desks. From the rafters above hung sprigs of pine and spruce with an American flag draped here and there. Round, silver-reflected kerosene lamps, planted six on each side, provided the illumination.

Back in the corner, on an improvised platform, sat two grizzled old fiddlers—Pop Cook and Squire Barker—affectionately tuning up their instruments.

The hollow thump of polished boot, the flash of vivid-colored, balloony silk shirts; the flushed faces of giggling girls, the beaming buzzing of many mother's; the ruddy, range-tanned, deep-throated fathers; there they all were, from sixteen to sixty, and as carefree and as clean-hearted as the wind that blows behind the rain.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BRAND.

SANDY CASSIDY and his little wife looked on the scene with bursting, prideful hearts. Ah, and sure what a sight, what joy, what happiness, and to think that it fell to their lot to provide such, and best of all, not a thing to mar—and then it was that Mother Cassidy's sharp eyes spied Lute Chaney surlily sulking off by himself. He was blazing with frank belligerence at Slim Kelly and Helen Horn as the couple talked.

" Sandy," said Mrs. Cassidy, " I'm thinking I'll have to be after camping on the trail of that young mon, Chaney, or he'll be a-spoiling the avenin' for us all."

And so saying Mother Cassidy moved from the side of Sandy and headed by a circuitous route toward Chaney.

Sandy Cassidy, now assured that all the crowd had arrived, raised his hand for silence.

" My good friends, mother and meself welcome you all to the Cassidy ranch. The program is: To-night the dance; to-morrow in the ranch-house, the organizing of the Nogales County Cattlemen's Protective Association, and while the men are busy, the good women will be preparin' the barbecue. May you all have the time of your lighthearted lives. Toad Curtis will call the dances. All right, Toad; let 'em stampede!"

Even above the roaring applause Toad's trombone voice could be heard:

" Come, all you fellers, stake yore pen an' lock horns with all them heifers. Come alive, now. Hey, you, Brite Perry, over there, come alive, I sed; don't stand there an' look like you been locoed *all* yore life."

Quickly the officious Toad lined up two sides for a good old-fashioned Virginia Reel. Lute Chaney, his lip curled in a sneer, shoulders humped, almost openly cursed as he saw little Helen Horn take her place opposite the grinning Slim Kelly. Snake fashion, Chaney slowly slid his way toward Slim, and as he edged, Mother Cassidy was seen edging in from the opposite direction. Just as Chaney gripped Slim's arm, smiling little Mother Cassidy was heard to say:

" Well, Mr. Chaney, and sure here you are and me lookin' everywhere for a man. Come on now and take me arm before Toad starts up the music."

With a smirk of a smile Chaney slouched off with the victory-faced hostess and took his place opposite her in the long line.

The next moment, with a weird wail and the heavy thump of boot, the two old violins in the corner struck up the never-old tune of " The Turkey in the Straw."

Toad Curtis, now moving up and down the lines like a prancing, upright bull frog, began to croak forth his commands:

" Saloot yer lovely critters—now swing 'em round an' round—*turkey in the straw—turkey in the straw*—now turn 'em loose—climb the grape vine—all hands sashay! Yee—yipp—fine! Come on you maverick down there, git to millin'—*turkey in the straw—turkey in the straw!*"

The dust began to rise as fifty pair of feet pranced and danced across the floor to the perfect time of the singing, swinging fiddles.

" Slim Kelly down the center with little Helen Horn—*ev*-reebody—pull yore freight—heads up, there, Lute Chaney—*turkey in the straw—turkey in the straw*—now purr around yore gentle pussies—what's matter, pop? You-all givin' out? *Turkey in the straw—turkey in the straw—*"

The first dance had neared its finish when, in the calmness of the moonlit outside, the stranger foreman of the Cassidy ranch quietly rode up to the little schoolhouse.

He wore a great, heel-touching gray cloak and on his head a huge gray felt sombrero. He was mounted on a coal-black horse and led a brown, white-faced roan. Both horses were packed for traveling with war-bag, blanket roll and sougan. Noiselessly dismounting he carefully tied both animals to

the wheel of a prairie schooner. Then, unnoticed by the thumping, shouting dancers, he slipped into the room and made his way to the corner nearest the door. With arms folded he watched the animated scene.

His hat remained upon his head.

It was Slim Kelly who discovered the stranger foreman and, laughingly, led little Helen Horn over for an introduction, only to find she had met the stranger that afternoon. And as they stood and talked, the stranger, perfectly at ease, made no move to remove his hat. Once Helen quickly glanced up at it, then at Slim.

While they talked the gray-blue eyes of the stranger roved over the crowded room. Suddenly they stopped. Fire—blood-red streaks of fire—danced in their depths. They were looking square into the face of Lute Chaney. Chaney gave the stranger eye for eye. Then he was seen to start and nervously finger his heavy jowl. The next moment Chaney's voice, high-pitched and raspy, was heard calling across the room:

"Cassidy!"

Instantly a hush fell upon the crowd.

"Cassidy!"

"Yes, Chaney!"

"Ain't some o' yer guests got bringin' up enough to take off their hats in the presence o' ladies?"

"What do you mean?"

"Look over there in the corner," yelled Chaney, pointing his finger. "Look over there—talkin' to Slim Kelly an' Miss Helen!"

"Well, what about it?" sharply asked Cassidy, making his way toward Chaney.

"*This* about it! If you ain't got respect enough for the ladies present to make that damn greaser take off his hat, my Gawd, *I* have!"

Before Cassidy could stop him, Chaney had cut a path across the room and stood facing the man with the gray sombrero. The stranger never moved, never blinked, but burned his blood-streaked gaze into the eyes of Chaney. Calmly, deliberately, he folded his arms, and with tightly pressed lips, was seen slowly but decisively to nod his head several times.

"Take off that hat, *you!*" snarled Chaney.

The stranger caught the pleading eyes of Mother Cassidy.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Cassidy. Mr. Chaney and I will step outside and settle our little differences."

As the stranger spoke he took a step toward the door. With a curse Chaney leaped, grabbed the gray sombrero and tore it from the foreman's head.

Even Chaney's blood-chilling shrill was drowned in the roar of utter amazement that came from the lips of the crowd.

"Branded! Gun-branded, by Gawd!" yelled Chaney. "Horse thief—horse thief! Cold-branded with the sight piece of a six-gun so the whole world would know him as a thief—a horse thief. Do you hear me, Cassidy? You're foreman's a horse thief; the same kind of a rattlesnake you promised to hang from a cottonwood, if you ever ketched one. Come on, men—git the rope! We'll make short work of this—"

"Stop!"

It was Sandy Cassidy's metallic voice that cut Chaney's words like a keen-edged knife.

The roar dropped to a grumble, then ceased. The stranger had picked up his hat and held it in his hand. Fearlessly he faced the crowd, his lips had gone dead white, his jaw steel-taut. His blazing eyes never left the face of Chaney.

On the stranger's forehead, extending down two inches from the crown of his head, in vivid, livid contrast against his sun-tanned skin, *was a deep, jagged X-shaped scar chiseled out, apparently by some hard, blunt instrument!*

"Men," said Cassidy, in low, tense tones, "Chaney is right. This man has been gun-branded. It was cut several years ago by a posse of Texas ranchers livin' in old Mexico. They thought this man was a horse thief. If they hadn't been scared o' the greasers they'd 'a' hung him, and to my notion better it would have been if they *had* than to've had to carry that brand o' Cain all his life—a brand as it happens worn by an innocent man who has—"

"See here, Cassidy," broke in Chaney, suspecting the play for time and now possessed of a rope handed him by one of his men, "what in hell's name's the use o' all

this gassin'? We got the man, we got the evidence, an' we got the rope. What's to stop us from stringing him up from one o' these here rafters? Come on, men!"

To a cowman a horse thief is less than a leper and worse than a common murderer. Chaney was right! The gun-brand *did* identify without a doubt. A start must be made somewhere if they were to break up the rustling then going on along the border.

Why not make an example of this fellow?

Led by Chaney and his own particular henchmen, the determined-faced crowd brushed Cassidy aside and surged toward the stranger. The women, white-cheeked, helter-skeltered to the door. Hands were outstretched to grab the stranger when, as one man, the crowd stopped and stood petrified in their tracks.

With a lightning movement the stranger had unbuttoned his great cloak and stood revealed to the crowd in the gray, bandoleered uniform of the *rurale*, the law on horseback of Old Mexico. In his right hand was a hip-aimed forty-five.

"A *rurale!*" shouted some one.

"Yes, a *rurale!*" came the sharp voice of the stranger. "And a *rurale*, gentlemen, who—has—found—his—man! Cassidy, see that Chaney is held until I finish!"

Fear-faced and trembling Chaney struggled and cursed like a madman. But he found himself in the grip of a dozen pair of hands and as securely held as though in the jaws of a sprung steel trap.

"This is the case, gentlemen"—the stranger emphasized each word with a jerk of his pointing gun—"of Sam Ramsey, American cow-puncher and Andy Walker, horse-thief and wife-murderer. Ramsey and Walker loved the same girl. Walker married her, then took her to Old Mexico to live down in the Bowl of Hell. You men know what kind of a place that is. He made his rock shack the headquarters for a gang of horse thieves. He was the leader.

"The girl, none too strong, cruelly treated by Walker, took sick. Her old trouble, of which she had been cured, t.b., came back. Then a prospector accidentally wandered into the Bowl, and the girl sent word by him to Ramsey to come and take her to the States and her folks. Ramsey had told the girl if she ever needed him to call. Ramsey went—found the girl sick—so sick he knew she could never get well.

"Even while he packed her things Andy Walker appeared in the doorway. For over a week he had been chased by a posse of Texas ranchers living in Mexico. They had caught him red-handed stealing their stuff. He rode one of their stolen horses. They had never seen his face, but knew his clothes and horse. Walker forced Ramsey to change clothes with him, and then mounting Ramsey's horse, escaped from the Bowl through a secret tunnel which only he knew of.

"Down through the Devil's Keyhole, the only entrance and exit known to and from the Bowl, came the posse. Ramsey, trapped, protested his innocence, but the evidence of coat, hat, and stolen horse was all against him. The posse would have killed him, but for the girl. She alone saved his life. She told them Ramsey had lied, that he *was* Walker, that he *was* the horse thief, but that he had stolen to save her, to get money so he could take her back to the hospital in the States.

"The posse took a vote. They decided to gun-brand Ramsey so he would never return to Old Mexico. This—they did—with the sight-piece—of a forty-five. They turned Ramsey and the girl loose. The couple was nearing the American line. They were very happy. Suddenly from a rock across the cañon Andy Walker opened fire on them. With the second shot Mary—the girl—fell from the saddle—dead. That pore little helpless girl, gentlemen, killed—killed by the man who had promised God—promised *God*—he would love and protect her no matter—no matter—"

The stranger's voice shook, then broke. Slowly he replaced his gun in its holster and stood with bowed head. The women had returned from the outside and were tensely watching and listening. Their eyes were moist, and many of them unconsciously gripped the arms of their men. The stranger again faced the crowd:

"Walker had taken Ramsey's gun and thought the cowboy unarmed. But he had not known of a gun which the girl had hid in her suit case. This Ramsey got and

plugged Walker in the shoulder. The dog ran. A few minutes later Sergeant—now Captain O'Neil, of the Mexican *rurales*—attracted by the shots, came up. Again it looked bad for Ramsey with the hot gun, the empty cartridges and the girl—dead at his side.

" O'Neil had nothing to do but arrest Ramsey for the murder of the girl. At Fronteras the captain of the *rurales*, a grin-go-hater, would have thrown Ramsey in jail to be hung or shot, but for O'Neil. O'Neil said he believed Ramsey innocent. Then he proposed to the captain that Ramsey be appointed as a *rurale* and be given six months to bring back the man for whose crimes he claimed he had been accused. Consent was given. The six months passed and Ramsey returned without his man. He found Captain O'Neil in charge.

" O'Neil sent Ramsey out and told him not to return until he had found Andy Walker. It doesn't matter, gentlemen, how long ago that was. What only matters now is the fact that I—*I* am Sam Ramsey! And that Lute Chaney standing there with the fear of death in his face is the horse thief, the murderer, the wife-murderer, Andy Walker. Cassidy, bare his shoulders and show these men that I tell the truth!"

Walker's shirt was ripped off with one jerk. On his white shoulder was the blue-black scar of a forty-five bullet wound. Above the deep-throated growl of anger Sandy Cassidy's voice again took command:

" Men, the story you have heard is true. Ramsey trailed Walker to Horn's place and came to me to get a line on him. I have Captain Jerry O'Neil's word for it all, and the captain's a friend o' mine. I have also a picture which Ramsey found in the girl's suit case."

Cassidy passed the photograph, and with its passing the identification of Andy Walker became complete.

" And Sergeant Ramsey," went on Cassidy, " has in his pocket requisition papers for Andy Walker, to take him back to Old Mexico, which relieves us "—and here Sandy began unconsciously to burr his r's—" which rrrelieves us gentlemen, I would say, of considerrrrable rrrrrresponsibility, I might say, of considerrrable pleasurrrrrrable rrrrrrresponsibility."

A few winks of the moon later, while sober-faced men and heart-eyed women silently watched, Sam Ramsey, cow-puncher, *rurale*, with the help of Cassidy and Horn lifted the hand-bound Walker to the saddle of the white-faced roan. Then Ramsey, with a look of peace upon his face, hatless now, shook hands with Mother and Sandy Cassidy, with good old J. D. Horn, then all around.

When he came to young Slim Kelly and little Helen Horn, standing together, he leaned over and whispered something in Helen's ear, whereupon, before the astonished Ramsey could prevent it, that young lady had planted a smacking kiss square upon his cross-scarred forehead. The cow-punchers, too long ill at ease with the tenseness of it all, took this as an excuse to give vent to their pent-up feelings, which they did with sharp, high-pitched yipps.

As Ramsey made his way toward his mount, the voice of Toad Curtis was heard to drawl in his wake:

" Miss-terr Foreman, you-all might say ter Lew-ute, that I'll take the ree-sponsibility o' co-leckin' them bets fer him an' send him the check—*writ* on—as-bestos paper."

A mighty whooping yell of laughter greeted this remark.

With the free, easy swing of the born cow-puncher, Ramsey vaulted above his coal-black horse. As he did so he slapped the flank of Chaney's mount and the white-faced roan started to climb the little hill.

Ramsey, serious-faced, looking straight ahead as though in deep thought, followed a few feet behind. Silence had again gripped the little group below. Chaney's mount topped the hill and quickly dropped from sight. Now on the crest was seen the moon-shadowed figure of Smoldering Sam Ramsey. He stopped, reined his horse around, and lifting his sombrero high in the air, swung it with a graceful curve to his heart.

Then the big cowboy, with hat and head still held high, leaped from view on the other side of the hill.

THE END.

The Beloved Brute

By KENNETH PERKINS

Author of "The Gun-Fanner," "The Fear-Sway," "The Bull-Dogger," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PART I.

PETER HINGES, a heroic frontiersman and sky pilot, summons, upon his deathbed, his two sons. David, the younger, a strong boy of sterling character, is sent forth with his father's blessing. Charles, the elder, a giant of physical and evil repute, is dismissed with a curse and the prophecy that David will one day bring him to book. The brothers have never seen each other since early boyhood. Charles breaks jail, where he is held for fighting, and hides out in Little Hell, a town of the Bad Lands. Here an aged palmist, Augustina, the Witch of Pimas, persuades him to attempt the rescue of Jacinta, a dance hall girl, from the clutches of China Jones, a half breed dance hall proprietor. Charles starts out to bring matters to a pass between China Jones and himself.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MONARCH OF LITTLE HELL.

CHARLIE HINGES found his man in the private office of the China Jones establishment.

The only entrance to the little room was behind the bar, and Mr. Milligan, the bartender, served also as the office boy, who introduced callers into China's *sanctum-sanctorum*.

"This old stew, Charlie Hinges, wants for to see you personal," were his words.

The room expressed, to some degree, the character of China Jones as well as of his saloon. Besides the usual safe and the case or two of choicer liquors, the den was decorated with lividly painted nudes and

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photographs of burlesque queens. The whole was softened by Jones's favorite mode of illumination—the Chinese lantern. On the desk of mission oak was a pile of papers —receipts, bills, ledgers.

An opium pipe and a thirty-six Colt completed the " atmosphere."

The proprietor, China Jones, was a large framed man with a long neck and small head. A knotting of the brown neck muscles, as well as the abnormally long arms and legs, gave him the aspect of an animal. This was enhanced by the slanting eyes which, under the light of his paper lanterns, took on the semblance of jade, and in his rare moments of intoxication, of cat's eye.

Jones was proud. He affected velvet vests, imported from the City of Mexico. An emerald ring and a green beryl in his beaded Indian tie touched up an otherwise somber costume of khaki, jackboots and a small sombrero. He rarely removed the latter from his little head where he wore it on the side and tilted slightly to the right. Jones smoked big cigars of the claro type with bright bands, and the left corner of his mouth was shaped to holding stubs—a contrast to the large, clean teeth.

Charlie Hinges looked at Jones and then about the room with an obvious air of disappointment. It was too small a room. There was entirely too small an amount of floor space for the business he had at hand.

" Now, then, Mr. Hinges," Jones said suavely, " I'm glad to see you. Have a seat and we'll talk over this business of yours—whatever it is—and if there's anything I can do to—"

" I'm not going to have a seat," Charlie rejoined calmly. " My business don't call for sitting down. It calls for standing up—man to man."

The proprietor did not evince any surprise at this. His visitor had some petty grudge, perhaps, about the game of the preceding night. Jones regarded these troubles with a fatherly compassion.

" I hear how you got cleaned last night, Mr. Hinges," the man at the desk said, twisting his chair about. Hinges took the chair which had been designated for him and threw it aside, thus clearing the three feet of floor space between him and his intended victim.

" It has nothing to do with last night, China Jones, and I didn't get cleaned—as you say. No man that has two fists can be called cleaned."

" I'm glad you bear no grudge about the game," Jones laughed. " As I've announced many times before, the management doesn't assume responsibility for—"

" Look here, China Jones, you listen to me—"

The proprietor held up his hand—a long, olive-colored hand with tapering fingers, on one of which was a well-polished ring. " No, Mr. Hinges, it is not my policy to listen to anybody without having my say first. You'll learn my ways—the more you come into this office of mine hankering for trouble. What I'm to tell you first is this: I reckon you came here to ask me for a loan. Your method of asking for loans, I have heard before this, is to frighten a man stiff first, so he can't refuse."

Hinges's mouth widened so that something almost approaching a smirk of derision flickered across his face. " If ever a bonehead got me wrong, China, it sure is you!"

China Jones, whose attitude until now had been one of impatient condescension, collected himself. He settled down to a mood of calm and implacable waiting. But while waiting his custom was at all times and in all situations to carry on a smooth flow of conversation.

" Being as you taunt me into a fight by calling me a bonehead, I come naturally to the conclusion that you have some grievance or other against me. Am I right?"

" Are you right!" Hinges repeated, raising his voice. " I'll say you're right! And the first sensible remark it is that you've made since I came into this stinking den!"

" And what have I done, Mr. Hinges, that you think is wrong?"

" I reckon you're so pure and white that it surprises you to have a man come and call your actions to question?"

" Not at all, Mr. Hinges," the proprietor said, raising his thin, black eyebrows. " On the contrary, I might say, when you ask me to guess what I've done that ain't exactly to your liking, I say to myself, I've

committed so many crimes I'm unable to put my fingers on just the one you take objection to."

"Well, that's talking now, Mr. Saloonman, and if you can't guess, I'll tell you. It concerns a woman."

"Ah, yes! They give me lots of trouble. Those women! Or I should say my dealings with them bring me lots of trouble. Now what particular offense against womenkind do you reckon you'll punish me for, Mr. Hinges?"

Hinges swore an oath and then blurted out the speech he had intended to make when he first met this sleek, suave enemy: "China Jones! It's your girl—she's the one I'll bring you to account for. I want her. Get that? I want her—and she's mine. Whatever you say one way or the other makes no difference. I want her and I'll take her now, and if you—"

Again the tapering finger with the green ring waved distractingly. Hinges finished a broken speech. "If you think you'll object I'll—I'll break your neck with my bare hands!"

The thin-featured face of the half-breed remained still passive, still unperturbed. Surely he would fight at this, Hinges thought. Even if his face betrayed no excitement, he would spring from his chair and leap for the throat of the man standing above him.

But Hinges was mistaken.

China Jones said with a surprising, almost shocking, equanimity: "Just which girl is it that you want?"

Hinges—aghast—at this reception of his challenge—a challenge that he had thought would mostly surely mean a fight—steped back, recoiling. He gained the balance of his feet, his left foot forward, his fists doubled. But for all this posture he could only evoke a complacent smile on the bronzed face of China Jones.

Before Hinges mentioned the name of the girl Jones said quickly: "I reckon it 'd be best for us to have the girl brought here. Suppose I send Milligan for her?" He struck a little gong which was hanging from the edge of his table—a signal to his office boy, the bald-headed and black-mustached barkeep.

"I'll tell you which girl—and the name of her makes little difference. She's mine, anyhow," Hinges shouted. "It's this girl called Jacinta—the one you abducted from Frisco. Let it be understood that *she's mine from this day on!*"

At this revelation there was the first perceptible change on the face of China Jones. It was a deepening of the color of his eyes, so that a green sheen came—like the peculiar sheen of a dog's eyes when seen in the dark. His voice, however, was still oily. "Jacinta? H-m! That makes a slight difference. But there is no reason why we can't settle the matter without the death of one or the other of us."

Hinges—aghast at this man who had refused to throw off these insults in the accepted way—looked at China Jones from head to foot with a glance of enraged and withering scorn. As his eye measured the height of his uncanny enemy it lighted again on the thin, tapering, olive-colored hand. There was the ring, and one thing else which glittered with the pale red light of the Chinese lantern—a thirty-six Colt with the barrel pointing directly at Hinge's chest.

At the door, blocking the exit, Milligan, the barkeep, stood. He had understood the language of China Jones's gong, *for he also held a six-gun in the palm of his fat, pudgy hand!*

CHAPTER VII.

THE TRAP OF DEATH.

THERE was the normal amount of discretion in the valor of Charles Hinges. Although he had no intention of giving up the fight he knew that for the moment at least he must come to terms—terms which, of course, would be dictated by China Jones.

"I had a hunch, Mr. Saloonman," he said in a completely changed voice—a voice softened at once by disappointment, condescension and a necessary respect for the two guns that were bearing upon him—"I had a hunch that when one man goes to another and demands what I demanded of you there'd be a grand and glorious fight. Not this kind of a fight when all of a sud-

den I find myself covered by two men—but a real life-and-death combat with fists, chairs, teeth, and such. That's the kind of a fight that generally gets pulled off when one man comes after another man's—well, after the dame he has picked out for his mate." Charles Hinges used the thrilling word suggested to him by Augustina, the palmist. "Since you won't fight, but prefer to bargain—and force *me* into doing the same, I have little way out but to accept. And I hear, Mr. Saloonman," Charles added with a slight crispness of enunciation, "that Chinamen are noted for sticking to their bargains."

China Jones covered this reference to his blood with a suave smile. "I'm glad you have a little sense, Charles Hinges. I thought at first you were too fighting drunk to be reasoned with. But I see ye can get down to business. It will be," he concluded, "a mere matter of barter."

"Shoot and I'll listen, Mr. Saloonman."

China Jones began carefully. "No one in Little Hell—in fact, no one in Jacktown itself—has questioned the fact that I own this dame you refer to. Keep your shirt on now! Keep your shirt on!" China added hurriedly, as he saw the huge giant tense every muscle as if about to spring. "By using the word 'own' I naturally throw a scare into you. I shouldn't say own. No man, as far as I can judge—and I'm a good judge in this business—has ever owned the dame—and never will own her without he gets a sky pilot and says to the girl 'With this ring I thee wed.'"

"You're right there!" Hinges said. "And if you or any man ever says the contrary I'll kill him no matter if he plugs me with lead while I'm doing it—I'll kill him with one blow on the jaw."

"You hear that, Milligan?" Jones laughed, looking over Hinges's shoulder to his barkeep. "Never say anything against Jacinta, the dancing girl, for if you do, it 'll do you no good even with that gat of yours."

"He ain't goin' to kill nobody," said Milligan. "I got this pointin' to his lung."

"Then maybe I can go on with what I have to say." China Jones rubbed his hands sleekly. "We can agree that the dame in question is a good dame—good to an extent which is extraordinary in these parts."

"She's too good to even be mentioned by a skunk like you," Hinges said, losing a part of his discretion. "When I try to think of you and her in the same thought it gives me a headache. It's like a dirty beggar groveling at the foot of some Madonna—like the Madonnas you see in the missions down at Puerto Gato and Gomez."

"That's putting it kind of strong," China Jones objected. "In fact, so strong that I want you, Milligan, to stand a bit closer when I say this next sentence."

Milligan obeyed, and Hinges felt a touch of cold steel on the back of his tough neck.

"I get the idea," China went on, "that you've spoken with the dame and that you think you have some claim on her affections. Like as not she's favored you—as women will favor men of the tremendous strength which is yours. Now, then, let me say this: she is no use to me—in her present state of mind. No women are any use to me as dance girls when they're scared to death at the very touch of a drunk cholo. I don't want to lose the reputation I've built up about this saloon and dance hall of mine. It's supposed to be the lowest dive on this side of the Rio Grande, and I capitalize on that very name it's got.

"It's necessary that I have girls of experience—not bad ones, don't get me wrong again. I mean dames that are a bit flossy when it's necessary—especially when some mucker comes in, shouting rich with gold-dust and turning himself into a pig with hootch. This being the case I want girls—pretty girls, who know a thing or two. F'r-instance, how to handle drunks who have found pay dirt. In plain terms, Hinges, I want married women. Of course, my clientele don't have to know my girls are married. But in the long run it's best for business.

"These little stage-struck flappers will drink and swear and smoke and all that, but when the right time comes for them to make a big killing and get a claim on a mine, they throw a fit and get religious instead! Unless, mind you, they're married. Then—zip!"

"Look here, Mr. Chinaman." Hinges spoke softly. "You're getting powerful far off from the point, and I'm getting rheumatism in the back of my neck because of Milligan."

"It's necessary for you to get all this straight before I come to my point. Now, then, I'm ready. It appears to me that you're stuck on this dame—and will do anything to get her. You come to me trying to pick a fight about her, and I refuse to fight. Why? Just because *I'm going to give her to you!*"

"Give her to me!" Hinges yelled, incredulously. "Then you'll say here and now that the girl's mine and you withdraw?"

"I won't go quite as far as to say that. I'm going to give her to you, but I'm not going to withdraw. You are to marry her. What can be better than that? But I'm still to have my claim. She is to work here—in my place as a dancer. I can use her then as my bait—for such suckers as come into town from their diggings in the desert. And in return for this favor you are doing me, I will give you a certain amount of money."

Hinges, livid with a new spasm of anger, stepped forward, balanced to deliver the blow that he had promised would kill. But the cold barrel of Milligan's revolver struck him again in the back of the neck. A string of foul oaths, as well as the foulest of names hurled at the saloonman was all that came of Hinges's anger.

He was powerless—at least, in that one situation.

"You've got me strapped here, Mr. Skunk!" he bellowed. "And lucky it is for you that you covered me with two guns before you made such a proposition to a fighting man. And let me tell you this: *you're going to pay!* You'll pay for every word you've said! It 'll be best for you to plug me here and now, and let me die at your feet hearing the things you've dirtied your mouth with. Otherwise I'll be back and finish this fight when you stand up to me like a man."

"Yes, it might be best for me to plug you, Mr. Hinges," China Jones rejoined, "except that it is not my usual habit to get an enemy into my office and then kill him. It would be, shall we say, too embarrassing. There are other ways. If you want the fight to go on, all right. But first let me break you and announce that I'll let you refuse this bargain I've offered, and go away free. But it 'll be the last time. If you come to me again I will not let you go away unharmed with that threat against my life. Milligan—take his gun; send him out!"

The barkeep obeyed, and Hinges followed him out of the room. "This house, Mr. Hinges," Jones called out, "is one more establishment which is closed to you. Of course you can come in. But you'll find difficulty in—going out."

Milligan, feeling the thrill of power which his six-gun gave him, could not resist his own personal parting shot: "You can come in, but you'll find difficulty in comin' out!"

Hinges did not seem to consider this worthy of a reply. He did, however, glance at the flabby face of his ejector, and the glance was fraught with meaning.

"And your nasty looks don't scare me neither!" Fat concluded. "You and your great muscles don't amount to much when I hold this gun—eh, Mr. Hinges? One little touch of this trigger will do more than all the brawn and strength and fight in your body. One little hole dug in you with this and your brawn will ooze out all over the sawdust. Haw! Haw! Haw!"

Hinges stood out in the road and looked at Fat Milligan. The latter felt it indiscreet to taunt the giant further. In fact, Hinges's last look—a slight lowering of the lids—persuaded the barkeep that having obeyed his master's injunction in escorting the giant to the street, he would best return to the inner, safer seclusion of the bar.

He brooded over the look for a few minutes, took a drink, and then knocked at China Jones's office door. Milligan's fat, red face had assumed a gloomy pallor. "You hadn't orter have let him go, chief," he said to China Jones. "We had him under our thumb, but now there's no telling what he'll do. I'm scairt to death of meetin' him hereafter. What if I was on the street with him on my way home from work? B-r-r-r!"

"It appears to me, Milligan, that you don't know how to handle men who are in love. If you think I let this man go, you're mistaken. He's in love and he'll be back. When he comes back we can finish him with better grace. I don't like to kill men in my office. Too many questions are asked. But if I get this girl he's so loony about, and have supper with her in a booth tonight, and then some one goes and tells him about it, and then if he comes to me in front of a crowded dance hall and sees me in the booth and picks a fight—"

"You don't mean to say you'll fight him, chief?" the barkeep said with wide open eyes.

"Not exactly. But you can see the outcome of the meeting would be simpler to explain—a jealous lover and all that. I fight to protect myself. Somebody else helps me, of course. Hinges gets killed, and we have a hundred—two hundred—witnesses to prove that I am without blame."

"A good game, chief, but—"

"Go and get Jacinta, the girl," China Jones decreed, turning to his desk and his bills. "I want to see which side she's on first. If she's for the hellbender, the fight will be a little complicated. If not—then, 'On with the dance'!"

CHAPTER VIII.

JACINTA PRETENDS.

MILLIGAN found Jacinta in the gaming room in company with the palmist. The two women were awaiting the return of their champion. Hinges, as the barkeep hastened to explain, was busted good and proper, and the chief had taken his gat. The girl glanced at the old *señora*, but took the latter's cue to assume a mask of indifference.

"Did you know you'd made a hit on that fist-fighter?" Milligan asked curiously.

"I noticed it," Jacinta replied calmly.

"Well, it's about that I come to see you. The chief wants you to report to him—pronto. He's wild. From what I could make out from the conversation of them two birds the chief's in love with you—as much as the hellbender himself. So watch your step. He's a bad *hombre* with any woman—and if he happens to be in love with 'em—good night!"

Jacinta scarcely needed this hint. She wrapped her shawl about her white shoulders, shrugging them to accentuate her indifference to the summons of her master. Without any more words to either the palmist or Milligan, she got up from her table, left the booth, crossed the dance floor and entered the saloon. Milligan followed and saw her go into the little den of China Jones behind the bar.

The scene was not new to the girl, but there was an atmosphere of tense conflict there which her peculiar intuition recognized. It was an atmosphere which transformed the details—the safe, the painted nudes, the dirty window pane, the Chinese lantern and the man working at the table—into a picture that reminded the girl somehow of the dark, comfortable apartment of a trapdoor spider.

China Jones motioned his visitor to a seat and for a few minutes continued scribbling at his papers. Finally he turned around.

"Have a cigarette?" he said, his lips tightening slightly in a smile as Jacinta reached for his monogrammed case. "I don't want you to feel like a little schoolgirl coming into the presence of a principal or something like that—do I now?"

"Darned if I know. It's not what I felt like, anyway, if you want to know my opinion."

"Good! I always think first of the personal feelings of my ladies—you know that."

"Yes, you do. Sure. Huh!" Jacinta's voice turned into a mocking little laugh as she took the first inhalation of smoke. "What did you want to see me for? Are you going to bawl me out about something?"

"I guess you know. I didn't tell Milligan to keep it a secret. It's about that Charlie Hinges."

"Oh!" She puffed again—not without enjoyment. "What about him?"

"I'm glad to see you're getting onto your job and making my guests feel at home. You're the best little gold-digger I've got."

"Is that what you wanted to tell me?"

"Yes, you're on the right track, but this time you picked a loser. Charlie Hinges is busted. I thought you knew that. He was cleaned last night at monte. Why waste your time on him?"

"If he's busted," the girl said quickly, "I don't suppose there's anything else about him that would appeal to a woman—like me—is there?"

"Well, *is* there? I like to study women. Is there anything about that brute who goes about beating up any man that so much as laughs at his big mouth or red nose—"

"Yes, it is a red nose, isn't it? I didn't notice it before."

"Oh, you didn't? Well, come to think of it, it isn't red." Jones paused a minute and then added—carefully: "It's big, though."

"Yes. And so are his fists, and his shoulders—and everything else."

"Are you warning me to keep away from him?"

"I don't suppose you'd be any too quick to pick a fight with him."

China Jones leaped to his feet, shoved back his chair and faced the girl. He looked down at her startled, upturned face and began to nod. "That all, girl," he said incisively. "I've got your number now. And there's not much use going on any further with this conversation. I asked you in here to find out whether there was anything between you and this bully Hinges, and I find out that you're in love with him. Now don't lie to me about it and say you aren't. I know."

"You know lots, Jones!" the girl shot back, scoffingly. "You know too much. If you want me to speak my mind straight, all I know about Charlie Hinges is that he's a fighter and could tie you up in a knot and throw you through the ceiling. I know that—and that's all I care about him. As for falling in love with him—I wouldn't do it on a bet. I like strength in a man, but not his kind of strength. All women like strength, and you assinine men think that means they like brutes. Well, it don't mean anything of the kind. If you want to know my real number I'll tell you. I'm looking for a man with strength, yes, but a man with a bean, too, and a man with looks. You yourself, Jones, come nearer to the man I want. No, I'm not trying to get around you. If you think I'm in love with Charlie Hinges, put me to the test and I'll show you."

China Jones studied her face for a moment, and finally answered doubtfully: "Maybe it's not love exactly. I was hasty there, I'll admit. But you've been telling that bird something. Don't delay that! And if I know anything at all—thinking it over carefully this time—I'm partly of the mind that you've been roping that bird into fighting for you. You don't love him—all right, I'll admit that. But you're going to use him. You want him to fight me, so you can be free—of me."

"You lie!"

China Jones smiled his usual defensive smile. "If I'm right"—he said with a cool, incisive air of finality—"if I catch you trying to get away from me by picking a champion for yourself I'll make you pay as no woman ever paid a score before in her life."

"I said you lie. I'm not going to stand here having you bully me into dropping before you on my knees. I say I hate Charlie Hinges. I hate brutes like him!"

China Jones had regained part of his compelling calm. "I have seen women tear themselves into a passion and I have seen men believe them sincere. It's very common. But I myself am going to put you to a test to find out whether you're on Charlie Hinges's side or on mine. I am going to have Charlie Hinges beat up to-night. There'll be ten men out there in the barroom slugging him. You and I are going to watch. By that I mean *you* will watch and I will watch you. If you can look on the spectacle laughing and joking with the rest of us, then I will be more apt to believe what you say is true."

"I will do more than that," the girl added enthusiastically. "I will put on a dancing costume—anything you wish—and celebrate his fall as the chorus ladies in Egypt and Babylon and other high-stepping burgs of the old days used to celebrate the fall of their enemies!"

China Jones looked at the girl, and as he

looked, he thrust his tongue into his cheek. He was far from convinced. But the prospect of an exciting night in his "place"—a memorable fight, an Oriental dance, a broken enemy—appealed to China Jones. He stepped to the door and called Milligan. "Bring in a split of champagne, Fat. We got a little plotting to do."

When the barkeep brought in the drinks, and the three had drawn their chairs about the office table, China Jones outlined his plan:

"To-night, folks, we're goin' to see the biggest jamboree ever pulled off in Little Hell. You remember that Little Egypt costume which Jude Silent did a term in jail for letting one of his women dance in it down at the Dead Cow Saloon at Lava?"

"Remember!" Milligan chuckled. "How could any man forgit?"

"Well, that's the costume this little lady is going to dance in to-night."

"Wow!"

"Before the dance we're going to have a preliminary which is to be a fight between Charles Hinges and—well, and everybody."

"Not me. I ain't goin' to do no fightin', chief. Not if you're goin' to let that Charles Hinges in here agin. *Count me out!*"

"You don't have to do any fighting yourself," Jones explained. "But you'll act as a sort of foreman. I want you to get ten men—the best fighters we have—Black Jefferson, he can use his banjo as a weapon, maybe; then you can get the bouncer, and Beefy Muggins. The whole gang is to do just as you say. Now this lady is going to have dinner with me in the booth nearest the faro table. Then, when Charles Hinges walks in—"

"He's goin' to walk in, is he, chief?"

"He'll come all right, mark my words. There's no doubt about that. Any man who has a girl comes back, and it 'll be up to the bouncer to keep him out—at the point of a gat if necessary until the proper time. Then when he comes in he'll see this lady here eating supper with me in the booth. This lady is going to taunt him, so that he'll pick a fight with me before the dinner's over. You get that, too, do you, girl?"

"Sure; I'll taunt him. I know 'taunt'!"

"She'll taunt him so much that he won't be able to wait until he gets me alone. Then as soon as he starts in to fight, it 'll be your cue to get ten men to hop on him and beat him up."

"What if we can't beat him up? What if he beats us?"

"Ten men?" China Jones elevated a set of politely scornful eyebrows.

"I've heard he can handle a bunch pretty slick, chief."

"All the better! It 'll look to the crowd in the saloon as if he's determined to get me—and it 'll be enough of an excuse for me to pot him."

"You're goin' to pot him, chief?" the barkeep asked, blandly delighted at hearing this.

"Why not?"

"Well, that's the first sensible word you've spoke yet." Milligan vented a long sigh of relief.

"Now, then, girl"—Jones turned to Jacinta—"you get into that dressing room across the hall, and for reasons which you may understand I don't want you to come out until it's time for supper. That 'll give you just time enough to get into your dancing costume and get dolled up."

China Jones got up from the table, and inviting the other two to follow, led the way into the dance hall, at one end of which was a small closet used by the dancing girls as a make-up room.

"I'll have old Augustina bring the Little Egypt costume," Jones said. "She's used it before for part of her palmist act. She'll put it on you and paint you."

When the girl had entered the dressing room China Jones turned to his aid. "I didn't tell you everything, Fat, but get this: I'm pulling off this show to punish that girl. She's not on our side. I'll swear to it that she's trying to get Hinges to fight me. She thinks I'm not hep, but I am. Now it's up to you to watch her. She's not to get out of that room, you understand?"

"That's easy, chief," the barkeep rejoined.

"And when the old palmist comes with her outfit, you watch the old bird, too, see? She's as crooked as any snake-haired Medusa that ever traveled west of Cairo!"

Fat Milligan winked. "I'll watch 'em both, chief. I know women!"

"Remember," hissed China, "neither one of them must escape!"

CHAPTER IX.

SIX JEWELS THAT KILL.

SEÑORA AUGUSTINA lived in one corner of a sand lot at the end of the small group of saloons and styled her shack the Gateway to Little Hell. She had transformed the shake-barn into a bower which, to those gifted with imagination, savored something of the mysterious. It was the tawdriness of the circus palmist—paper poppies, brilliantly colored horoscopes, and red lanterns, mingled with the sincerer atmosphere of a Mexican bazaar—chile-colorado garlands, burnt peas, bronze scales, and jewelry of jet.

Charlie Hinges, returning from his temporary and, more or less, technical defeat at the hands of China Jones, sought out the Witch of Pimas with the intention of planning a more definite attack in his campaign for the deliverance of the dancing girl. He entered the cabin, stooping low as he passed the draped threshold.

The scene that met his gaze was calculated to inspire confidence in the peculiar witchcraft of Señora Augustina. An odor of *ghoor* and *saffron* was mingled with recently fried bacon. Draperies of silk mull covered the bare pine boards. Dirty cards and paw-paw seeds, used by Indians as dice, were strewn about the table. Figs and dates in a tin cup, a cheap brand of incense-musk from a San Francisco firm, and a discolored skull preserved the atmosphere of a necromancer's booth.

The woman greeted her giant visitor. "I know all!" she said hastily before Charles could explain his recent, humiliating adventure. "And I have consulted my books of divination. The time is not yet auspicious. But to-night—"

"To-night—I kill!"

"No! I have thought these things out and studied them, and I have discovered the ascendancy of your star—and of his—and"—she added—"of hers!"

"The stars have nothing to do with breaking a man's bones!" Hinges interrupted. "Where is the girl? That's why I came here. You go and find the girl. Tell her to come to me! I'll ride with her into the desert, and any man that pursues me I'll bury alive out in the dunes."

"The girl will come," the palmist assented, soothingly. "You will save her, but many things will come to pass first. There must be no law hounding you two to your death. And—*there is a way!*"

"Get the girl now!" Hinges insisted. "You go in there to China Jones's place and get her. They'll pot me if I go in. And even at that I'll swear to you, I'll go in there and get her if you don't."

"It must not be! Not *yet!*"

The old woman had been rummaging in one of her boxes when Charles came in, and at this point she extracted a flimsy pair of trousers of striped silk. "This *serroual* of the Turks is for the girl to wear at the dance to-night. China Jones has ordered that she put it on, and I am to take it into her. When I go to her and paint her face with *sindur* and her feet with powders, then I will tell her that you are coming. You will go in to the dance hall and claim her before all the citizens of Little Hell!"

"That sounds all righto!" Charlie Hinges admitted. "But how are you going to fix it so's I can fight without some one pumping lead into me every time I double my fist?"

"There will be a fight—a glorious fight!" the fortune teller promised. "You will be like Samson. Your strength will come to you in the temple of the Philistines and you will fell them all—and smite them! 'Out of the eater shall come forth meat!' so went the ancient riddle of Samson! 'And out of the strong shall come forth sweetness!' The girl will be yours forever!"

"Let me get this straight," Hinges said with gathering fervor. "I've been looking for you for an hour and during that time you seem to have heard a thing or two. You say the girl is to dance—and in that one-piece suit you've got there. Then during the dance I'm to horn in and before the citizens who will flock to China Jones's place to see the dance—I will proclaim that she is mine? Now that's all very well as long

as China's army don't start in snipin' at me from behind every booth in the hall."

"It will be a fight of brawn—not of lead. It will be as primitive men fought. You will be like Samson pulling the pillars of the temple so that all the lords of the Philistines—which will be the men of Little Hell and Jacktown—were slain!"

"Fine!" Hinges shouted. "And I take it you've got all this dope by overhearing some frame-up. Eh, what? Now confess, old lady!"

The wrinkled soothsayer pointed to a large sheet which hung on one wall of the shack. Geometrical designs of a most complex order proclaimed the relationship of the mind, the soul, the body and the stars.

"It looks like a map of some settler's claim," Hinges observed.

"The planets which govern us are now in superior conjunction," the old faker said, with the proper intonation. "And I have found in the horoscope the degree of the ecliptic which rises above the horizon at eight to-night. It is then that you will fight. The dancing girl and her captor will be at supper together in a booth—so say the stars."

"Who else says it?" Charles asked.

"Enough—that you hear it from me. You will be admitted to the dance hall because China Jones will station his men to waylay and beat you. They will not shoot—they will fight with bare hands. You will have a chance to fight ten men and win the love of the girl you are saving."

"Zowie! If that don't suit me like a shot of scat to a Hopi! Your words are music to my ears, sister! I'll bowl the whole crew of 'em round the floor till their heads crack together like dice. I'll make their mouths bleed like a Jesako's been after 'em with a cupping horn! I'll—but say"—Hinges paused again incredulously—"is this the real dope you're handing me? Did you get it from Jones or his gang? Or are you just dreaming something about this road map of the stars you got up there on the wall?"

"The stars incline!" the palmist rejoined cryptically. "It is you who are to shape this climax of your life so that it will satisfy your soul!"

"I'll shape it all righto! Leave it to me. And a few other souls will get shaped, too." He held up his doubled fist—the one reassuring undeniable symbol. "The shaping's going to be done with this, and the souls to be shaped will be skulls and bones!"

"When the conflict is over you are to take the woman who is your mate, and you are to walk through the crowd in the saloon, which will bow down before you like a field of grain before a storm. You will take the girl in your arms and then you will come out here as swiftly as your feet will bring you to this booth. There will be horses saddled and ready. Your own horse and my two pintos which are born to the desert."

"And a grub-stake, sister? Don't forget that. We'll be gone a few days without crossing any of the regular trails."

"I will have everything prepared," the palmist said. "Your mate will be with you for many days and nights hereafter."

"You mention a point there," Hinges said seriously. "This jane, from what I've been able to figure out, is a good jane and young and afraid of men. Do you reckon she'll consent to go into the desert and live with me—Charles Hinges—who's been a drunk and renegade for so many years?"

"There is no freedom for her from China Jones, excepting only the sanctuary of the desert."

"I didn't think of that part of it, sister. Say, look here, when a jane like this little dancing girl who's like the pure and sacred nuns we hear about down at Santa Barbara's—I say when a jane like that goes off on a honeymoon with a drunk like me—and without being married, don't you reckon the right thing is for her to have what is in some countries known as a chaperon? I recollect now from my boyhood days that my father being a preacher maintained it was good to have an old lady along when certain kinds of parties are being pulled off. Much as I thought the old boy's ideas were phony at best, it appears that this is a circumstance which calls for the presence of your crooked, wrinkled, but respectable old carcass."

"There will be three mustangs—it is written in the infinite page: the sky, with its infallible script—the stars!" the old wo-

man answered, cloaking her delight with the somber tones of soothsaying.

Having come to this agreement, Charlie was ordered to wait in the booth, hiding himself until the hour designated by the algebraic computations of Augustina. This hour was eight o'clock—the time when Charles must make his entrance into the riotous company of China Jones's saloon. Until then, so the astrologer explained, it would be impossible to see Jacinta, who was at that moment held prisoner in a dressing room of China's dance hall.

Having given Hinges these orders the palmist hurried to Jacinta, taking with her the Nautch girl outfit prescribed by Jones. She found Jacinta waiting in the unventilated closet which served as the make-up room.

The girl was already employed in thinning her eyebrows by the means of a pair of tweezers.

It was obvious that Jacinta realized she was to play the leading lady in a memorable drama, and to this end she wanted to make use of all of her charms in the difficult rôle assigned to her. A beautiful girl can do more, she observed, than one who is unkempt—no matter what the situation.

Señora Augustina, the palmist, did not fail to emphasize this truth herself when Milligan the barkeep, who had stationed himself as a guard outside the dressing room, had let her pass through the door.

The odor of grease paint, stifling in this little cubby-hole, was relieved only by the less agreeable smell of cheap colognes. A sideboard of unplaned pine was littered with towels, soiled and smirched with many colors; hairpins and combed-out hair was strewn everywhere on the floor, the bench and the board.

A cracked mirror reflected the light of two candles perched on the top of cones of grease which resembled miniature white Christmas trees. A tin box lay open, revealing a hodgepodge of lipsticks, powder puffs, mascaro, safety-pins and talcum. Beside this box stood a bottle of freckle lotion—a necessary cosmetic for the dance girl of a desert town.

The palmist, upon entering, put her long, dark finger to her lips whispering that Fat Milligan was outside smoking a black, evil-smelling cigar, and that he was eavesdropping. Señora Augustina immediately fell to the business at hand, silently, energetically and with a consummate skill.

She ordered her charge to divest herself of her shoes and the torn pink stockings, together with her skirt, jacket and blouse. The duenna then commenced to beautify the dancing girl with a skill which would have satisfied the soul of any slave appointed to delight Belshazzar or Darius of Babylon.

First she plastered cold cream upon the knees and feet and the slender arms, massaging it in until a faint fire glowed under the white skin. "It is like the hue that gleams in embers flaked with ash," the old woman remarked, purring with satisfaction.

These words Fat Milligan heard distinctly, but he could make nothing of importance out of them.

He puffed away at his black cigar, watching the dance hall, which was already beginning to fill with the night's revelers. Black Jefferson took his place on the stage and started his plunking ragtime. "Lots will be expected of Black Jefferson!" Milligan thought to himself.

As the rhythm of the banjo drifted into the closet Augustina worked more and more enthusiastically. She undid Jacinta's hair, letting the silken ringlets fall rippling over the delicate shoulders and the snow-white back. Braiding these into two long braids she tied them about the girl's head preparatory to making up her face, neck and shoulders. Blue paint about the eyes, with vermilion in the corner for the sake of brilliancy, black grease paint, melted over the candle flame for eyelid beads—these effects the old palmist worked out with a miracle of enthusiasm and experience. Then the neck and shoulders and arms were powdered—though thinly—so that they seemed snow-white with still that gleam of youthful fire beneath. Finally the hair was combed out—a rich, silken gold in the candlelight and encircled with beads of jet from Augustina's property box—a "coiffure like the gold of Hellas maiden," the old duenna croaked joyfully; "like fair-haired Hellen going into the presence of Egyptian God."

"If you call China Jones an Egyptian God you're going some," was Jacinta's comment. "I don't quite agree with you there, *señora,* but I will say that as a make-up artist you're no slouch!" The dancing girl surveyed the beautiful, though somewhat lopsided, shadow which peered through the cobwebs of the mirror.

Augustina had done her work well.

"And now for the *serroual*—silken, crimson from a bazaar in Afghanistan—"

"Is that my costume?" the girl asked.

"This and this vest of muslin with gold buttons."

"Is that—all?"

"You will be like the dancers of Cairo—" the palmist hurried on, "and I have seen such at Madrid—and at Coney Island. Men lose their minds over these dancers."

"Well, I should think they would—and it must be pretty warm climates where they wear diving suits of this make. It's lucky for us this isn't Frisco or I'd feel like I was having a shower bath out in the fog."

The girl slipped nimbly into the striped silken trousers. Augustina buttoned the tight little vest about her shoulders.

Jacinta stood transformed into a ravishing figure evoked out of the mustiness of that wretched make-up closet, as one might find a jewel flashing in some dust heap. Or, as Augustina expressed it, "like a cloud of incense taking form in some den of Chinatown."

"And now these bangles of *redeefs* pierced and strung like emeralds for your ankles," the duenna said triumphantly, "and you are ready."

Jacinta looked down as the old crone hooked the anklets about her bare feet. "Say, look here, *señora,*" she said, "don't you figure you'd ought to show me something in the line of footwear besides that jewelry?"

"Are you ashamed of your feet, child? With these bangles about them they are like white lilies surrounded by green water!"

"No, you don't get me." Shame of her bare feet was the last thing of which to accuse Jacinta. "China Jones doesn't plane his floor down any too slick. I'll be getting splinters."

The duenna chuckled, shaking her gray-haired head and assuring the girl that she'd order Milligan to scatter an extra bucketful of sawdust on the floor.

"And one thing more—the crowning touch. With your beauty as I have decked you out there is wanting nothing to make you the master of many men. They will bow down to you; they will worship you—when they are drunk they will grovel before you as the swine of Circe groveled before her. And yet there is one thing more—which will make you master of all—of man and woman alike, of enemy and friend. It is an ornament more seductive than the bracelet about your wrist or the bangles about your ankles. It is like a necklace that you will wear—a necklace with six precious jewels—and any one of these jewels is of such power that should you present it to a man it will not profit him to own all the other jewels in the world. You will wear it as a pendant—here—close to your breast—underneath the muslin and the gold buttons. Do not take it out. Do not let any man see it—not even China Jones himself. For it is China Jones you must overpower with this last touch to your loveliness."

Augustina glanced swiftly at the closed door. Her lips signaled silence. A sudden motion on the part of her duenna and Jacinta felt, nestling against the flesh beneath her vest, *the chill steel of a small, glistening revolver!*

CHAPTER X.

THE DANCE OF DESIRE.

THE gambling room was the largest hall in the establishment of China Jones. At one end was the little stage where Black Jefferson enacted the dual rôle of entertainer and sergeant-at-arms. From his platform he could look down upon the roulette wheel and the surrounding poker tables, and across the floor to the *buffet* and observe the general trend that events were taking.

He was a good man for the post because guests and gamblers ignored him. He was supposed to be the entertainer only, and beyond his clog-dancing, banjo-playing and

coon-shouting, he was not counted on in free-for-all fights. In fact, if the place were held up—as had been the case more than once—Black Jefferson was generally overlooked.

There was a general impression throughout Little Hell that the big negro was harmless—perhaps slightly deficient. This rumor was substantiated by the peculiar shape of his head.

It resembled an egg.

He had a huge mouth, round features, with a buried sort of a nose that sniffed after the fashion of a pug dog. There was, apparently, no forehead.

The current estimation of Black Jefferson did not mean that the citizens of Little Hell, or Jacktown, did not respect his potential powers. This was evidenced by the fact that no one made fun of him. True, certain visiting gunmen when in liquor had thrown peanuts at him—as if he were an orang-utan in a cage, but these were rare instances, and the negro did not regard them as provocative. Quite the contrary, he seemed to be particularly slow to fight, and for that very reason the wiser inhabitants had a secret impression that he might be something like a suppressed volcano.

He was one of China Jones's henchmen—and that meant something.

China Jones believed in bodyguards who would inspire fear and magnify his name. China Jones inspired fear in a good part of the country and it was only the benighted among bandits who cared to meddle with him. He knew how to rule a country by fear—and the choice of such men as Black Jefferson—enigmatic, suppressed, silent—helped him maintain his sway.

At the opposite end of the hall was another henchman, at whom every one laughed without fear. Squatted at the side of the door which led to the saloon and thence to the street, sat Hump Domingo.

This little rat of a Mexican was engaged by China Jones to lend atmosphere to his Palace of Fortune. Superstition and savage fetishes found good soil in a community like Little Hell, and China Jones played up to them. He knew that the rubbing of Domingo's humpback was an inviting privilege for the losing gamblers at the tables.

"I never opened a wheel yet—this side of Frisco," China said, "but that I found a humpback made the betting soar."

Hump Domingo hated the world, and his delight was in watching men get beaten either in brawls or at cards. The prospect of seeing a big man like Charles Hinges battered to a pulp that night pleased him.

"I will grab him about the legs as I have been commanded," Domingo said to himself. "With these long arms of mine in which is all the strength that I possess I will encircle his huge calves and hog-tie him like a bull that's roped with a lariat. Then Jefferson, over there, will hurl his great black fists into Hinges's mouth, and Fat Milligan standing there behind the *buffet* and waiting—he will stop wiping his whisky glasses and come over and kick Hinges in the ribs. And all the time the bouncer and croupier will pommel him! It will be good for my soul—this fight!"

The sinister thoughts of the Mexican were interrupted by the appearance of some one who seemed as far removed from fighting as night from day.

The frail, laughing dancing girl, ushered to her seat in one of the booths, must have softened the fighting thoughts of every man there—from Black Jefferson down to the slinking, squat Mexican. She entered like a child into a den of brutes, like a ray of light into a cave. There could be no fighting, one would think, with this lovely, delicate thing in their midst.

And yet, curiously enough, the henchmen of China Jones when they looked at her were fired with a still hotter zeal: she was worth fighting for—that was the chord Jacinta struck in their hearts! The whole scene, every man's eyes, even the lights seemed focused on the booth where Jacinta was.

"I will fight the hardest of any," said the barkeep to himself, "and then she will see that I am the best of the chief's gang."

"I would steal diamonds for her," said the croupier.

"I will protect her," said the bouncer. "I am the biggest man here. She cannot help but see that."

"I would kill a man for her," said the negro.

"She is thickly painted, but a beauty at that," said the dance hall women.

"I could crush her with my arms," said Hump Domingo.

From then, until the entrance of Charles Hinges, every one watched China Jones and his partner. Domingo acted as waiter, setting before them an elaborately served feast of fresh, tough roast, canned goods, *tamales, enchiladas* and California champagne.

Of the latter China Jones seemed to have an unlimited stock. Observing that his dinner was already causing a sensation, he ordered the big crowd of cholos, prospectors, gamblers and muckers to drink on the house. All Jacktown and Little Hell, having got wind of the drama that was to be enacted in China Jones's place that night, had crowded in. Every booth was occupied with a company that grew more boisterous as the time went on.

Finally, when the shouting and laughing, the sharp *plunk-plunk* of the banjo and the insistent rhythmic pounding of the mechanical piano approached a glorious climax, a sudden hush—more nerve-racking than the loudest noise—fell upon the whole assembly.

Charlie Hinges had arrived.

Samson had entered the temple of the Philistines.

Every one there seemed to dwindle into insignificance at the appearance of Charles Hinges. Black Jefferson was as tall, but now he was lanky; Fat Milligan was flabby; the bouncer, chunky, slow, bull-like. These points had not been noticed before. But as Hinges looked from one to another, China Jones felt that his power would, that night, be taken from him. His men would no longer be thought invincible. But the game was started and it must be finished.

China Jones, eager to appear a magnanimous host, let Hinges pick the fight—as had been arranged.

Accordingly the bouncer, having been instructed in his duties by his employer, stepped up to Hinges. Softly as he spoke, his words could be heard in the innermost recess of the farthest booth.

"Howdy, Mr. Hinges? I'm right glad to see you."

"Howdy, Mr. Bouncer," Charlie rejoined. "I reckon you've been given instructions to throw me out? Which is unpleasant, as I don't like to hit a man smaller than me."

The bouncer, with the embarrassment of his mission, reddened from his swollen neck to his flat forehead and to the roots of his bristly hair. "I ain't been ordered to throw you out, Mr. Hinges. That is, not exactly in them words," he said carefully. "I know China Jones requested you not to come into his place agin—after the little talk you-all had this afternoon. But bein' as this is a sort of celebration to-night—and everybody's invited—from Jacktown, Little Hell, and the whole county, I figure it's all right for you-all to come, too. There being only one little objection: you can't come in heeled, as we figure they's a big chanst of your startin' to shoot the place up in about twenty-five minutes from now, when we're goin' to have a little dance ack pulled off out here in the center of the floor."

"I reckoned on that before I came into this room," Hinges replied calmly. "If I'd come heeled every one in Little Hell and in Jacktown, too, would swear that I came to commit murder. I left my gat in custody of China Jones himself, as you may know. I've come here without it—and without any other gat, and if things don't go the way I like them to go in here I'll have to rely on my bare hands."

"That sounds fair enough to me," the bouncer said. "And China Jones requested me to announce that being as he's a fair man, he promises he won't do nothin' if you won't do nothin'." He raised his voice to the pitch of a formal announcement. "They's to be no scrap here to-night without you start it."

"That sounds all righto," Charlie answered. "If there's to be no scrap without my starting it I sure can't kick, can I?"

"Not so fur's I can see. Now, then, have a bottle of champagne on the house."

"I sure will."

There was a general murmur of disappointment throughout the crowd when this bargain had been struck, although most of them understood that the ultimate intent of the bouncer had been merely to admit Charlie to the room and to prepare him for

the next event by ascertaining that he was disarmed.

Charlie took a seat at one of the gaming tables at the end of the hall opposite the booth where China Jones and Jacinta were seated. On one side of him was the *buffet*, behind which stood Milligan. In front of his table was the little stage with Black Jefferson, who had resumed his banjo song. Behind him, at the door which he had just entered, was squatted Hump Domingo, like a toad.

But Charlie was not interested in these surroundings nor in the guests who were observing him so intently. He was watching the ravishing figure seated at the table opposite to China Jones.

Few men could have been blessed in a lifetime with such a picture—and most certainly no man like Charlie Hinges. Jacinta had thrown a long, shimmering *zarape* about herself, but it only partially covered her. The little gold pompoms of her vest flashed like bubbles about the ethereal, almost transparent, body of a fairy.

The shadow of the lantern passed over her white back—now like a fantastic tattooed picture—now like a dragonfly floating across a pool of light tinged by sunrise. Atlas regaining strength from the earth, his mother could not have been prepared more adequately for a terrific combat than Hinges worshiping at this shrine.

China Jones watched his enemy out of the corners of sleek, tight eyes. He knew that little would be needed to provoke the big renegade to fight. The defeat of so notorious a scrapper as Charles Hinges on the floor of China Jones's gambling den would add not a little to the fear-sway of the monarch of Little Hell. From that time on, Jones thought to himself, men would say: "Leave the half-breed Chink alone. Look what he did to Charles Hinges, the invincible! If you tamper with China Jones he will have ten men jump out of the shadows of the room and beat you to death, like men who stone a mad dog." Jones was satisfied with this thought and he considered the time propitious to taunt his enemy into fighting.

He turned to the dancing girl and said in a loud voice: "Get up now and show us how the Egyptian dames entertain their masters in Cairo! What d'you say? *'I'm not your master?'*"

The girl had said nothing of the kind. In fact, if the truth must be told, little Jacinta was eager to get out on the floor and let rhythm and music set off her beauty as it is necessary for a Spanish turquoise to have a setting. Contrary to the plan of China Jones, she jumped nimbly from her seat, saying: "Why, sure I'll dance, Jones. Who said I wouldn't? Just watch me!"

But China held her hand, and at the end of the clapping that had drowned the girl's speech, he shouted: "When I say you'll dance, it's settled. You dance! Every one here understands that and so do you. You are mine and if there's any one here man enough to deny it—" he cried dramatically as he whirled the girl down from the booth so that she pirouetted on the sawdust-covered floor. "If there is any man who will deny it let him stand up to me, face to face!"

Now Charles Hinges did not answer this taunt for a definite reason. Although China Jones had made use of a lull in the cheering to hurl it at him, it had failed as signally as if he had been stone deaf. For at that very moment Jacinta, with an uncanny prescience that told her it was not yet the time for the fight, threw off the *zarape* and stood in the middle of the floor like a marble Galatea before her astounded creator.

The foul tobacco smoke and tawdry Chinese lights of the den dissolved into incense mists and into the flush of dawn on Olympus as far as Charlie Hinges was concerned. No bickering taunt of saloon man could have awakened him from that spell. It might be said that every gambler and barkeep and gunman was reacting to this climax in much the same manner.

China Jones himself forgot the fight as Jacinta danced.

The slow, broken rhythm of the mechanical piano was all the girl needed as inspiration. For her it was a vital moment. Every muscle in her responded to the terrific new enthusiasm. She felt that the ages of civilization had crumbled; that she was a slave before some barbaric king, dancing to delay an execution! She was *Salome* eager to en-

snare the hearts of Herod's counselors and guests, and she knew by the grim, silent faces of the ape men swirling about her that she was succeeding. She could ensnare their hearts—these subjects of her master. They would all fight for China Jones, yes—but against her—*no!*

As Charles Hinges watched her dancing in the pool of light he, too, felt the ages vanish; again the suggestion of old Augustina, the witch, that this was his mate thrilled him. She was dancing in that circle of brutes like the only human being among baboons. Charles watched her shoulders and arms flashing, writhing with a snake-like witchery.

Charmed as the big savage renegade was he suddenly saw the smoke efface all other details of the scene—the grinning red faces, the negro, the cholos, the stern mouths under sombreros, the crowded booths, the tinsel-skirted women—and he felt himself alone in an ancient cave with this woman dancing before a fire. And outside the cave there was a dragon, which, when the dance was over, *must be slain!*

The dragon?

Seeing the shadow of the Chinese lantern moving about the hall like a giant serpent on a horizon of clouds, Charles came suddenly to himself. It was now that he recalled that China Jones had said something about "standing up and meeting him face to face." Subconsciously these words had drifted to him, and as the girl danced, he realized for the first time that they had been said. "If there is any man who will deny that this girl is mine!"

Hinges sprang to his feet.

The scene whirled about him in a purple mist. Rage blotted out everything but the leering face of China Jones on the opposite side of the floor.

All else was blackness—and with it a sudden quiet.

The piano was silenced with a thumping discord. Jacinta sank to her feet and the ripples that had crossed her body vanished like ripples that die widening on a pool of water. She lay exhausted and motionless at the feet of Charles Hinges, while on the other side of her stood China Jones.

"Mr. Chinaman, I'm standin' up!" Hinges cried. "Those are your words! Face to face! You said 'Face to face!' And here I am. When you say this girl is yours *you're the dirtiest liar this side of hell!*"

CHAPTER XI.

A YELLOW HAND CREEPS.

AS Fat Milligan, backed by the bouncer and Hump Domingo, leaped across the open space of the floor, Jacinta sprang suddenly to her feet. It was Jacinta more than any one else in that hall who knew just exactly how the fight was to be staged. China Jones and his gang planned to lead it up to their own climax, but Jacinta planned a step further.

China Jones had resolved to let his gang give Hinges a sound thrashing before the eyes of Little Hell, and then in case Hinges proved too great a fighter, there would be ample time and ample excuse for China to protect the peace of his establishment by using a six-gun. This was as far as it was necessary for any man to plan. And his plan would have succeeded if it had not been for Jacinta.

The dancing girl played with the situation as a child will play with ninepins. Her one great aim was to break the power of China Jones—and she could do this, she knew, with the aid of Charles Hinges. The crowd—exclusive of Jones's own henchmen—was on her side. She had won them. She decided that if ever there was a chance to divest this monarch of his power—it was now, in the presence of all his subjects, while they were still drunk with the beauty of her dance. And to accomplish this her first step was to fly into the arms of China Jones himself!

It was her master stroke.

It virtually disarmed Jones, who was at that point only too eager to believe that she was not in love with Hinges. Furthermore, it permitted Hinges to whirl about on his feet and meet the attack of the bouncer, who was the first of the gang to reach him.

The bouncer was thick, bull-like, heavy-set. He had never before found it necessary

to swing his head back to relieve the shock of a blow. Hinges met his onslaught with a smash on the chin that sent him hurtling, senseless, to the side of the room.

This first step in the fight brought screams from the women in the booths, gasps from the men, who had pressed themselves against the walls, and an inarticulate cry from Jacinta. China Jones sprang back to his booth ready to end the fight at his preordained time. And Jacinta fled with him. To her, at least, the outcome of the fight was known.

The girl watched Hinges as he swung terrific crashes at the circle of men that had closed in upon him. She saw one drop senseless at his feet. She saw Hump Domingo tackle him with his viselike arms, only to have the hold pried like a wedge bending iron bars outward. She saw the giant negro leap down from the stage and time a shattering blow on the side of Hinges's jaw which sent him reeling to the ground. She would kill that black, Jacinta swore to herself, if Hinges lost!

But there was no indication yet of his losing. He jumped to his feet and met the rush of Fat Milligan with a swing which brought the huge barkeep crumpling to the sawdust where he rolled over like a dead horse. Again the ring closed in on him and he swung wildly on every side and again Jacinta saw the negro biding his time, until, when Hinges lost his balance with his frantic swings, the black caught him again on the side of the jaw. Hinges staggered, sank, and for a fraction of a second sat half prostrate on the sawdust, staring blankly at the huge leering form above him.

Shouts stabbed the girl's ears. But then she felt that they were not shouts of victory over the fall of Hinges. They were excited yelps for him to pick himself up. "Get up and kill him!" she heard them howl. "Kick him! Break him in half! Kill the black! You can do it!"

Hinges struggled to his feet, and Jacinta lost sight of him as he was covered by the gang. This time Beefy Muggins fell, sprawling senseless, and two others staggered back circling behind and swinging cautiously at Hinges's neck. Hinges ducked and the negro for the third time stepped in, gained the balance of his feet and swung.

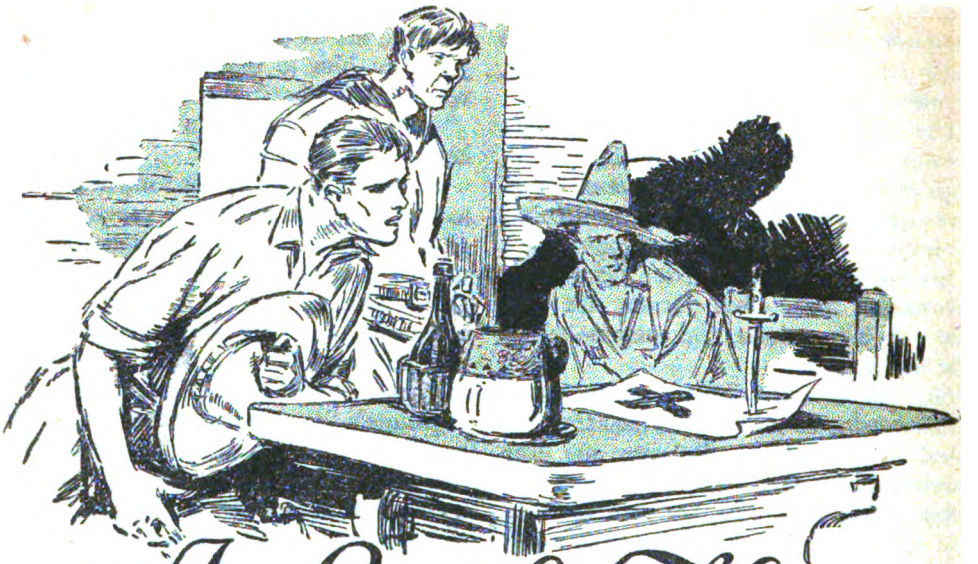
Jacinta's hand went intuitively to her breast, but she saw that this time Hinges had been waiting for the move. He threw up his right in an attempt to guard his face, and the negro's blow glanced off. From behind a smash caught Hinges, sending him reeling forward in a white light of pain. Yells trumpeted out: "Get the black! Bite him! He's swinging again!"

Blindly Hinges swung. He felt his fist crash into the big jaw, into the soft flesh, into the teeth. A roar of triumph went up from the crowd of howling men as they saw the negro stumble backward and then drop before Hinges's well-timed sledge hammer blow on the thick mouth.

Black Jefferson resigned. He had stepped back into the velvet comfort of sleep.

China Jones did not join in that glorious cry. He knew that now the time had indisputably come for him to play his one high card. And the girl beside him knew that it was his time to play and that he was going to play. And then the long, yellow fingers of China Jones *crept slowly to his holster.*

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.



A Little Flier in Coffee

By GEORGE M. JOHNSON

ANTHONY TRUMBALL dismissed his servant after the latter had passed coffee and cigars; then hesitated for a moment, glancing keenly at his two nephews.

" Here's what I wanted to put up to you boys," he said. " My impression is that it will appeal, but you are to be swayed by your own judgment, and take it or leave it, just as you see fit. This is strictly business—not in the least a matter where family relationship is to be considered.

" Several years ago, in a moment of inexcusable mental weakness, I was induced to buy a coffee plantation in Brazil. So far the investment is a total loss, though on the basis of figures presented to me at the time it ought to pay handsomely. Something is wrong somewhere. A Spaniard, Fernando Mendoza by name, who was highly recommended to me, has sole authority in the management.

" You know enough of my business methods to be aware that I don't like to have money tied up in a losing venture, and my first impulse would be to sell out for what I could get. However, to save my personal pride, I should prefer to straighten the thing out if possible.

" Now for the proposition. I'd like you boys to go down there, nominally on a hunting trip, but actually as my representatives, to sleuth around and pick up all you can regarding the management of the plantation. Of course, I'll pay all expenses, as well as a good salary. How does it strike you?"

The two young men, Jim and Dick Churchill, exchanged glances of understanding.

"Uncle Tony, you're a regular life saver!" the younger of the brothers exclaimed. "Jim and I have been yearning for a bit of excitement, and this promises well. How about it, old man?"

"When do we start?" was Jim's answer.

"That's the talk!" cried Trumball. "A steamer sails the first of next week, and so far as I'm concerned you may go then."

"Any Americans working for you?" Jim Churchill asked.

"Only one—an ex-cowpuncher named Jake Baldwin. He's a sort of foreman over the native help. I know little else about him."

"Say, what if it's the same Baldwin we knew down in the Panhandle!" Dick exclaimed. "He's the original clean-'em-up lad, is Jake—a good bird to tie to if there's any funny business being pulled off on the side."

"I wouldn't count too much on this chap being your old friend," Trumball remarked. "Jake Baldwin is a pretty common name. However, you'll find out about that in due course. Now, as to further details—"

II.

SOME three or four weeks later the close of a tropical day found the Churchills part of a small cavalcade that was following a narrow trail through a Brazilian forest. First came the guide, a sullen-looking native, mounted on a lean mule; then the two brothers on horseback; and lastly two other natives, whose duty it was to manage several vicious mules which, much to their disgust, were serving as pack animals for sundry articles of luggage.

"Nearly there, eh, *José?*" Jim demanded of the guide.

"Yes, *señor,*" the latter replied, without turning his head.

Dick spurred his horse close to his brother's.

"Say, Jim," he whispered, "that chap's just about got my goat. He's a bad actor. It 'd give me a heap of satisfaction to crown him with a section of lead pipe."

"I don't understand why Mendoza himself didn't meet us," Jim returned. "You'd think he would—that is, assuming he got uncle's letter. We've got this fellow buffaloed, anyway. He has us tagged as two little babes in the woods; isn't even wise that we understand Spanish. What ho! Here comes somebody!"

"Señor Fernando Caramba Mendoza, on a bet," Dick muttered.

They had emerged from the forest and were now looking out across a beautiful valley, the last rays of the setting sun tipping a range of distant mountains with a golden haze. A horseman on a powerful roan came cantering toward them, pausing to snap out a few words of brisk Spanish to the guide, who shook his head. The Spaniard then drew near, hat in hand, managing his spirited steed with the instinctive skill and grace of an old-time *caballero.*

"How do you do, *señors?*" he said in flawless English, though with a trace of accent. "You are, I suppose, Messrs. James and Richard Churchill, nephews of my esteemed employer. I received word from him not long since that you were coming down to spend a few weeks for the hunting. I am delighted to welcome you to his plantation, and am yours to command during your stay, which I trust will not be brief. I can promise you the best of sport."

The brothers responded suitably to the greeting, and all continued down into the valley, whither the guide and pack animals had preceded them.

"I must offer most sincere apologies," Mendoza went on, "for not meeting you in person when your steamer arrived yesterday; but certain things came up which demanded my presence here. The foreman, a fellow countryman of yours, was absent, so that I was compelled to send José. You found everything satisfactory?"

"Entirely so, *señor,*" Jim assured him. "We managed splendidly."

The boys glanced curiously about as they neared the cluster of buildings. Directly before them was a low yet spacious structure, which Mendoza explained comprised the quarters of himself and the foreman. Behind it, extending away to the right and left, were the dwellings of the native laborers, storehouses, sheds for tools, and other outbuildings. The horses were led away, and the three entered the Spaniard con-

ducting his guests to their quarters. Mendoza then excused himself, stating that dinner would soon be brought in to them.

"How does he strike you?" Dick asked of his brother in a low tone as soon as the other had departed.

"He's too dinged pleasant to suit me. Oily describes him. I bet he slings a mean knife."

"Yeah; my idea exactly. He and our agreeable little friend José would make a good pair. By the way, did you catch what he said out there at the edge of the clearing? I missed it."

"Asked if we understood Spanish," Jim retorted. "The guide shook his head, you remember. Good thing we've fooled him there; may drop an occasional choice bit that will help us."

"One thing's sure," Dick muttered. "This bird Mendoza's crooked as a rail fence. And didn't he impress you as if he was worried about something? Maybe he suspects we're down here to put a crimp in his game, whatever it is."

"I imagine you're right about the crooked part, old son," Jim rejoined, "but I'm not sure he's badly worried. He's so shifty-eyed you might figure him 'most any way."

A low knock sounded at the door.

"Come in," Dick called, whereat a tall, loose-jointed individual strode into the room, his hand extended.

"How are you, boys?" was his greeting.

Dick emitted a squeal of delight.

"Old Jake Baldwin!" he cried. "If this isn't a streak of luck I'll go jump in the cistern. I had a mighty keen hunch that the Baldwin uncle spoke of was you," and he fervently pumped the other's hand.

"What you been doing with yourself, old-timer?" his brother put in. "We didn't hear from you for so long that we began to fear the grim destroyer must have carved his initials on your leathery neck."

"No such luck," the ex-puncher grinned cheerfully. "I've been down here several years now. I was working for the XOX outfit, but one day there come a little misunderstanding between me and the poor goof of a misfit that was holding down the foreman's job. My gun went off, accidental like, and blamed if the slug don't caress this party that's argufying with me.

"'He's shot bad, Jake!' says one of the boys. 'You better drift.' So I drifted pronto, and finally ended up here. The guy I shot wasn't hurt bad, after all, but somehow I never got around to drifting back. Expect to, one of these days."

"How did you know we were headed this way?" Jim demanded.

"Didn't—till I saw you blow in. Mendoza said Trumball's two nephews were due to arrive for a hunting trip, but he forgot to mention who those nephews were. He's considerable of a clam at times, is my friend Mendoza."

"I don't like him for a cent," Dick put in impulsively.

"Now, that's right funny," said Baldwin dryly, "and him such a polished, smooth-talking gent."

"Can the spoofing!" Dick growled. "What have you got on this genteel Castilian?"

"What's the big idea underneath this sudden arrival in our happy midst?" was the cowboy's mild inquiry, in lieu of answering the other's question.

Dick sneaked a look at his brother.

"Shall we tell him—yes, the young man looks intelligent and trustworthy. Now that's out of the way, pray continue, kind sir, she said," Baldwin rattled off sweetly.

Dick laughed with rather a sheepish expression.

"You're too darned smart, Jake," he protested. "Fat chance a body's got to keep anything from you."

"Being smart that way is a gift, just like filling a flush. Some have it; some don't. Now, about Mendoza—"

Baldwin broke off, listening.

"Somebody's coming with your chow," he said. "I'd better not be found talking with you, so I'll vamose. See you later tonight."

The puncher hastily slipped out, and a moment after a native entered bearing a large tray loaded with food which had a most appetizing odor. The meal tasted as good as the smell promised, and when the two young men finally leaned back in their chairs with a simultaneous sigh of content-

ment the tray looked as though it had been through a freight wreck.

"That's what I call first-class coffee," Dick muttered appreciatively, as he drained his cup and then reached for a cigar. "Home product, I wonder?"

"You don't suppose they import the coffee they use here, do you?" Jim inquired with deep sarcasm.

"Well, why not? You know the restaurant owner that always went over to the hotel for lunch. However, I'll say a plantation that can turn out coffee like this ought to be a gold mine. What say we buy it from uncle after we've located the leak and plugged it?"

"Fair enough," Jim assented, "though the planter's life might not prove altogether attractive as a steady diet. I wonder what is Mendoza's little game, anyway?"

"Jake can probably tip us off when he comes back. Meantime let's turn in. I could tear off a few yards of sleep without half trying."

It was several hours later that the sleepers were awakened by a light tap at their door. Jim was out of bed in an instant to admit Baldwin.

"Easy," the puncher cautioned. "Don't speak too loud."

"Anything up?" Dick yawned.

"Mendoza and José have been having a palaver, and I've been practicing the gentle gumshoe art. Always did figure I was cut out for a detective."

"Learn anything new?" asked Jim.

"I'll say I did. Now I can see through a lot of things that weren't any too clear before. Mendoza's been smart enough to keep me pretty much in the dark, though that didn't prevent me from suspecting what I couldn't prove. I knew he was putting through some sort of a graft, and when I heard that we were due for a visit from headquarters it was easy to guess why."

"So José and the Spaniard run together, do they?" queried Dick.

"You said it! And furthermore they trail along with a cheerful group of knife heavers back yonder in the mountains."

"Ah-h-h-h!" Dick gloated. "This sure sounds good. Continue."

"Just yearning for excitement, ain't you, Dicky boy?" Jake inquired solicitously.

"That's me," Dick admitted. "Excitement's my middle name."

"Bless 'is 'ittle heart!" said the other mockingly. "He'll have all the excitement he wants 'most any time now."

"Oh, dry up!" Dick growled good-naturedly. "What about this gang you mentioned?"

"Them? Oh, they're a regular eyesore. Brave and gallant bandoleros—like you read about in a dime novel that retails for a dollar seventy-five in the bookshops. They ain't a one of 'em that wouldn't knife you for the price of a drink—and drinks don't come high down here. Mendoza's a prize package in the bunch."

"You don't mean that uncle's highly recommended manager is actually a member of this cutthroat gang?" exclaimed Dick.

"I don't, don't I? Mebbe you'd be surprised to learn that these birds are really running the plantation for their own amusement and profit?"

"Running the plantation!" Jim gasped.

"Sure! Why not? They've got a wonderful sense of humor, especially old Cap Cordeyo, generalissimo of the jolly crew. It was him that sold your uncle the plantation, and then recommended his star performer as manager. I judge Cordeyo was just about tickled pink over the idea."

"Sweet spirits!" Dick chuckled. "That is a good one on uncle. I'll kid the life out of him for this—see if I don't. He doesn't slip up very often, but when he does he's sure a glutton for punishment. Why didn't you have a heart, Jake, and tip the old gentleman off?"

"I'm just getting wise myself," the other explained. "Didn't I say this gumshoeing to-night had cleared a lot up? I dope it out that your being here has sort of forced Mendoza's hand."

"What else were they talking about?" Jim asked.

"Well, for one thing Mendoza was giving José an awful panning."

"Why?"

"For not knifing you chaps on the trip in."

"What!" exclaimed the two in chorus.

"Right," said Baldwin with grim enjoyment; "and little José was falling all over himself explaining how he came to fall down on instructions. He got to Jim's gun and fixed it with dummy cartridges, but couldn't lay his hands on Dick's. Then you two stuck together all the time, and him and his pals got a bad attack of chilblains."

"Well," Dick grunted, "I'll say this bird Mendoza's got a nerve. Won't he try again?"

"I expect he will," was the encouraging reply, "but not around the plantation, unless he figures on including me. He'll likely lay low for a while. Let's see that gun"; this to Jim, who had reached under his bed after a pistol, which he handed over to Baldwin.

Jake ejected the shells.

"Paper bullets," the cowboy said casually. "Wouldn't kill a mosquito at five paces."

"But I thought you said Mendoza was not sure why we were down here," Dick interposed.

"He ain't plumb sure," Baldwin explained, "but he's all-fired suspicious, and in his kind of business a chap can't afford to take chances."

"Why don't we go and have it out with him now?" Jim suggested.

"I've thought of that, but we don't want to go off half-cocked, before we're sure we can handle the proposition. There's a lot to this. We could stick up Mendoza all right, no doubt about that, but I imagine that some of the native workmen may be in on it. I don't know who they are, but I do know that there's some sort of signaling device so that anybody here can tip off the gang in the mountains in an emergency."

"How many in the bunch?" Dick asked.

"About fifteen of 'em, besides the natives, though they don't count in a fight. They don't count such a heck of a lot, anyway."

"Could we clean up the outfit?"

"Now you're talking!" cried Baldwin delightedly. "We could make a darn good try, if luck broke with us. That's been a pet ambition of mine ever since I heard of 'em. I've a score to settle on my own hook, too, because Mendoza tried to have me killed. Sent a native around to knife me in the back, but I got his man—he never knew how.

"He'd fired me in a minute, but he was afraid to, on account of what I might know, though I'll say that wasn't much till lately. They're a dirty bunch all the way through; not a man in the outfit that ain't worse than a murderer. I've heard some horrible tales about the black doings up in that hell roost of theirs. They got a couple of women once—white women, I mean—and— Oh, well, what's the use? You can imagine it all."

"What's your plan?" Dick asked.

"Haven't any yet. You boys mustn't let on that you're wise, and don't pay any attention to me. Treat Mendoza as if he was the only gentleman on the place, but have a gun with real bullets in it handy all the time. Plenty of shooting irons in your stuff?"

"A .401 automatic rifle apiece, as well as some lighter stuff."

"Always preferred the lever action myself, but I guess the automatics will deliver the goods when we need 'em. Better lock up your guns and ammunition where nobody can tamper with 'em."

"All right, boss," agreed Dick. "What else?"

"Keep your eyes working all the time, but don't start any gun play till you have to. Now I'll slide along."

"Be good, old-timer," Jim said.

III.

NEXT morning the two young fellows were awakened by the glare of the sun in their faces. At first neither mentioned the interview of the night before, finding it difficult to believe Baldwin's wild yarn in the dispassionate calm of day. Then Dick's eye chanced to see the small collection of dummy pistol cartridges that Jake had ejected from his brother's gun.

"So it wasn't a dream, after all," he said.

"Straight goods, I guess," Jim returned. He unlocked a stout box and from it took

a brace of automatic pistols; then broke open a box of cartridges and loaded each weapon, extending one to Dick, while he reserved the other for himself.

"I feel better with an automatic on my hip in place of the old six-shooter that José corrupted," was his comment as he relocked the chest.

"Right-o!" Dick agreed cordially. "And now we can meet uncle's precious manager with free and easy minds."

After breakfast the Spaniard courteously offered to show his guests around the plantation. Everything seemed to be going on in a prosperous manner, and their guide answered an unspoken question by explaining that the high cost of transporting the raw coffee to the shipping point was responsible for the scanty returns. He hinted—rather delicately—that this little matter had been carelessly overlooked by Señor Trumball when he made his investment. The boys learned much about the process of coffee raising. It was apparent that Mendoza was thoroughly competent, and that the plantation, under his management, ought to show a generous profit. Of course neither of them accepted the excuse of high transportation costs.

The Spaniard seemed ill at ease for some reason or other. His shifty eyes, even when he was talking to them, roved ceaselessly here and there, until it almost appeared that he dreaded a hidden danger. This became more and more marked as time went on.

"It's not us that's on his mind," Jim said in a low tone to his brother as Mendoza left them together for a moment. "It looks as if his conscience were working overtime. Maybe he's afraid some native he's abused may slip a knife into him. They all act scared to death when he comes near."

"Conscience my eye!" Dick retorted. "That bird never saw a conscience. But something's got his goat—that's a cinch. Sh! Here he comes back!"

"We might take a look at the other side of the plantation, gentlemen," suggested the Spaniard, "if you will be so good as to accompany me."

There was little variety in the arrangement of the plantation, the clumps of coffee trees following one after another with monotonous regularity. The plantation itself was located in a good-sized clearing, the forest crowding it on three sides.

The three were now approaching the western boundary, where the last quadrangle of trees—bushes, rather—was situated but a stone's throw from the jungle. A number of workmen were busy, and among them one stood out prominently—both for his height, which was fully five inches above the rest of the natives, and for a livid scar that traversed his right cheek.

He stopped working as the trio approached, and, looking straight at Mendoza, spoke a few words in a strange language.

The Spaniard's face flushed as he replied angrily in the same tongue, whereat the other smiled scornfully and with one finger made a cross on his forehead.

Mendoza started, and to the two young men it seemed that a shiver convulsed his powerful frame; but in a second he recovered himself, and jerked out his pistol just as the tall native, with surprising agility and serpentine grace, disappeared into the shelter of the jungle. Two shots rang out from the manager's revolver, but it was so clear that he had missed that Mendoza made no investigation.

Apparently feeling that some explanation was due his startled guests, however, he simply stated that the native had been insolent and that he had tried to punish him for it.

It was good evidence of the discipline exercised over the laborers that during this scene not one of them stopped his work.

Mendoza had lost all desire to continue showing off the plantation. He said that practically everything had now been seen, and suggested that they return to their quarters. The Spaniard's nervousness had noticeably increased, and it was easy to see that his encounter with the native had deeply moved him, though he made no further allusion to the affair.

"Well, old scout, we seem to be up against one queer outfit!" Dick exclaimed when they were again alone. "What do you make of it?"

"Not much, except that Mendoza was

lying back there. His excuse for shooting at the native was so fishy you could smell the scales."

"You said it! And wasn't he actually afraid of that chap with the facial decoration?"

"Perhaps not so much of the native personally as what he stood for. That queer sign he made caused Mendoza's blow-up."

"There's one thing dead sure," Dick went on. "Mendoza's considerable of a dub at snap shooting. Can you see old Jake Baldwin letting a man give him the slip while he watched with a gun in his hand?"

They had an opportunity for a short chat with the ex-puncher that afternoon, but he was able to offer no explanation.

"I can find out, though," Baldwin asserted. "There's at least one native in camp that I can trust. I happened to save his life some time back, and now he belongs to me body and soul. I call him John, because his real name is too many for me. I'll put him to work on the case right away. It's hard to figure out just what's going to happen, but the fireworks are liable to begin going off 'most any time now, so keep your guns handy and your eyes peeled. Look for me about midnight."

Night came with the usual suddenness of the tropics. The Spaniard had disappeared and the two had neither seen nor heard anything of him since morning. They again had supper in their room, and after the meal sat quietly talking over the situation.

They decided not to go to bed at all, and so, putting out the light, sat up waiting for Jake to appear according to his promise. He came sooner than expected, for it was not eleven when a faint tap sounded at the door.

"I haven't found out very much," he reported, "but John could tell me something. The chap Mendoza took a crack at is old Cap Cordeyo's private sleuth, butcher, messenger and what not. He's from a different tribe from the other natives, and appears like a bad hombre pretty generally. The workers will eat out of his hand, he's got 'em that trained."

Baldwin's remarks were interrupted by the sharp bark of a pistol, which apparently came from the direction of Mendoza's quarters; then a pause, followed by two more shots in quick succession. After that, silence.

"Round one, by thunder!" cried Jake, drawing his revolver. "Let's sit in the game."

They rushed out, Baldwin leading. Around the outside of the low building he darted, toward Mendoza's room. Through the open door could be seen a kerosene lamp smoking on the table, while eddying about in the air were some faint wreaths of a paler blue smoke. Their nostrils caught the acrid smell of burned gunpowder as they approached.

Gun in hand, Jake burst into the room, the other two close behind. Mendoza lay sprawled on the floor, his eyes glassy white and staring up at the ceiling. One limp hand still clutched a revolver.

"What's that on his head?" Dick exclaimed.

Jake snatched the lamp from the table, holding it so that its feeble rays fell upon the dead man's face. In the middle of his forehead, formed by hasty knife slashes, was a rough and bloody cross.

"I judge a flock of Mendoza's chickens came home to roost," Baldwin remarked as he replaced the lamp. "Now ain't that just the regular heck of being in business for yourself?"

Picking up the Spaniard's pistol, he opened it and threw out the cartridges. Two were empty.

"He fired twice, and the other party only once," Jake muttered almost to himself. "Mendoza never was much of a hand with a gun, anyway—a knife came more natural to him."

A door opened on an inner chamber which served the Spaniard as sleeping room, the outer being his office. Jake entered, followed by Dick. The room was but faintly lighted, and from a dark corner came a slight stir. The cowboy swung round like a cat, his gun leveled.

"Come out of that, and lively!" he snapped.

"*Madre de Dios, señor!* Don't shoot!" and an indistinct figure appeared.

"Oh, so it's you, eh, José?" the puncher growled in no pleasant tone. "Believe me, hombre, you're getting mighty careless with that skin of yours. You'll get punctured proper one of these days. I darn near salivated you then on general principles. Perhaps you can tell us what's been going on here this evening," and Baldwin's big gun centered full on the breast of the trembling native.

"*Por Dios, señor!*" gasped José, shrinking from the threatening muzzle.

"Come along with us, José," Baldwin commanded. "We're panting with eagerness to hear the sweet music of your voice."

"Do you think José did the killing?" Jim asked as they returned to the outer room, which he had been examining.

"No—he'd never get up that much gumption," Jake asserted contemptuously; "but he probably knows all about it. We'll find out what he does know in the jerk of a maverick's tail."

"How about that safe?" Jim asked. "It has been rifled."

"Tough luck, but we can't help it now," said Jake. "That was the ranch safe, and I'll gamble Mendoza had a good wad tucked away in it—the profits from at least a couple years of fat grafting."

"It's gone, anyway," interposed Dick. "What 'll we do now?"

"Go back to your headquarters and hold an inquest over José," replied Baldwin.

Dick went on ahead and entered the room from which they had been absent only a few minutes.

"Hullo!" he called out. "We've had callers, and I'm blessed if they didn't leave their card. So sorry we weren't in!"

An instant later the others joined him. Pinned to the table by an ugly-looking knife, its edge still damp from slashing the Spaniard, was a bit of paper on which was scrawled in red a rough cross.

For a moment the four stood silent; then with a gasp of utter horror and dismay José slipped limply to the floor, his teeth chattering like the rattle of hailstones on a tin roof.

"*Por Dios!*" he moaned. "All is now indeed over!"

"That's a rotten guess you've made, José," the cowboy informed their stricken prisoner. "She ain't hardly started yet."

"Why not take it easy?" Jim suggested coolly, lighting his pipe. "'Doesn't cost any more to sit down."

"Good idea," assented his brother; "soothing to the nerves, and all that. Now, Jake, can't you let a few stray beams of light sift in on this proposition?"

"I can't follow the whole trail alone," rejoined Baldwin, twisting himself a cigarette, "but I'm counting on José to add a choice thought here and there. Goes without saying that Mendoza and his little playmates have fallen out—with a big question mark after the cause of said harsh feelings. That explains why Mendoza's been so nervous lately, and likely the native was giving him a final warning or such like this morning. Also it was one of the bunch that nicked him to-night. Easy, so far. José's turn now. Here, José," and the cowboy, casually picking up his revolver from the table, turned to the native. "You understand English all right, so just speak up like a little tin soldier. What's the inside dope on the rodeo pulled off to-night?"

José, his eyes still resting fearfully on the gruesome paper, was hardly able to speak. He gulped once or twice, and managed to get a "*Por Dios!*" or two off his chest, but that was about the limit of his vocal ability.

"Come, come, José," the cowboy remarked reprovingly. "Time's something we ain't got much of. I got to stimulate your mental process a whole heap."

Grinning pleasantly, he cocked his pistol and leveled it at José's head.

"Now, José," he propounded, "I know it's a hard, hard world, chock full of sin and sorrow. Also it's a tough choice I'm giving you, but you've got exactly five seconds to make up your mind. You talk, or I shoot. *Sabe?* Fair enough, I'd say. All right! One—two—"

"I talk, *señor, muy pronto!*" cried the distracted José, whereupon the cowboy deflected the muzzle of his weapon a trifle.

"That's better, son," he remarked soothingly; "much better. I kinda had a hunch you'd round up your tongue. Hipper along!"

José's account was not very fluent, but they were able to understand it. He had been in Mendoza's favor for some time, and shared many of the aspirations of his evil-minded master. It developed that the Spaniard had been holding back on his comrades as well as cheating his employer concerning the returns from the plantation, and that he had thus accumulated a large sum, which he kept locked in the safe. He planned to escape with this in the near future and go back to Spain, where he hoped to buy an estate and establish himself in society as a gentleman of wealth and culture.

His associates had learned of this plotted defalcation, whereupon their revenge had been swift and sure. José had hidden himself in the inner room when the Spaniard was shot. Where the next blow would fall he could not say, but considered himself and the *señors* as good as dead already, and admitted this with engaging although terrified frankness.

The room had but one window, which Dick was facing, while his brother and the ex-cowpuncher sat with their backs to it.

"Don't move, anybody!" Dick suddenly exclaimed in a low tone. "That bird with the scar is looking in the window. He's watching me, so I can't do a thing, but Jake's got a good chance for a snap shot. Fire over your shoulder, old-timer, right into the center of the pane."

Baldwin was holding his gun in one hand. With a single motion like the strike of a rattler, he flipped up his arm and fired. The others caught one fleeting glimpse of a horrible face pressed against the glass, instantly to be blotted out by the burst of flame and smoke from the heavy six-shooter.

"You got him, old man!" cried Jim, as they rushed out into the night.

The tall native lay stone dead, his forehead drilled in the very spot where Mendoza's face had been mutilated by the knife slashes.

"Nice work!" was Dick's tribute, as he looked down on the lifeless body. "That's one less we've got to figure on."

"You don't suppose any more of this bloodthirsty crew are lurking about in the offing, do you?" Jim inquired. "Have a splendid chance to pick us off as we stand here."

"We've discouraged 'em some for a while, at least," responded the cowboy. "Let's get these dead bodies out of the way. I'll have John superintend that."

"Won't the natives be piling out to see what's up?" asked Dick. "Might be getting curious about all this shooting."

"You bet they won't," the other asserted. "They know enough to lie low when something's stirring. You boys better go back in the house with José, while I chase up an undertaker. Be right back."

"Don't you want us to go with you?"

"No; that ain't necessary," and the speaker strode away.

The boys, accompanied by José, whose courage increased, reëntered their room. In a few minutes Jake was back.

"Everything's all arranged for," he informed them. "Now for the next event on our program."

"I don't know how you fellows feel," Dick began, "but I think it's up to us to have a settlement with these gentlemen of the mountains. Mendoza stole a lot of uncle's money, and now they've got it."

"I'm with you!" cried Baldwin, banging his fist on the table.

"What do you say, Jim?" demanded Dick of his brother.

"It's a sort of foolhardy stunt, and our chances of stopping a bullet or a knife are mighty good, but I'm hanged if the thing doesn't appeal to me. Let's go!"

"Why not send John up on a scouting trip?" Baldwin suggested. "He can get the lay of the land for us, then we won't have to go blundering around in the dark."

"Good idea. How long will it take?"

"Well, a day to go; a day or more to look around; and another one to come home. Say three or four days."

"That's O. K.," Jim agreed. "Send him off in the morning."

IV.

EARLY the following day Baldwin dispatched his faithful ally with clear, concise instructions, and until the latter's return

there was little to be done unless some attack was meditated by the enemy, although Jake anticipated nothing of the kind.

"But there's that cross on the table," suggested Dick. "They showed the same sign to Mendoza and then killed him."

"Is something to that," the puncher admitted. "The bloody cross must be a sort of emblem with these lads. They might have just meant to warn us not to butt in, though, and not be planning to mix it up themselves."

José professed to have changed sides and seemed anxious to do all in his power to aid his captors, but they put little trust in the man, and took good pains that he had no opportunity to betray them.

At length the spy returned. He gave Baldwin a long account of his experiences, which the latter passed on to his comrades.

"They've been having some exciting times up there, too, I'll tell the world," he announced, "and things are breaking perfectly splendid for us. The gang is hanging out in a regular natural fort, halfway up that blue mountain that you can just see from the door of the store shed. John spent two days prowling around, and whatever would you suppose them foolish bandits have been about? They had a big row over this Mendoza business, and one of 'em got ambitious to relieve Cap Cordeyo of his duties. Some sided in with this lad, and some stuck by the captain, and when they got through shooting and tossing knives there was a fine collection of outlaws lying around in a more or less spoiled condition. What do you know about that?"

"Zowie!" enthused Dick. "That certainly is good news. Makes it all the easier for us."

"Right you are, young fella," the puncher agreed, "but they ain't any too feeble at that; six or seven of 'em left at least. Now my idea would be to have John guide us up there. Then we could watch our chance and take 'em by surprise. I'm hankering to get old Cap Cordeyo alive; he'd make a wonderful subject for a necktie party."

"That's the talk!" cried Jim. "I move we start to-morrow. Horseback or on foot?"

"We can ride for a good bit of it," Jake returned, "and then we'll have to leave the plugs and travel on shank's mare."

Followed a general overhauling of firearms.

"Care to try out one of these automatics, Jake?" inquired Dick, extending the rifle to his friend, who took the weapon rather doubtfully, returning it after a brief examination.

"No," was his decided comment; "I've a .38-40 that 'll split a string as far as I can see it, and I better stick to her. You boys try out these new-fangled shooting irons, but don't go forcing 'em on me."

They started in good season, taking three trustworthy natives along as camp-followers to tend the horses. In spite of the ruggedness of the country, which made their progress slow, a halt for the night found them not many miles from their objective. They camped in a secluded spot affording excellent facilities.

Early morning found the party again astir. The plan adopted after a brief consultation was to leave the natives and horses in this place, while John conducted the others within striking distance of the outlaws. Then they could make another camp, and if everything seemed propitious decide upon the nature of their attack.

The country through which they were passing, while exceedingly rough, was thickly wooded. Despite the serious business they were about, the two young men took keen delight in the many new and interesting things they saw—troops of scolding monkeys in the trees overhead, gayly colored birds and enormous butterflies flitting here and there, and all the variegated life of the tropical forest.

The cowboy was interested in other matters.

"There ought to be rubber in this country," he muttered. "Hold on!" he presently exclaimed, as they skirted a small natural clearing. "That looks like a rubber tree over yonder. I want to take a look at it."

What followed happened so suddenly that the others could hardly realize the train of events. They heard their companion give a startled exclamation, and saw him throw

up his rifle to fire. But just as he did so his foot caught in a projecting root and he pitched forward, his rifle digging into the forest mold.

Dick caught a glimpse of a lithe body, mottled black and yellow, flashing through the air, and almost without thinking jerked his rifle to his shoulder and fired as fast as he could work his fingers.

A fraction of a second later the body of a big male jaguar landed fairly on top of Baldwin, and with a convulsive shudder stiffened out—dead. By a miracle Jake was not even scratched, though the wind was pretty well knocked out of his lungs.

"Holy suffering cats!" he exclaimed as he righted himself. "How many times did you shoot, Dick?"

"Six—the whole works."

"I'll take my hat off to you and your machine gun," Baldwin went on soberly. "A bit longer, and I'd been cut to ribbons. This baby here meant business and no mistake. Well, mebbe I can even matters up before we get through this mess."

For another two hours they followed their guide through the forest, the course leading them in a gradual ascent, which constantly became more marked as they neared the actual mountains. At length John indicated that to go farther might be dangerous, and accordingly a halt was called.

The second camp was well adapted for concealment, a number of outcropping rock ledges forming a sort of roofless cave. The only inconvenience was lack of water; it was not yet mid-afternoon, but as they had come across almost no suitable drinking water since early morning, all were beginning to suffer from thirst.

"One thing sure," remarked Jake. "We've got to rustle some drink. I could light a match on the roof of my mouth."

"Suppose we do a little scouting," suggested Jim. "There ought to be water not far away, judging from the country. We needn't go far from headquarters, and one of us will be sure to strike something."

The idea met unanimous approval, and they started off in different directions, agreeing to meet again inside half an hour.

A little ravine, one that was evidently a watercourse during the rainy season, led away to the right, and this Dick followed on the chance that he might happen upon a spring. His search promised to be successful, for he soon found one or two tiny pools of water, and he continued on in the hope that something better might materialize.

Before long he came upon just what he had been hoping for—a large pool with a trickle of water running from it to vouch for its freshness. The young man threw himself down, bathing his face in the delicious coolness and fairly absorbing the liquid in through his very pores. At length he rose with a sigh of relief, but as he did so a voice behind him uttered the words:

"Hands up!"

Dick's arms went up like pump handles. He turned to look squarely into the muzzle of a double-barreled shotgun held by a man whom he put down as a Spaniard, probably one of the gang they were after. He bitterly blamed himself for the carelessness that had thus ruined their chances, to say nothing of getting him into so serious a position.

The stranger, keeping Dick well covered, approached and removed the automatic pistol from his captive's holster, transferring it to his own pocket.

"And now, *señor*, we move on," he remarked in fair English. "Any try at escape, and—" He shrugged his shoulders, fingering the shotgun triggers significantly.

Dick made no reply. He was attempting to take this misfortune as philosophically as possible, but it was no easy task. With the Spaniard close behind and indicating the route, the two went on down the tiny brook and soon struck a rough trail, which led, as Dick rightly judged, to the hiding place of the bandits.

The ascent was quite steep, and so their progress was not rapid. They had climbed steadily for about an hour since following the trail, when a small amphitheater suddenly opened in the rocks before them. A cluster of small buildings was to be seen, and two or three men, who at once approached. After a short consultation they thrust Dick into a cabin of hewn logs, fastening the door with a stout padlock.

The captive's thoughts were not in the least cheerful. Here he was, taken prisoner by a gang of desperate characters, in the very act, if they but knew it, of planning an attack upon them. Prospects were not inviting.

The cabin roof was fairly tight, but between the logs at the sides were long chinks, wide enough to admit a man's arm, though offering no way of escape. Through these openings Dick could get fleeting glimpses of the rolling forest country far below. That brought to mind his friends, and he began to wonder what they would think at his not appearing. Would they suspect the truth, or merely suppose that he had lost his way in the forest?

These gloomy cogitations were interrupted by the appearance of the man who had taken him prisoner. He conducted Dick to a hut somewhat more pretentious than the others, knocking on the door, and at a word of command thrust his captive inside, while he remained on guard. Dick found himself facing a large individual, handsome in a coarse sort of way, whom he inferred to be the redoubtable Captain Cordeyo.

The outlaw rose, courteously extending a box of cigars and indicating a chair. Dick declined the smoke, but sat down, keenly watching his companion. There were several guns about the room, and he began to speculate concerning his chances of securing one. The other, however, dampened these wild hopes by laying a huge pistol within reach on the table before him.

"Well," he said at length, puffing away on his cigar, "what have you to say for yourself?"

"I guess it's mainly up to you to do the talking," responded Dick, edging an inch nearer the wall, where a revolver was hanging. "I always was considered a poor conversationalist."

"Don't do it," cautioned the Spaniard in what was almost a fatherly tone, and he touched the butt of his own pistol. "Since you desire me to talk," he went on, "I may as well be accommodating. Permit me to introduce myself—Juan Cordeyo, at your service. You are already known to me as Señor Richard Churchill."

Dick volunteered no response.

"I know practically all about you and your brother," Cordeyo continued, "from the time you landed until your friend, the cowboy, shot El Serpiente."

"Means the chap with the scar," thought Dick. "Well named, I'll say."

"We called him El Serpiente," explained the bandit, "as you might suppose, because of his remarkable ability in quietly slipping around without being seen. But that American proved more than a match even for the serpent.

"It was really quite a favor to me," he added, sending forth a cloud of smoke, "for the fellow was beginning to know too much, and besides I had used him about all I needed. Your friend is—er—quite adept with the pistol."

Dick found his voice.

"Then you were down at the plantation the night Mendoza was killed!" he exclaimed.

The other nodded.

"And you must know about the—" He caught himself just in time. Perhaps it were better to conceal how much he himself knew of the matter, but the Spaniard proved the precaution useless by finishing the sentence for him.

"Yes, I know about the money in the safe," he assured Dick. "I ought to, for I myself had the privilege of extracting it. I can't say that I admire your sagacity in venturing so far from the plantation. You *might* have been safe down there, but coming up into our country was really a serious blunder. You had seen the cross once; that meant beware. Twice means death. Mendoza, who formerly had the honor of being associated with us, scorned his first warning and tried to kill the bearer of the second, as you know. You have seen what happened to him."

He paused, thoughtfully, flecking the ash from his cigar.

Dick took a sudden resolve. "See here," he burst forth, "there's no use discussing the matter. What do you intend doing with me?"

"My dear fellow, what an unnecessary question! We don't care to take on new members, in spite of being a trifle short-handed at present, and it is most inconven-

ient for us to be bothered with the care of prisoners; so—"

"You'll put me out of the way, I suppose," finished Dick grimly.

The other bowed gracefully.

"Your clear-sighted grasp of the matter is indeed gratifying," he said.

"When?"

"My dear *señor*, believe me, I sincerely regret the necessity, but you are to be shot to-morrow at daybreak. Supper will now be served you, after which I shall be compelled to have your hands bound."

He called, and the guard appeared to conduct Dick back to the log cabin. The interview was ended.

To be shot at daybreak! Those sinister words kept ringing in Dick's ears as he followed his jailer back to the prison. They glared at him in letters a foot high from the rocks and trees around him. So he was to die like a rat in a trap, with no fighting chance!

But this feeling of despair was only momentary.

"I'm very much alive now," he told himself, "and something may turn up. Who knows?"

He ate a hearty supper, and then, as the outlaw leader had foretold, his hands were firmly trussed up. That did make the chances of escape seem thin, but the young fellow set to work on the bands as soon as it was dark. An hour of straining, however, had brought about no result save rubbing a good bit of skin from his wrists.

The slow hours of night dragged on, and finally the outlaws had become quiet. It was evident that they had no suspicion that Dick was part of an attacking force, or else they held in derision any efforts that could be made against them. The prisoner was sitting on the earth floor, his back to the wall, when there came a faint scraping on the outside, and a low voice said:

"You there, Dick?" It was Baldwin speaking.

"Yes," he whispered in reply.

"You're tied up, ain't you?" Jake went on.

"Tied up is right," Dick muttered.

"Then put your arms close to the hole here, and I'll cut 'em loose. There! Now take this," and the cowboy thrust a heavy object through to Dick's hands. It was too dark to see, but no view was required to tell that it was one of the automatics. With it came two spare clips of cartridges.

"Door's locked, I judge?" Baldwin queried.

"Yes, and we couldn't open it with anything less than a hacksaw."

"How many of them is there, and what they planning to do to you?"

Dick told him.

"Then listen," whispered the puncher. "You wind the cord around your hands so it 'll look as if you were still trussed up. Put the gun in the front of your shirt, where it 'll be right handy. Jim and I'll be hiding in the rocks, all ready to open fire when they start to shoot you. See? Then you get into it too. Don't worry, old son!"

"How did you know where I was?" Dick whispered.

"John saw you captured, but he didn't have a gun, and by the time he'd located us it was too late to do anything. Well, so-long; see you in the morning," and with a final handshake through the opening between the logs Dick's visitor was gone.

V.

It was with decidedly different feelings that Dick now waited for the dawn. A faint glow at length appeared over the eastern mountains, and he concealed the precious pistol inside his shirt. The rope he twisted around his hands, holding the ends out of sight, so that even a careful examination would not have detected anything amiss. Presently he heard a stir outside and the door of the cabin opened to admit the outlaw leader.

"Come," he ordered curtly. "It's daybreak."

Dick followed him out, glancing about. The sun was not yet in sight, but he was gratified to note that there was plenty of light for good shooting. Only two of the other bandits were to be seen. As both of them carried Winchester rifles, they were clearly to be his executioners.

"Stand there!" commanded the outlaw; and Dick obeyed.

The captain moved back, waving his hand to the two, some thirty feet away.

"*Está bien!*" he called.

The men leveled their rifles. Dick's heart began to thump furiously. What if Jake and his brother had been delayed or unable to keep the appointment! Another outlaw appeared, leaning in the doorway of a cabin. An execution meant little in his young life.

Then two sharp reports, mingled as one, rang out from the rocks behind, and both executioners slipped limply to the ground. The man in the doorway snapped into vigorous life and tried to leap back to shelter, but spun on his heel and dropped across the very threshold.

Dick jerked his hands free from the false bonds. Two more outlaws burst into sight around the side of a building, and the former prisoner whirled on them, his pistol spouting a stream of flame. Both men fell, but he never knew whether it had been his shots or some from the rocks above that did the business.

Cordeyo had disappeared, and Dick couldn't remember what the captain had done in the sudden excitement of the opening volley. He ran toward the outlaw's cabin, coming face to face with the man he was seeking as he issued from the door armed with a repeating rifle. Dick's pistol covered his foe before the other had taken in the condition of affairs.

"Drop that gun!" came the sharp order, and Cordeyo sullenly obeyed.

Several scattering shots rang out behind them, and the attacking force consisting of Jim and the cowboy came into view.

"Are they all cleaned up?" cried Jim, grasping his brother's hand.

"Looks like it," replied the latter. "This gentleman"—and he waved his hand toward the Spaniard—"is Señor Cordeyo."

"Pleased to make your acquaintance, I'm sure," drawled Jake, grinning cordially.

Cordeyo's face became livid. Stooping, he thrust a hand into the top of his boot and jerked out a pistol, which he leveled at the cowboy.

The cow-puncher laughed even as he gazed into the muzzle of the other's gun, the laugh broken short by the deafening roar of his forty-five. The Spaniard was left staring stupidly at his benumbed hand, from which the pistol had been driven as by a hammer blow. It was thus he learned that Jake Baldwin's specialty was shooting from the hip.

"That reminds me," Dick chuckled, "of something you were saying last evening. It was to the effect, if I remember correctly, that my friend is—er—rather adept with the pistol."

When their captive was tied up beyond the power of doing further mischief the victors proceeded to go through the bandits' quarters. A large sum of money, evidently including that stolen from the plantation as well as considerable more, was found concealed in the hut occupied by the captain, while smaller amounts were secured from the other cabins.

"Let's burn the place out," suggested Jim, as they finished ransacking the last building.

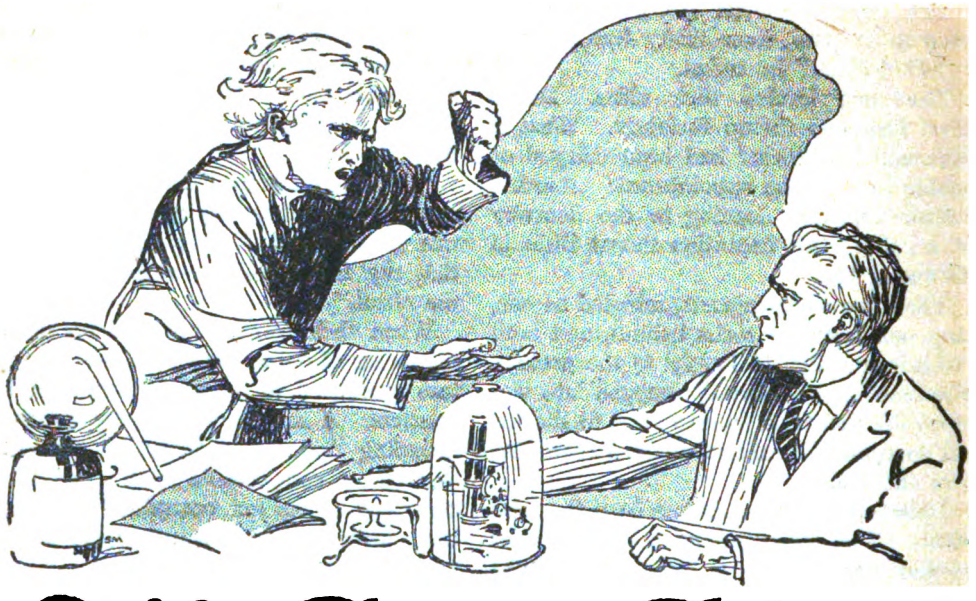
"Good idea," agreed the others, and the proposal was carried into immediate execution.

Two hours later found them on their way back to the first night's camping ground, where the native servants were awaiting them. The return journey to the plantation was accomplished without any incident of note.

The following day they started with their prisoner for the coast, where the authorities welcomed him with open arms, for Cordeyo was badly wanted for a score of crimes. The whole of the generous reward offered for his capture the boys insisted on giving to Jake Baldwin.

Jim located a suitable man to install as manager in Mendoza's place, and after cabling Anthony Trumball an account of what had been accomplished the party returned to the coffee plantation. Here the two young men enjoyed a month of the hunting for which they had ostensibly come to South America, though it proved rather tame sport after the bigger game they had been pursuing.

When they finally set sail for New York, Jake concluded to accompany them, for the cowboy found that he could no longer resist the call of the Panhandle.



The Poison Plague

By WILL LEVINREW

CHAPTER XII.

THE PROFESSOR IS COERCED.

WHILE Professor Brierly was blissfully ignorant of the black pall that hung over the city of which he was a resident, his young assistant had followed the newspaper accounts of the poisonings with absorbing interest. He thus showed lively attention when Jimmy came and broached his errand. He put aside a test tube he was holding over the blue flame of a Bunsen burner, and turning on his stool, listened gravely.

When Jimmy was finished he shook his head doubtfully.

"I don't think the old man will do it, Jim. He's engaged in some very important work just now. Besides, he hates to dabble in what he calls 'petty practical affairs.'"

"But, Jack, can't you see the importance of this? It is taking the shape of a national calamity. If it lasts much longer this city will be completely wiped out. Almost thirty per cent of the population is gone already. Mobs are beginning to appear, and there are frequent riots. The authorities are considering the advisability of putting the city under martial law. It seems that every crook in the country is finding this place a magnet and they're reaping a rich harvest. Robberies are frequent, and there have been several murders. What with these cyanide poisonings and the rest of it, the police are helpless."

"Oh, I see it all right. But the difficulty is to make his nibs see that this is as important, or more so, than his own work for the time being. I'll see what I can do with him, old man, but I don't think—"

"But doesn't he realize the seriousness of this thing? Doesn't he see—"

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for August 5.

"See," Matthews grinned. "The only things the old gentleman sees are the things that are directly under his microscope, or at any rate, something that is susceptible of scientific proof. The chances are that the old man has not even heard of any of these cyanide poisonings. When the ladylike gentleman from the police department came here several times to look for cyanide I kept it from him. If he knew that these sacred precincts were being invaded by such common clay as ordinary policemen, he would blow up so high that he would never come down.

"No, Jimmy, he doesn't see it at all. And I doubt that he'd see it if he knew about it, unless it would engage his scientific attention some way. It would take some very potent argument to make him see that there was something important enough to make him give up his own work for a time."

"By the way, Jack, why don't you take this on? From what I hear you're no slouch at this sort of thing yourself."

Matthews shook his head regretfully.

"I'm afraid I can't, Jimmy. I can't leave the old man just now. I owe him too much, as you know. I'm helping him in his work and he depends on me a good bit. He kids himself that he takes care of me. As a matter of fact, he has to be taken care of like an infant. He's hopelessly absent-minded and impractical. He will go forty-eight hours without food or drink if he is not reminded. Before I came he used to develop a process or invent something and give it to what he calls the 'world,' that usually took the form of some slick person who would pocket the profits. I can't leave him just now. Come on in. I'll introduce you and you can tell him your story."

Professor Brierly was bent over a microscope and he did not hear the two young men enter. He mumbled unintelligibly and impatiently shook his head when Matthews introduced Jimmy. The latter did not need his friend's wink to gloss over the apparent rudeness of the old man. It was when the professor raised his eyes after a while that Jimmy saw the distinguishing feature that held him spellbound.

Those eyes always seemed to be asking a question; they appeared to be looking through objects and men instead of at them. Jimmy, in the first glance, felt that he was being dissected with very sharp instruments.

"Professor," said Matthews, "Mr. Hale has something interesting to tell you."

The old man nodded curtly and looked inquiringly toward Jimmy.

Trained as the latter was to tell all the salient features of a two-column story in forty or fifty words, often in the first short sentence, he chained the scientist's attention at once by beginning:

"Twenty-three persons died through cyanide poisoning in this city during the past six months."

Then he went on, and swiftly, vividly gave the high lights of the tragedy. The old man was an attentive listener; Jimmy felt that he had never spoken to a person who absorbed to the same degree every syllable he heard. He sat like a graven image and gave one the impression that every word was being registered and permanently recorded, as on the recording apparatus of a phonograph. Toward the end of Jimmy's recital he interrupted to point out an apparent discrepancy in the story. When the story was told and Jimmy stated his errand he refused promptly.

"I cannot do it," he said emphatically. Waving his hand with an inclusive gesture over his laboratory he continued: "I cannot leave this work a minute. I am engaged just now on something very important. What you ask is impossible. I am not interested in such things."

"But, professor," urged Jimmy, "you gave the police the solution for that haunted house that gave them so much trouble, and this case is far more important—"

"That was different," interrupted the old man. "Some one came here and told me about it. I laughed at the idea of there being anything supernatural about those phenomena. I stated how those effects might be produced, and that is all there was to it. But in this case I would have to go out. I should have to see a number of the victims' bodies. I should have to conduct an autopsy or two myself. Impossible! Where are the police? This is their

work. Why do they not find out about it and put a stop to it?"

"The police have done all they could. In none of these cases was there a tangible clew. Of course there must be something, some trace; there is always a clew."

"What, what!" impatiently snapped the old man. "Always a clew? Nonsense! Drivel! There is decidedly *not* always a clew."

"But the authorities say and the history of crime shows that no chain of circumstances can be manufactured without leaving a—"

"The authorities who say that are idiots," interrupted Professor Brierly wrathfully. "For every criminal punished for committing a crime many go unpunished and unsuspected. Those who are punished are caught because they either committed the deed in the heat of passion, when they had not time to plan, or those who are ignorant bunglers, who do not understand the materials with which they work. Given an educated man with sufficient motive, and he might go on indefinitely killing his fellows without leaving what you call a 'clew.'

"There is no question about it. What I say can be easily substantiated. Why, I could kill you where you stand and not leave the slightest trace." This was said with such an entire lack of self-consciousness, with such utter sincerity and conviction, that Jimmy involuntarily moved back a pace.

"Then those poisonings must go on; they cannot be stopped?" broke in Matthews.

Jimmy saw that his friend was talking now for the purpose of drawing the old man out.

"I do not know. Three possibilities occur to me in this case. One is that all these persons ate something that in itself formed the poison in the bodies. Another is that some one with a motive is doing all this. The third is that a lunatic is doing it. I am inclined to think that the last is true. The first may be dismissed as being far-fetched. The second may also be dismissed. If a man had sufficient motive and had the mental equipment for doing it in this manner, he would not have to kill them one at a time; he could kill them off wholesale. My opinion is that a homicidal maniac is responsible for all these murders. If that is so he is bound to make a mistake sooner or later, or he has already made mistakes. If he has, he must have left what you call a 'clew' that is so broad that even your police can follow it."

He had by this time become absorbed in the problem. He pushed away his microscope and was gesticulating earnestly.

"While there is a great number of ways in which the drug might be administered, they are, after all, limited, and the particular way in which this is done, in these cases, if they were all done in the same way by the same person, should not be difficult to find. By the way, what reason have you for believing that all these poisonings were accomplished in the same manner by the same person?"

"The apparent causelessness of all these poisonings. The apparent lack of motive in all except the Gibson case, and that case is now in doubt owing largely to the other cases. In not one instance was there found a receptacle that might have held the poison, even though the concentrated dehydrated prussic acid were used and it were a receptacle that held only a drop of liquid."

The old man nodded thoughtfully.

"That might prove that it was all done by one person, but you say—let me recapitulate this particular feature of it and see if I understand it.

"I understand that in some of the cases traces of the poison were found along the entire alimentary tract from mouth to the stomach. In some of the cases traces of the poison were found in the stomach, but in no other part of the alimentary canal. In still other cases the poison was found in no part of the alimentary tract, neither stomach nor mouth. Is that correct?"

"Yes," answered the reporter.

"In these last cases"—interjected Matthews—"in those cases where the poison was found in no part of the alimentary tract, except such a minute quantity as might find its way there by absorption, where was it found in greatest abundance?"

The professor nodded jerkily as if in approval of the question.

Jimmy looked at the two other men uncomprehendingly.

"I don't understand you," he said at last.

"He means," stated the professor, "was there any particular locality of the body in those cases where more of the poison was found than in any other part of the body? Was it localized to any particular area?" Then, as if explaining to a child: "When a person takes poison most of the poison is found in the stomach. When a rapidly acting poison is injected most of the drug is found near the portion of the body where it is injected. Where, in these cases you mention, was most of the cyanide found?"

"I don't know," answered Jimmy.

The old man threw his hands up in the air with a violent gesture. "Bah!" he jeered explosively. "You newspaper men! You don't know. I suppose you have written reams about this thing, volumes of drivel, and you don't know this, the most elementary fact. Then how do you know that it was all done in the same way? Why, if you knew this one thing I might tell you without stirring from this laboratory how it was done."

He waved his hands excitedly in the air. He dropped his hands and stared off unseeingly into space, swinging one foot from the high stool. He presented an odd appearance with his striking head protruding from the enveloping apron that covered him from neck to heels.

As if thinking aloud he began to mutter: "And yet it might be. All these poisonings might have been accomplished in the same manner. I could have poisoned all those persons—" He shook his head emphatically.

"But that is mere guessing. That is all right for people like this young man here," pointing sarcastically at his young assistant. "We scientists don't guess. We investigate and we know—" Matthews winked at Jimmy. The old man continued:

"That is all beside the mark. I cannot take this on. It is impossible. Jack, here"—pointing again at Matthews with withering sarcasm—"would undoubtedly like to do it. He would like to play detective, I am quite sure. He is not above such things. But I cannot spare him at present and I cannot do it myself."

"But—" Jimmy was interrupted by a significant gesture from Matthews. "All right, professor. I am sorry you cannot see your way clear to doing this for us." He walked out of the room, accompanied by his friend.

"You see how much the old man thinks of my top piece," grinned Matthews as they reached his own room. "No use, Jimmy, we're on the wrong tack. I stopped you because I had an idea while you were talking to him. How do you stand with the police on this thing?"

"I'm here at the request of the district attorney. Why do you ask?"

"Well," answered Matthews gravely, "the police ought to decide to make another raid on all chemical laboratories in a search for the poison. When they come here they should be very careful during their search not to break more than five or six of the professor's pet instruments. I'll be here myself and see that they do not do too much harm. Before they leave they should also let it be known that it has been decided to make such a search every week to make sure there is no cyanide that is not accounted for."

Jimmy stared at his friend uncomprehendingly for a moment; then he seized his hand in a bone-crushing grip.

"You're a brick, Jack. I'll never forget this. You're doing a real public service. Do you think the old man will solve this if he takes it on?"

"You bet your life he'll solve it," was the slow emphatic answer. Then with a tone of reverence: "He is the greatest man in the world. That mind of his is a human interrogation point. It is like a sponge. Nothing to which he applies his mind escapes."

When Jimmy gave the result of his errand to McCall, the latter telephoned to Lieutenant Corbett, whom he gave private instructions.

"Understand, Dan," was his parting injection, "this must be worked smoothly. I couldn't leave it to those flat feet. The professor's assistant will put you wise and help you. Make sure the old guy under-

stands that you will pay him another visit in a week or so."

An hour later McCall was aroused from his fit of abstraction by a confused murmur in the anteroom that finally rose into loud voices in an altercation.

Through the door there bounded the figure of Professor Brierly, who fairly sputtered in his excited fury. He danced up to the calm figure of the official and shook his fist in his face. The open door framed the faces of the lieutenant, Jimmy Hale and several members of the prosecuting attorney's staff.

"How dare you, sir; how dare you! What do you mean by sending these animals to my place? Cyanide, indeed. What have I to do with your petty poisonings? What do you mean by it, sir? A fine state of affairs when a man cannot conduct experiments without having these brutes break in like bulls in a china shop and break his valuable instruments!"

"I beg your pardon, sir," drawled McCall. "What is all this about? Who are you? What instruments are you talking about? What have *I* to do with it?"

The old man fairly danced up and down in his attempts to explain and answer all the questions at once. To see the little man who, standing, was not taller than the official sitting, threatening the latter, sent some of the men at the door into a fresh spasm. Finally the old man succeeded in calming himself.

"I am Brierly, sir—Herman Brierly. These men came searching for cyanide and they smashed some of my—"

"Oh, I understand now. Well, the men were ordered to search out every grain of cyanide. If one of the search parties did any damage I am sorry."

"Search parties! Search parties!" howled the professor. "It was not a search party that visited my house, it was a wrecking crew."

"If they caused any unnecessary damage we will pay for it, of course, but this thing must be stopped. We have decided to make a search once a week."

His visitor glared speechlessly at McCall for a minute, then he burst out: "If I help you find the manner in which these persons were poisoned, will you order your men to keep away from my laboratory?"

"We don't want any amateurs on this job," growled McCall.

"Amateurs, amateurs? Do you mean to say, sir, that any efforts I may put forth in that direction will be amateurish? Do you know who I am, sir? Do you know who I am?" He fairly sputtered in his wrath.

"Oh, all right," grunted McCall grudgingly. "You might as well try it." Then dropping all pretense he said fervently: "If you help us to a solution to this awful mystery, the city will bless you. If you find the man or men who are doing this—"

"I have nothing to do with the person who is responsible, if a person *is* responsible. That is work for a detective. All I shall do will be to find out how the poison is administered. Finding who did it, after that, ought to be easy. I am not a detective. I am a scientist.

"Detection," he continued with a rising inflection. "I will attempt none of that at all. When I have learned how the poison reached those persons my work will be done. I shall not attempt to stop it. If it is some agency we cannot at present understand, we shall find means of stopping it readily enough. If it is by human agency then it is a matter for your police."

Those deep eyes seemed to read the official's doubts, and the voice lost its irritation.

"The chemical and physiological action of this drug is well known. Of course it may be a new drug, and the persons who said it was cyanide may be mistaken. I want, first of all, to satisfy myself that no mistake was made in this direction, although this seems hardly likely. For this and other reasons I want to exhume the bodies of several of the most recent victims, and I also want to assist in the examination of the next victim, if there be any."

"Do you think you can discover the manner in which the poison was administered, professor?"

"I do not know. I told Mr. Hale my belief that it was a lunatic who was committing these crimes. If it is, he is pretty certain to make a mistake, if—"

"But if it isn't a lunatic, if it is a man with a well-defined motive?" persisted the official anxiously.

"Then God help your city," came solemnly from the old man. "Such a man can go on indefinitely killing persons without hindrance."

"But there is always a clew, there is always—"

"In the name of reason *don't* repeat that idiotic asininity about there being always a clew. There is not always a clew. How can you say that, in view of the many crimes that go unpunished? True, you might say that it is because of the incompetence of the police. But this incompetence is surely matched by the average criminal, is it not?

"Given an omniscient detective with all his senses developed to the *n*th degree, plus some of the senses of sight, smell and hearing of the lower animals, you might say that for such a person there is always a clew. But there are no such persons living."

"But the authorities say—"

"Yes, I know all about that. Let us suppose a few cases. Suppose a man were standing on a cliff with hundreds of men passing that point every hour. The place at which he is standing is a point that is out of sight about five yards in either direction. The seventy-sixth person passing that point on a certain hour pushes this man off the cliff. The murderer wears gloves. What clew has he left?

"I might dip a thousand pins into a culture of a deadly germ and inoculate as many persons in a half a day as I walked through the crowded streets. I destroy these pins later, and destroy the culture into which the pins were dipped. Have I left a clew?

"The statement that a person cannot go into a room without leaving a single trace that another average person can find is sheer nonsense. The assertion that a person cannot perform a single act without leaving a broad 'clew' is drivel. If that were true there should be no undetected crime when you take into consideration all the delicate instruments of detection that it is now possible to produce.

"One of the numerous airplanes passing over this city might release enough deadly microbes to kill off most of the inhabitants in seventy-two hours. How much of a clew would there be? It is fortunate for humanity that not many persons with the necessary equipment, mental and otherwise, to commit such crimes had the desire or the motive impelling them to such acts. I could do it, and there are many more persons who could.

"I am basing my hopes for finding the methods that were employed in these poisonings on two possibilities. The first is that if it is a sane man, who has a motive, it is a man whose knowledge does not match my own. The second is that it is a lunatic. This seems more likely. In that event he is certain to make mistakes, if he has not made them already."

"From what you know of the cases, do you see any change at all?" asked the official eagerly. McCall was conscious of a profound sense of relief. Not from what the little man said, but from the way he said it. McCall was impressed that a master mind was expressing itself. The absolute lack of bombast one is led to expect of such men, the sincere absence of self-consciousness, impressed him much more powerfully than would optimistic promises.

Professor Brierly answered thoughtfully:

"Yes, I see one ray of hope, assuming that it is one person who is responsible for all these poisonings. This lies in the diversity with which the poison itself demonstrates its presence. In the mouth and stomach; in the stomach alone; in cases where there is none found either in mouth, stomach or any part of the alimentary tract.

"This may mean several things. It may mean that the person does not use one method of administering the poison, in which event the chances for error on his part are multiplied greatly. If he does use the same method in all the cases it means that it is not entirely within his control, which will make it easier for us in our investigation, of course.

"You can readily understand that if this person so far loses control of the action of the drug that it demonstrates itself in various ways he has not sufficient control

over its administration or action, or both, to avoid leaving well-defined traces."

"Might it not be, professor, that the person who is responsible for all these murders does it this way on purpose to complicate the matter for those whose duty it is to find him?"

"No, I oppose this theory on the ground that I stated before. If it were a sane person with a motive, or reason, for doing this thing he would not content himself with one victim at a time; he could, and would, kill them wholesale. But—if I should be mistaken in this, may Heaven help all of us!

"Now, then," he went on briskly, "tell me as much as you can that might be of value to me in my investigations. First a rough general outline, then the technical details of which no doubt you have full reports."

McCall took from a cabinet a sheaf of papers, from which he separated several sheets fastened together.

"I have here a concise account of the affair compiled from all the reports since the beginning, a summary as it were. Of course, for detailed accounts by chemists and so forth, I can refer you to these," pointing to the rest of his papers.

Professor Brierly nodded, and taking out several loose sheets of paper and pencil he prepared to listen. Once, as he had done with Jimmy, he interrupted the tale as it was unfolding itself, to point out a discrepancy, which the attorney verified by looking back. This demonstration gave the official fresh hope.

After several minutes McCall noticed a flutter of white. Looking up he saw the old man tearing into bits the sheet of paper on which he had been taking notes. Unable to repress his surprise, thinking that the other was doing it unconsciously, he called his attention to it.

"Go on, go on," said the little man impatiently. "I rarely keep notes. I just take them to help me remember." Just then McCall glanced up at the clock. It was quiet in the other room. His staff had gone.

"It is after six, professor."

"What difference does that make? Oh, well, I shall be here at nine to-morrow." And without the customary salutation he walked out as he come in—strangely, a strange man.

CHAPTER XIII.

ACTUAL AND THEORETICAL INVESTIGATIONS.

WHEN McCall came to the office the following morning he was greeted by an excited stenographer who told him that a young man had come to see him, and in spite of his protests had walked calmly into his office where he was making himself at home. When McCall opened the door to his private office he saw a blond young giant sitting in his desk chair with his feet cocked on one of the desk slides. In the young man's mouth was a large cigar and at his side McCall recognized a box of his own pet cigars that he usually kept hidden in a lower drawer.

At the opening of the door the young man looked up, and seeing McCall, said, waving his hand invitingly: "Come in, come in, the boss of the works is not in yet."

"Er—ah—I am the boss of the works."

If McCall expected this to disconcert the visitor he was disappointed. The giant was not abashed in the slightest degree.

"Ah, are you? Well, come in, anyway. Make yourself at home. Have one of these cigars."

McCall, who had bristled when he first saw this stranger making himself free with his office and his own pet cigars, could not help smiling. The total lack of "smartness," the complete genuine good humor of his visitor was infectious. He stepped into the room.

"May I know to what I owe the honor of your visit?"

"Why, I have come here to help you solve that mystery of yours. Don't you know?" as the official looked at him blankly. "You invited us to come here. We have an appointment with you for nine o'clock this morning. Why, the professor told me to be here and meet him. I had to make some purchases down town."

"Oh, are you connected with Professor Brierly?"

"Sure! He's my adopted father. I

mean I am his adopted son. I take care of his nibs."

"Are you the Matthews Hale was telling me about?"

"That's me. I'm little Johnny Matthews. I am the great detective who is going to clear up this mystery. After the old gentleman finds out how this poison has been administered, I'll catch the man who did it. In this way we'll keep all the glory in the family, see?"

McCall was amazed. To hear this young man speak of Professor Brierly as his "nibs," to hear him discuss in this frivolous vein a matter about which the whole city was so vitally concerned, struck him at first as would a harsh discord. But he remembered what Jimmy told him of this young man, and he soon recognized in him one of those irrepressible natures who apparently takes nothing, not even himself, seriously. In this way he could cloak his real inner self. Matthews continued:

"I was to have met Professor Brierly here. Hs is about due now. We were to have gone over some of your reports in those poisoning cases."

"What chance do you think, Mr. Matthews, Professor Brierly has of getting to the bottom of these things?"

The young man instantly shed his air of lightness.

"Professor Brierly is the greatest man on earth. If these poisonings are accomplished by human agencies—and of course it is preposterous to think of anything else—Professor Brierly will probably find the solution."

"But," objected McCall, "Professor Brierly says that his only chance of finding the person who does this is that the person is insane. Suppose it is not a lunatic who is doing this frightful thing, what then? He himself seems very pessimistic about helping us if the person responsible for these crimes is of sound mind and has a motive. What if he is mistaken? Suppose it is a person who is sane and has a motive for killing all of these persons?

"It is the professor's absolute lack of conceit that makes him talk that way. He is probably utterly unaware of the fact that he is one of the three greatest scientists living to-day. When he talks, as he did to you, he probably assumes innocently that the person we are seeking knows as much as he does himself. That you will appreciate is hardly probable.

"I hardly exaggerate when I say that he is one of the three greatest scientists in the world to-day. In one respect he is *the* greatest. He knows more different kinds of things than any one man, and knows those things more thoroughly.

"Let us assume that the man who poisoned these persons applied a profound knowledge of chemistry and anatomy in these poisonings. It would not be enough to put on this case two men, each with a profound knowledge of one of these two subjects. They would be at a distinct disadvantage. They could not correlate their respective knowledge and apply this knowledge to the problem. The only way to correlate and correctly apply this information is having it in one mind. You see that, don't you?"

McCall nodded.

"Well, Professor Brierly has that one mind. This is a double-barreled problem. We are seeking two things. We are seeking the method by which this poison was introduced into the bodies of the victims and we are seeking the person who used that method. The first part of the problem, that of finding the method used in introducing the poison, is distinctly the professor's job."

"That's the peculiar feature of this crime," answered McCall. "Not only do we not know who did it, but we have not the slightest idea how it was done. If we had—"

Suddenly there was an interruption. Matthews saw McCall's face blanch and his jaw set. The conglomeration of sounds that goes to make up the roar of a busy street in a large city had suddenly ceased. The continuous roar that is so constant and so much a part of city life that the big city dweller does not hear it, was suddenly cut off. The absolute silence that followed was so intense that it was almost palpable. Mr. McCall rushed to the window overlooking the street. After one look he beckoned to his visitor.

"Come here quickly and see what this city has come to."

When the younger man reached the window he beheld a strange spectacle. Just about midway on the cross-walk between the courthouse and the opposite curb a man was lying face down. From this point as a common center men, women, and children were running away as fast as they could. Vehicular traffic had stopped in all directions. Trolley cars, automobiles and wagons facing away from that point were moving. Vehicles of all kinds, facing toward the stricken man had stopped.

From curb to curb, and for a hundred yards in each direction along that street and the interesecting street crossing at that point, there was not a person. All doors and windows were promptly closed. No one was looking from any of the buildings facing that street. The policeman stationed on traffic post at that point was swept away by the mob that surged over him. There was something grim, sinister and terrifying in the spectacle of the busiest corner of the city so absolutely deserted as if a plague had struck that spot.

Matthews turned a blank, amazed look toward McCall.

"Why, what on earth does that mean? What are they all running away for, and why doesn't some one look at that poor fellow in the street? He may be badly hurt or dead. Where are the policemen?"

"That," answered McCall bitterly, "is what this beautiful city has come to. All these people are afraid that that man is a victim of the poison and every one is afraid of being found near him for fear of being suspected. And if there is a physician in that crowd he has more reason for fear than any one else, as suspicion would readily attach to a physician, more readily than to a layman. God!" he uttered explosively, throwing his hands out with a gesture of despair. "When will this awful thing stop and where will it end?"

"Come on," exclaimed the younger man. "Let's go and see if we can help that poor fellow, but wait—" He stopped and a look of mingled tenderness, affection, reverence, and half humorous toleration spread across his features. "Here comes his nibs. Let us see what he'll do."

From the crowd, which had stopped a hundred yards away, the little old man, straight as a ramrod for all of his seventy odd years, walked quickly toward the man on the pavement. His steps clicked sharply on the stone pavement as he approached with short, rapid steps. The little man, walking alone in the empty space with the huge crowd watching him, formed a strange spectacle. But he walked on as if unconscious of the strangeness of his surroundings.

As he was stooping over the prone figure on the pavement the traffic policeman, extricating himself from the crowd, came running toward him, and from the other direction, with clanging gong, the ambulance came dashing. This seemed to break the tension, and a number of people began hesitatingly moving toward the group.

The two watchers from the window of the courthouse saw the white-garbed interne hop off the back steps of the ambulance, and after a cursory examination motioned to the policeman to help put the man in the ambulance. As they both leaned toward the prostrate man the professor, still on his knees examining the patient, waved his hand impatiently as if ordering the other two away. The policeman thereupon stooped forward, and grasping the old man by the arm, yanked him sharply to his feet.

McCall turned when he heard an exclamation at his side. He just had time for a glimpse at the face which had now lost its good humor. The face was white, the jaws set and the laughing, gray-blue eyes now had the frosty glare of fresh ice. The heavy window which was hung on hinges was swung back with a crash and the young man leaped to the plot of grass ten feet below. In two strides he was at the ornamental iron fence surrounding the building, and like a hurdler he was over the four-foot obstruction and racing toward the group in the street.

McCall promptly dashed out of his office and went running toward the exit. He knew the temper of the crowd. One look at the young man's face and his knowledge of the policeman's disinclination to accept outside interference made him very anxious as to the result. He recognized in this all the elements of a first-class row, with possibly very serious results.

As he reached the street he was in time to see Matthews grasp the arm of the policeman and releasing the latter's hold on the arm of the professor, send the blue-coated official spinning away. Even in this moment of excitement McCall had time to be astonished, for he knew that traffic policeman to be one of the strongest men on the force. He reached the group just in time to stop the policeman's rush. The oncoming crowd made McCall very eager to get away. With a sharp word to the angry policeman he herded the professor and his young assistant into his office.

Here the official was amused to see the solicitous way with which the young man hovered over his mentor, patting him, examining him, and anxiously inquiring if he were hurt. It reminded McCall of nothing so much as of a chicken fluttering cluckingly about one of her chicks. Suppressing his amusement at the odd couple, he said:

"I don't think it was wise to interfere with that policeman. He might have hurt you; he has a very quick temper."

"But, man dear, didn't you see what he was doing to the professor? What business has the cop handling the professor that way? As to his temper—he couldn't hurt me with his temper, you know." Then turning to the old man, who had sat down in a huge armchair, as if nothing unusual had happened: "What was the matter with the man on the ground?"

"He just fainted, that's all, but I wanted to make sure it was nothing worse, and those idiots wouldn't let me finish examining him. It occurred to me that it might be one of those cyanide cases, and I should have the opportunity of getting first-hand information. But it was nothing of the kind," he added regretfully. "Just a simple fainting spell. Now, Mr. McCall," he continued, "let us have those reports, and Matthews and I will go over them."

When he received the bulky package of papers he turned half of them over to the young man and himself plunged into the rest. McCall looked with curiosity and saw that all the playfulness had apparently left him. The analytical reports which, to McCall, were so much Chinese were being hastily and understandingly gone over with the earnestness of a master at his chosen profession. It was the young man who first looked up.

"These are not exhaustive enough, professor."

The old man nodded.

"By the way," said Mr. McCall, "Dr. Morton, who conducted the most of these autopsies, is near by. Shall I call him?"

"Yes; it might save time," said the old man.

When Dr. Morton came in McCall noted the air of veneration with which he greeted the old man. Having steeped himself in the technical details of the poisonings for several months, he was able to follow the discussion that followed with a degree of intelligence.

CHAPTER XIV.

A GLIMMER OF LIGHT.

"ONE of the most astonishing features of the whole series of cases," said Dr. Morton, "is that in which the poison was found in the stomachs of several victims and not in their mouths or fauces. There were five or six such cases."

"What is there surprising about that?" asked Professor Brierly. "It could be taken in a capsule that would not dissolve until it reached the stomach, and thus leave no traces in the mouth or throat."

"Prussic acid?" challenged Dr. Morton. "It would dissolve the capsule almost immediately. It was prussic acid that was used, not the potassium nor any of the other known salts."

"The acid would not dissolve if it were fixed in glycerine or a vegetable oil," retorted Matthews.

Dr. Morton stared blankly a moment, then he nodded assent.

"By the way, doctor," continued Matthews, "in those cases to which you refer was sulphuric acid used in your analyses for the poison?"

"Yes."

Matthews looked at his mentor interrogatively. As though answering a spoken thought, the old man nodded.

"Matthews is right. That would make

your post mortems worthless. The use of sulphuric acid will decompose the sulphocyanide existing in the saliva, likely to be found in the stomach, and thereby evolve traces of the prussic acid. That makes it uncertain that there was any poison in that stomach at all."

Dr. Morton was silent for a moment, then he answered thoughtfully:

"That is so, but sulphuric acid was not used in all those cases. I think we used it in one case only—the first, or one of the first. You see, we suspected the presence of potassium cyanide in that case."

"In which case was it used?"

Reaching for the papers on the desk, Dr. Morton, after a search, said:

"In the case of Julia Edgerton. But she died of prussic acid poisoning, as did the others—there is no question about that. All the physiological symptoms were there, and the chemical evidence, the appearance of the blood, its color, fluidity, *et cetera*."

"Doctor," asked Professor Brierly, "did neither you nor any of your colleagues form any theory as to the manner in which the poison reached those victims? Did you inquire into the manner of living? It is hardly probable, but it is barely possible, that the body itself is the laboratory for the formation of the drug. As Matthews suggested, the action of sulphuric acid will form prussic acid under certain conditions. This is far-fetched, of course, but it is barely possible."

Dr. Morton shrugged his shoulders and shook his head helplessly.

"We have found and formed many theories, but every time it seemed to us that we were on the right track there was a fresh victim who would die under circumstances that would upset our previous notions. Just the location of the poison itself is positively bewildering. In some cases it is found in the mouth, throat and stomach. In others there is prussic acid in the stomach and nowhere else. In still other cases it was found in neither the stomach nor mouth, nor any part of the alimentary tract leading into the stomach and going out from it."

"Where was most of the poison found in those cases?"

"That is the strange thing about it. While traces of the poison were found in the upper part of the body generally, it was so diffused that it was practically impossible to tell at which point it entered. Of course it is such a volatile substance that it would diffuse very rapidly, but even then you would think that you would find a trace. And I'll confess that we did not search in that direction very long. It seemed so useless. We knew from the other classes of cases that the patient took the poison or was given the poison through mouth, but that got us nowhere. This seems to lend weight to the theory that the poison is formed in the body itself."

The old man nodded slowly, thoughtfully.

"For the sake of clarity, doctor," he said slowly, checking off the points on his fingers, "we will divide the cases into three classes: those which showed traces of the poison from the mouth to the stomach, those which showed it in the stomach alone, and those which showed it neither in the stomach nor mouth. Putting aside for the moment the first two classes, what did you do in the other cases toward finding the method of administration?"

"What we did in the first few cases of the kind that were presented to us was, in the light of later knowledge, practically valueless. We were so confused that we had no constructive plan of making a thorough examination. But in the last two cases of that kind—and by the way, most of the later cases were of that class—our examination was as thorough as we knew how to make it."

"Did you examine the teeth in those cases?"

"Yes, we examined them very carefully. In two or three cases we removed crowns and bridge work with the idea that the poison had been secreted under these artificial dentures. But we found nothing. We found a number of filled teeth in these cases. Wherever we found a tooth that had been filled we examined it very carefully. But they were hermetically sealed. When we found a filling that leaked we extracted the tooth and took out the filling. But we found nothing suspicious. One or two cavities that we found showed noth-

ing. They were ordinary cavities, small or large as the case might be, and there was certainly nothing about them to indicate that the poison had been kept in them.

"We also examined the teeth in other cases, those that showed traces of the poison in the alimentary canal. There was nothing in those cases, either. In one of these we extracted every tooth that had a filling and we made the most exhaustive tests. The result was negative. In every instance we drew a blank.

"We made what amounted to a microscopic examination of the entire surface of each body, looking for the mark of an hypodermic injection. We shaved off the hair wherever we found it in our search. We examined the mouth, the nose, the eyes and ears. We examined every opening of the body where a small quantity of the poison might have been lodged.

"Whenever we found what bore the faintest resemblance to the mark of a hpodermic needle, we carefully examined the area immediately surrounding it, seeking for pronounced traces of the poison. We did not neglect a single thing we could think of in those cases.

"You understand, of course, that owing to the changes that occur on the surface of the body, in cyanide poisoning, we followed many false trails. In the case of one woman we found something that looked like a hypodermic injection in the fleshy part of the cheek. In the case of another we found one on the arm. This, we learned later, was really the scar left by a hypodermic needle. An hour before he died this man had a dose of morphine injected to ease him of frightful pain that he was suffering.

"But this was done by a regularly qualified physician, and to make it certain that this did not have anything to do with what we were looking for, a most careful analysis in the tissue surrounding the scar showed almost none of the poison, certainly not at the place of the injection. This was a mighty lucky thing for the doctor. Very few outside of official circles knew of this. We had determined long ago, with the help of the editors of the several newspapers, to say nothing that would throw the least suspicion on any one without good cause."

"Was it possible in any of these cases to obtain a statement from one of the victims?"

"Nothing that would be of any value," stated McCall. "But one of the men who was stricken with the poison is alive to-day. That is the King case."

"How did it happen, and what did he say?" asked Professor Brierly with interest.

"He has not said anything yet. Yesterday was the first since it happened that he was able to talk coherently. He is still technically under arrest. We can get his statement if you wish. There is a new phase of the case of which we were not aware before. Dr. Corson was here yesterday and made a startling statement. He said that King was taking a drink of water that he handed him when he was stricken.

"Dr. Corson told me that he realized at once what it might mean to him if such a thing were known, so he did not tell us at the time. His assistant and the nurse who were on the scene a few seconds after it happened knew of it, but they, too, kept quiet. Dr. Corson, to protect himself, turned the glass of water over to those two and insisted that they have the glass of water analyzed for traces of the poison. I have statements made by both the young people that the tests, which were made by a competent chemist, were negative. Dr. Corson also told me that in order to satisfy himself that nothing he might have done unwittingly had caused the death of any of these other victims, he made a careful examination on his own account.

"He finds that he has nothing to do with any of the other victims since the series of deaths began to occur. I have taken pains since yesterday morning to verify and check up all his statements, and I find them true in every particular. In view of what has happened I cannot blame him for keeping those facts to himself. I told him so. If it had become known that King was attacked while drinking water given to him by Dr. Corson, Dr. Corson's life would not be worth a counterfeit cent."

"To which of the three classes does the King case belong?" asked Matthews. "Was there any of the poison found in his stomach?"

"I don't know," answered Dr. Morton. "We have not analyzed—"

"Of course there was cyanide in his stomach," asserted Professor Brierly.

"Why — er — professor, how do you know—" stammered Matthews.

"Ah, have some sense," snapped the old man impatiently. "Can you imagine anything that would keep a person alive if the cyanide had been introduced directly into the system? No human agency on earth could have saved King if cyanide, particularly prussic acid, had been introduced directly into the system, either intravenously or subcutaneously. Only if it had been taken into the stomach could the very efficient methods employed by Dr. Corson have been of avail.

"By the way, doctor," he stated, turning to Dr. Morton, "what you said about making a microscopic examination of the surfaces of those victims' bodies does not necessarily prove anything. If the poison was introduced by injection, say, intravenously into a vein, the blood would carry it right off, and if found at all it might be found a considerable distance from the area of injection."

"But, professor," objected Matthews, "in two of the places that the reports mention of as having suspected needle punctures, the veins are so small that it would take amazing skill to inject a medicine directly into the veins without infiltrating the rest of the tissue."

"Just what I was thinking," murmured Dr. Morton.

"That's true. I am not saying that it was so, but it might have been so. While it would take amazing skill it is nevertheless possible. If Dr. Corson kept some of the contents of the stomach after the use of the emetic, I should like to anaylze it."

"Just a moment," said McCall, lifting the receiver off the hook on the telephone. After talking for a moment he turned to the professor. "Dr. Corson says that he had the stuff analyzed in his laboratory, and he found prussic acid."

"Ask him to send some of the contents of the stomach, if he saved any, up to my laboratory. I want to make an independent analysis."

"All right," said the official, hanging up the receiver. "He will bring it up himself. I told him that you were on the case, and he is eager to give you his version of the affair if you should like to have it. If you'd like to speak to King I can have him brought around. He is still technically a prisoner, you know."

"Isn't he too sick to come here?"

"Oh, no. It seems that he recovered from the effects of the poison several days after it happened, all except the use of his voice. The vocal organs were left in a state of partial paralysis from which he did not recover until yesterday. He can be brought here without any inconvenience to him at all."

As one of the attendants in the outer office was being instructed to bring King to the office, Dr. Corson was announced and ushered in.

In response to a request by the old man, he went into a detailed description of the scene from the time King walked into his office until he noticed the symptoms of the poison. With reference to the water he had handed King to drink he had very little to say. In response to a request by the patient, the nurse brought a glass of water from the cooler in the adjacent room. King had drunk from this water, leaving about a quarter of it standing on the desk. As he was applying the pneumatic instrument to King's arm for the blood pressure test the latter had reached for and taken the rest of the water. It was while he was drinking this that he was seized.

The patient had abruptly set the glass on the desk and would have fallen to the floor if Dr. Corson had not caught him.

At this point McCall, whose suspicion had not been entirely lulled, interrupted.

"Hold on, doctor. Didn't you tell Corbett that time that you did not give King anything or that he did not take anything while he was being examined?"

Dr. Corson looked at him with elevated eyebrow.

"Why, yes, I told you so. Frankly I lied, and I asked my assistant and nurse to lie about it, too. The memory of the druggist was too vivid in my mind then. I could not help thinking of him when I

thought of the possible consequences to me if it were known that I, a physician, had given him water to drink, and that it was while he was drinking the water that he was stricken.

"I justified myself for the lie by the belief that there was no injustice being done thereby. I had the skill and facilities to make a proper examination of the water. We did that. If we had found anything suspicious we could then have told the authorities about it, and done what we could to track it down. Since we did not find any of the poison, I felt that no harm was done by withholding a fact the possession of which could serve no one, and only do me incalculable harm—perhaps cost me my life—in the state of mind the mob had attained."

McCall nodded as if satisfied, and the old man resumed:

"Was much water left?"

"About three drams. Fortunately he neither broke the glass nor spilled the water. We made very exhaustive tests of this water. I still have some if you care to make an analysis for yourself."

"About how much time would you say had elapsed between the time he took the first drink and the time he took the last?"

"About twenty minutes, I should say. He asked for the water almost as soon as I began the examination."

Just then King walked in.

"Not dead yet, you see. But"—his mouth closed in grim lines—"I should not like to try it again. Only for your very efficient, prompt work, sir, I should not be alive now." He bowed gravely to Dr. Corson. "I cannot thank you enough, I suppose."

His calm equable bearing in face of the awful ordeal through which he had gone excited the sympathy and admiration of all those present. Only Professor Brierly remained unmoved.

"Mr. King," he asked, "what did the capsules that you had been taking consist of?"

"It was just a simple tonic, sir," he answered, and he gave the ingredients.

"How long had you been taking them?"

"For several months."

"Was the prescription always compounded by the same druggist?"

"I compounded them myself. I had a fairly complete little laboratory, and this sort of thing kept me amused."

"Did you take one of those capsules while at Dr. Corson's office?"

"No, I took one about half an hour before I came there."

"Do you happen to know the condition of your stomach at the time?"

"My doctor told me that my stomach was rather acid. In that condition I should not think it would take a capsule much more than twenty minutes to dissolve."

"Just about the length of time between your first sip of water and the last."

Mr. King shook his head emphatically.

"No, sir. There was nothing in that water. I know the taste and the smell of cyanide in its usual forms too well. And yet—" He seemed to stop himself as though he were about to say something he was reluctant to utter while glancing at Dr. Corson.

"And yet what?" asked McCall sharply.

"Well," he said, smiling apologetically toward Dr. Corson, "of course if I had swallowed the poison I should not have tasted it. And a peculiar thing occurred to me just now. I seem to have a hazy recollection that while I was drinking the water the first time I had a kind of a feeling as though I were swallowing capsules."

"Capsules?"

"Yes, two or more. As I say I am very hazy about it now. I must be mistaken."

"Is it not possible," suggested Dr. Morton, "that one or more capsules—colorless capsules—containing the poison were in the glass of water and you did not see them? Was the light in Dr. Corson's consulting room very good?"

"No."

"Well," insisted Dr. Morton, "is such a thing not possible?"

"How would the capsules have got into the water?" asked Professor Brierly.

"It might have been in the cooler."

The old man shook his head emphatically.

"A capsule of anhydrous prussic acid—and it would have to be that to kill in such

small quantity—would be buoyant and would float. In that case it would not leave the cooler until almost all the water had been drained off. Another possibility is that the nurse might have put the capsule or capsules in the water, but there are very strong reasons against that.

" The evidence is that if there were a capsule in the water, Mr. King must have swallowed when he drank the first time. If you ever drank anything with something floating at the top of the liquid and tried to get that object into your mouth with the liquid, you know how difficult it is, how illusive that object is, how it persists in staying away from the side of the glass where your lips are.

" No, gentlemen, we have to seek another explanation for these poisonings. I assume that what Dr. Corson and Mr. King says about it can be checked up. You can also check up the movements of the nurse. Your regular detective force can do that very efficiently, no doubt.

" But it would not be enough to fasten this peculiar case of Mr. King's, either on Mr. King himself as an attempted suicide, or on Dr. Corson, or any one connected with him. That would still be very far from explaining all the other cases."

" It strikes me that this is one of the dangers you gentlemen will have to guard against. The power of suggestion in such cases is sometimes irresistible. It is entirely possible that this long series of cyanide poisonings might so work on certain minds that a person would either commit murder or suicide by this poison. This is a phase of morbid psychology that can easily be explained. When you find a person or persons who has committed such a crime make sure that you have the person who has committed all of them before you are satisfied that you are done with all the poisonings.

" Mr. King undoubtedly took, or was given, the poison by the way of the stomach. I am still not satisfied that those victims in whose stomachs the poison was found were given the poison by the same person and in the same way as those in whose stomachs it was not found.

" By the way, in those cases in which traces of the poison was found in some parts of the alimentary tract, do your reports refer to the relation of the meal time to the time of the poison?"

" I don't know what you mean," answered McCall.

" I mean, did all or most of those cases happen during or shortly after the victim had drunk anything?"

McCall took up his summary of the reports and went through them hastily.

" Yes," he said after a few minutes. " All of them, with the exception of Julia Edgerton and John Lamb, who died about a month ago. Julia Edgerton did not have a meal, but she had some ice-cream soda about half an hour or a little more before she fell a victim to the poison. Outside of this, neither of these two had eaten or drunk anything several hours before they showed the symptoms."

The telephone bell rang and interrupted the conversation.

" Yes," said McCall, taking the receiver from the hook.

The first few words uttered by the person at the other end of the wire seemed to age him perceptibly. The dull gray pallor and the look of hopeless misery his face had worn for months returned. To the men who were watching him it seemed that each birdlike squeak that was faintly audible to them acted on McCall like a blow. After listening a few minutes he said: " All right, Dan. I'll be right over there."

He sank listlessly into a chair, seeming to forget the others. He was aroused by the sharp words of the professor, who touched him on the arm. " What is it—another one?"

McCall nodded. " Lord!" he burst out with a vigor that made it sound like a curse. " When will it stop! But come, here is your chance; we will go to the house of the victim."

Just then there came pealing the sound of bells. In another moment it was taken up by the blowing of whistles until it seemed that all the church bells and factory whistles of the city were sounding.

The little man looked at his companions interrogatively. McCall explained.

" This is to notify the people that another death from the poison has occurred. There

were several riots at the newspaper offices, and this means was devised of notifying the city of a fresh victim. One newsboy was trampled to death a few months ago."

Pressing a button on the desk, he asked an answering attendant to get a car ready, and the party prepared to leave.

"I do not think I can go, Mr. McCall," said Dr. Morton. Then he said with a smile: "But be sure this is in good hands."

When McCall, Professor Brierly, and Matthews stepped to the street the old man noticed, for the first time, that the people wore the same haunted look McCall had when he was answering the telephone. The bells and whistles were still going. Even the irrepressible newsboys were calling their extras in a subdued voice. To a stranger it would be apparent at once that something was wrong. Unusual activity was going on everywhere. Vans, from the elaborate house on wheels to the one-horse street variety, were backing up to the stores and houses, moving the contents.

The more busy thoroughfares were patrolled by detachments of the State guard. Each of the men was busy with his own thoughts as they were driven through the streets. Suddenly their car stopped. The quick, regular, rhythmic beat of many steps keeping in time was heard, and a company of men, unmistakably of the regular army, went marching by. Their bearing would have stamped them without their uniforms.

McCall turned to his companions. "You can imagine to what straits this city was brought when such a thing was found necessary. They were ordered here last week when we found that the State guard could not cope with the situation and that the men themselves were becoming demoralized. As usual in such cases there are those prepared to take advantage and make capital out of the misfortunes of a whole city. For several months this has been the abiding place of every crook in this part of the country."

Professor Brierly nodded. He had been looking out of the car intently. He now turned to the official, put his hand on the younger man's knee and said: "I am not much in the world nor of it. I spend most of my time with my books and instruments. Seeing this brings it home to me. I am sincerely sorry; the sight of little children with the fear of death in their faces is not good to see. I shall do all in my power."

This sentiment, expressed by the old man so simply, acted like soothing balm on the official's overwrought nerves.

In a short time their car stopped in front of a house in the western section of the city. A small detachment of the State guard, several plain clothes men, and uniformed policemen were grouped about the entrance. It was some minutes before Matthews could formulate in his mind what it was that struck him as incongruous in the spectacle. Then he realized that aside from the officials at the door there were no spectators. The crowd that is drawn by morbid curiosity in such cases was lacking.

When he mentioned the matter to McCall the latter answered:

"Yes, it is a common thing now. Like a plague! Fear—fear of the poison, fear of being suspected, fear of the unknown. Mob psychology is queer. When one or two are drawn to such a scene they feel so lonesome, they feel so much like intruders, that they leave quickly."

When the three men entered the house they were ushered into one of the upper rooms where the latest victim, Samuel J. Kilgus, was lying in bed. The presence of a white-robed nurse was explained by the statement that Mr. Kilgus had been ill for some time and needed such professional attention. All the symptoms of cyanide poisoning were plainly apparent. On the table was a row of medicine bottles and boxes. Professor Brierly, after the briefest look at the occupant of the bed, went at once to the table and smelled the contents of each bottle and box. He also smelled a glass that contained a little liquid and a spoon that showed recent use.

Then, stepping quickly to the side of the bed, he leaned over and smelled at the mouth of the victim.

"Jack," he ordered curtly, "move the bed to the window. I want more light."

Forcing open the dead man's jaw with a surgical mouth gag he peered into the mouth. Then he carefully took specimens of the inner portion of the upper and

lower lip, tongue, cheek, and palate, and put each section into a separate test tube, which he had carefully labeled. After this, with the help of the nurse and his young assistant, he made an exhaustive search of the surface of the body.

Then he turned to the nurse.

"Miss Hammond, when did your patient eat last?"

"He was eating when this happened."

"When did he eat before this?"

"Early this morning."

"How long ago?"

"About five hours."

"What was he eating when this happened?"

"Toast and milk; he was still on a diet."

"Was the toast crisp?"

"Yes, sir."

"Were you in the room when this happened?"

"Yes."

"Were you watching him just then?"

"Not specially, but I was looking at him."

"Can you describe just what happened?"

"He was chewing his toast and was about to put the glass of milk to his mouth. Just then he stopped and put his other hand to his mouth, then he clutched his heart and fell back. I called a physician, but he came too late."

"How long after the first seizure did he die?"

"Fifteen minutes."

"What were the symptoms?"

"All the usual symptoms."

"Describe them," said the old man impatiently.

The young woman went into a detailed description while the professor listened carefully. He stood in thought for a minute, then he asked:

"You said he put his hand to his mouth. Can you describe that accurately?"

Miss Hammond looked puzzled. "I do not know what you mean, sir."

"Well, a person might put a hand to his mouth casually, or he might do it as if he were putting something in or taking something out."

"I don't think I can tell you just what you want. But what first made me pay him special attention was an exclamation of annoyance. Yes, that's it. He had his hand to his mouth as if he were annoyed about something."

"Annoyance! Are you sure?"

"That's what it seemed to me."

"Did the annoyance his face and gesture showed—did the act of putting his hand to his mouth look as if he might have struck some hard substance in the toast—say, like a piece of gravel or wood, as sometimes happens?"

The nurse's face lit up. Matthews, who was following the interview with close attention, also became tense.

"Yes, yes, that's it. Now that you mention it I am sure of it."

"Did his head fall forward or backward immediately after that?"

"Backward."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes. I came to him and helped ease it back."

"Did he take something from his mouth?" The little man's face lost its trace of excitement and now bore a look of disappointment.

"No."

"Are you quite sure?"

"Yes, sir."

Professor Brierly thanked Miss Hammond, and turning to Matthews, said: "I began to think that it was solved without going any further. But it was a chain of circumstances that was bound to mislead me unless I followed the line of reasoning to its logical conclusion." Staring at the body meditatively for several minutes he turned to McCall.

"There is nothing further for me to do here. Please make arrangements for me to conduct the autopsies on this case and the one that happened yesterday. Better still, have them sent to my laboratory. I have all the conveniences there. I shall report as soon as I find anything definite. When I am finished with this I shall want several bodies of the most recent victims exhumed. If there are any new cases let me know." He nodded briefly, and calling Matthews, the ill-assorted couple walked out.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

The Key

By MARC EDMUND JONES

OF all those present in the grand ballroom at the Ritzmore, Montgomery Snedden, crook to the Four Hundred by self-appointment, alone detected the fall of the little key to the heavily waxed hardwood floor. A quick gleam came to his keen gray eyes.

"Small things," he muttered to himself, "may loom up quite large under a microscope."

With prompt but not too hurried movement he advanced the several necessary steps and paused. Obviously this gentleman who had stopped between two tables, almost at the very edge of the dancing space, was seeking some other member of his party, or perhaps was endeavoring to locate his partner for the next dance—

But the cool gray eyes, not without their suggestion of a sardonic sense of humor, were directed fixedly upon the retreating figure of the lady who had dropped the key. A trained and practiced glance took in every detail of her dress and person—and manner.

"Young!" Snedden told himself. "That is, young enough to get excited about life if life warrants excitement, and old enough to have had something out of life to warrant excitement if that can be found out—about thirty-five, in other words." He smiled. "That dress looked like Roma silk, and it's simple enough to be expensive even for the Ritzmore dances, and then that rope of pearls and the brooch in her hair—"

Suddenly she was lost in the kaleidoscopic shift of the dancers, but Snedden's smile remained at the corners of his mouth. He took out a handkerchief and permitted it to slip from his fingers. He stooped to pick it up from the floor, and as he did so he removed an immaculate dress shoe from a

little object which his toe had covered. Then he straightened. In his hand was the handkerchief, and in the handkerchief the key. He turned and strolled back under the balcony to find a place to examine the latter.

At the first glance a little involuntary whistle escaped him. The lower part of the key might have been the regular bit of stamped metal made for any Yale lock. The upper part, however, was set with jewels—tiny sparkling diamonds, rubies and emeralds in the daintily executed design of a crown, and this was repeated on both sides of the handle.

"I've a hunch this is going to become interesting—very interesting indeed!" muttered Montgomery Snedden. He slipped the jeweled key into a pocket of his vest, then adjusted his dress tie, and with studied nonchalance started on the circuit of the floor, back of the tables, to locate again the owner of the key.

When the music stopped she came, as it happened, toward him, and gave him his first full view of her. He watched her as she took her seat at the table, studying her escort briefly, and the man of the other couple who joined them a moment later. Neither of the male members of the party seemed to interest Snedden, however. Remaining carefully back under the balcony near the curtains of a doorway, he glanced at the woman again.

"She is very handsome—very handsome indeed; and this remains interesting." He glanced at his watch. "About an hour and a half to go, eh? I'll wait it out!"

He walked away, his assumed manner of boredom a perfect bit of acting. The lady at the table, however, was not allowed to escape his observation, as he loitered near one of the heavy hangings at a doorway.

Probably just to demonstrate that fate was now ready to bring about any result to satisfy Mr. Montgomery Snedden, the party under his observation suddenly concluded to break up and the ladies rose and started for the door, followed by their escorts. The crook disposed of his cigarette with easy nonchalance and leisurely followed down to the cloak rooms on the third floor.

There the two couples separated, and Snedden was able to trail the owner of the key more easily. At the hotel door her companion ordered a taxi, and the crook, with a smile, strode diagonally across the street to an inconspicuous, curtained touring car, where a chauffeur waited with cap well pulled down over his eyes. With the approach of the gentleman in evening clothes the latter lifted his face enough to reveal the fact that he was an Oriental.

The crook muttered several instructions in quick, low tones, then he settled back into the cushions of his car and watched until the taxi in the glare of the hotel entrance had taken its load and had its door slammed.

"Follow, Nuki!" he ordered.

The chase was not long and not involved, because it did not lead out of the arteries of traffic until just before the taxi's destination in one of the side streets between Fifth and Madison, a small and very new and very splendid apartment house.

"Turn around, Nuki! Wrong block!" Then: "Wait three blocks down on Fifth."

Because of the length of the wheel base of the touring car, it had to stop, back, go forward, and back to the curb a second time before it could make the turn. Then there was the whistle of the intake, a faint *pet* of meshed gears, and the car was rapidly out of sight, turning out into and down the avenue.

At the curb where it turned a gentleman was standing, lighting his cigarette. Now he started on briskly toward the little apartment house.

The taxi had left, but the woman still stood inside the door with the man who had brought her home. The doorway was carried in from the street, the building line of the apartment being directly at the walk. There was a false vestibule much wider than the entrance itself, and in the darkness of this Snedden found a precarious hiding place. As he darted into the shadow he threw away the cigarette.

"I've no idea how I could have lost my key," came in petulant feminine tones.

Snedden smiled sardonically.

"What on earth will you do?" asked her escort. "Shall I—"

"I'll ring the janitor's bell and get him up," she interrupted. "You needn't wait," she added.

"I want to make sure you get in safely, Molla," her escort replied.

"I'd rather you wouldn't stay," she said, and the distress in her voice was evident. "Of course I wrote Jim I was going with you to-night, but—but the janitor might think—"

Again Snedden smiled. Things were going much as he had anticipated. And why should he have anticipated? Hunch, probably. And to a crook there is nothing in the world quite so valuable as a well-defined hunch.

With many apologies the lady's escort made his departure, and Snedden stiffened himself against the wall as the man passed. Then he was aware that she was pressing the janitor's button, and he ventured to lean forward a bit to get the lay of the land.

It was a new apartment of the very latest design. Rather than the hall boy and switchboard, there was simply the outer door on spring lock with a heavy door-check to close it. The tenants admitted themselves with their keys, and there was no one to witness their coming and going. Even the elevator, the crook could see, was of the finest automatic design.

"What a pipe!" he reflected to himself. "A man of my talents should have become acquainted with this place long ago."

Then the janitor appeared, and when Snedden saw him he smiled until his teeth gleamed white in the darkness.

"There's a square-head for you," he muttered inaudibly. "He's three-quarters asleep. Watch me put my foot in the door."

And as a matter of fact, when the nodding janitor peered through the iron grille-work of the heavy glass door it was obvious that it was about all he could do to focus his eyes enough to catch the identity of the woman.

"Mrs. Cheshire!" he ejaculated in drowsy surprise.

"I've lost my key, John," she explained, and slipped him a bill. "You will have to let me into my apartment also."

As Snedden anticipated, the janitor stood aside to let the woman pass; then followed immediately, allowing the door to swing shut and catch of its own momentum. So the crook calmly put his foot out, and waited.

The other two entered the elevator together. As the car went up, and the moment it was out of sight, Snedden entered and sprinted to the stairs. He was able to move noiselessly upon the light soles of his dress shoes. The stairs, fortunately for his purpose, circled about the little elevator shaft.

At the second floor he paused momentarily. Not here. At the third he hesitated again to see that the coast was clear. Finally at the fourth floor he found them. One glance enabled him to mark the apartment that was hers; then he slipped down the stairs as swiftly and as noiselessly as he had come up. At the bottom he listened and made sure that the elevator had not yet started down with the janitor. In another moment he had strolled out of the entrance as poised and calm as befitted the bearing of a rather striking-looking gentleman in evening clothes.

Three blocks down Fifth Avenue he entered the touring car.

"My hotel, Nuki!" he directed. Lowering his voice as he leaned back in the cushions, he muttered: "Oh, what a pipe!"

When morning came he shaved carefully and donned a suit which he selected with considerable interest. Over breakfast he chuckled.

Then shortly before noon a luxurious taxicab drove up before the apartment and departed. The passenger, swinging a slender cane with the full assurance attributed usually to aristocracy, entered the little vestibule, took a key from his pocket, opened the heavily grilled door, and passed on to the little elevator. Here he pushed the button for the fourth floor, and upon arrival there strode down to the front apartment on the right, where he put the key in the door and entered.

A room with curtains half drawn faced him, delightfully furnished in the best of taste. He strode to the windows, raised the shades, and looked about.

A little hall led to the rear of the apartment, and with noiseless step he made his way back through a small dining room, an immaculate pantry and kitchen, to a tiny maid's room. This obviously was unoccupied. He nodded at that fact in approval. Then he returned to the reception room.

Was he alone? Had he selected the wrong time to call? The telephone caught his eye, and he stopped long enough to take a pair of scissors from his pocket, clipping the cord below the knot that tied it to the box. After that he straightened and with his cane still hanging on his arm he knocked softly upon the door leading—obviously—to the front bedroom.

"W-who's there?" came a startled voice, after a moment.

"It is I," he replied, his smile sardonic.

In just a moment the door burst open, and the woman stood, wide-eyed, holding a brilliant satin dressing gown close about her.

"Who are you?" was her frightened query.

"Do you mean to say you do not remember me?" he asked in rather aggrieved tones.

The color flushed up into her cheeks, and he was compelled to admit to himself that she was even prettier that he had thought her the night before. But this was no time for softness or consideration of anything except the business before him. Mr. Montgomery Snedden was a specialist in dainty crime, and this would be just about as dainty as any in his career. It must not be marred by sentimentality.

"W-who are you?" she repeated,

"You don't remember me?" He laid his hat and cane upon the table with elaborate nonchalance. He folded his gloves, putting them in his pocket.

She shook her head.

He took a card from his pocket, but she shrank away.

"How—how did you get in?" she demanded weakly.

He smiled benevolently. "Why, with the key you gave me, of course." He took it from his pocket, holding it tantalizingly in his hand.

Instantly she rushed toward him. "You found my key!" she cried. "Give it to me this instant."

He checked her with a firm outstretched hand and the smile.

"Not so fast, Mrs. Cheshire!" Then his voice softened. "Molla, Molla," he chided. "Have you forgotten all the sweet things you told me when you gave me this key? Have you forgotten—"

"I never saw you before in my life!" she exclaimed indignantly. But all at once the real, genuine, soul-intrenched fear of one in an inescapable predicament began to catch hold of her. "How—how do you know my name? And—and how do you come to call me 'Molla'? That's—that's—"

"That's the name you told me to call you by when you gave me the key and promised that you would be everything in the world to me." Again he affected softness of tone. "Molla, Molla! When I think—"

With sudden decision and with an amazingly quick movement she seized the telephone and began to jiggle the receiver hook frantically, holding the transmitter to her mouth and eying him with fear frank in its expression.

He stood watching her, mildly amused.

Gradually she realized that the telephone was dead; that she was in the power of this intruder. More and more slowly she moved the receiver hook, but still she held the instrument as though she believed that this was yet her only hope. Her waning self-possession was only indicated by the almost imperceptible dropping of her lower lip and by the distending pupils of her eyes.

Suddenly, without warning, she gave a little gasp and collapsed to the floor.

"Damn!" ejaculated Montgomery Snedden. "Why must a woman faint?"

With businesslike celerity he went about bringing her back to consciousness. First picking her up and laying her on a couch beneath the window, he then went to the bathroom and wet a towel, with which he flicked water into her face. As she gasped and opened her eyes he drew back to the other side of the room.

After a moment she sat up and faced him. Now she was calm.

"I suppose," she remarked, "the only way I will get you out of here and get that key away from you is to—to talk to you—"

"Mrs. Cheshire," he answered with a bow, "my respect for you mounts by the minute."

There was something in her eyes which had not been there before. If she had fainted, it was because she had reached the limit of her fears, and now—now the something in every woman that permits the sex to rise to an emergency of almost any nature, had come to the rescue of Molla Cheshire, and she no longer feared the intruder blindly.

Snedden understood and was pleased. It was now a contest of wits against wits. Behind the veiled look in the woman's eyes was purpose and determination. Before she had been widely frightened and Snedden had not been so wholly at ease because a panic-stricken woman might well do something beyond the power of human cleverness to anticipate. But now Snedden felt that he could relish the battle because he had long proven himself the master of any woman's *conscious* cleverness.

He drew up a little three-legged mahogany drawing-room chair and sat at ease, facing her.

"You know I did not give you the key," she began with a tremor.

"I know nothing of the sort," he rejoined, although his smile was easy and almost reassuring. "You gave it to me a week ago, and—"

"I lost it last night at the Ritzmore," she interrupted hotly.

"Pardon me," he apologized. "It distresses me to contradict so charming a person as you, Molla. You gave the key to me a week ago, and this morning is the first opportunity I have had to come to you—"

"You—you—" But as suddenly as the indignation had reddened her face again she remembered that she must remain cool to outwit this unbidden guest, and she caught control of herself. "What do you want?" she asked calmly enough. "Tell me what you want, and end the farce."

He rose and bowed low. "Mrs. Cheshire, again my respect for you mounts—it soars."

"Tell me what you want," she repeated irritably.

The little lines about his mouth hardened and the wolf in him was revealed for just a moment. There was genuine menace in the face she saw.

"About ten thousand dollars will do," he remarked coldly.

She sprang to her feet and clasped her hands until the blood splotched them and made them ugly.

"Do you realize that this is blackmail?" she gasped, drawing away from him.

But Montgomery Snedden was suave again. "That is a harsh term upon lips such as yours, Molla," he rejoined banteringly.

She began to pace up and down. "This is outrageous," she exclaimed. If he was a blackmailer she felt no fear of his physical presence, and movement clarified her thoughts. "If I give you money once, I am in your grasp, and—ugh!" She shuddered.

He said nothing, but resumed his seat.

All at once she turned on him.

"My husband is expected back in the city this morning. He may walk into this apartment any moment."

"So much the better," remarked the crook.

"B-but he would manhandle you terribly. You had better go."

Snedden merely half revealed the hidden small but very efficient automatic which he carried.

She flung herself to the couch again in her distress. After a moment she returned to the argument.

"What can you do? What could you do? Is your intention physical violence if—if I do not give you money?"

He raised his shoulders deprecatingly.

"I would not think of offering harm to a charming lady, or to any one of your sex. I"—the sardonic smile—"I abhor violence."

There was actual curiosity in the lift of her eyebrows. "What do you expect to accomplish? No one would believe your story about the key."

"No?" Snedden's inflection, rising, was polite. "Have you asked yourself, dear Molla, how it is that I know where you live, and know your name, and—" He laughed. "You haven't the slightest idea what I have up my sleeve. Your reasoning is a little hasty."

The crook's bluff registered perfectly in the harassed consciousness of the woman, still honestly frightened beneath her grasp of herself.

"But—but I haven't any—any ten thousand dollars," she stammered. "I—I could not even send it to you."

Snedden's face showed no change, but inwardly he exulted. He had won. She had surrendered, and would try to buy him off.

"What I take, Mrs. Cheshire, I take with me—now," he explained coldly.

For an instant she wrung her hands. In the moment of weakness she resorted to pleading.

"Please, please," she begged. "I'm not wealthy, and—and I haven't any money, anything I can give you. Won't you—"

He stopped her, amused at the ease of his task now. "The little string of pearls will do nicely as a start, Mrs. Cheshire."

An odd, not to be defined expression flitted across her features.

"They are valueless," she declared. "Paste!"

He looked at her uncomprehendingly, for he had been so sure they were real at the Ritzmore. Yet he had not been very close to her.

"Let me see them." There was the wolf in his voice.

"I'll get them," she said, springing up.

Suspicious, he followed her into her chamber and with a look of withering disdain she whipped several silken intimacies out of his sight as she took the rope of pearls from an ivory box on the dresser and handed the gems to him. Oblivious of her scorn at his intrusion into the room and distrust of her, he led the way back into the reception hall and in the strong light of the sun examined the pearls. She was right.

Covering his disgust with a bantering tone, he faced her again, and noticed that she was somehow in a different mood. She seemed to feel in a vague sort of way that she was outwitting him at last. But she did not know Montgomery Snedden.

"I am ashamed of you, Molla," he remarked. "People of the sort I condescend to prey upon do not wear false jewels."

She was undisturbed at that. "Are you convinced that I am a poor subject for your blackmail?" With this went her first smile.

"The brooch," he suggested, "might bear examination."

"It won't," she rejoined cheerfully. "Since you have intruded in my chamber once you might like to get it. It is in that same box, and, like the pearls, it is imitation—"

Just inside her door he whipped about and with drawn automatic was at the doorway again just in time.

She had started for the door to the hall. Caught, however, she laughed and went back to the couch.

Her changed mood bothered Snedden, but he took the ivory box of jewels, and found the contents imitation or cheap and worthless, and then it began to dawn upon him that he had wasted a great deal of time without result, and more and more the change in Mrs. Cheshire disturbed him.

With a sudden flash of fear that perhaps there was some menace here that he had not perceived and did not understand, he changed himself in turn. In an instant Montgomery Snedden, suave and polished and a gentleman in everything but heart and fingers, disappeared.

The crook strode over to the couch. With cruelly strong grip he seized her wrist. Twisting her arm, he bent over her. The half smile, the confidence in her face, faded and left her blanched.

"Before I turned my attention to New York society," he told her, "I served an apprenticeship as 'Monty the Gat'! And now, my dear lady"—an additional twist—"I've enjoyed my call this morning, but it's time I'm going, and I'm not going empty-handed—get that!"

"What do you mean?" She pulled away as he released her.

"You don't want me to keep the key?"

She shook her head fearfully, vigorously.

"I'll keep the key, if I do no better, and I'll give you cause to remember my visit—" He left the threat in mid-air.

"W-what can I do? I haven't ten thousand dollars. Why, ten thousand dollars is—"

"Make it five thousand dollars, then."

Her eyes, wide, met his. "I haven't five thousand, either."

"Two thousand!"

Sobering, she went over to a little desk in the corner of the room. There she unlocked a small compartment with trembling fingers and took out a check book. From the desk she took a pen and dipped it in ink.

"I—I have just twelve hundred dollars in my own account," she explained haltingly. "I—I'll give you a check for one thousand dollars if you will give me the key and go."

Montgomery Snedden looked at her, then threw back his head and laughed.

"Are you that simple," he inquired, "or do you think I'm altogether a damn fool?"

"W-what do you mean?" Her face revealed nothing.

"You can stop the check, and have whoever presents it arrested. No, my dear Mrs. Cheshire. Cash! Two thousand dollars!"

She put the check book away before she faced him. "That is impossible. I have no cash to give you." Was her manner resignation?

Slowly the blood mounted to his face. This was the job he had called a "pipe." This was the little woman he had twice had at the point of abject fright which will do anything. And it was impossible that she had no money, no jewels of real value.

Yet she had had far the better of the interview up to this point. All that he possessed was the key, and of course the lock would be changed within a few hours of his departure and it would be out of the question ever to capitalize on its possession again.

She grasped his intention even before he moved. Quicker than he was, she darted into her own room and slammed the door, locking it.

Equally quick to act, Montgomery Snedden threw his whole force against the door. It gave. He seized her even as she had picked up a shoe in either hand and had raised them to break the window to the street, her last effort to summon help.

"Damn you!" he muttered, all outward mask gone.

Then he picked her up bodily, although she bit and struggled. In the reception room he threw her roughly upon the couch. He waited until she looked up at him and he saw that the fear had again distended her eyes.

He clenched his fists. "What are you going to do? You know what you can do. What do you offer me to surrender the key and leave you?"

A little sob of fear escaped her. Then she pointed to a picture in a certain spot upon the wall.

He strode over and behind the picture found a wall safe.

"In the safe is five hundred dollars in cash—" She hesitated.

"Yes?" He was crisp. A small haul, but better than none.

"Will you go, and give me the key?" Still the fear.

"Open it up!" Snedden decided not to commit himself.

She shook her head, drawing away. "I—I don't know the combination. My husband—my husband—"

Irritably he glanced at the safe, then gave it a second look. A broad smile spread over his features.

"This is not the sort of job for a gentleman of my caliber in the profession of my choice," he observed, "but for Monty the Gat, I rise to remark, lady, that this tin box is a snap. It's a wonder they would put such a cheap wall safe in so fine an apartment."

"We—we had to put it in ourselves," she explained. "John, our janitor, put it in."

"So John did?" Somehow, in spite of the fact that he had a bit of what he termed "low-brow" work ahead of him, Montgomery Snedden felt his good humor returning at the prospect of actual results from his adventure.

" I might remark," he added, " that that janitor of yours is about as square-headed and stupid a looking an individual as I've seen in or out of jail, and now I'm certain that this little box is going to be no trouble at all."

He took off his coat and rolled up his sleeves. He began to whistle " Cutie " under his breath. Then he noticed that the woman was edging toward the hall door. He laughed.

" Come here, Molla, my dear!" With the return of good humor his mood was bantering. " Your social education is not complete until you watch an expert at this sort of thing. I used to have quite a reputation opening safes. I'm what is called a listener. But if you are not standing right here where I can keep my eyes on you I might be hearing my heart beats and not the little words the tumblers whisper to me when I ask them."

He indicated the spot.

She stood, trembling and worried, and now he took delight in noting her mental and emotional discomfort. As an added artistic touch he consulted his wrist watch.

" Molla, my dear," he murmured softly, " in just fifteen minutes by this efficient timepiece of mine I will be within your tin box here."

Then he settled down to work. After all, there might not be any to great amount of time to spare. He must open the safe and then close it again, and he must be sure to obliterate all finger prints and all traces of his visit. He had no intention of returning the key to his victim, for she would have no witnesses to her story, and that story must be made as hard as possible to believe.

He was almost able to solve the combination, a simple one, by the feel of the tumblers in his fingers. But several times, on the verge of his solution, he lost it, and so at last he resorted to his ear. This was more difficult, because he realized that he must watch the woman every instant. After the first failure he considered tying her up, but abandoned that idea as a needless waste of time. Then he caught it and the little door swung open.

" Molla, my dear," he laughed. facing her before turning to loot the compartment, " the only objection to opening a safe that way is the crink it is apt to put in your neck. And I don't recommend it to you, because as I remember you have a very lovely neck."

He chuckled gleefully at his own humor.

Then he turned, and not without a sidewise glance, to watch her give a quick look of inspection to the interior of the compartment. And with that his jaw dropped in abject amazement. There was no money, but—

Reaching into the little safe he pulled out, first, a perfectly matched rope of pearls that were not to be mistaken as the one she had worn the night before. Reaching in again he brought out the brooch she had used to clasp her hair. And then he drew forth, one after the other, fourteen or fifteen other bits of valuable and easily negotiable jewelry.

The pearls and the brooch she had shown him were paste duplicates!

And if these were in the safe, and if her husband was away and had been away according to the conversation with her escort at the time of her arrival last night, how had she opened the safe to put them in?

" You lied to me!" he said angrily. " Why did you tell me you didn't know the combination?"

She flushed. " I—I didn't think you could open it the—the way you did."

He looked at the loot in his hands and his good humor returned, was intensified a hundredfold. Here was thousands upon thousands of dollars in gems easy to dispose of. He slipped the various articles in different pockets. Still with his eyes upon her, he resumed his coat.

" Molla, Molla," he chaffed, " you nearly outwitted me. And do you know "—confidentially—" if I ever thought I was outwitted by a woman, and a New York society woman at that, I believe I would be willing to plead guilty and "—a laugh—" even help the cops arrest me, for that much of it hasn't happened yet."

He took his handkerchief and removed all traces of his work with the utmost dexterity. " The trick of avoiding arrest, Mol-

la," he went on, "is always to have a perfect alibi, or a perfectly good reason for being wherever you happen to be. Now, my reason for being here was the key—"

In his unexpected good fortune in obtaining the jewels Snedden had failed to hear a key put softly into the outer door and cautiously turned. He had failed to notice the stealthy opening of the door—the appearance of a stolid and determined figure in overalls and jumper. And the sudden spring and heavy jump of the janitor would have carried a young elephant to the floor.

When the woman had tied the crook's hands according to the janitor's instructions, when John himself had laced the ankles together—these operations sacrificing a fancy embroidered table cover and a portière rope—the crestfallen Mr. Montgomery Snedden was stood upon his feet.

Then John, with every symptom of affection, fingered two tiny wires barely to be seen within the open compartment of the little wall safe.

"I tank it was a gude ting—" he began.

Molla Cheshire laughed and faced the crook. "The square-headed and stupid janitor you wasted your scorn upon had set his heart upon installing a burglar alarm when he put in the safe. Because my husband would not arrange for a connection to the police he ran it down to the basement, and every time we open the safe we have had to phone down to John to warn him."

She laughed again, but Montgomery Snedden did not seem to find the matter humorous.

She faced the janitor. "You go for the police, John, while I guard the prisoner."

As the Scandinavian hesitated she reached over and took Snedden's automatic from the pocket under his arm where he kept it hidden. "I'll shoot if he starts anything, so run along."

And when she was alone she carefully closed the door, then reached out very gingerly and abstracted the jeweled key from the waistcoat pocket where she had seen him put it. Half turning away she placed it safely in her stocking, then drew her satin dressing gown more comfortably about her and found a chair where she could keep the revolver properly trained upon her morning visitor.

"I think it is just as well," she remarked, "that the matter of the key be kept out of this affair altogether, don't you?"

He still disdained to reply, and so, after a moment, she went on:

"You have been outwitted by a woman, and while it will not be necessary for you to help the police arrest you, I wonder if I need remind you"—she laughed—"that you have promised yourself to plead guilty?"

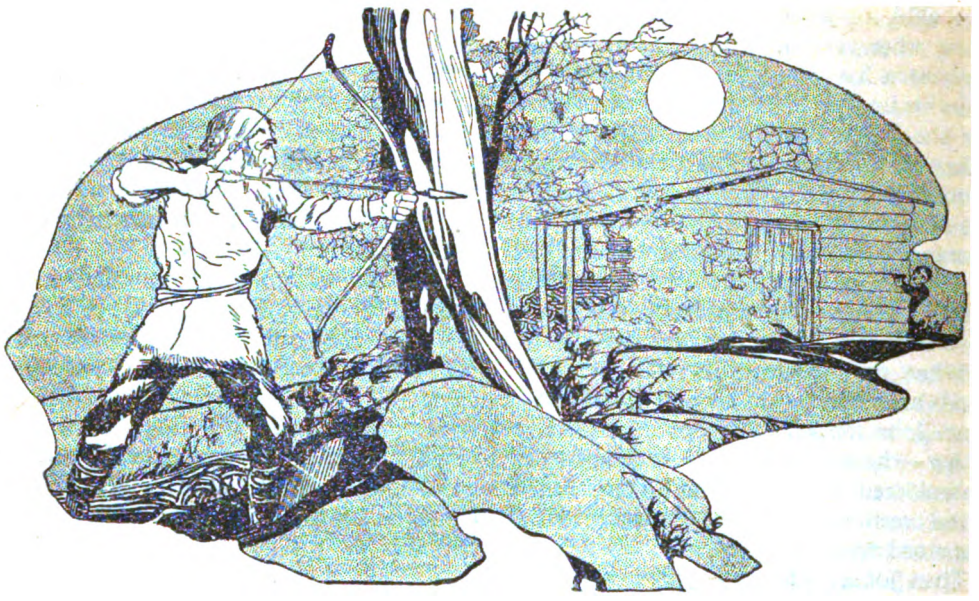
Montgomery Snedden's reply was in his throat and inarticulate.

PARADOX

IF love demands a sacrifice
And sacrifice is pain,
Then, loving you I suffer twice
Since loving you is vain.

Yet in the futile thing I do,
There is a sweet alloy—
The more my pain in loving you,
The greater is my joy.

Francis W. Sullivan.



Hidden Trails

By ROBERT AMES BENNET

Author of "Finders Keepers," "The Sultana of Marib," "His Grace," etc.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MOONSHINE.

DAN was dragging the plucky but almost exhausted Ellen up to the foot of the last steep climb. He stopped for the girl to catch her breath. In the gorge above them they heard a sharp detonation that might have come from the cracking ice of the glacier.

Before the sound had ceased to reverberate up the precipices, Merdith came bounding over the crest of the little moraine. He flung out his hands in a repellent gesture.

"Run!" he yelled. "Grizzly! Go back! Run!"

The one thought of Dan was for Ellen. He seized her arm and rushed her down the rocky trail. Fright gave wings to her little feet. She ran with Dan along the rocky shelves and leaped from bowlders and ledges. Close behind rushed Merdith, shouting for them to hurry. He turned once and fired back.

All three came flying down to the landing place, the men panting, Ellen gasping. Merdith sprang ahead to lift the canoe out into the water. As Dan followed Ellen aboard he glanced up the gorge.

"Ease off," he said. "There's no bear coming."

But Merdith hastened to take his place and send the canoe shooting down the river.

At the first portage he spoke hurriedly:

"That place up there—must be the gold mine. Big timber wolf tried to jump me—plugged him first shot. Saw he was chained. But he had nearly got me—made me jumpy.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for July 29.

I went toward the mine hole. Something big and grizzled started to charge out at me. I remembered that bear of the Kissacks—the one that treed you. Fired at him and ran. Haven't lost any grizzlies—when I'm carrying only a popgun."

"I've heard they charge even with a bullet through the heart," remarked Dan. "I can't see hide or hair of yours, though. You must have disabled him—possibly put a shot into his brain."

"Not likely," disclaimed Merdith. "He was back in the dark of the mine hole, and there was a dazzle of light on the quartz vein above. I couldn't see whether I hit him, and I didn't wait to look."

"Oh—if you had!" shudderingly cried Ellen. "Think of that terrible Jock, Dan! But if it was Jock, and if he's hit, won't Jean be grieved?"

Merdith's look and tone became highly indignant.

"What do they mean, then, keeping such beasts to attack their visitors? I tell you, if the chain had snapped, that wolf would have slashed my throat open. Never had anything so knocked my nerve. Fact is, I was so shaken I can't swear that the other beast really was a grizzly. Might have been another big wolf. It was back in the dark hole, and the dazzle of light on the white quartz—"

"Sort of case of shell shock, eh?" chuckled Dan. "Suppose we go back and lay the ghost? Loan me your pistol, and I'll lead."

"No," refused Merdith, his arm twitching with quick jerks. "This is no place for Ellen. I must get her down to the cabin."

He splashed his end of the canoe into the water of the divided stream and almost jumped aboard.

Swept along by the current and driven by the paddle, the canoe bore the returning searchers downstream from portage to portage at arrowy speed. Nearing the falls Dan looked sharply for Jean's canoe, but could see no sign of it. The borrowed canoe was left on the bank above the falls.

Little was said during the walk to the cabin. Merdith strode ahead, his eyes narrowed and the crease between his eyebrows deepened to a gash. Though the canoe ride downstream had somewhat rested Ellen, the reaction from the intense excitement of the chase and flight had left her weak. She clung to Dan's arm. This brought no reproof from Merdith even when he turned to beckon them on.

In the cabin they surprised Kissack twanging his powerful bow. He now could hold it out with his injured left arm, but not while he more than half bent the weapon. Jean was watching his efforts with an anxious look.

On the way from the river Merdith had become morose. At sight of the father and daughter and the bow he burst into passionate denunciation:

"You treacherous sneaks! Getting ready to shoot me in the back, are you? That's quite in keeping with luring us into wolf dens. Like father, like daughter!"

Kissack was quick to sense the provocative intention of his enemy. He stood perfectly still. The slightest movement that could have been misconstrued as an attempt to attack would have meant the outwhipping of Merdith's pistol.

The anxious eyes of Jean turned to Dan.

"Wolf den?" she whispered.

"We canoed up the river," Dan explained. "Just missed you. At the gorge Merdith went ahead and—"

"And nearly got torn to pieces by your wolves!" angrily broke in Merdith.

His voice rose to a shout as he went over again what he had already told Dan and Ellen about the attack of the wolf and the half unseen beast in the dark hole of the mine. He emphasized the dazzling of his eyes by the light on the white quartz.

With dilating pupils Jean looked at Ellen, uttered a low moan, and sank down to hide her face in her hands. Kissack bowed his gray head.

"'Tis the will o' the Laird, Jeanie," he muttered. "The Laird's will be doon."

Ellen went to kneel beside Jean and clasp her arms about the bent neck.

"I'm so sorry, dear," she soothed. "Was it Jock and another of your pets?"

Jean sprang up as if every word were a white-hot knife plunged into her bosom.

"Ah! Ah!" she cried her despair. "God forgie me! I ne'er can forgie mysel'!"

Out she fled, stumbling and reeling, through the lean-to and away into the forest. Merdith started to follow her, and found his way blocked by Dan. He paused, hesitated, and turned about to jeer at Kissack.

"Hoot, Angus mon, I've found the real mine this time. What're you going to do about it?"

"Goold is a yellow curse. A heavy curse may't be to ye!" execrated the Scotchman. "Ye've doon the black deed. 'Tis time ye were ganging oot to record the lode. Take all the goold, and may ye fall wi' it into the deep sea!"

"Thanks for the good wish. Ellen, set on something to eat."

Domineering as was the order, Dan made no protest. After the meal the big bully might go off. He was betraying a wary uneasiness. He stood clear of Dan and Kissack and kept his hand down at his belt. When Ellen had brought tea and cold food for the midday meal, he took a seat that placed her between him and the other men. His moroseness soon blanketed even Dan's attempts at conversation.

In the midst of the meal Kissack broke the silence with a sudden outburst of scolding. Ellen had forgotten the pickles. Before she could recover from her bewilderment over the uncalled-for tirade, the Scotchman irascibly jumped up, snarling that he would get his food for himself. He went out into the lean-to—and did not return.

A wait of half a minute was more than enough for Merdith. He rose and sauntered to the front door. From outside he stared back at Dan and Ellen.

"Stay here till I return," he ordered. "It will be safer for you both."

His tone was not domineering; it was almost pleasant. Yet it held an unmistakable undernote of menace. Dan smiled at the still bewildered Ellen as the threatener made off.

"You see, he is getting into a better temper. As for Kissack, you should not mind his scolding. That healing wound must make him half crazy. He won't keep the arm quiet."

"Oh—if that was it!" The girl brightened; only to recall her greater cause for concern. "But—but Jean?"

"Don't worry. She'll be all right. She must have been fond of the wolf that Merdith shot. No doubt she raised it from a cub—like Jock. There's the other beast, too—either Jock or another wolf. Remember, she and her father have been living here alone all these years, and Merdith said Jean is daft over pets. For another thing, she's afraid her father and Merdith will quarrel—and Merdith lied about turning over to her all his pistol cartridges. He has been armed all the time."

"I—I don't like you to say that Perry did not—tell the truth, Dan. He is father's partner and he built up the business for me—"

"And for himself," cut in Dan. "He'll get it all when—if—you marry him."

"Dan! How can you?"

"You're right," admitted Dan, his face very red. "I've asked you to marry *me*, and I haven't a cent!"

Ellen averted her face to hide a responsive blush. He sprang up.

"You see, I never open my mouth without putting my foot into it! Come on. Get your basket. We'll go berrying—same place."

"But—Perry said—"

"He's not your boss—yet. Come along."

When they reached the pottery Ellen picked blueberries while Dan changed jugs and started redistilling another kettleful of the raw liquor. Meantime he used Merdith's hand ax to chop down dead birch trees for a catamaran. Cross pieces and strips of moosehide that he had brought from the cabin fastened the logs firmly together. He loaded on the raft the jugs of alcohol already distilled and moored the catamaran downstream under an overhanging screen of willows.

As he came back to the still he suddenly realized that for some time Ellen had been oddly quiet. He sang out to her. No answer. Ax in hand, he sprinted up the brook to the blueberry patch. In his haste he almost dashed against the girl.

She stood amid the blueberry bushes, still and hushed, her head half bent in the attitude of one who is listening intently.

She seemed to be in a trance. The crash and snap of branches before Dan's wild rush failed to startle her. He saw that she had not even heard his noisy approach.

For several moments he stood waiting close beside her before she at last drew in a long breath and turned her head. Her violet eyes gazed up at him, wide and purple with emotion. She clasped his arm with her quivering fingers.

"Dan—oh, Dan! I heard him again—daddy! He's calling to me! But his voice—it's so faint, I can't tell which way it comes from."

"Cheer up," encouraged Dan. "You've got him on the wireless wire again. The call may soon come through clearer. You might—"

He stopped short. Up the slope his quick eyes had glimpsed a skulking form in the bushes. He pulled Ellen behind the nearest tree and twirled the hand ax.

"Hello, there," he sang out. "That you, Kissack—or is it a wolf?"

Merdith stood upright and came crashing down through the scrub, his face dark with anger.

"I told you both to stick at the cabin," he said. "It's a wolf I'm tracking. Came within an ace of potting you, Reade—an ace of plunking an ace, huh!"

"Better let Ellen pack your pistol," suggested Dan. "I'm more afraid of it than of the teeth of any four-legged wolf. You might have shot Ellen."

The lumberman broke into a short, unpleasant laugh.

"No chance of that. I always hit what I aim at. Don't count too much on being indispensable. If anything should happen to you, I can either get Ellen out with me, or else go out alone and fly back for her with another pilot. Do you see the point?"

"My eyesight is still A-1," replied Dan.

"Then watch your step. After this you'll do what I tell you, if you're not aching to be manhandled."

Dan nodded approval.

"Regular Fritz tactics. First shake your opponent with gas; then go over the top—of him—if you can make the climb. Any more orders, sir?"

"Yes," snapped Merdith. "You'll remember you are my hired man. You are not to let Ellen come out alone with you, and you will not again call her by her first name."

"Don't be a goose, Perry," exclaimed Ellen. "You know he has proved himself a dear good friend. There's no reason at all for you to quarrel with him. If you hurt him I'll—I'll never become engaged to you!"

Merdith's face darkened again with morose anger. He stared suspiciously from Dan to the girl. Each met him clear-eyed, though Ellen's look was puzzled.

A slight breeze came wafting through the trees from down the brook. Merdith faced it, his nose slightly uptilted.

"What's that smell?" he demanded. "Sour, like—"

"I'm trying to distill fuel for the plane," said Dan. "Want to take a look?"

He led down a-slant the hillside to the pottery. Merdith gave the kiln only a glance. His eyes gleamed as they fixed upon the still.

"Moonshine! Why didn't you tell me? Get busy. Pull a cork."

"Wouldn't you rather have your wood alcohol straight?" asked Dan. "It's half amyl—fusel oil. And you notice the foul smell. That means enough methyl—wood alcohol—to blind you if—"

"*Bah!*" said Merdith. "Thought you said you were studying to be a chemical engineer. I've made first-rate stuff with only a little coffee-pot still."

"You're welcome to your white mule. This stuff will kick the engines a lot harder. What I'm after is to make the propellers spin—not your head."

Merdith's eyes narrowed.

"You think it will work? Could you fly out with Ellen and return for me?"

"Sure thing," agreed Dan, a bit too eagerly.

"Maybe," growled Merdith. "It's not so sure, though, you'd come back for me. I'll not chance it. You'll wait till I'm ready to go along."

"The alcohol may not have enough kick in it to carry three," qualified Dan. "But with only one light passenger and no luggage—"

"We'll see about that—when I'm ready. Hurry up your work. It may be only a day or two now."

"You can't hurry a still," replied Dan, who had no intention of telling how much high-proof alcohol he already had on hand.

Merdith frowned.

"You can keep it going night and day. We've got to be ready. That Scotch scoundrel is trying hard to get his game arm into shape to start something. He went off with his bow and arrow."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE LOVE OF A WOMAN.

THE command to return to the cabin had been forgotten. Instead, Merdith urged Dan to stay at the still all afternoon and evening; and he did not order Ellen to go back alone. He himself betrayed a restlessness that would not permit him to remain quiet. Before long he went off toward the river.

After sundown Dan and Ellen trailed in for supper. They found Merdith sorting over the finest of the dressed furs—ermine, black fox and silver fox. He had searched the lofts and opened all the bales of raw pelts. His reply to Ellen's pleasant greeting was a harsh outburst:

"Your fine friends are up to their tricks again. One or other of them made off with our canoe. It would take a full day to buck a way up to the mine through all those devil's club and salmonberry thickets."

As, without replying, Ellen and Dan started to cook a hot meal, the angry man sat down to stroke the best of the black fox skins.

The supper was almost ready when Jean walked in through the lean-to, followed by her father. Their faces were stolid. Neither appeared to notice the sudden tensing of Merdith. Ellen stopped in the midst of spooning out the boiled potatoes.

"Oh, Jean!" she cried. "It's good to see you home again. Did you—go up? Did you find your pets both—both—"

Merdith had bent forward to listen. His left hand was down at his side. Jean stepped between him and her father.

"Aye, lass," she answered Ellen with sharp emphasis. "I foond the twa cold. 'Twas all ended. We can begin to forget. In time we e'en may forgie the slayer."

"The Laird ha' rid us of a sore trial," said Kissack, and he faced Merdith with a grim smile. "We dinna' hold it again' ye, Peery. Ye ha' cut our Gordian knot. Ye ha' fair won a share in the goold."

Merdith smiled understandingly. But at supper he again put Ellen between himself and the others. Jean gave no heed either to his sudden sharp glances or to Ellen's sympathetic murmurings. She seemed sunken in a stolid apathy, as if every drop of Scotch blood had run out of her veins and left her all Indian.

The meal was nearly over when a deep "*Woof!*" brought Merdith leaping to his feet. A monstrous head thrust in through the open doorway, its jaws half agape, the red tongue licking out sidewise.

"Dinna' shoot, Peery!" screamed Jean. "Dinna' shoot. 'Tis Jock."

Merdith paused with his pistol outthrust. He had no wish to fight a grizzly in a room. Even if tame, the beast was no timid, manshy grizzly of the south. A wound would mean certain death to the shooter unless the bullet pierced the beast's brain. Merdith waited to see if the bear intended to charge.

The visitor sniffed the cooked food, grinned, rumbled, and put a huge paw on the log doorsill.

"Mind yer manners, Jock," chided Jean. "Gang roond back. The swill crock is a-brim."

The bear understood either the words or her gesture. He withdrew his paw and head. Soon, from the back of the cabin, came a sound as of a giant hog slobbering at a feed trough. By the time the men went out to their usual bed places under the spruce, the bear had emptied the big garbage crock and gone off again into the forest.

Kissack lay down at the opposite side of Dan from Merdith. Under the spruce the night seemed as dense as a black solid. As Dan turned over on his bearskin he murmured a good night to his companions. Neither replied. He reached out, first on one side, then on the other. His groping

fingers found only the dead spruce needles. Both Merdith and Kissack had crept away with their bedding, each evidently afraid of an attack from the other.

Out of his first doze Dan flicked back into alert consciousness. A hand lay upon his mouth; another hand had clasped his wrist and was tugging gently. The hands were too hard-palmed to be Ellen's and too small to belong to either Merdith or Kissack.

Dan tapped the hand that covered his mouth and quietly sat up. The hand drew away, but the other one pulled harder at his wrist. He crept out from under the spruce as softly as his hard-soled shoes would permit.

Without so much as a whisper, Jean led him around the cabin and down the trail. A slight haze overhead made the starlight so faint that he could not see an object beyond arm's length. But Jean glided along with never a falter and as noiselessly as a ghost.

She led him through the birch woods and across the beaver dam before she stopped to breathe a whisper in his ear:

"Gie me your promise, lad, you will na' tell e'en the lassie if I take ye wi' me."

"What's doing?" he inquired. "If it concerns her—"

"Aye, 'tis service for her. God willing, it may work oot to her joy. I canna' do aught wi'oot ye. Wi' his game arm, my father canna' help. But he forbade the telling o' the lass. You'll promise?"

"I'll not tell unless you give me leave."

Jean grasped his hand again and walked stealthily on along the trail. They were almost opposite the pottery when the moon peeped over the ragged crest of the east range. Jean increased her pace, breaking into swift dashes whenever the moonlight through the trees enabled Dan to see the trail.

From the ridge above the pool the forest girl ran down to the shelf of rock at the foot of the falls. The flow of the river had lessened since sundown. The wall of downpouring water had thinned. Jean grasped Dan's hand, crooked her elbow above her face, and stepped quickly along the rock shelf into the falls.

One stride brought Dan under the deluge and through it into a booming hollow. His cautious steps felt only a smooth level platform of rock as Jean drew him, first in, and then along, parallel with the ghostly luminous wall of white water. How the Kissacks could have discovered this water-hidden grotto puzzled Dan until the thought came to him that the river must run dry, or nearly dry, when in winter the glacier ceased to melt.

Jean hurried him across to the far side of the falls. The overhang here extended sidewise beyond the edge of the straight-dropping water. The moonlight shone through a two-foot space between the rock and the liquid wall. Jean darted out the passage and bounded up the ledges of stratified rock to the top of the falls' cliff.

In the bushes, a little way up the bank from the brink of the falls, lay hidden the canoe that had been taken by Merdith from the lower stream. With Dan seated in the bottom and Jean kneeling to paddle, the craft drove up the moonlit river much faster than Merdith had paddled it with two passengers aboard. Jean's stroke was no less strong and even more skillful, and she knew every little slack and swift of the river's current.

One after another the moraine portages were reached and the canoe carried up as fast as Dan could scramble with his end. At last came the island, the little portage at its head, and the final spurt to the landing place.

They took the ascent of the gorge in the bright moonlight almost as fast as Merdith had climbed in the daytime. Up over the little moraine bounded Jean, with Dan close behind. At the near corner of the side cleft the dead guardian wolf still lay sprawled at the end of his copper chain. Behind the body all the rest of the cleft was in the inky-black shadow of the overhanging precipices.

Jean led Dan across. His free hand touched a wall of rock. A few more steps and she asked him to strike a match. The flare showed that he was in a narrow tunnel. Jean lighted a thick tallow candle with the match and stepped forward into a small cavity.

On a heap of matted evergreen twigs lay a skin-clad form. Dan saw that it was not an animal, but a man. The truth flashed upon him. Jean and her father had lied—no, they had not lied. They had said only that the slayer of the wife and mother had been condemned and punished. He had not been executed. He had been sentenced to imprisonment at hard labor.

Small wonder Jean had suffered such anguish of conflicting emotions over the daughter of the prisoner. Even Kissack had felt the torture of listening to the "bonnie lassie's" loving talk of her daddy. Day after day they had grieved over her grief, yet had given no slightest hint of the condemned man in this wolf-guarded prison.

Then Merdith had come hastening to find the gold mine. He had shot the wolf and this skin-clad figure in the mine tunnel. He had fled, yelling "Grizzly!" But of that later. Far more vividly Dan saw over again the anguish of Jean's face when Merdith had told of the shooting. Then for her to hear Ellen prattle about pets!

"Carrol!" he whispered. "Ellen's father!"

Jean had knelt to feel the heart of the injured man below the skin bandage on his breast. The white-bearded face was sallow-gray. A rim of white showed under the slightly open eyelids. But the flicker of a smile lighted Jean's face as she looked up.

"He yet lives! Dannie lad, he yet lives!"

Out of the small pack that she had brought she drew Dan's first-aid kit. Between them they took off the crude, yet effective, emergency bandage and dressing. To Dan's relief, the wound at the back was only slightly larger than the one in the breast. The small caliber, steel-jacketed bullet had pierced through Carrol's body without splitting or upsetting.

While Dan bound up the wounds again with antiseptic dressings, Jean fetched a pole ladder from back in the mine and knocked out the middle rungs with a copper mallet. Around the poles she wrapped a big bearskin, forming a deep pocket. Dan shook his head.

"It's fifty-fifty he will go west if we move him, Jean."

"'Tis sure death to him if thot de'il finds him here. Ah, the leeing de'il! Dazzle o' quartz, when there be no quartz! Wolf—grizzly back in the dark—when he lay wi' his feet clear oot the mine mouth! He must ha' steppet full into the sun."

"Impossible! Merdith could not have shot him down in cold blood. They are partners. He expects to marry Ellen."

"Unless her father forbid."

Though Dan could not see the point of Jean's reply he helped her lay the unconscious man in the litter pocket. A quick looping of moosehide line lashed him fast in place. Over him was spread his fur bedding. Dan took the foot, or front, end of the litter, for Jean's wilderness training enabled her to descend the rough trail of the gorge without seeing where she stepped. In her fear-driven haste she kept Dan to his fastest foot work, yet with never a jolt of her end of the litter.

Down at the landing the litter was laid lengthwise of the canoe, the ends of the poles on the gunwales. Dan held the head of the ladder. With the cold of the advancing night on the glacier, the river had already shrunk to a large brook. But Jean knelt between the poles at Carrol's feet and sent the canoe racing down the dwindled stream. The portages required two trips, first with the litter and then with the canoe. Even at that, fast time was made, for Jean kept the canoe in the swiftest water of the now shallow stream.

They glanced down to the head of the last, long reach above the falls and landed on the north bank. When the canoe had been hidden in a thicket the litter was carried up the shallow, gravelly bed of a small brook. The stream curved around a half mile or so into a glade behind the dense growth of giant cedars and underbrush that muffled the roar of the falls.

The wounded man, still deep in his death-like coma, was laid on a bed of balsam boughs beside a big fire. Jean started to brew tea in a small copper pot. For the first time Dan found voice to question her:

"Why did you lead us to think that Mr. Carrol was dead?"

"To the world he died lang syne," sighed Jean. "Ah, could I but forget his deed!

When my mother fell dead, my father rushed the cabin like a mad wolf. He gied the killer a clout that dropped him senseless. Alas, the poor wretch coom back to life. He lived to make denial o' his guilt."

"He denied it? Yet your father condemned him to a living death!"

Jean's fine, strong face contracted with anguish.

"God help me! 'Twas I who proved he leed. Each mon swore he was reloading when the shot was fired. I had to bear true witness that my father was reloading—that his rifle was empty—when she fell. Yet more, the bullet that struck her coom from behind—from oot the cabin."

A sudden thought struck Dan.

"But how about Merdith? Could not he have—"

"Alas, he canna' e'en be suspectet. When my father was rushing the cabin, we both saw Peery coom running toward it doon the path, off to the side o' the clearing. 'Twas o'er there my father's bullet broke his rifle and cut his arm. A shot from where Peery was hit would ha' knocked my mother on her side. She fell on her face. Na, na, lad. The bullet coom from the cabin. Peery was off on yon side. On'y Paul could ha' fired the shot."

"Then it was purely an accident—it must have been," insisted Dan. "Yet you brought the unfortunate man here to suffer all these years."

"Aye, to work oot his doom—life imprisonment at hard toil for his crime," moaned Jean. "Ah, had I na' plead wi' my father to temper justice wi' mercy! Se'en year o' labor and sorrow! 'Twas the swift death would ha' been merciful. Ah, Paul, my luckless Paul!"

Dan stared. The cry of despair betrayed more than remorse.

"Jean—you love him!"

She pressed her hands upon her heaving bosom as if her heart would burst out.

"Ah, 'tis true. I will na' lee. I love him!"

The lump that rose in Dan's throat choked his attempt to condole with the anguished woman. He realized how the years of Carrol's punishment, his hopeless labor and imprisonment in the bleak glacier gorge —had brought even a greater measure of suffering to Jean.

"But, Jean," said Dan when he was able to speak, "surely he has paid enough, and he may die very soon. You will let me go at once for Ellen."

"I canno'. At my pleading my father spared his life. But the dooming was that the murderer should be to the world as one wha is dead. My father will na' commute the sentence. He gie me leave for ye to save the prisoner from thot de'il. But he forbade him the comfort o' his lassie. The way o' the transgressor is hard!"

A hiss from the overboiling tea sent her twisting around to lift the pot from the fire.

"You are cruel!" reproached Dan. "Think of how Ellen longs for him—needs him! He is her father."

"To me he is more than father," groaned Jean. "He is the mon I love. Wi' all my heart and soul and body I love him—and betwixt us lies the corpse o' my mother!"

CHAPTER XX.

WOLVERENE.

WITH Jean holding the head of the unconscious man upon her bosom, Dan managed to pour down his throat a quantity of the strong, almost scalding tea. The effect of the hot stimulant was slow, yet certain. The ghastly sallow-gray of the wounded man's face gradually changed to a pallor tinged with faint color.

Still half unconscious, he gasped an entreating cry:

"Ellie—my little Ellie! Where are you, sweetheart?"

Jean's eyes darkened with tragic grief. She stroked the clammy forehead on her bosom.

"'Tis his way, poor mon, whene'er he's a bit daftlike. For days before ye coom flying oot o' the south he lay in a fever, calling for his lassie—his wee lassie. And noo I canna' fetch her to him!"

Dan thought of the perplexing call that Ellen had claimed to hear. Clearly it had been no illusion, but a real telepathic call sent out by the delirious father. He had

yearned for the daughter whom he had last seen as a little child—and she had heard his cry.

The staring, near-sighted eyes of the wounded man opened wide.

"Jean—dear Jean—" he whispered. "Your voice—you are—near."

"I ha' ye in my arms. Be still and rest wi' the boom o' the falls for lullaby. Ye are doon among the balsams, in a dell bright wi' posies."

"Heaven!" sighed Carrol, and he sank again into unconsciousness.

Under Jean's clear directions Dan threw out the tea leaves from the pot and boiled a little fresh water. Into this he dropped powdered herbs, powdered dried meat and fir sugar from the small bags that Jean had brought in the pack with the first-aid kit. The mixture was reviving, nourishing and medicinal. It roused Carrol to full consciousness.

"Hold me fast, Jean," he murmured. "I begged God—for death, and then—"

"The de'il answered!"

"Devil?"

"Aye, thot Peery Merdith wha brought ye to us—wha hid his wheesky in your pack, and, as 'twere by a slip o' the tongue, dropped my father a hint that ye had a flask."

"Merdith here—in Vengeance Valley? But why—shoot me?"

"For the goold. Ye signed the paper making him your partner. Wi' you dead, he would ha' your share."

"Give the devil his due, Jean," interposed Dan. "He has been honest as junior partner in Mr. Carrol's lumber business."

At the sound of the strange voice the injured man peered with his near-sighted eyes, his pain-racked face full of amazement.

"Who—" he whispered.

"A lad wha coom wi' Peery, but true-hearted. He helped me fetch you doon the river."

"Jean," burst out Dan, "I'm going to tell him about her. I've got to. I didn't promise not to talk to him."

"Ye will but add to his burden," protested Jean.

"No," differed Dan. He bent down to take one of Carrol's inert hands. "Listen, sir. You must not talk. Will you lie quiet and rest if I give you good news—news of your daughter?"

The father's lips curved in an eager smile.

"Tell!" he cried.

"Ellen—your daughter—is well. She has grown to be a lovely young lady, as sweet as she is beautiful. And she has the enjoyment of the income from your half of the lumber business."

For several moments Carrol lay still upon Jean's breast, his face aglow with purest happiness. But then a perplexed look shadowed his quiet bliss. He made a feeble tug at Dan's clasping hand.

"Half?" he whispered.

"Yes. Merdith has done well by you and Ellen. He has proved himself a true partner. I don't like him, but I can't believe he intentionally shot you when all these years he has built up your partnership business instead of getting everything into his own name."

"Partner?" gasped Carrol. "No!"

Jean stroked his frowning forehead.

"Hush, Paul mon!" she soothed. "Ne'er mind aboot the de'il. Ye've heard glad tidings o' your wee lassie. Dwell upon thot, and rest. If ye would e'er hope to see your Ellie, ye must rest and sleep. Be still—rest—sleep."

Exhausted by the effort of talking and the excitement of what he had heard, the sufferer was already on the verge of unconsciousness. His eyes closed. His head sagged upon Jean's supporting arm. But this time his face did not go gray. He had not lapsed again into the deathlike coma. He had fallen asleep.

With utmost gentleness Jean lowered him upon the bed of boughs and tucked in the fur coverlet. Dan was already building up the fire. At a sign from him she came around where their voices would not disturb the sleeper.

"He may die before morning," said Dan. "Give me leave to bring her to him."

"My father has forbade."

"You say that when you love her—and her father?"

"My first duty is to the memory o' my mother. The doom o' her slayer was stern but just."

"Can you never forgive?"

"Aye, but I can ne'er forget. I owe him undying hate. I gie him my love. None the less, he must suffer his doom. My father has fair right to command."

Dan raised his hands in appeal.

"Wait, Jean. The father may be guilty, but how about the daughter? She is innocent of all wrong. What right have you to make her suffer?"

"To save her greater sorrow," replied Jean. "Dinna' ye ken. If she learns naught o' him, she will take back wi' her but a sad memory o' childhood loss. Would ye ha' the lassie find him, on'y to see him dee?"

"But if he recovers?"

"Then must he gang back to work oot his doom—if the de'il danna' first get to him again."

"You seem so positive that Merdith shot him intentionally. I still can't believe it. As Mr. Carrol's partner, he would have a share in the mine, as well as his half of the business."

"With a flash of intuition Jean divined the truth.

"Ye heard Paul say it. Peery Merdith is na' his partner."

"Impossible. He must have shown a legal partnership agreement to Mr. Carrol's lawyers before he could have taken charge of the business."

"Papers may be foorged."

"Perry Merdith a forger! He has doubled the business—made it worth over a million. He was honest over Ellen's—that is, her father's—interest."

"Honest? When he stole the half, and need on'y bide his time to win all—wi' the lassie to boot!"

"Good Lord! I begin to believe—"

"He's a de'il—he's a wolverene!" cried Jean. "I ha' told how he put his wheesky in Paul's pack. 'Twas not alone the goold. He was jealous because I gie ear to Paul's honest wooing. He then leed to my father aboot Paul and me."

"I see! And then?"

"Betwixt thot lee and the wheesky, my father fell into a killing rage. Noo ye ken all. Wi' Paul slain and my father hanged for murder, na doot the de'il thocht to ha' his will o' me and the mines. But he got the bullet in his arm and fled. When he coom back, we—"

A slight move of Carrol's head sent Jean darting to stroke the forehead of the uneasy sleeper. Dan stood weighing in his thoughts the evidence for and against Merdith. Though so quick in action, he was deliberate when forming judgments.

He knew that Merdith had won high standing in the business world. What little he had heard of the big lumberman's private life was no less favorable. Jean's love for Carrol and her fear and hate of Merdith may have caused her to misjudge the junior partner.

But "partner" was the very nub on which all turned. Carrol had denied the partnership. Granted the truth of the denial, all else became not only possible, but highly probable. It proved Merdith an unscrupulous adventurer. Having failed to get Jean or the mines by treacherously inciting Kissack against Carrol, he had taken over control of Carrol's business under forged papers.

His first intent no doubt had been to sell out everything and abscond. But he may have found himself unexpectedly successful as a business man. He had brains, audacity and great will power. In his certainty that Carrol was dead, and with Kissack a fugitive charged with murder, he had counted upon his fraud remaining undiscovered.

His success had led him to keep on with the business, year after year. Then—as Jean had divined in her flash of intuition—he had seen the great chance to get all the property legally into his possession by marrying Ellen.

His two search trips for Kissack's valley may well have been based upon the triple object of winning the girl's gratitude, of giving plausibility to his pretense that he thought her father still alive, and of finding Kissack's mines. He had come with Ellen on the air trip for the same motives and the added one of mastering her, out in the wild.

Once in the secret valley, lust of gold had centered his thought and energy upon the discovery of the mines. He had first found the copper lode. Then had come

the canoe trip up the river and the climb to the cleft in the glacier gorge.

In a vision of crystal clearness Dan's imagination pictured what had followed. He saw Merdith shoot down the wolf guardian of the mine. He saw the killer rush forward to examine the mine. But between, like a repellent ghost, appeared the man he thought dead.

Had Merdith been the man he pretended to be, he would have grasped his partner and rushed him out into the main gorge to meet Ellen. He would have rescued the prisoner from that bleak cleft beside the ice —would have defended him against Kissack—safeguarded him back to civilization, home and fortune.

What had happened? According to Jean, Carrol had stood a little outside the mine mouth. She had found him with his feet in the sun. Therefore Merdith had lied. The pistol shots and the yells of the chained wolf no doubt had brought the prisoner to the mouth of the mine. Merdith had not fired until the man's face and white head were clear in the sunlight. Carrol could not have seen him a few yards away. But the full width of the narrow cleft would not have been too far for Merdith to see and recognize the prisoner.

The man he had thought dead stood before him alive. He saw himself ruined—his forgery disclosed—all claim on the lumber business lost—Ellen lost. To save himself he had only to seal the lips that called upon God for death. Dead men tell no tales.

Dan beckoned Jean back to the far side of the fire.

"You are right about your de'il," he said. "The man is a cold-blooded murderer. I must first think of Ellen—get her away from him. If you will not let me bring the poor girl to her father, I will fly out with her at dawn. Before noon I shall be back with rifles—and a surgeon."

"Ye canna' bring a doctor, lad. My father—and your promise—"

"The surgeon will know only that a man has been shot. While he gives treatment, your father and I can capture Merdith. When I take the surgeon back to the coast he will be unable to tell the location of your valley."

"But I dare na'—"

"Wait! If you do not agree to my bringing a surgeon, I feel sure Mr. Carrol will die. If he is to die, I see no reason for me to return and keep Merdith from killing your father. That is the next thing he will do. You know it."

"Aye, aye, the de'il is mad for the goold. He was dabbling in the treasure bowl when poor Paul coom oot. And noo my father— Aye, for his sake, Dannie lad, I gie ye leave. Gladly would I take Paul's hand and pass wi' him into the beyond. Best for him he should na' live. But I canna' see my father murdered by thot de'il."

"If I find him I'll send him to you, Jean. Keep Mr. Carrol hidden until tomorrow. You can look for me by noon, or sunset at the latest."

Jean clasped the hand that Dan offered.

"God grant ye save the sweet lassie. She is *his* lassie! When all is past, dinna' forget to gie her the love of one wha's heart has been bruised to tenderness."

A tear rolled down the dusky cheek of the hard-tried young woman.

Dan put his hands on her shoulders.

"Your heart is tender, Jean. Yet it is the heart of a Covenanter. Your justice is without mercy, either to yourself or to others. For what you believe to be your duty you are sacrificing yourself and the man you love—and his innocent daughter."

"Ye ken I forgied him lang syne. But I canna' forget my mother."

She was as unshakable as a Puritan judge.

Dan went to take a last look at Carrol. The bearded cheeks showed a feverish flush, but the bluish eyelids were closed in heavy slumber. Jean's powdered herbs may have contained a narcotic.

"He will na' wake," said Jean. "Coom."

"I can make it alone—down along the bank and under the falls."

"Na, na. The de'il may be lurking behind the last ridge on the trail. He would see you coom oot the falls. I'll land ye as though from up the river. If he sees, he will think we coom from the mine. If he dinna' see, ye may slip across into the trail behind him."

The wisdom of the plan won a nod from Dan. His own plan might have betrayed the hiding place of Ellen's father. He followed Jean down the shallow creek bed. Jean guided the canoe around the bend, in the middle of the shrunken stream.

Dan's eyes were fixed upon the bank and the bare rock ledges down at the falls. The canoe had no more than rounded the bend when he saw a small object lift slowly into the moonlight above a bowlder out on the ledges near the brink of the falls. At the distance few eyes could have seen it.

"Merdith, Jean—at the falls!"

A quick twist of Jean's paddle shunted the canoe over to the stone-strewn south side of the river bed, left bare by the night's lessening of the flow.

"Quick!" she cried. "Oot and up the bank."

She jerked the prow of the canoe out of the water and dashed after Dan across to the willows that drooped from the bank. He started to force a way through the thicket. She caught his arm.

"Whist, lad, bide here," she said.

"But he saw us. He'll come running to get on our trail."

"Aye, gie him time for a fair start. Ye will then creep doon along the bed, under the droop o' the willows."

The stratagem was as artful as it was simple.

"I see. How about you?"

Jean pointed to the canoe and upstream. Dan crawled along the bank to where he could see the falls. The roundish object had disappeared. He glimpsed a crouched figure gliding from bowlder to bowlder. It leaped up the bank into the bushes.

With a wave to Jean to go, Dan started down the river bed as close under the overhanging fringe of willows as the bank would permit. Here and there great glacial bowlders thrust out in his way. He had to creep around them, sometimes splashing in the edge of the stream. Smaller bowlders had to be climbed over. His shoes left a heavy trail in the gray silt deposited by the glacier water.

He was more than half down to the falls when a backward glance showed Jean only just putting out into the river. Back of her in the canoe was a huddled object not unlike a crouched man. To Merdith it might have seemed either a wounded man or Dan with his head ducked low in fear of a shot. Dan guessed that the object was a bundle of willows stuffed in Jean's buckskin tunic.

As the canoe started to drive up the stream Dan saw a violent movement in the bushes at the last big bowlder that he had passed. He could have tossed a pebble to the place. Merdith leaped out upon the bowlder and began to fire at the canoe. Dan did not try to hide. Merdith's first downward glance would show him the telltale trail.

Dan turned and sprinted for the falls at top speed. He knew that the boom of the falls would drown the clatter of his shoes on the stones. And Merdith's ears were deafened by his rapid shots.

"The treacherous devil!" panted Dan. "Must have had his coat full of cartridge clips! Jean waited—too long. If he hits her—"

CHAPTER XXI.

FOR LIFE AND LOVE.

A SUDDEN pause in the shots forced Dan to ease his pace and look back. He was fearful of seeing Jean crumpled down in the canoe. But both she and the little craft had disappeared. Merdith still stood on the bowlder. He had bent to peer at Dan's fresh tracks in the silt below the big rock.

Dan dashed on again as fast as he could sprint. Luckily he was already beyond accurate range of the pistol. He had not taken a dozen strides before bullets began to whine over his head or smash on the stones alongside him. Some glanced off, shrieking. He increased his speed to a little better than his best.

Again came an abrupt cutting off of the shots. Dan eased down his pace a bit, but he did not pause to glance back. He knew without looking that Merdith had stopped to jump down and pursue him.

The bare rocks of the falls' buttress were now close. Dan rushed out upon them and

across to the step ledges. At the edge he paused for a glance. Merdith had been outdistanced. He was running by no means slow, but his left foot limped. In the jump from the bowlder a stone hidden by the silt may have twisted the ankle or bruised the foot through the shoepac. But there was also the chance that the limp was being shammed.

The possibility sent Dan bounding down the step ledges like a goat. He reached the foot and saluted up the slope to strike into the trail at the crest of the ridge. Behind the crest he dropped flat to recover his wind. He knew that Merdith would follow him down the step ledges and up the slope. Any other way lay through dense brush.

Most men with a murderous pursuer on their trail would have been up and off as soon as they could draw the first deep breath. Dan waited for a look at his enemy. He wanted to make sure of that limp.

Against the pistol he had no other weapon than the butcher knife. The hand ax had been left with Jean. He figured on the chance of taking Merdith by surprise—leaping out upon his back in some black-shadowed reach of the trail. Either that or the blow of a club. But there was the pistol—and there was Ellen. A slip, and she would be left to the mercy of the man who had shot down her father in cold blood.

No—the one thing to do, if possible, was to reach the cabin first and get her away into the forest. By circling, they could work around to the pottery. The catamaran would float them and the load of jugs down the brook to the lake in time to fill the hydroplane tanks for a flight at dawn.

Out over the top of the falls ledges bounded the moonlit figure of the pursuer. The limp had lessened. But the jump down the first step ledge showed a nursing of the left foot. The limp was not shammed.

"Good luck!" Dan told himself. "Gives you an even break, Dan-i-el."

He rose unhurriedly and started off along the trail at a jog. From the jog he gradually worked into a good swinging cross-country pace. At the first moon-bright stretch of the trail he sprinted. The dash carried him into the black tree shadows at the far edge of the open ground, just before Merdith ran out at the lower end. He still limped, but his strides were longer than Dan's, and his flexible-soled shoepacs made running easier than Dan's stiff shoes. Dan eased down his dash to the best pace that he thought he could hold to for a mile. He wanted to be so far ahead that Merdith could not hear the thump of his shoes. The roar of the night-dwindled river was far less loud than during the day. Near by it had drowned all other sounds, but the trees here already had begun to muffle it.

After several minutes of the fast pace the noise of the falls died down to a rumble. At the far end of a second moonlit stretch Dan eased off to catch his wind. He looked back. Merdith was out in the moonlight, running with the same limpy yet long, swinging stride.

Whatever the man had been, he was now a killer. No lame wolf on a blood trail could have loped along with a more relentless steadiness of pace and purpose. The mile or more of speeding had gained Dan hardly more than three hundred yards. One glance at his pursuer settled him down to an attempt at the same wolf lope. He knew that he could outsprint Merdith. But a long-distance race is another matter from a dash.

The rumble from the shrunken falls had become only a murmur when Dan heard another kind of rumble ahead. The sound quickly swelled in volume. It became, not a boom, but a succession of roars. Between them sounded a crashing racket—a din such as might have been made by a mad beast tearing to pieces itself and all around.

Dan wondered—and added a trifle more quickness to his stride. This was no time to pry into the doings of wild beasts, when he had on his trail a pursuer far more deadly than any wolf. He guessed that the roars and racket were down near the pottery. Then all of his attention swung back upon the vital need of outdistancing Merdith.

The slight increase of pace strained him almost to his limit. Yet, half a mile or so

past the fork of the pottery trail, a third open stretch gave him alarming measure of how his race for life was going. Merdith had gained at least a hundred yards. For the first time Dan felt fear—not fright or terror, but the fear that a brave man feels under the certainty of great danger. Instead of paralyzing his muscles, it spurred them to redoubled effort; instead of making him cower, it roused all his courage.

But this time Merdith had seen his quarry while still crossing the open. He yelled and fired. The bullet seared Dan's thigh. He bounded into a dash. Merdith added only a little to the swiftness of his loping stride. As a result, lack of breath soon slowed Dan below his former pace, and Merdith gained steadily.

At last came the beaver dam. In the crossing, Dan, now almost spent, stumbled and fell. When he sprang up Merdith had started to sprint. He was already within fair range for his pistol.

Dan leaned forward and dashed on up the trail. By all counts he should have collapsed within the first hundred paces. He was purple-faced. His breath came in wheezing gasps. The longer-limbed, bigger, forest-trained pursuer had run him off his feet. Yet he still kept those feet.

Fast as Merdith sprinted to overtake him, Dan dashed ahead still faster. He was running on sheer heart and nerve. So far as feeling went, his legs were dead. He could not feel the thud of his feet upon the hard trail. Yet his legs were chugging with the speed and steadiness of pistons. In his head was a hideous roaring that drowned all sounds but one—all sounds but the still small voice that told him to keep on and on and on—for the sake of Ellen.

Through the birch woods, all black velvet shadows splotched with moon silver—now a corner of firs—another birch wood, endless as space—no, the cabin at last—yet how far away! And why should the moonlight be dimming?

Almost unconscious, Dan staggered and lunged against the front door of the cabin. The thick planks did not give. The door was barred. He sought to cry out to Ellen, but could only gasp. He fell down.

Merdith burst into sight, still sprinting. He uttered a hoarse yell and thrust out his pistol. The range was moderate. But he had begun to reel in his stride. The bullet buried itself in one of the log butts of the outjutting eaves above Dan's head. Then Dan felt the door give before the dead pressure of his lax body. It swung in. Little clutching hands seized him—half dragged, half rolled him into the dark cabin. They rolled him aside. The heavy door thudded shut. He heard the rattle of the thick bar into the copper socket—not a moment too soon.

A thud outside—the door creaked under the impact of Merdith's weight. But no man in full strength could have pushed in that barred door, much less a man almost outspent.

Had the door burst open Dan could not have risen from the floor. He lay gasping and wheezing, unable to move. Out of the blank darkness of the closed cabin soft little hands came groping to touch his face. They began to wet it with a damp cloth. As soon as his gasps eased to a less violent panting the hands held an earthenware cup to his parched lips.

He sipped the water and flattened out again to rest. At last came breath, and with it came strength enough to speak.

"You—saved—me!"

"Hush!" whispered the girl. "He's still there—at the door."

"If you'd—been asleep!" Dan gasped his thankfulness.

"How could I, when he had— Oh!"

A bullet crashed through the door.

Dan whirled, grasped Ellen about the knees, and dragged her down. He flung himself over between her body and the door.

Three more shots in quick succession—then a rasping command:

"Open! Do you hear me? Open—or I'll fire the cabin and roast you out!"

"Oh! Oh!" shrieked Ellen. "He—he'll kill me!"

"Not he," scoffed Dan. "He's too shrewd a business man. Dead, you'd be worth nothing to him. Alive, you're a million-dollar asset. He'll not kill you or burn you up—or anything else. Little Dan-

iel just made it—by the skin of his teeth and your corking good play. He got in by a squeak. But now he's on the job."

By way of demonstration he staggered to his feet, stole over to the door, and felt the planks near the top. He groped back to Ellen and lifted her up beside him.

"Bluff," he said. "Those shots were just to rattle us. Every bullet was fired high."

"But—I'm—frightened, Dan!"

Up about his neck slipped a pair of soft round arms. A small face pressed hard against his breast. He drew her close in his arms until he could feel the flutter of her heart against the heavy thudding of his own. He kissed the top of her silken tresses.

"There, Miss Scairy! Now we'll get into action. He's a bit too quiet. Something's simmering. Are the other doors fast—and the windows?"

"Y-yes. Jean told me—"

"O. K. Now your popgun. Maybe I can use it to better purpose than you."

"Dan! You—you wouldn't think of shooting Perry?"

"It's past the thinking stage." Dan's voice became serious. "Ellen, that man has twice tried to murder your father—once by treachery, another time by direct action. He—"

From the rear of the cabin came a thudding of muffled blows.

"Quick—give me your pistol!" said Dan.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.

THROUGH CHINATOWN

THE lights were changing red and green,
With dragon emblems everywhere,
The lights were writhing serpentine
And spreading silver, and the street
Was blue with incense in the air,
And stealthy with small padding feet.

The windows full of strange cut jade,
And elephants of carved black teak,
Weird smiling Buddhas, subtly made,
And burnished dragons, many scaled.
I heard a slant-eyed woman speak,
A singsong chant, as though she wailed.

We saw tall smoothly lacquered jars,
And glided chains, and Chinese gongs,
And doors with heavy metal bars,
And Chinese zither-players there,
With strangely wailing Chinese songs
And incense heavy in the air.

Strange Oriental faces came
To stare at us and disappear
In darkened doorways, with the same
Cold slanting eyes, impassive gaze,
And catlike footfalls everywhere,
Through crooked streets, a tangled maze.

Violet McDougal.

Extra Pay

By JACK WHITMAN

THE rumor of a day's work for a mob of men mysteriously penetrated the devious streets and lodgings of the jobless, and from them, like rabbits from their warrens, issued a motley stream of humanity. Singly, and by twos and threes, they came, pouring up the narrow, dark stairs, and filling the hallway before the doors of the Motion Picture Service Bureau.

There were scores of them, waiting stolidly in the smoke-filled hallway for the doors to open and the casting director to come out and pick and choose his mob. In the crowd it was easy to spot the professionals; men who cultivated whatever individualizing feature nature or life had given them. Here was one whose long, straight black hair and high cheek bones made him an ideal Indian type; there was another with two cauliflower ears and a twisted mouth; another's cheek was scarred by an ancient knife thrust; another's nose, broken and unset, turned at an amazing right angle. They were "types." The directors demanded types; any distinct divergence from normal, commonplace appearance would add to the "color" and "atmosphere" of the films they made.

Most of the men, however, were simply the odds and ends of the unemployed—former clerks, struggling to keep their frayed collars clean and their trousers creased; laborers of the migratory class, making no sartorial pretensions; hoboes, tramps, bums.

Near the doors, a little apart from the others, stood Denton Maclise. An actor, obviously. His carriage was that of one who is conscious of being looked at; life was a stage, and he was in the center of it. His gray hair and lined face told of years

of adversity and emotional strain. To-day, despite the air of superiority that set him apart from his fellows, his usual dignity and poise were lacking. It isn't easy to look calm when one hasn't eaten for three days.

He looked enviously upon a full-blooded youngster rolling a cigarette. He conquered his pride sufficiently to borrow the makings.

"I must have forgot mine," he apologized.

"'S all right, old-timer!" The boy handed him tobacco and papers. "What's the chances of gettin' on to-day, huh? I hear they're only goin' to use about twenty men. We're lucky to be near the door—there must be a hundred here already, and more comin'."

Maclise murmured his thanks in his deep-voiced, trained tones, and returned the tobacco. Then he was compelled to bother the other for a light.

"Gee," said the lad good naturedly, "do you want me to smoke it for you?"

Ancient and good humored as the jest was, it brought a flush to the actor's face. He was thankful that the door opened and Billy Fish, the "type picker," came out. Fish was a rotund, short young man, who wore spectacles and affected brightly colored silk shirts. He looked superciliously over the men, suddenly silenced by his appearance. It was part of his task to be scornful and contemptuous; perhaps he sometimes exceeded the requirements of the job. But daily he confronted men who would lie, fight or steal for one of the five-dollar "tickets" issued by the Service Bureau. It was up to him to detect their lies and prevent their fights. Moreover, it was his duty to choose just the types required by whatever director called upon the bureau for a mob of extras.

His cold, contemptuous eyes passed over the men. Some of the more timid ones, awed by the hopelessness of it, retired to the edge of the crowd, looking on. That one cursory glance was enough for Billy; he had already picked the twenty men needed.

"You!" He pointed his finger at the lucky fellows. "And you! And you!"

Then he turned to Maclise and the boy beside him. "You'll do, kid," he snapped. His tone was different when he addressed the actor. "Good morning, Mr. Maclise. Step inside, please."

In all he had picked thirty men, knowing that at least ten would have to be eliminated.

"That's all! The rest of you birds might as well beat it!"

They did, sullenly, slowly. The lucky ones followed Fish into the office. He sat down at a desk and scrutinized them again, the same cold malice in his eyes.

"Can you swim?" he demanded.

"Sure!" came a chorus of perhaps twenty voices. Maclise, standing beside Billy's desk, did not answer.

"You guys that can't swim—and what I mean is you've got to be regular ducks in this picture—can light out now. Nothing for you. Go on, you! And you! No stalling! Don't tell me that on second thought you remember that you can swim! None of that stuff, see? You can't get away with it in this picture, and I won't be responsible for a bunch of you getting drowned. The rest of you stick around—it's location stuff at San Pedro, with the Frank Fay Company. We start in about an hour. Five a day. Sit down over there."

"Five a day less your ten per cent, you mean," said one grumbler.

"Sure," responded Billy; "you think we're in it for our health? If you don't want a job what are you here for? Nobody's begging you to work, you know."

Maclise heard none of the give-and-take that centered about Billy's desk. The name of Frank Fay, now one of the most popular young stars, had awakened old memories and a new fear. Maclise was having considerable difficulty in making a decision. He didn't know how he should answer one or two of Billy's questions.

"Have a seat, Mac," Billy suggested, more respectfully than was his wont. "This isn't anything for you at all, but I thought you might take a day of it—er—while you're resting."

"Thanks, Billy. Yes, I'd rather be working, you know—it's in the blood."

They both ignored Maclise's palpable need of the money he would earn.

"That's what I thought. You can swim, can't you, Mac?"

"Oh, yes, moderately well. Yes, moderately well, Billy. Did you say it was Frank Fay's Company?"

"Yeah. You're one of a gang of conspirators he's trying to get away from. He runs across the docks, or something, dodging you, knocking a bunch of you into the water, see? Not your kind of stuff, at all, but it isn't hard, either. You won't work more than an hour or so."

"It's funny, Billy. When I was stage director and character man with the old Burbank Stock Company, Frank Fay played 'super,' at fifty cents a performance. Now I'm an extra in one of his pictures! Well, well!"

"Think he'll remember you? Let him know you're on the job and maybe he'll give you a real part, Mac."

"Thanks, Billy. Perhaps I shall."

But he knew perfectly well that he would do nothing of the kind.

II.

A SIGHT-SEEING bus, chartered for the day by the Frank Fay Company, bore its cargo of hand-picked conspirators to the harbor. Maclise, struggling against weakness and fatigue which had superseded the pangs of hunger itself, had the rear seat to himself. The long car bounced roughly over the pavements, and the wind from the sea swept like a cold wave through the uncurtained sides. Physically, Maclise was in torment; mentally, his condition was no better.

Over and over again he told himself that he had to go through with it. There was no way out now. He had accepted the day's work; he had to have the four dollars and a half he would be paid the next morning; he couldn't allow pride or fear to come between him and his more urgent needs.

Then he would think back over the days Frank Fay's name recalled. He remembered the fellow well. He had come to him, a mere stripling, looking like an overgrown and awkward puppy, to ask for a chance on the stage. At the time only the boy's sincerity and determination had saved him from Maclise's laughter. He had been given a chance, in a speechless part, as a soldier in "Shenandoah." Maclise remembered him as he first went on the stage; he was on himself at the time, and he watched the boy stand for the first time in the glare of the footlights and turn, wide-eyed and open-mouthed, toward the audience. He forgot the simple action that was required of him, and stood there, ludicrously unconscious of the picture he made, until another super poked him in the ribs and seized him by the arm.

Frank had never got over that clumsy, boyish awkwardness. After that first attempt he often played similar parts with the company. Once or twice he was given a line or two, which he invariably uttered in the rapt tone of a self-conscious schoolboy "speaking his piece."

Maclise recalled, with an ironic smile, the last time he had played in the troupe. The piece was one of those long-dead melodramas dealing with the wicked night life of New York City, and its second act was laid in a dance hall of low repute. When the curtain rose several couples were discovered seated at tables, smoking and drinking. After a moment they got up to dance; while they were dancing the hero entered in quest of the abducted heroine. While the play was in rehearsal, Maclise, as stage director, had asked Frank if he could dance.

"Pretty well," the lad had replied.

In the rush of getting the play ready—with a new bill every week, there was little time to waste—Maclise neglected to rehearse the silent action of the couples in the dance hall. The action was so simple that any one might be expected to do it.

But when the first night came the whole illusion of the theater was lost and the audience sent into gales of laughter by Frank Fay's antics. Dance he could not; but he manfully did everything else. He stepped on his partner's gown, stumbled and half fell, bumped into two other dancers, and knocked a table several feet across the stage. The leading man entered just in time to re-

ceive the loudest laughter; being a temperamental young matinée idol, he immediately made his exit and the curtain was rung down.

Maclise's wrath knew no bounds. He could remember in part what he had said to Frank Fay.

"Get out and stay out of this theater! Never go on another stage as long as you live! You're the clumsiest, awkwardest lump of beef I've ever seen! Go drive a truck, or go back to the farm! You'll never be an actor with feet like that!"

The boy had gone, silently, his head low. Afterward Maclise laughed over the incident, and he was thoroughly pleased as he watched the boy's progress toward stardom in the films, where the very characteristic awkward charm that had ruined a performance made him the idol of millions who were tired of too handsome heroes. Now he was a star, at the head of his own company, and the man who had told him to go back to the farm was a humble member of his supporting cast.

He was afraid that Frank would recognize him. That fear was almost greater than his hunger and weakness; it drove him desperately to thoughts of desertion. Badly as he needed the little money, he couldn't bear to think of the humiliation that would be his if Frank knew him and recounted to the company their last meeting. He admitted that it would serve him right. But, if he could avoid it, he didn't intend to be seen.

Maclise was proud; otherwise he need not have gone hungry in a city in which he had once been a popular actor.

As they neared the scene of location, coming in sight of the docks, with ships at anchor in the channel, he resolved that he would remain close to the other conspirators, inconspicuously lost in their ranks.

Hiding was futile, however. His distinguished face and bearing stood out from the others with the stamp of true leadership. When the conspirators were lined up on the dock the director selected him as the leader of the gang, and briefly instructed him in the action of the scenes to be taken there.

Some distance away Maclise saw a dark-blue roadster, in which the star sat. In spite of his well-tailored clothes, Frank Fay was as clumsy and puppylike as ever. As he stretched and jumped out of the car to the dock, playing with an Airedale, Maclise trembled lest he come closer and recognize him.

But the director turned over the twenty conspirators to an assistant in charge of make-up, and Maclise smeared his face with grease paint and powder, applying heavy lines of mascara to his brows, until he hoped Frank would pass him by without a second glance.

Then there was an interminable period of waiting, while the director and his assistants worked at the many details of preparation, now and then consulting the star. Maclise forced himself to think of other things than the work that lay before him. He shuddered when the prospect of a collision with the husky young star and a plunge into the cold water of the channel obtruded. As he sat at the edge of the wharf, his back turned to the others, his hands shook and his lip trembled. He felt that he was going to faint; only the last remnant of his self control kept him up.

He was in a kind of stupor when the director's call came. "Get ready, everybody! Conspirators, this way! All of you! Come on! Move a little! The sun's going and we've got to get these scenes today."

Then he outlined the definite action. Mr. Fay would appear from the shelter of that shed over there, would run down the pier. He had just loosed his bonds and freed himself; his escape was a surprise to the conspirators outside on the wharf. They were to look surprised, then they were to set up a cry and take after him, attempting to stop him and bring him down. He would go through them, running along the edge of the dock, knocking all he could into the water, dropping the others with his fist.

Maclise and two others were chosen as the first to block the path of the onrushing star. Maclise, as the leader, was to cling to him, meanwhile calling upon his gang to help him. Before the others reached them, the star was to use a football trick and jolt

Maclise into the water with the force of a hunched shoulder.

"That's all," concluded the director. "We won't rehearse it, because the sun's going. Jump into it, men! Lots of pep now, so we won't have any retakes! As soon as we get this you fellows are through. You can change your clothes and the bus will take you back to town. Ready, Frank? Ready, camera? Let's go! Action! That's it! Now, camera!"

Down the dock sped the six-foot, awkward, brawny star, directly for Maclise. One camera got a close-up of the surprised, frightened old actor, while another, shooting from a little distance, took the long shot. Maclise's knees knocked violently together as he waved his hands and called the other conspirators to his aid. He saw them start up and run toward him, but already Frank Fay was upon him. With arms as weak as a child's, Maclise attempted to seize the athletic boy; when the star leaped free, Maclise clung to him in nervous terror. For a moment they struggled, Fay moderating his efforts to the strength of the other. Then, as the gang closed in around him, he hunched his shoulder, and, as gently as he could, bumped the old man into the water. With a gasp almost of horror the star turned to fight off the others. Until he was free of them he could not leap overboard after the fallen man, and he must do that.

For in the moment that Maclise clung to him, his fear had mastered him.

"Don't, Frank, for God's sake!" he had cried into the other's ear. "I'm Denton Maclise! I can't swim!"

The words had not penetrated to Frank's consciousness in the excitement of the moment, until it was too late. Then, for just a second, he paused and looked down at the floundering, helpless man. Before he could plunge after him the conspirators had attacked him from all sides. Fighting now like mad, he thrust them out of his way, knocked them down, shoved them overboard, and freed himself from their clinging arms. As a fight scene it was the real thing, a strip of film that would bring the audience out of their seats when they saw it on the screen.

Several of the more daring extras, angered by the star's realistic punches, leaped upon him again. Once more he had to fight free. Meanwhile he endeavored to shout to the director: "Cut! Cut! Man overboard!" In the tumult the words meant nothing. Frank, almost beside himself, at last had to carry one of the clinging extras overboard with him. Diving deep with the man upon his shoulders, he succeeded in loosing his clutch upon him and sprang to the aid of Maclise, now coming up for the third time.

The director, seeing this interesting if unexpected action, hastily ordered the camera men to get it, and the instruments were tipped and tilted over the edge of the wharf so that their eyes looked down upon the scene of rescue.

Out of focus, the other conspirators were pulling themselves out of the water. Frank Fay reached Maclise as the other weakly struggled to snatch a floating piece of wood. The star's arms encircled the old man and he lifted him to his shoulders. Maclise lost consciousness. Then, swimming in long slow strokes, Frank carried him to the end of the dock, pulled him ashore, and bore him in his arms to his own car.

The members of the company surrounded them.

"Call a doctor, Jeff!" Frank instructed the director. "He fainted on me. He couldn't have lasted much longer, either. It's lucky that bunch wasn't all as tough as the last few. Poor old chap! He couldn't swim."

"I'll raise the devil with Billy Fish up at the bureau!" growled the director. "I told him three times he'd have to guarantee that every man in the lot would have to be a swimmer! What does he mean by sending us a lot of fellows just to get 'em drowned?"

Denton Maclise struggled to open his eyes. After a painful, sobbing effort he spoke, in a whisper: "Not Billy's fault. I —I—told him—I could—swim."

"Oh!" grunted the director. "That's the way with these guys! Serves 'em right, to take a chance like that. Look at all the film we've wasted."

"Never mind that!" commanded Frank

Fay. "I wouldn't care if we'd wasted a thousand feet. I know this man. He's my friend. If it hadn't been for him I wouldn't be where I am to-day!"

"Oh!" exclaimed the director, in a quite different tone. "Is that so? Well, listen, Frank, I shot all the stuff in the water, and it would be a cinch to change the story a little, making this man not really one of the conspirators, but a fellow they had in their power, see, and have it turn out that he's trying to help you. Then when you pull the noble rescue, he's stronger for you than ever, see, and with his help you break up the gang. How about it?"

"Go ahead! Write in a good part for him. We'll talk it over to-morrow."

Maclise vainly endeavored to make himself heard. But the effort was too much for his ebbing strength. He sank back into a silence from which he did not awaken until late that night, when he discovered himself in a strange room in a strange house.

"I didn't know where you lived, Mac, old man," explained Fay, who was at his side, "so I had to bring you home. I want you to stay a good long time, until you've rested up. When you feel like it, there's a part waiting for you in my picture, and I'll see that there's another in every one I do from now on. I owe you a lot, Mac."

Maclise could scarcely believe his ears. He raised himself on one elbow and looked in amazement at the boy. A worried frown came between his eyes.

"Owe me a lot?" he cried in perplexity. "As I remember it, all you owe me is a hearty bawling out, and a dishonorable discharge! After the way I fired you, and what I said to you back in the Burbank days—for not being able to dance! Why, look at me—I'm in the same boat—I said I could swim. After the way I served you, you save my life!"

"Sure, that's what I mean," smiled the young star. "Listen, Mac, if you hadn't fired me then I'd still be goofing around a tenth-rate stock company trying to act all kinds of parts! If there ever was a one-part actor, I'm it! On the screen I just play myself, but I couldn't do that on the stage! And if you hadn't fired me the way you did, making me so sore that I vowed I'd never drive a truck or go back to the farm, I wouldn't have had the ambition to make a try for it. Why, Mac, I owe you all I've got! You've got to let me pay you back!"

Proud as he was, Maclise had lived too long, and learned too much on the road of adversity ever to stare a persistent gift-horse in the face. As he sighed and sank back against the luxuriously comfortable pillows, his only comment was: "Now I'm hungry!"

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THE DEWDROP

REFLECTING the blue sky,
Glist'ning with sunbeams,
Perfumed with sweetness,
Just a dewdrop on a roseleaf—
A perfect circle—
Like the world—
As Love—should be—
Like my Life.
Should a bird pause in its flight,
And quaff the dewdrop, to make his song
More sweet—
I hope, ah, I hope,
It may be,
A bluebird.

Margaret G. Hays.

McCarty Incog.

By ISABEL OSTRANDER

Author of "Between Heaven and Earth," "Twenty-Six Clues," etc.

CHAPTER XXI.

BUCK HATHERLY BREAKS SILENCE.

IT was noon on Monday when an asthmatic car of ancient vintage bore McCarty and Dennis once more over the highroad from Plimptonport to the Cove. Their trip from New York had been a comparatively silent one, for McCarty was lost in his own thoughts and Dennis was in a numbed state bordering on stupefaction from the recent developments in the case.

He aroused himself for a moment when they passed the Norris place and craned his neck to peer over the fence toward the house, but the shutters were closed, no one was in sight, and even the dogs were still.

The single street of the village itself, when they turned into it from the common, bore the same aspect of semidesertion and brooding somnolence which had characterized it when they emerged from their ignominious night in jail, almost a week before. A few old men still lounged in the scanty shade, and the same dogs sprawled in listless attitudes, panting and snapping at flies, yet, as on the previous occasion, with their appearance the shutters on the cottage windows clicked as they turned, and here and there a woman came out to porch or dooryard.

Interest in the murder had not flagged—it was merely held in abeyance while the ordinary routine of life went on. Mrs. Griscom met them at the door with a beaming smile of welcome.

"I declare!" she exclaimed. "We calc'lated you folks wasn't comin' back to go fishin', after all! Dr. Allen's be'n like a hen on a hot griddle, over here five times a day to find out ef you'd come back, an' Eb Bartlett, too."

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for July 15.

"I guess we'll go right over and see the doctor," McCarty remarked. "Can we leave our bags here in the entry?"

"Course you can, but the doctor won't be home till night." Her soft eyes clouded. "Jed Wiggins's boy's dyin' over to Mattagansett. Hev you seen the newspapers? 'Masa Hite's be'n talkin' mighty big to the city reporters 'bout what he's goin' to do, but he hasn't done nothin'. Seems 's ef mebbe we'll never know who killed thet poor critter."

"Run over, Denny, and leave this at the doctor's office, anyway." McCarty handed to his companion the walrus bag, freshly incased in brown paper. "I'm going down to the shore for a while. Terrible hot, isn't it, ma'am?"

Mrs. Griscom nodded as she turned to go back to her kitchen. "Looks as ef we'd have another blow by nightfall. The sky 'pears thataway. I—I hope the boats come in airly."

They paused at the gate, and Dennis asked:

"What are you going down to the shore for? There's nothing we can do till the doctor gets back."

"There's something you can do as soon as you've left that bag safe," McCarty responded, his eyes on a gaunt figure advancing excitedly toward them at a shambling trot down the street. "Get hold of that constable and keep him off me. I want to look over the ground outside that shack again, and besides you can get a line on what he knows about the other people besides the Hatherlys who have summer homes around here. Don't be crowing too loud to him, either, Denny; remember we have got everything about this murder except the guy that pulled it off; and we're no nearer him than when we started."

Reluctantly Dennis left him, and McCarty proceeded to the shore. Nets were drying in the sun, but no one was in sight, and he turned toward the shack huddled in forlorn isolation on the Point, but as he passed the sere, broken hedge which marked the lower boundary of the artist's garden a voice hailed him.

"Good day to you, Mr. Thompson." He took off his hat and flapped futilely with it at a sand fly. "'Tis a cruel hot day, and no mistake."

"I thought you had changed your mind about staying on for a little fishing after the inquest, for I have not seen you about." Thompson, in a painter's smock and with the inevitable meerschaum pipe in one hand, came down the path toward him, followed by the great setter. "Won't you come in?"

"Thanks, sir—'twould be a bit cooler in the shade, I'm thinking." McCarty mounted the terrace steps which led up from the strip of beach. "My friend and I did go back to town, but it was worse there than here, and we thought we'd run out again for a day or two on the water and to see what the sheriff is doing about the murder. The papers are full of it on account of the poor lady being known in society."

Thompson shook his head gravely. "I am afraid it will never be solved. The local authorities mean well, but they are totally inadequate to handle the affair, and none of Mrs. Wall's relatives appear sufficiently interested to come forward and institute a more expert investigation. It will go down as one of the grim tragedies which suddenly rear themselves in the peaceful countryside like noxious weeds in a garden. Speaking of weeds, I am sorry I cannot offer you a cigar."

"I've one myself, sir." McCarty drew one from his pocket. "I didn't see you at the inquest."

"No. As I was not needed, I kept away." Thompson waved toward the house. "There is a faint breeze up on the porch; suppose we sit there? I am distressed that my friend young Hatherly should be under such a cloud."

McCarty glanced up, and the match he had been about to light dropped from his fingers. Groping for it among the shiny, long leaves of the plant which bordered the path, he repeated:

"Young Hatherly? Oh, the sheriff can get nothing on him just because he was driving around the country in the storm while the murder took place."

"But the attitude of the neighborhood is veering." Thompson puffed at his pipe for a moment and then went on: "Of

course, it is unthinkable that he knew anything about the crime, but the village folk are looking at him askance and even some of the summer residents are commenting on his inability or unwillingness to account more plausibly for his whereabouts that evening. He's a light-hearted, devil-may-care sort of chap, and if he went out and drove aimlessly for hours through the storm it must have been because of some unusual disturbance of mind. Mr. Lowden tells me— But I am gossiping like an old housewife."

"Not at all, sir." McCarty leaned back in the grateful shade of the porch. "It seems to me Mrs. Hatherly spoke of somebody named Lowden. Haven't they got a bungalow farther up the shore?"

Thompson nodded. "I believe they were to have dined with the Hatherlys on the same evening I was invited to meet this Mrs. Wall, but Mrs. Lowden was indisposed, so they declined also. I am glad now that I followed my own lazy, unsociable impulse and remained at home, for had I made the acquaintance of the unfortunate woman the shock of her subsequent horrible death would have been even more revolting." He shuddered and then laughed half apologetically. "I am not a hermit, but the longer I lived alone in solid comfort with my painting and books and garden, and Lisa, the less I have felt inclined to cultivate my neighbors."

The setter crouched at his feet had raised her head at the mention of her name, and McCarty looked down at her thoughtfully.

"Is she a good watchdog, Mr. Thompson?"

"Splendid. It is regrettable that I did not leave her out of doors last Monday evening, but I took her in for shelter from the storm. She would undoubtedly have heard any disturbance in the cabin or seen an unaccustomed light there, and her baying would have warned me and aroused the village, perhaps preventing the tragedy." He pulled gently at the silken ears. "Lowden tried to buy her from me once— But I started to tell you what he said about young Hatherly; he did return home, or at least drive toward it from the west more than an hour after he left the house. He must have started in the direction of the canal and then turned and followed the highroad out toward the end of the Cape."

"So that he passed Hatherly House and the common here, and Norris's place and out through Plimptonport?" McCarty inquired. "How does this Mr. Lowden know?"

"He met him just the other side of Hatherly House, but driving furiously in this direction while he himself was hurrying homeward from the storm. Lowden is a good friend of theirs, and he cannot fathom the youngster's attitude of dogged defiance over what must of course be a trivial matter, quite apart from the events of that night."

"Who are these Lowdens? Have you known them long, sir?"

"They built their bungalow here before I came, and I know them in the casual way that I do most of the summer visitors," Thompson replied. "I have dined with them once or twice, and they had tea with me here a little over a fortnight ago. Mrs. Lowden wanted to see a study of the dunes which I had just finished. They are Boston people, and I believe her husband owns some mills out near Brockton. I'm not interested in manufacturing, and I never inquired what he produced."

"Do you sell your pictures, Mr. Thompson?" McCarty's question was blunt, but his host laughed pleasantly.

"When people are kind enough to take a fancy to them at the exhibitions! I keep a few which I like particularly, but paint and canvas and boots and bacon—and dog biscuit, eh, Lisa?—must be paid for if one would live."

"Of course." McCarty threw his cigar end over the railing and rose. "I'd like to have a peep at the pictures some time, Mr. Thompson, though I'm no artist myself. I must be getting back to the village to meet my friend now."

"Drop in whenever you like," Thompson replied. "I'm glad to have seen you again."

Dennis did not return to the Griscoms for dinner, and the visitors from Barnstable had departed, so McCarty ate alone in the big kitchen with Mrs. Griscom and the girl

Millie. The latter greeted him constrainedly and took no part in the conversation, but he saw with satisfaction that her wild-rose color had returned and her eyes were clear and sparkling. Whatever weight had lain upon her spirit seemed to have lifted during his absence.

As soon as the meal was over he changed his collar and struck out heroically in the smoldering heat for the two-mile walk to the Hatherlys, but he found only Buck in possession.

"You returned for some fishing, after all?" the latter greeted him. "Gad, it's hot! We'll have some iced coffee sent out to us in the summerhouse; it's the only shady spot with a breath of air."

He gave the order to a strange maid who appeared in answer to his ring, and as they started for the little vine-clad retreat on the edge of the terrace, McCarty remarked:

"That's a new girl your sister-in-law's got. Did Lizzie and the other one go, then?"

"Yes." Buck darted a quick glance at him. "How did you know they meant to? Servants are hard enough to keep out here, but Mrs. Hatherly wasn't sorry to have them leave; they were continually prying and gossiping. She sent this one out from Boston on her way to the mountains."

"Mrs. Hatherly has gone away?"

"Yes. Bill took her up to Vermont for a change, for she went all to pieces over this horrible affair." Buck paused, and then added with a short laugh: "Did you come to call on her, Mr. Doe? I thought you wanted to see me!"

"To try to pump you for the coroner, sir, about why you went driving around like a crazy loon in the storm that night?" McCarty faced him candidly. "I didn't, for I've known that all along, and why you wouldn't explain."

"You knew?" Buck sat down abruptly on the bench in the summerhouse and stared at him. "What did you know?"

"That you were sore because a neighbor of yours was trying to flirt with—with a certain little lady it was up to you to protect, and you quarreled with her for not seeing it your way. It's to save her from gossip, nothing more, that you're sitting tight now," McCarty replied carefully. "Your good friend Lowden saw you coming his way from the direction opposite to what you said a little before the squall, and he's telling the neighborhood."

"The damned old busybody! I don't know how you learned what you've told me, but I appreciate your keeping quiet about it. I don't want Bill to get on to what was just plain foolishness, for it's all over now, and Nor—" Buck checked himself, flushing darkly, and McCarty supplemented:

"Norris knows where he gets off. Isn't that what you were going to say, sir?"

"He is selling his place down here and leaving the neighborhood for good." Buck hesitated, and then broke out: "Since you know so much, and have shown you can keep it under your hat, I'd like to talk something over with you. Norris is a cad and a rotter, but I'd stake my life on it that he had nothing to do with the murder. Yet Mrs. Hatherly is possessed with the idea that Mrs. Wall and he knew each other before they met here and concealed the fact."

"They did," McCarty nodded. "Norris admitted it to me, and it's all right; it was a kind of a confidential business acquaintanceship. So that is what Mrs. Hatherly was keeping back? I knew there was something. After Lowden saw you that night you didn't stop at the house here, but kept right along the highroad, didn't you?"

"Yes. I was wild, and wanted to knock Norris's block off, but Bill would have heard of it. I even forgot an engagement I had—"

He halted once more, and a light broke over McCarty.

"With Miss Millie? You were to have met her on the highroad and taken her for a bit of a spin after dinner, maybe—"

"Who the deuce are you?" Buck stared. "You seem to have everybody's number! It's all right now, and I don't care who knows it. Millie and I are engaged, and we're going to announce it as soon as my brother and his wife return."

"I hope you'll let me congratulate you, Mr. Hatherly!" McCarty exclaimed hearti-

ly. "She's a fine young lady, and a true one, Miss Millie is! Did you know that she went to meet you on the highroad that night and saw something that made her run home as though all the fiends were after her? I'm thinking I know what it was, but wild horses can't drag it from her!"

"She saw me with Norris, and heard me order him to stop his attentions to—to the lady you spoke of." Buck nodded. "No names were mentioned, and Millie thought I meant Mrs. Wall, for only a few minutes before I drove along like blazes in the car—it was about half past seven, just after Lowden must have seen me farther up the road—Mrs. Wall and Norris had met there near the common while Millie waited for me. She didn't hear what they said, and they didn't see her; they were talking confidentially together and laughing, and then Mrs. Wall hurried on and left him. Millie didn't observe which way Mrs. Wall went, for just then I came along furious, stopped the car, had it out with Norris about another woman, and drove on, forgetting all about my date there with her. Of course she drew her own conclusions, and we had a quarrel, because I couldn't explain; but I think she understands, and bless her, she trusts me, anyway."

McCarty pulled idly at the leaves of a luxuriant, low-growing plant which thrust themselves through the interstices of the rustic railing.

"So that's why she thought you'd be suspected yourself, sir, of knowing something about the murder? She thought you must have taken a fancy to your sister's society friend and were forgetting her?"

"Yes, but I soon convinced her of the truth." Buck's homely, clean-cut face lighted with a smile and then grew quickly grave once more. "She never suspected me of the murder, of course, but she thought I might have met Mrs. Wall alone still later on the road, and been seen, and then on Wednesday afternoon, as you and your friend were leaving her aunt's house, she heard him say to you: 'If he pretended to Mr. and Mrs. Hatherly that he'd never met Mrs. Wall before she came here to visit, and she kept up the bluff, too, we've only to find out what there was between them, and where he was the night of the murder.' She thought you meant me, and that it was I who had known my sister's guest elsewhere, you see; but her one thought was to protect me! I tell you, Mr. Doe, I'm a lucky man! So Norris did know Mrs. Wall, in spite of his denial to me!"

"When was this?" McCarty asked.

"On Wednesday morning. After the murder, and then your visit here with the coroner to question my sister-in-law, to say nothing of the sheriff's hectoring, she was almost beside herself, and came to me with her conviction that Norris had known the murdered woman before, and might suspect who had killed her. I sent for Norris, and when he came I took him into my den and asked him point-blank what he knew about our late guest. He declared he had never seen nor heard of her till we presented him to her, and I couldn't call him a liar with no proof. I don't like the fellow, naturally; he's a bounder of the worst type, but whatever the nature of the understanding between himself and Mrs. Wall, and whatever he may know about her, he had no more to do with her death than I!" Buck Hatherly brought his fist down upon the railing. "It's my opinion that she came down here to avoid some one, but when they followed and demanded an interview she went out gamely enough to face them, only to go down in that hideous final defeat in the shack on the dunes!"

CHAPTER XXII.

THE HAND OF DESTINY.

THE brassy sky was deepening to purple, and an ugly, droning sound was in the air as Dr. Allen drove his dust-covered little runabout at a snail's pace down the village street. His ancient enemy had defeated him in the little cottage back at Mattagansett, and the thought of the bereavement he had left there dulled the twinkle in his small, kindly eyes and made his fat face sag wearily; but his aspect changed when he recognized the three figures awaiting him upon his porch.

"Hello, there!" he called excitedly, ex-

tricating himself from behind the wheel. "I'm mighty glad you've come back! What luck?"

"Good as far as it goes, sir; but we're not at the end yet," McCarty replied.

"They done a heap, by Glory!" Constable Bartlett executed a rheumatic shuffle upon the steps. "Found out all about the woman an' talked to her pa! Her husband was a criminile, doc; a murd'rer, too; an' her name wasn't 'Wall' no more'n mine be!"

"Come in, all of you!" The doctor threw open the door and waddled ahead down the hall. "Wait 'll I light this danged lamp! I held in all the questions I wanted to ask last week till I pretty nigh bu'st, and now I want to hear!"

Dennis had had a fatiguing afternoon in the constable's company and his nerves were on edge. As they trailed the other two down the hall he whispered to McCarty:

"If that old blatherskite keeps butting in we'll never get the half of what we do know told to the coroner this night! I've got the family history from Bartlett of everybody that ever set foot in the Cove, and not one of them could have been back of Walsinger through his trial; they've not money enough! We'll have to be off in the morning again."

"Maybe." McCarty scratched one hand reflectively with the other as he spoke. "I've an itch that's been driving me to distraction since supper and before, Denny, and if that's any sign we may be nearer the truth than we think."

"Now, then!" Dr. Allen fixed his beady eyes expectantly on Dennis as they seated themselves. "What were you arrested for in Dalesboro, and how did you know that was where those labels came from on the woman's bag?"

"I didn't, no more than a babe unborn!" Dennis replied truthfully. "I got pinched chasing another man and luck landed me there; but Mac would have found it anyway. In all the cases—"

"Denny!" McCarty exclaimed. Was his incognito to be thrown away at the last by that loyal blockhead? He scratched his tingling hand again and then turned to the coroner. "'Twas just a case of follow-your-nose, doctor, after I found the old guy who pasted those labels on the bag. There are gaps here and there, and one big question we've got to answer before we can hope to lay our hands on the man that committed this last murder; but I'll tell you what we do know."

The little doctor sat forward with his hands on his fat, widespread knees, and his cheeks puffing out with each breath while McCarty told his story, and when it was finished he exclaimed:

"Sodom and Gomorrah! Mebbe Dr. Walsinger didn't kill the rich old man after all! She was a nurse, she'd know about poisons! It was arsenic, you said, wasn't it?"

"White arsenic, the papers had it," McCarty replied. "After we left the attorney's house on Long Island, Denny and I spent Saturday night going over the newspaper accounts of the case from start to finish. Bartholomew Talmadge had quarreled with his nephew and niece who were the children of his sister, and with another nephew, his brother's son. They were his only living relatives, so he left the bulk of his fortune equally to them in his will, but he was all alone in a great house filled with servants in New York when Walsinger, who had been attending him for a good while for old-age ailments, began switching the treatment. Mrs. Walsinger could have had nothing to do with it herself, although she may have put her husband up to it; but if she did, it was because somebody else was standing behind her, urging her on! Where did the money come from that paid for Walsinger's defense? Not from her, for she was a nurse companion to old Mrs. Yates when he married her, and her own father was on the verge right then of going to the poorhouse."

"Why did she treat him so, do you suppose?" the doctor asked.

"She had little heart in her, by all accounts, and I'm thinking that when she got traveling around to those health resorts she forgot all about him. Then, when this handsome young doctor—he was good-looking all right, from his pictures in the papers, and not much over thirty—when

he with his fine practice asked her to marry him, I guess she was ashamed of Dalesboro and everybody in it."

McCarty continued:

"After his arrest she'd not face those at home till she knew what was going to happen, and maybe we'll never know where she spent the next five years; the two while his trials were going on and the first that he spent in prison before she wrote home, and the next two before he died, himself, and she felt free again. But all that time she was living on money that came from somewhere!"

"That was why when she did come home she told her pa she was working where she could get dresses at cost price, likely; so's she could account for even the plain things which was all she'd be apt to take with her," Dr. Allen ventured. "Why was her husband so hopeful all through his trials if he wasn't innocent?"

"He had the best counsel money could hire, and he knew if the worst came to the worst he could turn State's evidence." McCarty clenched his reddened hand. "Do you know how I figure it, doctor? He'd never get the chair, and he'd been promised that if he did go up for manslaughter he'd be got out quick. That's why he didn't take his conviction like a deathblow, and why he kept hoping through the three years that followed, up to the very hour when the crazy convict bashed him and he knew he was out for the count. Then maybe his eyes were opened and he saw he'd been used as a tool all the way through, and it had been meant to leave him there, or else he just turned yellow and made up his mind that whoever was in it with him should suffer, too, since there was no longer a chance for himself. It was then he sent for his lawyer and tried hard to peach, but death closed the lips of him. He never took a chance on killing old Talmadge for fifty thousand bucks! He was playing for millions, and it was worth the risk of being caught, and even a year or two in prison with sure freedom and wealth at the end. Somebody else wanted Bartholomew Talmadge out of the way bad enough to pay that high for it, and they found the doctor ready and willing for the job."

"Do you calc'late that lawyer knows who 'twas?"

"If he does, there's no way of making him speak. But we'll get back to Mrs. Wall, as she called herself later. She was a money getter and a money spender all the way through. As a girl she wanted every luxury in the world, which was natural; but she made it her purpose in life to get them, and nothing, not even crime, would have stood in her path. Whilst we were in New York, Denny, here, said to me she was that cold-blooded you'd think she could commit murder herself and not turn a hair, and he was not far from the truth. She didn't let any village love affair sidetrack her, and it was to make a rich marriage she went to New York." McCarty paused to scratch his hand once more, and continued: "She found it wasn't so easy, though, as many another has done before her. Prospective husbands didn't come flocking to that doctor's office, nor yet to wherever it was that she worked as secretary before that, so she tried the hospital; all respectable jobs enough. There were no matrimony germs there, and work was not to her liking, so she made up to the old Yates woman when she found out how rich she was, and that there would be a chance to travel and go to gay health resorts.

"'Tis in my mind that she meant to pose around in a pretty uniform, a poor but beautiful young martyr to the old lady's whims; but she found more reality to it than posing, and there were too many society girls in the running, with swell clothes and the time to ride and dance and flirt. When the doctor came along with the fine house and good income, she was glad enough to take him, though she never cared for him, you can be sure of that, or she'd never have left him flat in his trouble. 'Twas not in her make-up to care for anybody. Whether she put him up to poisoning old Talmadge because of the money that was offered or not I don't know, but she knew who was financing his trials, all right, and the same party was financing her, too. I wouldn't be surprised if she was glad when he was sent up, for even if he'd been acquitted, she'd no mind to start life again with him and the fortune promised

him, so long as she could go it alone and still keep her hold over the one who was paying."

"Blackmail!" The coroner's face was a study, and Eb Bartlett exclaimed:

"Thet's what 'twas, by crickey; an' when we find the feller thet wanted the old gentleman put out o' the way, we'll find who killed her to shet her mouth about it!"

"We'll have to find out why he was in the way, first," McCarty remarked. "That's the big question I spoke of—the one we'd have to be answering before we can point to the party who planned the first murder and committed the second with their own hands. Old Talmadge had made his millions in Wall Street, and he'd made many an enemy along with them — men that had lost everything through him, and the families of one or two who'd blown out their brains because of it; but those that still lived would not have come back strong enough to bribe the doctor nor nursed the injury that long, for 'twas many years since Bartholomew Talmadge had retired and been forgot.

"We've the heirs left, then—the niece and the two nephews. One nephew—the brother of the niece—is dead; that's proved. Denny and I — well, knowing you'd want all the dope we could get for you, doctor, we went to a friend yesterday who pulled some wires for us, if it was Sunday, and got us a peep at the death records and the wills probated. Talmadge's nephew, John Marchmont, died four years ago, in New York, leaving all his money to his sister, a widow named Vernon. She lived in London, came over here to settle the estate, and is supposed to have gone back again, but we've had no chance to trace her yet, nor the other nephew, Paul Talmadge, who disappeared right after he'd got his share of his uncle's money; he may be in China for all we know!"

"Disappeared!" Dr. Allen repeated.

"Turned all his money into small lots of securities, the kind that could be got rid of for cash anywhere, all over the world, and just dropped out of sight. His cousin, Mrs. Vernon, sold out everything here and bought British securities, which we've not been able to trace yet—through our friends who have influence, of course," McCarty amended hastily. "Bartholomew Talmadge was supposed to have left about five millions, but when the estate was settled it was found to have shrunk to less than four; a good lot, even for those times; but after the smaller bequests were taken out the nephews and the niece got just a little over a million apiece. Now, if Walsinger's defense was paid out of it by any one of the three, and Mrs. Walsinger kept going since, with her gambling and all, there'll be precious little left. We were told, Denny and me, that she'd lost a small fortune lately."

"Couldn't the woman find 'nough ways to throw money round 'thout gamblin' it?" the constable demanded.

"I'm thinking she turned to that for the excitement; to forget," responded McCarty. "'Tis speaking ill of the dead, maybe, but although she had shown she'd no heart and no conscience, her memory was still working, and the thoughts of an old man dying, helpless, in slow agony, and another young and strong behind prison bars for years, and then struck down by a crazy convict, could not have been easy to live with."

"Look here!" Dennis had evidently been following a train of thought of his own. "There's one guy we've forgot all about! That 'kiss-your-hands' fellow, 'Claude,' who wrote Mrs. Wall the two notes in the bag, inviting her to the theater. Maybe he was hired by either this nephew or niece to get in with her and kill her!"

"'Twas not the theater, Denny; you'll mind he said 'play.'" McCarty turned to him for a moment. "When I spotted a certain friend of ours the other night for what he was, I remembered he used to have a side-kick named Claude Rapideaux, a Frenchman. He's probably split from the —the syndicate, and running little semi-private games of his own in town. I've raid —I've acquaintances who know old Swifty Claude, and he hasn't the nerve to stand off a shake-down! If Mrs. Wall—or Walsinger—lost a lot lately, she'd have been needing more, and when it wasn't handed out free she put the screws on. That's the way I size up the situation. It came to a finish somehow there in the shack on the Point."

The droning sound in the air without

had increased, but none of the four in the doctor's little cottage were conscious of it in the brief pause which followed. Eb Bartlett sat tugging at his beard as though trying to drag out a reluctant idea, and finally he spoke:

"Mebbe thar was more'n one in it; the murder I mean. When we first got a talkin' it over, thar in the jail, didn't ye opine thet somethin' else hed happened in or around the cabin after the murd'rer left an' 'bout an hour before ye come, thet shuk it to its foundations?"

"Oh, I found out what that was as soon as I saw the shack in daylight," McCarty explained. "The guilty party wouldn't have tried to set fire to the cabin and gone out leaving that pole with the hook on it sticking through the window to let the rain in! The pole fell and crashed through the glass when it was jarred out of place by his hammering those pieces of wood across the door. But there we are! That's all we know, doctor, and we're sitting here, the four of us, just where we started when the least bit of a clew we've maybe overlooked would have put us on the right track."

"Look at the hand of you, Mac!" Dennis cried suddenly. "Didn't you tell me awhile ago that 'twas itching you fierce? It's all swelled up, and red, and there's little marks on it like blisters!"

"Let me see?" Dr. Allen reached forward with professional interest, and McCarty extended the afflicted member.

"'Tis nothing but a bit of an itch," he began deprecatingly, but the doctor interrupted.

"Ain't it? Mr. Doe, you've got a pretty bad attack there of *dermatitis venenata.*"

"Merciful Heaven!" Dennis closed his eyes as the horror sank in, and McCarty himself essayed a sickly grin he was far from feeling.

"Have I, so?" he asked. "It sounds like something too fashionable and expensive entirely for me to carry around with me, doctor."

"When—" Dennis was making horrible faces in the effort to control himself. "How long has he got, sir? If I let him die out here at the back of beyond—"

"Who said anything about dying?" The doctor laughed as he rose and waddled over to one of his cases of medical supplies. "It can spread, that's all, and burn and itch like sixty. *Dermatitis venenata* is just ivy poisoning. I'll wash it with hyposulphite of sodium, and then a mite of zinc ointment and a bandage will fix him finer'n a fiddle."

McCarty glanced from his swollen hand to the doctor's face and then back again, saying no word, but Dennis was voluble in his relief.

"Glory be to God! But where would he get it? Ivy grows high up on walls—"

"Not this kind." Dr. Allen's tone became a shade didactic. "It's called *rhus toxicodendron.*"

"It is, now?" Dennis asked with awed respect. "And where would he be getting into this *rhus*—what you said—around here? What's it look like?"

"It has three dark, shiny leaves and grows low to the ground and thick," the doctor replied. "I never noticed any of it around the Cove."

"By the twenty-four feet of the twelve apostles!" McCarty's ringing tones broke in upon him. "Hurry, doctor, or leave it be for now, we've other work before us. Constable, got that horse pistol with you that you pointed at me in the shack that night?"

"I hev!" Eb produced the article in question and his staring eyes almost popped from his head. "What be we a goin' to do? Ye don't mean—ye hain't got—"

"I've got the clew that's been under our eyes this week past, but little did I know it till I put my hand on it!" McCarty gave a quick glance at the finished bandage and started for the door. "You've got it on the sheriff at last! Come on and work fast when I give you the word, for he's waiting for you, the man who killed Mrs. Wall!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

A SOUL GONE FREE.

IT was pitch black outside as the four sprang down the steps of the doctor's cottage, and the wind arose in a moaning swirl about their ears.

"Why—he's a goin' down to the shore!" Eb Bartlett exclaimed between rheumatic hops. "Thar's nothin' down thar but the empty cabin—"

"Never you mind where he's goin, Eb!" the doctor panted, holding his rotund stomach with both hands as he galloped valiantly along. "He's on the right track, you can bet!"

Dennis was just at McCarty's heels, his lean body and homely, lantern-jawed face quivering with the tense joy of the chase. No glimmering of the truth dawned on him as they reached the strip of beach at the end of the street and turned toward the lonely cabin on the Point, but he followed with the implicit, unreasoning faith which had never yet been shaken.

A blinding flash of white lightning streaked the sky high above the Sound revealing for a fleeting instant the vast stretch of angrily tossing waters, but the seething roar of the rollers sweeping up to their very feet was lost in the crash of thunder, distant but portentous, which reverberated about them.

They had passed the cluster of fishermen's huts and were plowing through the loose sand with heads bent low against the rising gale when the deep-toned barking of a dog close at hand made McCarty halt abruptly and wheel about to the others.

"That's Mr. Thompson's dog and there's a little, low light in the house. We'll stop by for a minute, for there's something he may be able to tell us after all."

A second blaze of lightning outlined the terrace steps leading up to the path down which the setter loped inquiringly, and as the darkness closed in once more a door back of the porch opened wide and a broad, softly luminous glow shone forth. Silhouetted sharply against the haze of light Thompson's tall, slim figure sheathed in a togalike dressing gown stood erect and motionless.

"Who is there?" he called in a low, clear tone which yet carried above the moaning wind.

"Down, Lisa!" McCarty muttered. "Down! It's us, Mr. Thompson: Mac Doe and Dr. Allen and Ed Bartlett. We want your advice; it's about the Hatherlys. I hope you'll excuse us for disturbing you with the storm coming up and all—"

He had raised his voice as he addressed the artist and seemed to be talking on in garrulous haste, but he had increased his pace as well, and the others followed.

"Certainly. Come in. Here, Lisa, old girl, it's all right! You did not disturb me." Thompson stood aside to let them pass, and they filed into a long, low-ceilinged room lighted only by a single, tall, torchlike lamp, which flared in the gust of wind, revealing massively carved settles and chests placed at intervals against a somber-toned wall unrelieved by any break in its dull surface save that of the high-arched, heavily shrouded windows. Rushes slithered beneath their feet as they advanced, and with the closing of the door the leaping flame of the lamp died to a flickering glow.

Dennis muttered something beneath his breath and Eb Bartlett stared and gaped, but Dr. Allen's beady eyes were fixed upon their host, and McCarty bowed gravely.

"I was reading, as you see." Thompson laid his pipe and a great leather-bound volume upon the refectory table that stood in the center of the room and moved to a tall cabinet in the corner, upon which the heavy carving seemed to writhe grotesquely in the smoldering light. "I shall be glad to give you any advice or assistance in my power, but meanwhile draw up chairs for yourselves and let me offer you a little refreshment, for a wild night is upon us. I sincerely hope the Hatherlys are not in any difficulty."

He turned, bearing a tall decanter and glasses, and McCarty replied significantly:

"They aren't, not yet, but you were the nearest of the people they go with and you'd likely be able to tell us a few things, sir, that even the doctor here wouldn't know."

"I will tell you anything I can." Thompson poured a clear, rich fluid like liquid amber into the five slender glasses and replaced the decanter on the table. "I am afraid it will be no help to you, however, if you are referring to the tragedy of a week ago. Doctor, this is ripely aged and mellow, for it has lain in the cellars here since long before I came. You see, constable, you need have no legal scruples about touching it, and our friends from the city will not

find its like there. Gentlemen, your health!"

He drank slowly, as though each drop of the smooth, potent liquor were precious, but when he had drained his glass it slipped from his fingers and fell with a tinkling crash upon the reed-strewn floor.

"Ah!" It was more a sigh of regret than an exclamation. Then he shrugged and drew forward a tall, cathedral-backed chair. "It doesn't matter. That is good old stuff, isn't it?"

Dennis blinked as the creeping fire stole through his veins and the constable drew the back of his gnarled hand across his mouth while the doctor nodded slowly and McCarty seated himself.

"It would be a rare drink in any day, sir, but now 'tis a gift of the gods."

"The gods bear strange gifts sometimes." A half smile curved Thompson's lips. "But you wanted to ask me something about the Hatherlys?"

"About Mrs. Hatherly, sir." McCarty darted a swift glance of warning to the others. "When was it did she tell Mrs. *Walsinger* you were a neighbor of hers here at the Cove?"

There was a moment of electrified silence, and then the doctor's chair creaked and the constable's gaunt frame jerked spasmodically, but the robed figure in the tall chair did not move.

"I do not know when Mrs. Hatherly told her." The reply came at last in perfect self-possession and there seemed to be even a trace of amusement in his tones. "Did you think that the purpose of your visit here to-night was not clear to me from the moment I saw you on the path? I did not know when you would come, but I have been ready."

"You mean—" McCarty's gaze turned to the decanter, and Dr. Allen cried out in sudden horror, but their host lifted one slim hand reassuringly.

"Only one glass was—prepared, gentlemen, and it lies broken at your feet. Do not disturb yourself, doctor. It is a drug beyond the range of your pharmacopœia and there is no known antidote. You will be interested, I am sure, in the symptoms as they manifest themselves, and I will describe them to you. I am rather curious about them myself. It will be an unusual experience."

"My God!" The doctor's fat face was ashen. "Thompson, tell me what it is you have taken!"

"The way out, doctor, the way to freedom. My name is not Thompson, but Talmadge."

"Then—then you're under arrest!" The constable came suddenly to life.

"Can you arrest the departure of a spirit?" Talmadge smiled once more and a slight shudder shook him. "It is coming, doctor, a faint creeping chill like icy needles. If there is anything you wish to know we had better waste no time."

A searing, white streak of light stabbed through an opening in the draperies of one of the windows and a peal of thunder crashed down. When it had died hollowly away they heard the soft pad of feet outside and a dog's anxious whine at the door.

"Poor Lisa!" Talmadge murmured. "You will take care of her for me, doctor? She has been a patient, devoted friend."

"You are Paul, nephew of the late Bartholomew Talmadge?" McCarty asked when the doctor had nodded solemnly.

"Yes. My two cousins had quarreled with him long before his death, but I managed to keep in his good graces and I confidently expected to be his sole heir. He had given me over eight hundred thousand dollars in varying amounts urging me to follow in his footsteps and play the market, learning by experience. He offered me no advice, and when I went to him overcome by chagrin at my losses he only chuckled and gave me more. He was determined that I should become a hard-headed, mercenary financier, a gambler like himself—I! I learned to follow the loathsome market reports sedulously and calculate my supposed losses to a penny, but I put away all that he gave me, waiting until I could realize my dream. Doctor, my feet are growing numb, but there is no pain, and my head is clear. I can move them still, however. They have not ceased to obey the dictate of my brain." He thrust one slim, slippered foot forward over the dry rushes and regarded it with impersonal interest.

Dennis shivered, and the constable's beard stirred with the quivering of his chin.

"What was this dream of yours, Mr. Talmadge?"

"A home abroad—a palace of æsthetic splendor, graced with masterpieces of the ages. There I could paint and gather about me the rarest souls of the artistic world at their creative best; other painters, sculptors, poets, actors. It would have been a salon of genius, of great endeavor and achievement, of undying renown. I did not delude myself with the idea that I might become famous; I would have been content to remain a pygmy among giants if I could have but lived in that dynamic atmosphere. I would have been their host, their familiar, in tune with their colossal aspirations. It was intoxicating, stupendous, eh? It would have taken more millions even than I thought my uncle possessed, but his fortune would be the nucleus and I would find other kindred souls.

"The old man would not die, though, and he was growing more impossible every day. What was a mere wisp of dried-up humanity, a shred of skin drawn over crumbling tones, to stand between me and my dream! I can no longer move my feet, doctor. They are like stone, and the numbness is creeping up to my knees. It is cold!"

The lightning was playing in vivid sword-thrusts at the window now, and the thunder roared and rumbled like the crash of battle.

"If you ain't fooling us, Talmadge, you are making murderers of us!" Dr. Allen cried out. "You can't expect us to sit here helpless, tied hand and foot, and watch a man die!"

"I did, and I was not helpless," Talmadge smiled. "When I made up my mind that the old man must go, I began to study his physician. He was young, clever, mercenary and unscrupulous, slavishly devoted to a voluptuous, luxury-loving wife more money-mad than he. I approached him at last, and the deal was made, but he broke one of the conditions of the agreement later when the moment of his exposure came by confiding in his wife. From that hour the woman has dogged me; I have never been free from her importunities, her clutching, reaching fingers, her cry, 'Give! Give!' My dream was shattered, my life in her hands, my soul in bondage."

The wind rose in a whistling shriek, and the dog cried softly at the door, while the flame of the lamp flared up in an unseen draft and then died.

Talmadge shuddered again. His face was ghastly, and the tips of the long, slender, tapering fingers that clutched the arms of his chair were turning blue, but he held himself erect.

"I must hurry," he mumured. "You know the terms of my uncle's will, the dwindling of his fortune; you can fathom the bitter disappointment which came to me. It had been part of my arrangement with Walsinger that in the event of his crime being discovered his wife was to be spirited away and kept in luxurious seclusion until he was free.

"I kept that part of the bargain until his death, and then she spread her wings like a noxious moth and fluttered to the spendthrift life which her knowledge of my secret forced me to provide the means of opening to her. Doctor, my limbs are rigid, the cold is creeping up about my thighs, and there are strange lights before my eyes."

Dennis groaned audibly, and McCarty silenced him with a look.

"You had no intention of getting influence to try to free Walsinger after his conviction, had you, Mr. Talmadge?"

"Naturally not. He had served his turn, but it was necessary to keep him silent by repeated promises, to keep him hoping and believing, and it grew irksome. His death was a relief, but in all the five years that have passed since, the woman's demands have increased until now there is a bare pittance left, and I was weary of that shadow always at my elbow. It had been part of our arrangement after her husband's death that I would go to her at her command; she was never to intrude her presence upon me, but when Mrs. Hatherly innocently enough asked me to dinner a fortnight ago to meet 'Mrs. Wall' I realized that the crisis had come, for the woman had recently made demands upon me which I

could not meet, and for the first time I ignored her summons. I declined the invitation and waited, meaning to defy her, to put an end one way or another to a situation that had become intolerable."

The lightning was less vivid and the thunder rolling away in the distance, but rain was sweeping in great gusts against the windows and the wind soughed in the trees.

"It is growing dark." Talmadge raised one hand slowly, waveringly to his eyes, then it fell limply once more upon the arm of his chair. "Your faces are dim. The time is short now. Last Monday I was reading here in this room with Lisa at my feet when the squall broke and all at once the dog rose growling and bristling. Some one came softly up on the porch, a hand fumbled with the latch, the door opened—it was she!

"In a few short, terse sentences she reiterated her demand and even as she spoke I realized the futility of defiance. I was desperate; a plan sprang full-fledged into my mind, and with it a picture of that deserted cabin out there.

"I knew that she must have come here in secret, and my old servant was away, but might return at any moment. My unwelcome visitor would not have been tricked into accompanying me to that cabin, but there was another way, and the storm would aid me, for no one would be apt to be abroad in that howling gale. It takes long to tell it, but it all happened in a few moments.

"Do you see those great brass candlesticks on the mantel? I temporized with the woman, waited until I caught her off her guard, and then I struck! I had never lifted my hand in violence before, but she went down like a log, and after an instant, in which I stood stunned myself at the irrevocable step I had taken, I worked with feverish haste.

"I tore off my dressing gown, flung it into that closet, and locked Lisa in there with a stern command to be silent. She has been trained to perfect obedience, and I knew she would not stir, no matter what she heard. Then I put on a heavy ulster, extinguished the light and picked up my senseless burden—the burden which I had borne in spirit for these interminable years.

"It was dark outside, a darkness that was impenetrable, but I could feel my way. I knew every inch of the path. There was no sound but the roar of wind and water, no movement about me but the trees and shrubbery twisting before the blast. The woman's body was heavier than I thought, and I had taken it up clumsily. One of her arms was swinging, dangling, the hand almost trailing on the ground, but I staggered down to the terrace steps leading to the beach.

"The tide was high, yet still coming in, and I knew it would obliterate my footsteps for all time, but that journey seemed never ending. Once I stumbled over a half-buried log of driftwood and almost fell, but caught myself up and plowed on, the weight in my arms growing heavier and heavier.

"I skirted the edge of the marsh, and as it curved outward sharply I knew that I was nearing the cabin. I broke into a staggering run then, plunging through the loose sand, and at last—at last I reached the door.

"It was open, banging in the wind, and I crossed the threshold, eased my burden to the floor, and turned to fumble for the lantern which I had left there full of oil two days before. The rain and stinging salt wind must have revived the woman, for when I had lighted the lantern and turned again she was struggling to rise, gazing about her in a bewildered fashion. I sprang to the door, closed it, and with my back against it I told her what my slavery had meant throughout those years, but that the end had come—death should free me from her!

"Death! I am a dead man myself now, doctor—that numb rigidity holds me in a vise from my waist down, and only—only my heart still beats and my brain lives."

His voice had grown weaker, higher, and McCarty commanded hoarsely:

"Go on!"

"What need? She read my purpose in my eyes, and for the first time I saw fear in her own. A babbling shriek rose to her lips as I advanced upon her, but after that

I think she fought in desperate silence—I think, because there was a tumultuous roaring in my ears and a lurid haze arose before me, obscuring everything except her form, and my brain was on fire. I was not conscious that I had seized the boat hook and struck once again until she dropped limply before me. Then the haze slowly cleared, and I saw her gasp once or twice, and her great brown eyes opened, became fixed, staring into my own.

"At that moment the door blew open, and as I dropped the boathook and staggered toward it the lantern flickered and went out. My own sentient thought was to rush from the hideous presence, that loathsome thing which living flesh had all at once become, but when I reached the doorway and looked toward my house I saw a light in the rear.

"My old servant had returned. I must wait until she retired. I closed the door and crouched within, wondering if those dead eyes could pierce the darkness, if that awful scarlet stain were creeping toward me. I—I don't know how long that dreadful vigil lasted, but it seemed countless hours. I was like a man half drugged, a lethargy stole over me with the reaction from my fury, and I must have gone a little mad, for her living hold upon me, her domination, had strengthened, not relaxed. I could feel the bonds tightening, the weight settling heavier than before, and the conviction came to me that I had not freed myself, after all—I had only fastened her shackles upon my spirit forever!

"At last there came a rumble of thunder, the first faint streak of lightning, and with it my brain cleared like magic, and I knew what must be done. I found the lantern, relighted it after pouring a little oil from it into an old can, whittled shavings, strewed them upon the floor, poured the oil upon them, and was about to touch a match to it when I remembered the door. There were some nails in a keg beside it, thick pieces of seasoned driftwood were heaped near the stove, and a stone worn smooth by ages in the water held down a pile of yellowed newspapers on a shelf. I dropped a handful of nails in my coat pocket, together with the stone, tucked two pieces of wood under my arm, and lighted my trail of fire.

"All the time I had avoided that motionless figure lying there, but I was conscious that the fixed gaze of those glassy eyes had followed my every move, was following me then as I extinguished the lantern and sprang for the door. The little spurt of flame had begun to hiss and crackle, and a spiral of thin, pungent smoke arose, but it was not that which stifled me—it was the mounting horror overwhelming me at last.

"The storm had burst in all its fury, and the rain slashed down like flailing whips as I hammered those wooden bars across the door. The sound of my strokes was lost in the crash and roll of thunder, but as I drove the last nail it seemed to me that something moved within the cabin. I fancied I heard a dull thud and the crash as of glass. Had the dead awakened?"

Talmadge's eyes had opened wide, were staring straight before him, and his rigid body was drawn up, moving slowly forward in his chair. The wind swirled, wailing down the chimney, and in the ghastly flickering red glow beads of sweat stood out like drops of blood upon his brow. His listeners sat as though turned to stone, and even McCarty held his breath as the graying lips moved once more.

"I flung the stone into the Sound and plunged madly back toward my house, which was in darkness now. I do not know how I reached it, for I was beyond a conscious sense of direction, but the flashes of lightning guided me, and once up the path and inside my door I moved calmly, rationally.

"I released Lisa, caught up my dressing gown, and went to my room. I do not think sleep came to me—it was a sort of coma, in which the woman came and sat at my side. She has never left me since, sleeping or waking. She walked beside me when I went to find you, doctor, at the jail the next morning—she clung to me when I talked with the man Doe in my garden the following day—she was close at hand this afternoon when again he came. I saw her face ever before me."

The rigid body relaxed and he settled

back inertly in his chair, his head falling upon his breast, and only the labored, hoarse breathing told that he still lived. Dr. Allen started to rise, but the dog's soft, appealing whine came from the other side of the door, and at the longing cry Talmadge lifted his head.

"I can—no longer see you; even—*her* face has faded—but she is still here. I can feel—her presence. Soon—soon I shall be free from it—forever. I told her that—there in the cabin. Whatever—I have done I—have paid for. Something—is clutching at my heart and—I cannot lift my hands to—tear it away. The cold is creeping—creeping up. But where is she? She has gone—gone!"

His breast heaved convulsively, then was still, and his eyes closed as the head fell forward once more. The wind moaned, dying away, and from beneath the door came Lisa's whimpering wail.

McCarty rose heavily.

"Doctor, Denny and me will be getting away now; the rest is up to you and the constable here. The case is finished; you've got the murderer of Mrs. Wall."

Constable Bartlett shook his head solemnly.

"Ye ain't got no ways o' shacklin' a speerit, ner handcuffin' a ghost, ner puttin' a soul in prison. We got the shell o' Paul Talmadge, but his soul is free at last."

CHAPTER XXIV.

TIMOTHY M'CARTY, ESQ.

THE sun beamed down graciously upon the smiling, tranquil countryside, and a cool, salt, refreshing breeze blew in their faces as the doctor's rattletrap car with his own rotund body squeezed in behind the wheel, McCarty beside him and Dennis clinging to the running-board, bowled along the highroad toward Plimptonport. Every available space on the little car was piled with luggage, for the two vacation seekers were going home.

"I mind"—Dennis broke the silence, speaking with the utter disregard of absorbed introspection—"I mind that when Mac and me was chugging along in that tub of a dory before the engine died on us, he said to me: 'As long as there are men and women in the world there'll be love, good or bad, and the desire for more than they can gain rightfully, and the fear of what they've done or what somebody's got on them, and when there's no other way out they'll turn to crime.' True for him, and though he's—"

"Denny Riordan, you'll oblige me by not recalling what we said in that boat!" McCarty interrupted sternly. "If you'd keep your tongue to yourself and your eyes and hands on your job, we'd never have been washed up on the shore."

"And we'd never have found out who killed Mrs. Wall," the doctor interjected. "Her swollen hand and the irritation of the skin didn't appear to me to be anything but a bruise from her struggle with the murderer, and even the autopsy didn't show that the abrasion on the back of her head was caused, as it must have been, by the blow of the candlestick. I calc'lated she'd struck it in falling."

"We were the lot of us blind as bats," McCarty remarked. "I ought to have guessed from the first, for Talmadge's house was the only one near, and I knew from the shoes of her she'd never walked to the cabin, but been carried there, though I thought 'twas from up back somewhere. Then Mrs. Hatherly told us that Mrs. Lowden had not been able to come to dinner because she'd got ivy poisoning, and Talmadge told me yesterday that a few days before that dinner was given Mrs. Lowden and her husband had come to tea with him and to look at his pictures. I didn't get the connection, though the dead woman's hand had puzzled me since I first laid eyes on it; and 'twas only when my own began to swell and itch and burn like the devil and all, and you told me what ailed it, that I remembered dropping my match in among the leaves of that shiny, low-growing plant bordering the walk down from Talmadge's house, and the truth came to me."

"You told me in Dalesboro that this was not a case where a body could look ahead; that you'd have to feel your way—and feel it you did, Mac!" Dennis glanced down

at the bandaged hand on his friend's knee. "'Tis strange that poison, of one sort or another, has followed this case from start to finish. It was the beginning of Talmadge's downfall, and the end of it."

McCarty shook his head ruefully as the highroad merged into a quaint, narrow, cobbled street and the weatherbeaten houses of Plimptonport crowded about them.

"When I talked to Talmadge on Wednesday I thought it was queer he was so anxious to tell me in every detail what he had done on the evening of the murder, and how he spent every minute, when I'd not so much as asked. He made another crack, too, just before I left, that ought to have put me wise, when he raved about his garden and how peaceful and contented he was, and with his next breath said he was going away for good and all.

"'Twas the natural instinct of the guilt inside him, to start the ball rolling for his get-away, but he pulled it too soon, and on the first one who would listen to him. That's the oldest mistake in the world for a crook to make, and anybody that's had experience—" He checked himself, and added hurriedly: "There's some credit to any one of us in this, but just bull luck that I put my hand on that deceitful, shiny little plant and it stung me."

"Speaking of bull luck"—Dennis's introspective mood was still upon him—"will you remember, Mac, that Nor—we were told about Mrs. Wall's gambling, that she never lost until she bulled her luck too far? 'Twas what she did the night of the storm, and it turned on her, wiping her out. Talmadge spoke truth, I'm thinking. She must have rode him hard and long, and whatever he'd done he paid for."

They pulled up beside the platform of the little station just as the way train chugged noisily in, and while Dennis scrambled about collecting their impedimenta McCarty held out his hand.

"Good-by, doctor. 'Twas a pleasure you gave us, letting us work with you, and if ever you come to New York—"

He stopped, remembering his incognito, but Dr. Allen shook his head gravely.

"I'll never get there. I'd like it, but folks for miles around depend on me to bring 'em in the world and ease their way out of it, stopping what pain and suffering I can in between, and until my own time comes my place is back there, to the Cove. But mebbe you'll come again some time?" His kindly voice rang with wistful sincerity. "Barnstable's got to take a back seat now, and by the time Eb Bartlett gets through lording it over the sheriff he'll begin to think he found the truth out himself and landed the murderer, but it was you did it all. I won't forget you, and I hope you'll come out our way the next time you take a vacation."

They wrung his plump hand and hurried to their train, craning their necks through the window as they moved off for a last glimpse of his friendly, benign countenance. Then as they settled in their seats Dennis glanced upward at the paraphernalia overflowing the rack above their heads, and remarked:

"A vacation, the good little man called it? 'Twas a fine fishing trip for you, Mac Doe, with luck coming your way and wind and tide running free."

"It was a bigger fish we caught than ever we expected, Denny, and that's no lie; but I'm Mac Doe no longer, thanks be! You'll go back to fighting fires and me squabbling with my tenants like the private citizen and landed proprietor that I am, no less! Timothy McCarty again!" He sighed with deep content. "Timothy McCarty, Esq., of New York!"

THE END.

THE TOAST

OUR lives are now each other's cup,
Our love the golden wine to drink,
And at the table of our hearts—we clink!

Oscar C. Williams.

On the Dotted Line

By WINIFRED DUNCAN WARD

"SO you want three thousand bucks by Friday night, eh?" said Mr. Jacob Isaacs, banker, to Mr. Julien Farber, theatrical producer. "Well, my boy, you won't get it."

Isaac's small hard eyes shifted from the club window and came to rest upon the long, handsome and still youthful face of Broadway's newest comet—for no less a word describes the sudden shooting into the limelight, out of the nowhere, of Mr. Julien Farber, the producer of "Fan-Tan—the world's snappiest musical comedy *de luxe*"—as it was modestly described upon the billboards.

Julien, with his easy smile and his nonchalant assumption that nothing he undertook could fail, had become almost overnight a personality accepted along the gay White Way. "Charming," the women called him. "Quite a boy," the old managers said, smiling at his optimism and his poise, both born, they knew only too well, of inexperience. And every one was interested to see how long he and his extraordinary success would last. And no one was quite sure, for he had a knack at handling people, especially women; and that, in the complicated give and take of casting for musical comedy, was an asset well worth consideration.

Shortly after his emergence out of obscurity Julien had taken to patronizing the Black and Tan Café—for this was in the days just before prohibition, when a cabaret was still a cabaret—and so gay and amusing and altogether unusual were the groups of theatrical folks whom he succeeded in collecting around his table there that it became quite the habit for habitués of the Black and Tan to say, after the theater was out:

"Let's go up to the Circle—Julien's evening on, you know."

And once there, there was always much speculation as to the origin of Julien, with

his black hair, his slim, graceful figure, his unending smile and his slightly Semitic cast of countenance.

He was always pleasant. He was pleasant now, as the old banker launched his ultimatum in regard to "Fan-Tan," and although it meant instant bankruptcy unless he got the three thousand dollars, he did not show it by so much as the flicker of an eyelid. He merely smiled—lit another cigarette and crossed his knees—and although he was too slim by half for the huge armchair he lounged in, he managed somehow to give the impression of filling it.

"It's not," Isaacs continued less harshly, "that I don't like you and what you've done, Farber. I do; I like your nerve. I like the way you handle things, and after the success you made of our first venture I was glad to give you your fling on this one. All right; you spent my money like water, and you've lost hands down. The experience will be good for you—next time you will go slower. But I'm too old to go deep into this gambling game. When the show fails next Saturday I'll stand the deficit up to our original figure. After that I quit cold, and you'll have to face the music. Do you get me? Is it clear?"

"A radiophone couldn't be clearer," said Julien. "The only flaw in your reasoning being that 'Fan-Tan' is not going to fail."

"Stuff!" exclaimed the banker. "It *has* failed, and your only chance is to pull out quick and not sink anything more. Got anything left to sink, by the way?"

"No," answered Julien, still smiling pleasantly.

"Humph! What 'll you do then?"

"Well," said Julien thoughtfully, "if the show did go under, which it isn't going to, I frankly confess I'd have to beat it—leave New York."

"Where to, in Heaven's name?" Isaacs spoke with the accent of one to whom leaving New York was synonymous with death.

"I've got a little house out in Ohio," explained Julien briefly. "I suppose at a pinch I could go and live in it; but as you know"—and his voice lifted as though escaping from something it couldn't bear to talk about—"as you know, I believe that if the show had another chance—even one week to recoup in—it would pull through."

The old man exploded.

"Don't sit there," he said, "and say that over and over like a parrot—you make me nervous."

"Of course I do," retorted Julien. "You're afraid I'm right."

"Now listen to me," and Isaacs leaned forward with the gesture of one who is dealing patiently with something strongly resembling idiocy. "There's only one thing will save that show, and that is to put in a specialty that would pack the house for two weeks, bring publicity and turn the tide overnight. Well, you can't get that specialty. You're broke, and I won't give you the money, and at the moment you can't get it anywhere else. Now what are you going to do about it?"

"I had a little scheme," said Julien, "for getting the specialty first and raising the money on that."

"Indeed," observed the banker. "Something from small time, perhaps—a banjo solo, or a tall-timber act, eh?"

"No," said Julien. "I thought it might be nice to get Estralita, the new Arabian dancer."

Mr. Jacob Isaacs took his cigar out of his mouth and stared at his companion in stupefaction.

"Are you aware," he said coldly, "that Estralita is under contract with Sterling for a year's work in grand opera at three thousand a week?"

"Yes," said Julien smoothly; "that was why I wanted the three thousand."

Isaacs rose heavily, as though about to depart, and then sat down again on the edge of his chair and with one stout hand on either knee regarded his companion.

"Young man," he said, "your faith in human nature is touching. Do you mean to sit there and tell me that you don't know that Estralita is the most cold-blooded commercial proposition that ever came over the Atlantic? Don't you know how she cabled Sterling at the last moment, when he had the new opera all framed up, and the cast picked and the advertising out, that she wouldn't be able to make it unless he raised her a thousand a week?

Don't you know that she's been a drawing card all over Europe and has danced for three kings? And do you think a woman like that will break a grand opera engagement in a country where she's never been seen before, to come and bury herself in your little two-for-a-cent musical comedy—and at the *same figure?* Don't talk to me—don't say anything, or I'll lose my temper. Why, boy, you couldn't even get an appointment to see her, let alone get her to talk business with you." Rising, Isaacs put out his cigar with a gesture of finality.

"As a matter of fact," said Julien patiently, "she's dining with me to-night at the Black and Tan."

Isaacs stopped abruptly at the door and came back a step.

"*What?*"

"At the Black and Tan," repeated Julien steadily.

The banker regarded him astutely.

"How did you pull that off?" he asked.

Julien smiled persuasively.

"Well, you see, we met coming over on the steamer—the last night, unfortunately, but I made the most of it. She seemed to rather take to me. In short, I'm hoping—" He paused and, stroking his hair thoughtfully, smiled at his indignant senior.

"Is she beautiful?" inquired Isaacs, in whom the fires of youth were not yet dead.

"She is," answered Julien. "She's a raging beauty. Will you join us?"

The old man chuckled and looked at his protégé with something faintly bordering on admiration.

"If only my son," he said irritably, "had some of your colossal nerve— Yes, I'll come—and I tell you what I'll do," he added, with a sudden gleam of humor in his eye. "I'll do this for you. If you can show me, before the dinner is over, Estralita's signature at the bottom of a two weeks' contract at three thousand, I'll advance you the three thousand. And I tell you right now, my boy, you're up against the most cold-blooded European proposition that you could possibly have picked, and you won't get away with it. I know these Orientals."

"So do I," said Julien modestly. "At least I think I do."

But Mr. Jacob Isaacs was already beyond earshot, and as his limousine purred past the club windows the smile on Julien's face relaxed into a thoughtful whistle.

Avoiding the telephone in the smoking room, he went around the corner to a public booth, and gave a month's notice to his landlord, and the intimation of a brief holiday to his Japanese valet, and a tip to his tailor to lay off a while on that fur-lined overcoat—precautions, he told himself, which, if Estralita had been an American girl, he wouldn't have taken, but with these Orientals one is never quite sure. As he reëntered the club, still smiling amiably at every one, there floated on the secret background of his mind a little picture, like the shadowy outlines on a film that has been discarded, but still tells a tale if it is held against the light—the picture of a dreary house at the end of a lonely street in a dull Midwestern town—a town where life is as stagnant as a pool—where little, dreary people drag out lives that do not count, and where ambition and youth languish year after year and die.

"You've got to get her," he told himself quietly. "You've simply got to get her."

II.

WHEN rumor had floated out the news to the habitués of the Black and Tan that Estralita, the Oriental dancer, was to be Julien's guest at dinner, there was a rush for seats, and none to be had, owing to the activities of various omniscient gentlemen, who, having got the news on the Q. T., had ordered their tables well ahead for a good look at the celebrity.

"He's going to nab her for 'Fan-Tan,'" said the wise ones, putting two and two together; and every one was agog to see it happen.

"They tell me," remarked Bennie Isaacs, genus lounge lizard, who, upon hearing of his father's sudden good fortune, had insisted upon sharing it, regardless of the fact that he was not invited—"they tell me that she has three hundred Oriental twists never seen in this country till she brought 'em. Fancy that—she's some little humdinger, I'll say—what?"

"Don't talk nonsense," said his father, looking at his watch with irritation.

"Fact," insisted Bennie. ."Three hundred whirlwind twists and kinks—new—never been seen before, so they say. Some little technique, I'll say—some little bird she must be. Paper says she's the only genuine Oriental dancer in this country. Why, she's got an Arab desert dance they say makes your hair stand on end."

A sudden murmur ran around the room.

"There she is."

"Here she comes."

"What a beauty!"

"She's grown stout."

"No, no—why, when I saw her in Budapest—"

And in a hush so sudden that the laying down of knives and spoons was like the crash of a cymbal, doing homage to her beauty, Estralita stepped slowly, proudly, before them all—a slender regal creature, in her leopard furs. She crossed the room with head erect—young, triumphant, sparkling as a glass that life has filled to the brim with champagne.

Outside, a snowstorm was chasing itself in ghostly loops around Columbus Circle, and the wind howled against the window panes, and Estralita had sparkling snow crystals in her blue-black hair, yet she unfolded before them as fresh and radiant as though she had just stepped from the Orient.

And behind her Julien came, smiling, graceful, silent.

The two men at the corner table rose with one accord, each remembering, terrified, that the famous beauty spoke no English, and each mustering together whatever French he could recall. But she surprised them.

"Ah," she said, when introductions were over and she had let the leopard skin slip down from her creamy shoulders and flaming orange gown—"eet iss good to be inside. You haf here a cold climate—what?"

And although this remark was not in itself brilliant, a hum of enthusiasm swept the nearest tables, and a sense of calm pervaded Julien's guests. Thank Heaven, she spoke English!

"Well, say, I hope," said Bennie Isaacs, stroking his black mustache and avoiding Julien's eye—"I hope I'm not butting in, or anything of that sort—I thought you probably wouldn't mind my being here."

"Mind?" repeated Estralita, opening her huge black eyes at Bennie for the first time. "I deed not notice eet"—and having thus crushed him, she concentrated her attention upon the banker and on Julien. For although Oriental, she had a surprising acumen at picking out the grain from the chaff, and after all, her manner clearly said, the staff of life is very similar in America and Arabia.

"This is no place for me," said Bennie Isaacs under his breath, and, rising astutely, he departed.

"Ah," cried Estralita, suddenly lifting her head—"ze museek—*mais* what eet ees? Ah, *ma cherie*—" and impetuously stroking Julien's hand, she made them listen to the jazz the orchestra was playing.

"Zat leetle tune," she said, "ees ze one ze orchestra play upon ze boat—when I sail for ze first time under your Statue of Liberty—ees it not so?"

She turned to Julien with sparkling eyes.

"I asked them to play it for you," he replied.

She leaped to her feet.

"I knew eet—he is a young man extrordinaire." She turned to the banker. "Hand in ze hand we sail into your country—always when I hear ze tune I will think of ze handsome Julien. Now for ze reward. We will dance, eh?"

With a gesture which made all turn their heads she stepped out on the floor. As they whirled through the mazes of a popular one-step she talked to Julien, gayly, affectionately. She had the good taste to follow his lead as simply as though a thousand steps were not tingling in her feet, eager to be let out. For the moment she was a lovely, languourous creature—his gracious guest—and as docile as a child.

"Eet was charming of you not to forget," she whispered as they danced.

"And still more charming of you to remember," said Julien.

"Ah—indeed—I must tell you—three

engagements were—how do you say—*casse*—broken—zat I might see you zees evening."

Julien took a deep breath and leaned his handsome head a trifle nearer hers.

"And now," he said, "I want you to break another engagement for me—your engagement at the opera."

She kept on dancing, but he saw her eyes narrow suddenly—was it with surprise, or anger, or pleasure? He could not tell. Something chill crept over him—he suddenly felt the creature in his arms hardening into something cleverer and more powerful than he. Yet there had been no outward change—she still followed his lead, smiling, soft, and at her ease.

"Ah, *oui*," she said at last, as though having thought it all out in that brief pause—"eet would be *charmant* to dance in 'Fan-Tan.' Zey say eet is a great success—and how much do you, zen, offer me?"

"Three thousand—what you are getting now," said Julien calmly; "but with the guarantee of a longer run and more publicity."

She laughed at him—unmistakably a hard, amused, polite laugh.

"Make eet four t'ousand," she murmured, "and eet might not be so beeg a joke."

"Is there no other inducement at three thousand?" said Julien in his softest voice. "I rather thought—"

She cut him short.

"Ah, my friend—eet ees not wise to think—eet confuse the brain."

"I knew it," said Mr. Isaacs, Sr., grimly, watching from the table. "She's turned the poor boob down."

But no one else suspected this, for when they returned Julien was chatting amiably about his travels in the East, and she was smiling and nodding with the air of one who is entranced.

"I'm awfully keen to know," said Mr. Isaacs, since Julien made no unnecessary attempts at conversation, "just what part of Arabia you were born in. I've traveled there a bit myself."

Estralita glanced at him, amused, and shrugged one lovely shoulder.

"Born?" she cried. "Vell, my friend, why take me back so far? But since you do—I vill tell you. I was born in a leetle veelage named Sirion, on ze edge of ze desert eet ees, a tiny house I was born in; eet stood on ze long white road zat leads to desert and ze mysterious south."

"It must have been lonely," observed Mr. Isaacs, to whom all places outside the more congested districts of New York seemed somewhat primitive.

"Yes," continued Estralita, in the voice of one who looks into the past reluctantly, "eet must have been. But my heart is there—for eet was there my dear, dear mother died; she was my only friend."

Tears of genuine affection filled her eyes.

"Tell us about—your father," said Julien, changing the subject. "Was he Arabian?"

"Ah *oui!*" She brightened and laughed. "He was a—well, een your country he would have been called a 'traveling salesman.'"

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Isaacs. "What a come-down."

"Not at all," said Estralita, raising her wine glass and looking through it at the banker's profile, "for in Arabia ze traveling salesman he ees a very important person; he travel on ze camel, sometime he have five camel. He go out into ze desert, an' when ze moon ees full we climb up into ze blue cupola on ze top of our leetle wooden house and watch for him."

Julien looked up sharply from his cigarette.

"A *blue* cupola?" he asked with interest.

"*Oui*," she continued, gayly, as though enjoying these far-off memories, "such a strange leetle house eet was—there was a leetle path all made of white, white stones, and up ze path ze camel would come at twilight and down climb my father wiz ze dates—and figs—and silks—ah—"

"Imported silks, eh?" said Isaacs, who was always interested in trade. She caught him up with a laugh.

"Ah, you should have seen—gold and purple silks from Samarkand—and at ze door to our Arabian house we had a leetle iron deer—eet ees there yet, perhaps, in

rain and sunshine. Some day I shall go back." She sighed and sipped her wine.

But Julien put down his glass, softly, and leaned closer.

"How did an iron deer come to be there, in front of your house?" he asked.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"How should I know?—eet was always there. Perhaps eet came out of the desert." And again she grew sad, and even the prosaic old banker felt his imagination vaguely stirred.

What strange lives this girl must have led—cycles of experience she would never share with him. Perhaps she had wandered with the Arabs across the desert; perhaps she had been loved by Arabian princes and danced with them in lotus groves beside Arabian streams—

"Shall we dance?" asked Julien, and she rose and stepped once more into his arms. But at the farther end of the room he stopped abruptly and led her to a little table, and drawing out of his pocket the contract he had brought for her to sign, he spread it before her with a gesture.

Her gayety and charm changed instantly into stony indifference.

"I have already told you," she said politely, "zat eet ees out of ze question—zis does not interest me," and she pushed the paper away. "En short, I vill not discuss eet further."

"I beg your pardon, but I think you will," said Julien quietly. And something in his tone made her turn her lovely head and look at him.

"Why?" she asked simply.

"Have you ever noticed," said Julien, with his arms on the table, his eyes on hers, and his voice dropped to a murmur—"have you ever noticed how an interesting piece of gossip, once you spread it, goes out and out, like water round a stone, until in the end everybody knows what you thought you were still keeping a secret? Ever noticed that?"

"Vell?" she stared at him quietly. "Vat has zat to do wiz me?"

He hesitated the fraction of a second, and their eyes met steadily. Then he leaned suddenly over the table and smiled, with his face close to hers.

"Listen, kid," he said softly, "you do it well, but the game is up. I was born in Sirion, Ohio, myself."

"Indeed?" said Estralita. "Ver' interesting," and she lit a cigarette and hummed a little to herself. Julien kept his eyes on hers unwaveringly.

"Yes," he continued, "it *is* interesting—in fact, quite a coincidence. And the house with the blue wooden cupola—right out at the end of Main Street, where the coal yards began—you could see it from where I lived as a boy—with the little path made of white stones. I remember the day Al Collins laid that path—"

Estralita sat motionless and smoked. She did not speak—she merely waited, and Julien continued, picking his words carefully, waiting also, and watching for some sign that he was right.

"If it had been just the house and the cupola, I might have missed it. There might be two blue cupolas in the world"—he smiled at her amiably—"but the thing that really clinches it was the cast-iron deer—that couldn't happen twice. I must get a photograph of that."

He saw her start. Her eyes narrowed as they met his, and like lightning he built upon his successful guess.

Spreading out the contract again with a single gesture, he took out of his pocket his own silver-mounted fountain pen, not passing it to her crudely, but laying it gently down beside her hand.

"S-so—eet ees for me to give in, eh?" Estralita met his eyes squarely for the first time, she smiled straight into his face, and dropping her voice a pitch lower than the strident music, she said:

"Nothing doing, boy! I've met a good many cold blooded ginks in my time and I hand it to you for having nearly got one over on me—nearly—do you get it?—but not quite. Don't forget that I've been in this game longer than you have, and when it comes to a show down, do you suppose any one will take your word as against mine? Not much." She paused abruptly, and the diamonds rose and fell and sparkled on her handsome throat. Julien saw with secret pleasure that she was both angry and frightened.

"Unfortunately," he said, "I can get photographs of the house. The whole thing would make a most amusing newspaper article."

The actress's ancestral fear of the press rose visibly in Estralita's eyes. He had won a point on her, and crushing out her cigarette she turned on him like a fierce animal that scents danger and is alert, but not afraid.

"All right," she said, her black eyes snapping. "Go ahead; a fat lot I care. Go on and spread the news." And with a gesture of decision she pushed the contract from her. "Do you think any one will believe the tale? Not much, not after to-night. Why, I've been advertised over on the other side for ten years. If I could pull the bluff there, do you think for a moment I can't get it over on my own country? You can't stop me—you can't down me! Why? Because I've got nerve. I'll see it through—I'll keep right on and give you the lie. Go on, and do your worst. You can't hurt Estralita—when you think you've got me nicely knocked out, I'll come to again, that's all. Why, my woods are full of enemies like you, trying to trip me up; you can't do it!"

Julien winced at this, and she dropped her voice abruptly, and continued:

"Do you remember the traveling circus that used to come every spring to Sirion? You do? Well, that was my start. I told you the truth—my father *was* a traveling salesman, and when I was fifteen he drank himself to death and left mother and me all alone. I was just a kid; I took in washing, and God, how I hated Sirion, and everything in it!

"And then moon gave me an idea.

"'Jen,' she said one day, 'the circus is coming along. If you could get in it somehow, we might leave this town.'

"Those words stuck in my brain like the first drink of wine. The circus—why, what could I do? Well, I thought and thought, over the wash tubs, and all the while I kept remembering a snake charmer I saw once in a side show. She made a hit doing a dance just from the waist up, moving her arms and head like a snake. I went up into that wooden blue cupola an' tried it out one night. An' after that I tried it every night, over and over and over, till I ached—and I used my feet, too, picking out all the steps I could think of. Mother, she made me a costume out of an old curtain. God! It must a been a sight. Well, the circus came, and when I did that dance out in a tent for the circus boss he laughed himself sick.

"'Where do you hail from?' said he.

"'I'm a gypsy,' I said, at random, 'and I was born in Arabia.'

"The gink looked at my black hair and dark skin, and believed it—yes, sir, I got it over on him, though God knows why I picked Arabia, where there aren't any gypsies at all. Anyway, he fell for it, and took me an' my dance on the spot, and I've traveled some since then, believe you me. I've put the bluff over on kings and princes, I have, and if you think you can knock me out with any of your dirty publicity—me—Estralita—all I got to say is—go on, try it—and I wish you bad luck."

The music rose and fell to the rhythm of a waltz, and the cabaret watched this tense conversation covertly over its shoulder.

"He's losing out, that's sure," said some.

"Don't you be certain," said others. "He's giving her rein, but he'll get her in the end. They say he has a wonderful knack with women."

Julien smoked in silence, watching her; listening with intense interest to that familiar Ohio slang which recalled his boyhood, with all its hopes and fears, and as he listened he caught his cue, and his mind groped quickly, silently, back into that dim past for hints which should help him now.

When she stopped, he smiled, and leaning forward as one who indulges in a sudden intimacy, he took up the reminiscences.

"Say, do you remember the day you came running down Main Street yelling 'fire—fire' in front of old Andy White's grocery store, and got the whole town out with ladder an' hose, and it turned out to be a fire you lit yourself behind his wood shed? You were a handsome little kid—and full of life—"

Estralita melted into a silent laugh.

"Do you remember that? What were you doing in Sirion that far back?"

"I was janitor of the Elks' Hall," said Julien, modestly. "And about the time you cut out with the circus, I was hauling lumber out behind your house, for the B. and O., making fifty cents a day when lucky, and giving forty of it over to the old man. I wasn't more than seventeen. I spent my nights up in the attic on an old mattress my mother died on—and left to me—about the only thing she had to leave—and I used to lie there staring up at the rafters with the tears rolling down my face, wondering if I'd ever get a chance to escape out of that awful, heart-breaking place. It was like a prison—it crushed the hope out of a fellow inch by inch—and yet I knew that somewhere life was roaring and flashing past me like a train in the night, and I was missing it."

"And then?" she prompted.

"Well, one night I got out of bed and just left Sirion all of a sudden, and never went back. That's all."

"So you've been through it too," she said slowly, looking at him as though she saw him for the first time. "You've known what it was to pull out of the quagmire like that and make good, with everything and every one against you.

"And now"—she smiled at him suddenly—"we're here—both successful—we've proved the stuff that was in us—and all the world is ours. Boy, it pays, after all, to have the nerve—never to give up and never to turn back—"

"At the end of the track," said Julien softly, "there's sure to be a station, all lit up; if there weren't, the track wouldn't be there—"

"Right you are," said Estralita, and putting out her hand she touched his and then instantly regretted the action, and withdrew it.

"And at the end of my long track," said Julien gravely, "there lies *failure!*"

"Not Fan Tan '?" she asked.

"Gone bust—absolutely." He looked her straight in the eye, with a smile.

"I'm bankrupt," he said. "That's why I'm here to-night; that's why Isaacs is here. We hoped to get you at my figure for two weeks. It would have pulled the show through to success—but now—" He flicked the ashes from his cigarette and dropped his voice and his eyes together, speaking very gently. "You've beaten me. As an Oriental dancer, I could have made you sign up—but now I know—well, we've been through the mill together, we're pals—well, in short"—he leaned back, smiling, and drew the contract toward him—"I guess it's back to Sirion, Ohio, for me, back to the dirty old town I started from, and I wish you all the luck there is, Jen." He held out his hand, still smiling.

Their eyes met—the hard, bright eyes of those who have faced life on its ugliest terms, and won, and lost, and laughed and dared again—and picking up the silver pen, she signed.

III.

A MURMUR ran all around the noisy room, from a hundred curious onlookers.

"Look—look—she's signed."

And not the least interested observer of that fact was Mr. Jacob Isaacs. He felt for his check book, thinking the while, with an expression of melancholy, of his son.

"If only Ben had half his brains," he said to himself.

And when Estralita, smiling radiantly, crossed the now empty floor on Julien's arm, his admirers, feeling vaguely that once more their idol had put across something very clever, threw convention to the winds, and, springing to their feet, the ring leaders raised their glasses high, and shouted, "Hurrah for Julien! Hurrah for 'Fan Tan'!" But Julien, with a smile, stopped them with a gesture, and said:

"May I propose a toast to Sirion in Arabia, the birthplace of the world's greatest Oriental dancer, Mlle. Estralita?"

And all the guests at the Black Inn clinked their glasses and drank, and Estralita, with tears in her eyes, was put upon a table, whence, in her best broken English, she made a little speech, and said:

"Eet ees my great happiness, dear friends, to be een zis spot wis you to-night, to dance for you een zees so enthusiastic country. Eet ees my wish, now and always, zat you have 'ze wine under ze floor and ze fig tree by ze door,' as they say in Arabia."

The Little Man

By JACK BECHDOLT

IF ever a man looked scared, it was Clem Hawkins when he bolted into the cabin of the schooner Birdwing for a private word with Professor Richmond Morse, who was leading the route-mapping expedition to Mount McKinley.

The schooner was tied up at Potlatch, a town whose chief claim to fame is that it is the headquarters for the Golconda low-grade mines, great mountains of ore which are being worn down gradually by modern engineering and refined into precious metals.

The exploration party was taking a few last-minute supplies aboard the schooner at Potlatch, and had also added to itself Clem Hawkins, who knew the McKinley country, and Pete Edsol, the giant packer. Edsol and Hawkins worked on a job together or they did not take the job. Professor Morse was not keen to add another packer to his outfit, but Hawkins refused his services as guide unless his partner went along.

It was the afternoon of the second day of the schooner's stop at Potlatch that Hawkins slipped into the leader's cabin and confronted Professor Morse, looking like a man who has just seen a ghost. Hawkins was a little chap of about five feet two or three inches in height, proportionately light in build.

He was sometimes addressed by strangers as "My son," or "Boy," but seldom did the same man make the mistake twice. He was as tough and wiry as he was small, could stand more punishment than men twice his size, and had a considerable reputation as an old-timer in a country where only the fit live to become old-timers.

"Professor"—Hawkins stuttered a little as he got the words out—"just how soon do you figure to tie loose from here?"

"Not until morning. The tide serves better then, and it's easier to run the channel by daylight."

"C-could you go now?"

"Now! Why—"

"Yes, sir! Now, right away, pronto!"

"Well! Mr. Hawkins, this is—"

"Anything special to keep us?"

Morse answered with a question of his own. "Anything special to take us away? I have a dinner engagement with the mine superintendent."

"Break it!"

"What!"

"You could break it, couldn't you? One dinner more or less—"

Morse was a human, reasonable sort of person, even if he was a scientist. He could get on as well with a packer or a guide as with the young college men who made up his party of experts.

He smiled and shrugged. "That's a queer sort of request, Hawkins."

Hawkins glanced around the cabin to make sure they were not overheard. He leaned closer and said in a low voice, very earnestly:

"Isn't it a whole lot better to get out of here to-night than see a murder done? Isn't it a whole lot better than having to go up into that McKinley country without the best packer in Alaska? Yes, and without me, too—"

"Without you! Why, you agreed to guide this party—"

"Now, you listen! If you don't get Pete Edsol out of this town within the next hour or two, there's going to be murder done just as sure as I'm here telling you! I've got him aboard right now by lying to him that we changed our plans. I can keep him fooled for maybe an hour or so, but if he ever gets ashore again and finds out this Dr. Strathmore is back in Potlatch, I nor anybody else can't hold him in. There's going to be murder. I'm telling you. And if Edsol gets in trouble I got to stay here with him, so you won't have any guide."

Professor Morse frowned.

"What sort is your friend Edsol? If he's subject to homicidal mania I don't want such a man with me—"

"Hold on, professor—hold on now! You listen. Pete Edsol isn't subject to anything of that sort. Not a bit of it. There isn't a milder, better tempered man in the territory. Anybody can get on with him. It takes a month of tormenting to get a cross word out of him. But if he ever runs across Dr. Strathmore—"

"Strathmore? That's the young company doctor who was married recently?"

"That's him. He and his wife have been on a trip to Outside the last couple of months. I was figuring all the time on getting Pete out of town before they came back. Great cats! I knew what 'd happen if those two should meet up."

"The men are enemies?"

"In a manner of speaking, yes. You see, there was a young lady—"

"Ah! Rivals in love!"

Clem Hawkins nodded. "Professor," he exclaimed, "this love is a hell of a disease when it hits a man like Pete Edsol! My godfrey, I've seen Pete through German measles, frost bite and scurvy! One time he gashed his leg with an ax, and I had to pack him three hundred miles on a sled. One time we had smallpox together, both flat on our backs. Those times were tough, professor. When a big man like Edsol gets laid up it's no fun nursing him. But this woman business—wow! That's got 'em all topped!"

"Had it bad, did he, Hawkins?"

"Wait till you hear. Pete got sick last winter and went to the company hospital here. This Miss Rosa Breem was a nurse there. She came from Tacoma summer before. A nice young lady, as far as I can see—a right nice young lady."

Hawkins gave this judgment like a man trying to be perfectly fair to both sides.

"Pete made a hit with this lady," Hawkins went on. "I could see that myself. Why shouldn't he? He's a real man! I don't say she was in love with him, but I will say she could have done a damn sight worse! It looked like a match all right. I'd about made up my mind to say goodby to Pete for good and all."

Unconsciously Hawkins sighed at the memory.

Morse understood that sigh.

Here were two men who had gone through a lot of life together, hard times and flush times. They had worked and suffered, failed and tried their luck again. Then a girl, a pretty nurse, was about to split their one trail into two divergent ways.

Pretty hard on Hawkins, that must have been!

"Well, professor, I don't aim to give the rights and wrongs of it. Who in hell knows what a young lady is thinking about or how her fancy is going to jump? I don't! Anyway, this young Dr. Strathmore came along, taking the place of the old company doctor.

"He was stuck on Rosa Breem from the first. Seemingly the girl forgot all about Pete. The doctor's one of these slick young college men—all right in his way, I suppose—and his is the kind of ways that make a hit with Rosa Breem.

"Pete, he swears the doctor stole his girl away by crookedness behind his back. When he heard Rosa was going to marry Dr. Strathmore I never saw a man like him. Just one thing kept him from doing murder to the doctor—that was because the doctor had already gone to a medical convention down in Portland.

"Rosa was gone, too—to her folks in Tacoma. Next word of them, they was married. Pete Edsol's been a ramping, rearing, tearing lunatic ever since, swearing the first time he meets him he's going to tear this Dr. Strathmore into fine pieces. He means murder!"

Morse thought of the gigantic, yellow-haired packer in a rage, and the picture chilled his blood.

"He did it once before," Hawkins went on. "Got mad at a Polak, bigger even than him, and nearly killed him with one blow of his fist. A fine time I had keeping him out of jail for that! But that ain't a marker to what he'll do if he meets Strathmore.

"This thing has got him bitter. He broods and broods about it. It's like a kind of poison, professor. He's got the idea everybody knows about it and is laughing at him. He's got the notion he hasn't any friends any more. He keeps to himself and hates the world.

"He—why, he don't even trust me like he used to. I tell you if he meets Strathmore in the shape he is now there will be murder done. We've got to get him away from here, that's all. For the love of Mike, Professor Morse, can't you help me out?"

Clem Hawkins was so thoroughly in earnest that his voice shook and there were tears in his brown eyes.

Morse sighed. "It's a pretty big request, Hawkins."

"Murder's a pretty nasty crime, professor."

"And it's rather inconvenient—"

"Good Lord! So's a blizzard inconvenient, but you got to take it when it comes. And Pete Edsol's just about as reasonable as a blizzard when you mention the name of Strathmore. Listen, man! It means sure-fire murder if I don't get him out of town."

Morse sighed again.

He could not doubt Hawkins's sincerity. "I'll see what he can do," he said.

He did so well that the schooner got away from her berth at Potlatch before six o'clock that evening.

Not until the town had vanished behind a point of land and the schooner, driven by her auxiliary engine, was plowing steadfastly north and westward through open water, did Clem Hawkins draw a peaceful breath.

II.

THE several packers of the party berthed in the forward deck house with the schooner's crew. Hawkins, as a guide and qualified expert on the unknown country, had been offered the distinction of a stateroom aft. He refused it.

"I'll bunk up alongside Pete, if you don't mind," said Hawkins.

During the evening and again next morning Hawkins kept close to his friend. The fear had not left him yet. There was always the chance that some one aboard had seen Strathmore and might mention his name to Edsol.

It was in favor of Hawkins's plot that Edsol was a silent, reserved man. Since the affair with Rosa Breem he had kept more to himself than usual.

A gigantic figure he made in his trail clothes, his shoulders and chest bulging under a faded red sweater over which he wore a heavy flannel shirt coatwise; his legs outlined by trousers stuffed into the tops of trail boots looked like two sturdy Doric columns. A small, battered cloth cap on his blond head served to emphasize his bigness.

Slow to speech ordinarily, slow to anger, once he was roused Peter Edsol was terrible in his rage. No man knew it better than Hawkins, who had seen him almost kill the giant Polak with one blow of his big, square fist.

Clem Hawkins guarded his charge like a terrier set to guard a mastiff.

With morning the schooner ran into thick fog. From aft it was barely possible to discern the bowsprit. They did not slacken speed, for there was little or no travel in these waters.

They plowed on to the rhythmic shredding of long waves off the cutwater; the melancholy yawping of a fog signal pumped by hand and the steady putter of the heavy duty gas engine.

Pete Edsol was out early, and Hawkins, like the faithful shadow he was, trotted beside him as he measured off the deck with easy strides. The after cabin was all asleep. Except for smoke from the galley chimney and a face at the pilot house window, there was no sign of life aboard.

Edsol said nothing at all as he walked, and Hawkins, knowing his every mood, kept silent. The giant stopped at the galley door with a nod for Flanagan, the cook.

"How about a cup of coffee?" Edsol suggested.

Hawkins passed the cook a good cigar by way of underscoring the suggestion.

"Coming right up!" Flanagan agreed briskly. "Say, Edsol, I saw a friend of yours yesterday when I was uptown—"

Hawkins, who had just received a brimming tin cup from the cook, lurched against his side partner violently and showered him with coffee, stinging hot.

"Damn!" he cried. "My foot' slipped. Deck's like grease."

"What friend?" Edsol rumbled, brushing coffee off his shirt.

"Say, cook, haven't you got a piece of bread or something could go with this?" Hawkins interrupted anxiously. "Any old thing. That pie looks good."

Hawkins snatched up half a pie, shook it deftly from its tin, broke it in two, and offered Edsol half. His hand was shaking a little.

"Come on," he said. "Let's not crumb up the galley. It ain't manners. There's a warm corner back of the deck house—"

"Hey, you!" The cook's voice was shrill with displeasure. "You blooming little cockroach, who said you could have that cabin pie! I've a good mind—"

Hawkins entered the quarrel with zest, eager to change the subject.

"What friend of mine did you see?" Edsol broke in with his usual slow pertinacity.

"No man living can call me a cockroach without a fight!" Hawkins declared, trying to drown out the question.

"Well, I call you a cockroach—you damn cockroach!" the cook was asserting belligerently. "Stealing my pie—"

Edsol roared: "Oh, shut up, both of you! What friend of mine did you see, cook?"

Standing behind Edsol, Hawkins shook his head in violent pantomime meant for the cook. He grabbed Edsol. "Oh, come on out of his galley if he's going to cry about it," he argued.

"What friend?" persisted Edsol.

The cook, who could not make head or tail of all this, answered the question at last. "Why, I saw Dr. Strathmore, of the Golconda company's hospital. He'd just got in from a trip to Outside. Hear his wife came with him."

Hawkins exclaimed bitterly: "Oh, for the love of cats! I never saw a cook in all my life that didn't hinge his tongue at both ends. Come on, Pete."

Edsol shook him off.

At the name of Strathmore the big man had stiffened to attention.

"You saw the doctor, sure?" he demanded.

"Sure! Talked to him!"

"In Potlatch?"

"Why, of course, in Potlatch. Think it was in Tokyo?"

"In Potlatch yesterday?"

"Yesterday? Why, sure it was."

"Pete!" Hawkins pleaded. "What d'you want to let that stiff kid you for? Come on."

Edsol was as easy to move as one of the pyramids of Egypt.

"That's on the level?" he demanded, his voice, low, unhurried, calm, belying the lamps of hell that were lighting in his blue eyes.

The cook began again to affirm that he told the truth. Edsol nodded and swung away from the galley.

Hawkins clutched his arm. "Wait! Where are you going? Hey, Pete—"

The big man shook his arm and Hawkins skidded across the deck until collision with the rail stopped him.

Edsol paused just long enough to add to Hawkins: "You! You lying runt, you knew Strathmore had come back! You framed this up." Then he strode aft.

Hawkins tarried long enough to shake his fist at the cook. "A fine, sweet mess you've made of it!" he exclaimed bitterly, and ran after his friend.

Edsol had gone aft without pausing. He vanished around the corner of the after deck house. Hawkins came running up to find him hauling in the small dory that served as utility boat and was towed astern. Edsol had pulled the boat under the counter as Hawkins reached him.

"Pete!" Hawkins cried. "Pete! Wake up! Come out of it! What you trying to do?"

Edsol mumbled: "I'm going back to Potlatch."

"Listen! Listen, you old fool! You can't go back!"

"Who says I can't?"

The giant whirled about to glare at his friend. "Who says that?" he demanded. "Not you, anyhow. I'm going back there and find Strathmore."

"No, no, Pete. No."

"I'm going to find Strathmore, I tell you—and when I do find him—"

"Aw, listen to sense!"

"I'm going to hit him just once, Clem. Just once! But I'll make him sorry for the day he was born."

Desperate, Hawkins flung himself on the big man and wrapped arms and legs about him. Edsol shook him off with little more effort than a violent shrug, but it sent Hawkins staggering.

"Pete!" Hawkins's hoarse cry died in his throat.

Edsol had gone over the side, into the dory. Hawkins ran to the rail and hurled himself after him. He struck the small boat all asprawl at the moment Edsol slashed the tow rope in twain.

Hawkins raised his voice in a loud outcry: "Overboard! Man over—" He got no further, for Edsol's hand was clapped over his mouth, and thus Edsol held him, gagged, until the schooner had vanished into the fog. Hawkins's one, half strangled cry had failed to rouse any attention on the schooner. They were alone, unmissed, adrift in the fog.

Edsol released the little man.

"Who asked you to come in on this?" he demanded.

"I'm here, ain't I?"

"I don't want you. You double-crossed me yesterday when you didn't tell me Strathmore was back. Yes, and by the gods, I bet you got Morse to start earlier than he planned because of that."

"I did," Hawkins admitted calmly. "I'm going to keep you out of a penitentiary or know the reason why. If you ever meet Strathmore the way you are now you'd kill him."

"I'd like that."

"You wouldn't like twenty years in a cage! And that's what follows. I'm not going to see you make a fool of yourself over any woman, Pete."

"You're not going to stop this thing."

"Is that so? Why"—Hawkins laughed suddenly—"you old fool, you can't get back to Potlatch or any other place! Adrift in a fog, out in the Pacific! You haven't got any idea which way to head."

"Fog 'll clear off."

"Suppose it does! The schooner was twenty miles offshore. How you going to find land—"

"Compass."

"Got a compass?"

"Of course, I got a compass—"

"Show me, Pete!"

Edsol pulled from a pocket a small compass in a brass watch case. "Set it down on the thwart, right there, where I can watch it," he said. "I'll take a spell at the oars."

If Hawkins snatched the compass with undue haste his friend did not suspect. He did not suspect until, with his own eyes, he saw Hawkins glance at the compass, raise it aloft and throw it far out into a wave.

The brass compass sent up a few feeble drops as it struck the water. Then it was gone for eternity.

Hawkins lowered the arm that had flung away the compass and faced his friend. Edsol, who had comprehended the act too late, had half risen as if to spring.

"Go on, throw me out after it if you want to," Hawkins taunted. "You'll have a sweet time finding Strathmore or anybody else now!"

Edsol groaned. "You threw our compass away—"

"Maybe you think you can find Strathmore now!"

"Strathmore! You fool! How can I find anybody, find shore, anything? Adrift in a dory, fog, no compass, twenty miles off shore—"

"Better than jail for murder—"

"No grub! And, yes, by thunder, *no water*—"

"Better than a steel cage in the pen—"

Edsol stared, wondering if Hawkins had gone mad. "You utter fool! You did that—"

"Rather than see you do murder. You bet I did!"

"Clem, I ought to do a murder right here—"

"Throw me after the compass! I don't care now. Go on—"

"Oh, shut up! Sit down. This is serious. Clem, this is damned serious. I hope you've got sense enough left to see that!"

They said nothing more. There was nothing more to be said.

Edsol sank his chin in a big fist and stared into the gray horizon, but a few feet distant from their dory. Hawkins slouched on a thwart, legs straight out before him, resigned to anything, now that he had won his point.

Presently, for occupation, Edsol took up the oars and rowed until it occurred to him he was as likely to row off shore as toward land.

"If this damned fog only would clear!" he groaned.

"Couldn't see anything, anyhow—"

"Might see something. Wish I'd had my breakfast. Yes, and I'm thirsty, too!"

Their eyes met and they stared grimly.

There was no water beaker in the boat. It was a utility boat, used for errands ashore. Fishermen would have put water in it at least. The scientists of the expedition had not bothered to think of such a thing.

Somehow the day went by.

They stared into the eternal monotony of fog; heard nothing but the slap of water on the dory's sides and the mewing of the gulls, feeding in great numbers all about them.

Thought of drinking water brought premature thirst that burned their throats dry as a lime kiln.

The sea was calm. The rollers were slow, almost imperceptible except in the dory's rise and fall. The fog clung, thick, wet, cutting through all clothing like a knife, chilling to the very marrow of them.

At times they slept. It was not restful slumber, for they shivered fitfully and huddled closer together. They dreamed of pools of cool, fresh water—water that lapped in little waves over clean rocks or ran in limpid current, spread out on gravel beds and always they woke to realize the salt rime that chapped their lips and constricted their throats.

"Pete! Pete! Wake up! Listen!"

Hawkins shook his parner in misery by the shoulder.

Day had returned. The fog clung thick, chill as ever, and it might have been noon or it might have been early morning, they had no way of telling in the cold, diffused, uncanny light of their world.

"Listen, Pete!"

A put-putter, unmistakable song of a gas engine, came from somewhere distant. That meant a schooner or power boat of some sort, a halibut fisher, perhaps, off the usual track.

It was hard to say if the sound was ahead or behind, to the right or to the left.

They sprang to their feet and shouted together.

No telling if they were heard. No telling if the boat had passed and was leaving them or was not yet come up with them.

Edsol shipped the oars and began to pull frantically. Hawkins alternately shouted and listened.

Neither man was sure if they were going toward or away from rescue.

Edsol's enormous strength sent the dory

in an erratic course, a wide circle. His big chest bulged through the sweater. The muscles knotted along his arms. One of the heavy ash oars broke with a loud snap and he went sprawling into the bilge.

Hawkins's mouth formed a round O. He stared, overwhelmed. Edsol recovered, sprang erect and hurled the broken fragment of oar which he still clutched far away.

The big man poured out his anger at the universe in terrible profanity, looming enormously in that rocking dory, his clenched fist raised toward heaven, the absurd cloth cap clinging to the back of his shock of wild yellow hair.

Edsol wound up his tirade with defiance of his invisible god. " I'm not through yet, you hear! You've double-crossed me from the start. Thirty-eight years I've lived and suffered and worked like a horse and ate rotten grub and drank poison booze for what? For friends that robbed me, for crooks to get fat off me, for a woman to make a fool of me. And on top of it all my own partner, the man I trusted and worked with and shared with turns out to be the worst yellow dog in the lot, framing to cheat me out of getting square with the man that stole my girl! Go on, do your damnedest, I'll live through it all till I find the man that stole my girl, and when I do I'll break every bone in his lying body. I'll kill him with these two bare hands, and no man nor god is going to make me quit—"

Hawkins cried hoarsely. " Pete! Pete, old-timer! Sit down! Forget it! We—we'll get out of this. We'll—"

" We!" Edsol roared. " *We!* None of that we stuff with me, you lying little—"

" Pete!"

" You—you—you're no partner of mine! You've double-crossed me for the last time. Hear me? I'll give you what's coming to you, anyway—"

At the look in his partner's eyes, Hawkins sprang to his feet, prepared to sell his life dearly. He was absurdly small, slight, helpless before Edsol. Edsol, if he chose, could crush him in one embrace that would snap his ribs and twist him into a lifeless rag.

The man was so mad with rage he could have done it then. But what he said hurt Hawkins even more: " It's your turn, anyhow, you dirty, lying Judas!"

Then Edsol lurched at him, sweeping him off his feet with his rush.

All this time the sound of the gas engine had been growing louder, and neither man heard it. The bowsprit of a halibut schooner stabbed the fog above the rocking dory. Her bows loomed black and enormous for a moment.

There was no warning sound from her.

A crash of splintering planks was the last they heard. The schooner rode down the fragments of broken dory. The two men were hurled far apart, struggling in the icy water.

III.

Pete Edsol became aware of light that hurt his eyes cruelly. For a long time he blinked, accustoming himself to the strange sensation. And when, finally, he got his eyes open, they did not seem to make sense of objects about him.

He was in some sort of room—a room with white walls and ceiling. The details of it wavered and became distorted in his vision. He found himself swathed in white and decided at last that he lay in a bed.

His head ached horribly, and when he raised his hand to it he was surprised to find it wrapped tightly in a bandage.

Edsol studied over these things for an hour or longer, trying to piece out a hiatus in his life. He remembered the dory, Clem Hawkins's startled, white face as he lurched on him, then a vague, rushing, terrifying vision of a monstrous black wall bearing them down and under—then nothing.

His aching head interrupted steady thinking about these things. He was astonished to find how weak he was; how pleasant it was just to lie still and let things drift—

Somebody was standing by his bed. A woman! His eyes recognized something familiar in the white apron over a blue and white uniform. The woman bent her head lower to him and he knew, suddenly, it was Rosa Breem.

" You're a lot better," she said.

" Am I? I—I don't seem to get any sense out of it yet! You—it is Rosa, sure?"

"Sure!" She smiled.

"There was a dory," Edsol puzzled. "Then, I don't know—"

Rosa supplied the missing chapter gently. "You were run down in the fog by a halibut schooner. You got a bad blow on the head—a fracture. You have been either unconscious or out of your head ever since. You see, they brought you here—"

"Where?"

"Why, it's the hospital, in Potlatch, of course!"

"The hospital! Potlatch! Then you—"

"I'm helping Dr. Strathmore, just as I always have. He needs me here, there aren't enough nurses—"

Edsol remembered with a rush. He burst out: "You married Strathmore!"

She smiled and nodded.

"But you're still working here—"

"Because I'm needed, Pete. Dr. Strathmore works twenty-four hours a day when people are sick and need him. I can't do less, can I?"

Pete thought it over slowly. He said finally, "I—I guess you're pretty happy, marrying him? You—kind of look—"

"Happy! Why, Pete, I love him! I loved him almost from the moment I first saw him—"

Inwardly Pete Edsol groaned. But if her words hurt him they also gave him a clearer understanding. She had always loved Strathmore. He had been a fool to think anything else.

Rosa went on: "If you could have seen him work to save your life! That was a fight! Not one doctor in a hundred—in a thousand—could have done that. And he worked night and day in order to bring you back, Pete!"

Pete saw tears in her eyes, but they were shining, too, with pride in her husband.

"And Pete! If you knew how popular you are in this town! If you knew the number of friends you have. All day long coming up the hill to ask: 'How's Pete now?' Why, your head would be turned for life—"

"Me? Got friends—"

"Friends! If the President of the United States was lying here sick there wouldn't be more people asking after him!"

Edsol considered this startling news for a long time. Friends! Friends climbing the hill all day to ask: "How's Pete now?" Well, by Heaven! And here he'd been making every variety of a pink-striped fool of himself!

He started. "Where's Clem? Where's Clem Hawkins? Rosa, he—he isn't—"

"Can you turn your head? Wait, I'll help." She stooped over the bed, lifting his big frame in her arms. "There, on that cot right beside you. See? Quiet! He's asleep now—"

"What—what's wrong. Is he—"

"Clem Hawkins's ankle was broken when the schooner hit your dory. He swam with that broken ankle and got hold of you and he struggled in that icy water for an hour, managing to keep afloat and keep you afloat, too. All the time you were unconscious, a dead weight, but Clem Hawkins did it! Did it with those broken bones hurting him so. Kept you up until the schooner had hunted through the fog and found you."

Edsol groaned as if he could bear no more.

He turned his face away from Rosa. He felt his hand caught and held in her warm one. Her other hand, soft and wonderfully soothing, stroked his cheek. "Look here, Pete," she said with a catch of happiness in her voice, "here's a friend of yours."

Edsol turned his head slowly. Looked up. Dr. Strathmore was smiling. "You're looking great, Pete!" he said.

"Doc! You—you saved me—"

Strathmore snorted indignantly. "I did not! Me save you? Who says so? If you want to know who saved you, it was Rosa. You were her case. Night and day she neglected me to stick by you and pull you through this. There aren't many like her, Pete!"

So that was it! Rosa, giving her nights and days to help him, not because she loved him, but because she loved Strathmore, and through that happiness loved everybody. And Strathmore, loving Rosa and expressing that love in service to every stray human that came along.

Edsol said slowly: "Doc, would you shake hands?"

"Why, of course!"

"Thanks. I—just wanted to say—I'm glad—you got each other. I—I wanted to wish you—oh, hell, I can't say it proper now, but you know—you know!"

"Pete!"

Rosa stooped swiftly. Almost before he realized her intent Edsol felt her lips, warm and soft, on his cheeks. He closed his eyes then, ashamed of the tears that started to them.

The room became very quiet. Edsol guessed they had left him alone. After a time he heard a stirring in the cot near by, and Clem Hawkins's well-remembered cough. Pete hailed Clem cheerfully: "Hello, old-timer!"

"Hello, yourself!"

"I heard about everything, Clem. Rosa told me. Been doing a powerful lot of thinking. I was thinking, Clem, maybe I've been a damn fool—"

"Didn't I always say that?"

"Yes, I guess maybe I was a fool. But it's no use crying about it. What I was really thinking was we ought to still be able to get out of here in time to get in a good season prospecting. What say?"

Hawkins coughed. His manner was embarrassed. He answered reluctantly: "Well, Pete, I guess maybe I can't go—"

"What do you mean, can't go?"

"Well, maybe our breaking off being partners that way was kind of timely—"

"That! Hell, you know I never meant a word of it. I—Clem, I tell you I'm cruel sorry for what I said—"

"Oh! What you said! Of course that was just your mad talking. But—but the fact is, you see, I busted some bones in my leg. Kind of misfortunate for me, Pete, because the doctor says they can't be made to heal just right, and I'm going to walk with a flat wheel. So—you see, Pete—I'd like to go, but I wouldn't be much use—with a flat wheel. I couldn't maybe pack my rightful share, or travel fast enough on a trail—so you see—"

Edsol found his voice at last. Weak as he was he managed something almost like his old-time roar of anger.

"To hell with that talk! You'll go with me. Pack? Who's asking you to pack? I can pack all the stuff we ever take and not know it's on my back. But I can't get along without you to take care of me, Clem. God knows it's fair if you want to stop being partners, but, Clem, old-timer, I need you now! I need you bad!"

"Then I guess we're partners still," Clem Hawkins grinned. "I guess we'll always be."

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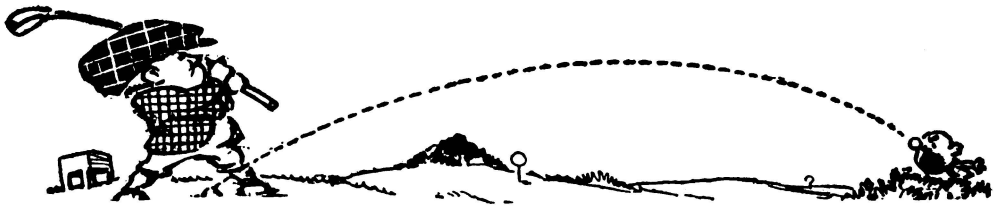
ZOOLOGICAL

'TIS quite sublime to sit upon a rock
Beside the turbid waters of the Nile,
And look upon the very weary croc-
odile!

Or, if you would prefer some other spot,
You can survey without the slightest fuss
That awful monstrous form, the hippopot—
amus!

But, if for them you do not care a cuss,
Just cast your eye upon the parlor mat,
And there most probably you'll see the puss-
ycat!

La Touche Hancock.



IZZY KAPLAN'S KOLUMN

Received via Radio by W. O. McGEEHAN

GOLF AS A BUSINESS

THAT keen observer, and even sharper sportsman, Izzy Kaplan (himself), has consented to reveal, through the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY, *the innermost secrets, the lowest low-down, and the dopiest dope of every game that can be classed as a sport.*

Naturally, everything that Izzy has to say will come through W. O. McGeehan, the noted humorist and sport writer, the only person, according to Izzy, that knows a baseball bat from the other kind. At every big sporting event this inseparable pair are in the front row, and when Izzy, the temperamental, gets excited, only McGeehan, the calm, can get what he says.

From time to time the firm of Kaplan & McGeehan will give up the inside stuff. Remember, whether the game is played with five aces or a piece of rosin, McGeehan can tell you the rules and Izzy how to beat them.

YOU would think that this golufing business was for loafers, but I could told you that there was good money in it. My cousin, Moe, which he is living beside the linx, which is what they call it the place where the golufing is going on, is making a lot out of it.

Moe has six smallish children which he was always complaining about it was hard times with him till one day little Sol, which he is the second youngish boy, came home with a blue eye and five dollars. He told Moe that one of the golufing fellers hit him in the eye with a little ball and gave him the money if he wouldn't sue him.

Right there Moe got the ideer to go into business for himseluf. He would send all of the children out on the golufing linx and they would hide in the bushers until some feller would hit it a goluf ball near them. Then they would holler like it was a moider and all the time the golufing fellers would give them money. In one week Moe made it more money from goluf than he could make it in his other business, which he was only a basting puller, and woik was slack anyhow.

The best woik that Moe had was when he got in a argerment with his wife, Reba. There is more argerments going on in Moe's house than there is in a pinochle game, and when the argerment was over Moe had a blue eye and Reba had a cauliflower on her ear, so they both went out on the golufing linx and they made twenty-eight

dollars and a haluf between them. A accident is woith money if you wouldn't lose your head, and call in the politz instead of suing somebody.

I was reading about this feller, Walter Hagenstein which he went over to the golufing in England, and now he is the champeen golufer in the woild. He is getting a fine celery for being a perfessional golufer for a swell linx, and rich fellers is giving him good tips on the market which they are guaranteed to be right or money is refunded.

Personally, I wouldn't get interested in knocking a little ball over the hills no matter how much money I am making on account, you know. I am too smart a feller to be wasting my time that way. But the money these goluf perfessionals is making is getting me to thinking that maybe it ain't so foolish after all.

Up to now all of these goluf perfessionals is Scotch fellers, and every Scotch feller is raising his boy to be a goluf perfessional. But now the business is getting too good that the Scotch fellers shouldn't get all of the cream out of it. You bet they would have some competition, on account my cousin Moe is sending his oldest boy to be a caddie so that he would learn the business good from the basement to the roof.

Moe tried it himseluf wunst, but gave it up on account he had the wrong ideer. The feller he was playing with told Moe it was in the count, so Moe agreed to play him for ten dollars a metch. They went around all of the pockets which you shoot the ball into them and the other feller asked Moe what was it his score.

But Moe was too fast for him. He answered him quick. " I am a new beginner. First you should tell it to me, what is your score."

The other feller said, " Oh, I was rotten to-day. I only made it a ninety-nine."

"I ONLY MADE IT A NINETY-TWO." THEN MOE SAID QUICK BEFORE HE KNEW NOTHING, "WELL, I BEAT YOU GOOD. I MADE A HUNDRED AND EIGHT."

Then Moe said quick before he knew nothing, " Well, I beat you good. I made a hundred and eight, and I could have made a whole lot more on account I wasn't trying so I would be polite."

Then the other feller explanationed to Moe that the ideer of the game was not to make a whole lot of points, but it was the other way around and that the feller who made it the most would lose the golufing game. So Moe quit the game right there on account he was pretty good in addition but rotten in subtraction, so on account of that he never would be champeen in the golufing business.

By anyhow, those Scotch fellers ain't going to have all that fine business for themselves where there is so many smart fellers in Harlem and the Bronx, which most of them come from Russia and ain't foreigners like the Scotch fellers. Of course, this golufing wouldn't pay so well as the shoe-legging business, but it is safer. Making sympathetic gin out of good natured alcohol and a lot of other comicals makes it so you got to have a lot of capital. In goluf you don't need nothing but brains, and my relations has got plenty of them. Look at how my brains keeps going all the time. I am always thinking even when I don't think about nothing at all.

My relations could learn anything where there is money in it, and there is good money in goluf. So pretty soon when you are reading about the perfessional goluf champeens you wouldn't see no foreign names like MacGreggor, McDonald and Campbell. They would all be good New York American names like Benneh Levinsky, Sol Koenigsberg and Izzy Kaplan.

And why not? I don't mean I should say that I would be playing the game personally on account I couldn't wear short pants and roll my stockings up at the knee like I should be a goil who is flapping or like I seen Irving S. Cobbstein, the big newspaper feller, wearing them. But some of my relations would be champeens if counting would make them that way, even if it is rewerse counting.

It is my advice to all of my relations to get busy in the goluf business unless they are already in business for themselufs. I should care if the Scotch fellers starve to death. As my old man said the day he landed at Alice Island from Kovno in Lithuania, "Us Americans should keep the best business for ourselufs." Goluf is a business and it wouldn't be petriotic to let the Scotch in on it.

Next week Izzy Kaplan will comment upon THE LADIES IN SPORTS.

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LAKE-STILLNESS

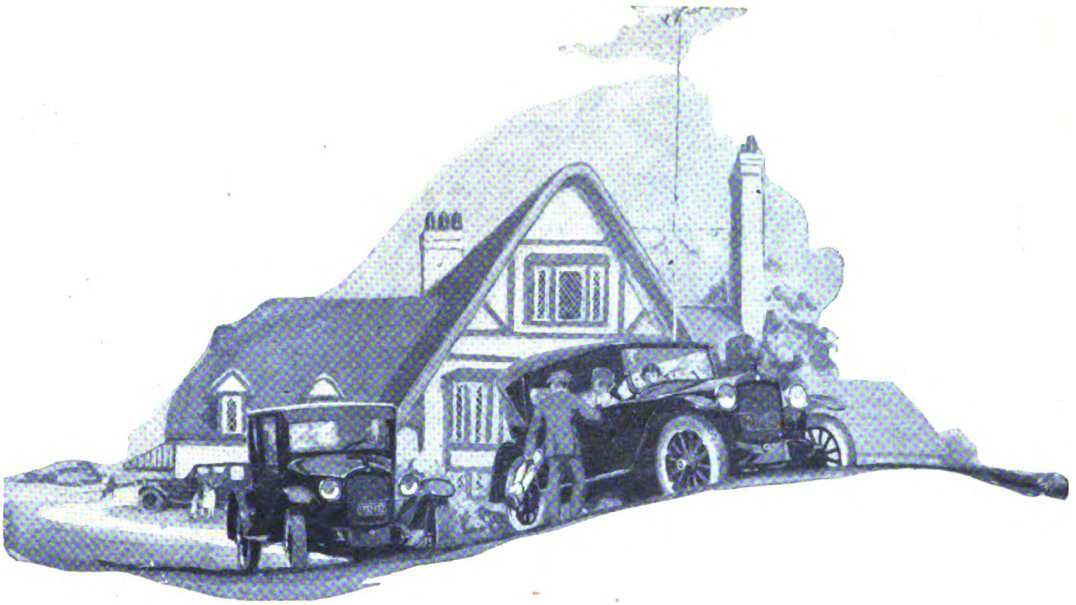
FAIRY TREES on a fallen sky,
Woodlands wed to their lake in wonder,
Shining heights that have found reply
In furtive depths retreating under.

Birches bending beneath our boat,
Dream on crystal dream recorded
Like music caught while still afloat
And by the thirsty water hoarded.

Mountains lured by some patient power
To lie on the lake's calm breast enraptured,
Beauty snared for a magic hour,
And heaven at last by old earth captured.

Like soul and flesh, the Otherwhere
With this strange Here divinely blended
Till—at a little breath of air
The miracle is ended.

Morris Longstreth.
10 A



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